Terrorism and Realism in Contemporary Italian Literature: The Victim as a Literary Character and a Cultural Paradigm

Alessandra Pellegrini De Luca

PhD

University of Edinburgh

2021

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the idea of victimhood in Italian literary representations of terrorism, looking at its relationship with realism. More specifically, I focus on the period of Italian political terrorism in the 1970s, the so-called Years of Lead, through a corpus of novels and short stories written by authors who did not have direct experience of those events. By examining how these writers reworked the memory of 1970s terrorism in the 2000s, I look at the victim as a literary character and as a cultural paradigm for this generation. I argue that a fundamental narrative of impotence lies beneath the political commitment of these authors, and that their realism expresses a concern about the practical usefulness of their writing. The portrayal of victims is underdeveloped and ideologically polarized, and more similar to representation in political and media discourse than in literature. Moreover, a mythologization of leftist revolutionary violence informs many of the works. This thesis presents the first extensive and comparative analysis of the imagery of political terrorism of the 1970s in the work of a generation of writers who were born after those years. By exploring the relationship between generations and memory in the context of the crisis of the nation-state and the growth of a globalized environment, as well as the relationship between political commitment and literary imagination, this study may also offer some new insights on the question of ethics and intellectual engagement in contemporary Italian literature.

This thesis is divided into three main parts. In Part I, I develop a close textual analysis of the representation of victims as literary characters: I show how this representation interacts with the political and social background of Italy in the 2000s, and how it casts light on the authors' urge to demonstrate the authority and public importance of their role as writers and intellectuals. In Part II, I explore victimhood as a cultural paradigm of the so-called 'transition' generation, who saw the decline of the idea of the nation-state in a

globalized world, namely the generation born between 1966 and 1980, entering their twenties between 1986 and 2000 and their thirties between 1996 and 2010. By reworking the memory of 1970s terrorism, these authors approached and tried to interpret the globalized present through political and historical paradigms typical of modern national narratives. In Part III, I discuss how their work relates to realism. In fact, the corpus of this thesis is part of the so-called 'return to reality' after postmodernism. With this formula, some critics identify an increasing interest, in contemporary Italian literature, in subjects taken from contemporary history and politics – such as the Years of Lead – and characterized by a mix of fictional and non-fictional features. By engaging with the critical debate on the 'return to reality' and the literary trends that this debate identifies, I argue that the 'return to reality' identifies a preoccupation with the political engagement of intellectuals in a moment of deep and significant social and political transformation. Analysis shows how this preoccupation reproduces the pragmatic narratives of violence in the representation of victimhood. Finally, I focus on two works that stand out for their original and unconventional depiction of victims. Showing how the authors make use of two radically different modes of representation, I highlight the political dimension of these works, and I argue that an attention to history and politics in literature does not necessarily imply the use of a realist mode of representation.

LAY SUMMARY

This thesis explores the idea of victimhood in Italian literary representations of terrorism, looking at its relationship with realism. I focus on the period of Italian political terrorism in the 1970s, the so-called Years of Lead, in a corpus of novels and short stories that are by authors who did not have direct experience of those events. By examining how these authors rework the memory of the 1970s in the 2000s, I look at the figure of the victim as a literary character and as a cultural paradigm for this generation. I argue that beneath the political commitment of these authors lies a fundamental narrative of impotence, and that their realism is engaged with a concern about the practical usefulness of their writing. The portrayal of victims results underdeveloped and ideologically polarized, and more similar to representation in political and media discourse than in literature.

This thesis is divided into three main parts. In Part I, I develop a textual analysis of the representation of victims as literary characters, showing how this representation interacts with the political and social background of Italy in the 2000s, and how this representation illustrates the authors' urge to demonstrate the authority and public importance of their role as writers and politically committed intellectuals. In Part II, I explore victimhood as a cultural paradigm of the so-called 'transition' generation, who saw the decline of the idea of the nation-state in a globalized world, namely the generation born between 1966 and 1980, entering their twenties between 1986 and 2000 and their thirties between 1996 and 2010. By reworking the memory of 1970s terrorism, these authors tried to interpret the globalized present through political and historical paradigms typical of modern national narratives. In Part III, I discuss how their work relates to realism. In fact, the corpus of this thesis is part of the so-called 'return to reality' after postmodernism. With this formula, some critics identify an increasing interest, in contemporary Italian literature, in subjects taken from contemporary history and politics – precisely such as the Years of Lead – and characterized

by a mix of fictional and non-fictional features. By engaging with the critical debate on the 'return to reality' and the literary trends that this debate identifies, I argue that the 'return to reality' identifies a preoccupation with the political engagement of intellectuals in a moment of significant social and political transformation. Analysis shows how this preoccupation reproduces the pragmatic narratives of terrorist violence in the depiction of victims. Moreover, it helps figuring out that, at least in relation to my corpus, the 'return to reality' has little to do with a desire to recover a specific kind of literary realism, and rather builds on a lack of symbolization of reality. Finally, I focus on two works that stand out for their original and unconventional depiction of victims. Showing how the authors make use of two radically different modes of representation, I highlight the political dimension of these works, and I argue that an attention to history and politics in literature does not necessarily imply the use of a realist mode of representation.

By analyzing the victim as a literary character and a cultural paradigm in works by this generation of authors, I devised a composite theoretical framework spanning literary criticism, historiography, sociology, and psychoanalysis. Overall, my theoretical approach pursues the following aims, which also correspond to the three parts of the thesis: 1) I highlight the specific historicity of the literary works, showing how they enter in dialogue with the political and social background of the years in which they were conceived and written; 2) I comment on the resulting imagery on the basis of a number of theories, with further exemplification from primary sources to provide textual evidence; 3) I analyze the forms and language that shape this generational imagery, contextualizing this formal level within the historical and cultural context described through points 1 and 2. To pursue these aims, I employ theoretical frameworks or notions whose pertinence to my primary sources is highlighted case by case, either by direct exemplification or through the voice of the authors in non-fictional contributions or interviews.

This thesis presents the first extensive and comparative analysis of the imagery of political terrorism of the 1970s in the work of a generation of writers who were born after those years. By exploring the relationship between generations and memory in the context of the crisis of the nation-state and the growth of a globalized environment, as well as the relationship between political commitment and literary imagination, this study may also offer some new insights on the question of ethics and intellectual engagement in contemporary Italian literature.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

Alessandra Pellegrini De Luca

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

The man we surround, the man no one approaches
simply weeps, and does not cover it, weeps
not like a child, not like the wind, like a man
and does not declaim it, nor beat his breast, nor even
sob very loudly—yet the dignity of his weeping

holds us back from his space, the hollow he makes about him
in the midday light, in his pentagram of sorrow,
and uniforms back in the crowd who tried to seize him
stare out at him, and feel, with amazement, their minds
longing for tears as children for a rainbow.

(Les Murray, *The Weatherboard Cathedral*, 1969)

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the idea of victimhood in Italian literary representations of terrorism and its relationship with realism. I focus on a corpus of novels and short stories on the strategy of tension and terrorism of the 1970s, written by a generation of authors who did not have direct experience of these events. By examining how these authors reworked the memory of the 1970s in the 2000s, I look at the figure of the victim as a literary character and as a cultural paradigm for this generation. I argue that beneath the political commitment of these authors lies a fundamental narrative of impotence, and that their realism is engaged with a concern about the practical usefulness of their writing. A politicization of the figures of victims – whose depiction is ideologically polarized – dovetails with a mythologization of revolutionary violence. This thesis presents the first extensive and comparative analysis of the imagery of political terrorism of the 1970s in the work of a generation of writers who were born after those years. By exploring the relationship between generations and memory in the context of the crisis of the nation-state and the growth of a globalized environment, as well as the relationship between political commitment and literary imagination, this study may also offer some new insights on the question of ethics and intellectual engagement in contemporary Italian literature.

Between 1969 and the early 1980s, Italy experienced an unparalleled outburst of political violence. More than 600 terrorist groups were active in the national territory and perpetrated thousands of politically motivated attacks, in which hundreds of people lost their lives (Della Porta & Rossi 1984). Those years are known as the 'Years of Lead' (*anni di piombo*), a formula inspired by the Italian title of Margarethe von Trotta's film *Die bleierne Zeit* ('The leaden time', 1981). The Years of Lead saw a series of terrorist attacks from both

the extreme left and the extreme right, and included both targeted attacks and large-scale bombings, commonly identified as *stragismo*. Sometimes, these attacks resulted from connivances between terrorist groups, military or paramilitary organs of the state, and the secret services, as part of the so-called 'strategy of tension', with the aim of facilitating the political control of the Italian territory during the Cold War. As Pierpaolo Antonello and Alan O'Leary wrote, the Years of Lead are 'the crucible of many political, ideological, social contradictions and tensions accumulated in Italy since the end of the Second World War' (2009, p. 1).

In the last two decades, the Years of Lead have attracted growing scholarly interest. Studies have been published on the legacy of 1970s terrorism in collective Italian memory (Tota 2003; Foot 2009, pp. 183–203; De Luna 2009; Tabacco 2010; Hajek 2013); on its representation in Italian culture (Cento Bull & Giorgio 2006; Uva 2007; O'Leary 2007; Paolin 2008; Antonello & O'Leary 2009; Lazar & Matard-Bonucci 2010; Glynn, Lombardi & O'Leary 2012; Glynn & Lombardi 2012; Glynn 2013; Cento Bull & Cooke 2013; Vitello 2013a; Conti 2013; Ghidotti 2015; Ward 2017); the Years of Lead have also attracted the attention of an increasing number of historians (see Ceci 2013, pp. 309–323 and Ceci 2016) and Italian writers (Donnarumma 2010, pp. 463–465), some of whom have been selected for the corpus of the present study.

There is more than one reason for this curiosity towards the Years of Lead in the new millennium, some of which are domestic while others need to be considered from an international perspective. Firstly, a national debate on the *indulto* – a legal measure that extinguishes, either in part or in total, the penalty for criminals in prison – took place in Italy between 1996 and 1998, and it involved a discussion about former political terrorists in jail. Secondly, two politically motivated terrorist attacks were perpetrated by the leftist formation known as the *Nuove Brigate Rosse* in 1999 and 2002, against the labour lawyers Massimo D'Antona and Marco Biagi respectively. The resurgence of political terrorism after the end

of the 'emergency phase' in 1995 (Ceci & Zinni 2017, p. 252) certainly contributed to drawing attention back to the Years of Lead. Thirdly, in 2001, the city of Genoa hosted the summit meeting of the Group of Eight (G8), a political forum that brought together the leaders of the eight major industrialized countries: on that occasion, a worldwide community of demonstrators gathered against the summit, and the protest rapidly escalated into violence, with one protester killed and dozens injured. The resurgence of social conflict and, most importantly, the violence of the law enforcement agencies recalled the conflicts of the Years of Lead. Lastly, the 9/11 attacks in the United States made 'terrorism' a key word in the geopolitical vocabulary of the twenty-first century and gave momentum to a new strand of historiographical studies on the Years of Lead (Ceci 2013, 293–332).

From a more general perspective, the renewed interest in terrorism and political conflicts in contemporary Italian literature could also be seen in the light of the calls of new ethical paradigms in the present 'age of globalization', as defined by Jeffrey D. Sachs (2020, pp. 169–194), namely in the intensified global interconnection of the twenty-first century as a 'Digital Age'. This latter has introduced some deep transformations in the fabric of our societies, with a radical discussion of a number of paradigms of interpretation of reality and new emergent crises in politics, society, and the environment. As the latest period of deep political conflict and activism, the 1970s became for many contemporary Italian intellectuals an indispensable frame of reference to interpret their time. As we shall see, all these factors – the debate on the *indulto*, the resurgence of political terrorism at the threshold of the new millennium, the G8 events, and the new conflicts in the globalized world – variously helped to reconstruct the generational and literary imagery of the Years of Lead that this thesis explores.

1. Thesis approach and objectives

In the last two decades, the theme of 1970s terrorism became growingly popular as a subject for novels and short stories in contemporary Italian literature. This attracted the interest of an increasing number of literary critics, whose contributions have explored Italian literature on the Years of Lead from different angles and perspectives. Some focused specifically on the increasing depictions of 1970s terrorism in Italian literature of the new millennium. While Demetrio Paolin (2008) and Gianluigi Simonetti (2011) offered a comprehensive overview of this editorial phenomenon, other literary critics focused on more specific aspects. Gabriele Vitello (2013a), for example, looked at representations of terrorism within a familial frame of reference; Cecilia Ghidotti (2015) focused on five authors from different generations who addressed the 1970s at large and not only through the lens of terrorism; David Ward (2017), focused on writers who addressed the Years of Lead as a 'challenge to representation' (p. 2). On the other hand, other scholars have examined literary production on the subject of 1970s terrorism published before and after 2000. This is the case of Raffaele Donnarumma (2010) and, more extensively, Ermanno Conti (2013), who chronologically mapped Italian literary production on 1970s terrorism. Other critics, finally, focused their attention on a specific literary genre (Pezzotti 2016) or, as in the case of Domenico Guzzo, Camilla Lettieri, and Vincenzo Binetti's contributions to Claudio Milanesi's *Il romanzo poliziesco: la storia, la memoria. Italia* (2009), on a specific literary work.

In this thesis, I focus on the representation of the Years of Lead in a corpus of twenty-one literary works, written by authors who were born during or after the 1970s and were too little, or not yet born, to have a direct experience of those years. I chose to focus on literary sources because I was interested in exploring the relationship between literary fiction and political commitment. My interest in this topic first emerged when I carried out my research for my Italian *tesi di laurea*, where I compared the depiction of Aldo Moro as a victim of terrorism in Leonardo Sciascia's literary work *L'affaire Moro* (1978) with the newspapers of

the time. I was impressed by how clear and sharp Sciascia's perspective on victimhood and terrorism was, despite being contemporary to the events narrated, and by the centrality of literature in such clarity and sharpness. I thus decided to expand the research by engaging with authors who revisited those years three or four decades later, often with references to the generation of intellectuals of which Sciascia was part. Moreover, as we shall see in greater detail ahead, the authors I address have explicitly mentioned their interest, as writers of fiction, towards the Years of Lead. Finally, I chose to focus on literary fiction because the growing popularity of 1970s terrorism in contemporary Italian novels and short stories led many critics in the peninsula to engage more closely with, and debate about, the question of political commitment in literature. I wanted to examine this issue more thoroughly.

Particularly within the journal *Allegoria*, Italian literary critics tend to judge literature on the Years of Lead negatively for not being politically committed enough. In *Una tragedia negata* (2008), Paolin writes: '[i]n Italy … the narration of the years of lead was never able to overcome a reassuring and quite self-soothing dimension' (p. 9); by the same token, Raffaele Donnarumma maintains that Italian literature on terrorism 'does not tell us how things went, but rather how little we want and are able to see of them' (2010, p. 443); similarly, Gianluigi Simonetti argues that Italian literature on the Years of Lead overindulges in spectacular modes of representation that are taken from mass media and end up positioning this literature 'on the side of History' (p. 124). In his book *L'album di famiglia: gli anni di piombo nella narrativa italiana* (2013), Gabriele Vitello maintains that Italian literature on the Years of Lead 'censors' the 'historical and social reality of terrorism' by hiding it behind 'self-referential' representations and by simplifying interpretations within a familial frame of reference – that is, when authors represent terrorists as parents, children, siblings, or lovers – that 'privatizes' terrorism (2011, p. 184). Sometimes, this critical perspective leads to mourning over the lack of a 'great novel' on the Years of Lead (Sartori in Vitello 2011, p. 5; Donnarumma 2010, p. 445) or of 'the' novel on the Years of Lead (Donnarumma 2010, p.

439; Vitello 2013b, p. 320): critics do not specify what a 'great' or somehow 'definitive' novel about 1970s terrorism should look like. On closer inspection, the real issue at stake in this debate is the political engagement of intellectuals and the possibility for writers today to have an impact on society.

Such critical positions emerged particularly within the context of a debate around the relationship between literature and politics that, since 2008, has animated contemporary Italian literary criticism. This debate, which I will discuss in Part I and Part III of this thesis, revolves around the question of a so-called 'return to reality' or 'return to realism' in literature, two formulas through which critics discuss the increasing interest in subjects taken from contemporary history and politics, precisely such as the Years of Lead, among contemporary Italian writers. In the present study, I wanted to explore how the treatment of the Year of Lead in my authors' novels and short stories relates to their desire to be politically committed, examining how the imagery and rhetoric shaping their political commitment relates to the question of a 'return to reality' or 'return to realism' in contemporary Italian literature.

With regards to my focus on literary fiction, I am aware that other media, such as films or comics, could also have contributed to my analysis. Moreover, generic hybridity is one of the key literary trends in the literary period under scrutiny in this thesis (Palumbo Mosca 2014), and a sharp demarcation between fiction and non-fiction might seem arbitrary. If we limit ourselves to the written production on the Years of Lead by authors of the same generation of those considered in this thesis, non-fictional memoirs such as Benedetta Tobagi's *Come mi batte forte il tuo cuore* (2009) are interspersed with literary references. However, a difference remains between a novel or a short story and a memoir. My interest in this thesis is in fiction through words, and in authors of a particular generation, who used their literary imagination to address the dreadful and traumatic events that took place in the 1970s. These authors invented characters and told stories using words: while I am aware

that literature is part of a broader cultural discourse (which I have used to illuminate my corpus), I believe that it also has its specificity and its own way of constructing meaning. For this reason, I decided to explore how the latest generation of writers have reworked the existing ideas, perceptions, and representations of the Years of Lead in their works. This thesis stemmed from the following research questions: How does 21st-century Italian literature represent political terrorism? How is 1970s terrorism represented by young Italian fiction writers who did not directly experience the traumatic events? How 'mediated' are their narratives? How do these writers deal with the construction of the 'victim of terrorism' as a literary character? How far do they confirm or challenge the established narratives conveyed by other media? What do we mean when we talk about 'realism' in contemporary literature of the so-called 'return to reality'? Is political commitment related to realism?

2. Selection criteria

The corpus of this thesis consists of twenty-one literary works on the strategy of tension and the Years of Lead published between 1999 and 2019 by the following authors: Babette Factory (a collective of authors including Nicola Lagioia, Christian Raimo, Francesco Pacifico, and Francesco Longo); Silvia Ballestra; Gaja Cenciarelli; Patrick Fogli; Giorgio Fontana; Alberto Garlini; Giuseppe Genna; Antonio Iovane; Valerio Lucarelli; Luca Moretti; Dario Morgante; Demetrio Paolin (who appears in this research both as a literary critic and as a writer); Christian Raimo; Nicola Ravera Rafele; Simone Sarasso; and Giorgio Vasta. Their works were published by both large-scale publishing groups (Mondadori, Einaudi, Newton Compton) and by medium or small publishing houses (Minimum Fax, Sellerio, Fandango, Marsilio, Transeuropa, Pequod, Castelvecchi, Nottetempo, Sironi, and Piemme).

I selected my corpus according to a biographical criterion: crucially, all the works addressed in this thesis are by Italian authors from the first generation who, because they were too young or not yet born, did not have any active or direct experience of the Years of

Lead. The asymmetry in the corpus between representations of left-wing and right-wing terrorism (thirteen and eight works, respectively) should be seen as a consequence of this. When I decided which works to select for and to exclude from my corpus, I created a comprehensive list of all the literary works published by Italian writers who were born during or after the 1970s and who addressed the Years of Lead in their writing, regardless of the kind of terrorism they chose to depict. This brought me to observe a number of differences in the depiction of right-wing and left-wing terrorism. First, I noticed that Italian writers of this generation tend to be more attracted by left-wing terrorism than they are by right-wing terrorism: in my corpus, eleven authors out of sixteen addressed leftist terrorism. Second, I observed that the depiction of victims and perpetrators varies considerably depending on the ideological origin of violence: when leftist terrorism is addressed, the authors tend to justify, or even magnify, perpetrators, depicting the victims as enemies or mere targets. By contrast, when they focus on right-wing terrorism, the authors tend to magnify the innocence of moral goodness of the victims, fiercely condemning perpetrators. Third, I noticed that right-wing terrorism tends to be under-conceptualized and almost often addressed through enthralling and entertaining conspiracy narratives. By contrast, a deeper reflection is devoted to leftist terrorism, which writers tend to contextualize historically and to address in their ideological foundations. The asymmetry between the representation of right-wing and left-wing terrorism thus became a central point of my analysis, a distinctive trait of which lies precisely in illustrating the ideological involvement of this generation of writers in the memory of the Years of Lead, and the centrality of victimhood in such generational involvement.

The biographical criterion through which I selected my corpus is also at the origin of the gender imbalance that characterizes my corpus. As the list at the beginning of this section shows, my corpus is almost entirely composed of male authors. This gender imbalance is not deliberate. Rather, it reflects how the Years of Lead have predominantly stimulated the interest of male authors within the generation under scrutiny. In this case,

too, this factor became central to my analysis. As we shall see, the predominantly male interest in 1970s terrorism appears consistent with the patriarchal understanding of conflict that permeates the generational imagery of the Years of Lead that this thesis addresses. Yet, this thesis also shows that a gender-oriented reading of this corpus should not be seen as deterministic. There is little or no difference between the representation of victim characters by male and female authors in the works addressed. Moreover, I also cast light on two male-authored works that go beyond this main trend, offering a different and less patriarchal depiction of conflict through the literary character of the victim.

With regards to the biographical criterion through which I selected my corpus, a few considerations need to be outlined. Various reasons guided me to adopt this criterion and to look at works by authors who were born during or after the 1970s and did not directly experience the Years of Lead. First, the primary sources seemed to justify such an approach: as we shall see in greater detail in Part I, when I first started researching the increasing interest in 1970s terrorism in Italian literature of the last two decades, I realized that, in interviews and non-fictional essays, several authors openly expressed the biographical basis of their interest in the Years of Lead. I also realized that this generational interest significantly informed their works and that it was illustrative of the politically committed attitude to literary writing that characterizes the so-called 'return to reality'. In fact, this attitude permeates the representation of terrorism in the works of my corpus. Moreover, I decided to adopt a biographical and generational approach because I found it to be productive, though adopted by few critics.

Memory studies have explored the relationship between generations and the events experienced by their predecessors. In his seminal study *La mémoire collective* (1950), for example, Maurice Halbwachs highlighted the importance of memories inherited from previous generations and, more specifically, of the impulse to return, as adults, to the events witnessed in childhood (Halbwachs 1980, pp. 60–63). In addition, in 1992, Marianne Hirsch

coined the specific notion of 'postmemory' to address the relationship between one generation and the events experienced by those of the previous generations. Hirsch refers to the trauma of the Holocaust, but her reflections on the mechanisms of 'imaginative investment, projection, and creation' (2008, p. 107) through which the following generations revisit the memory of their predecessors provided a good lens to approach my case study. As Antonello highlights, moreover, in contemporary Italian literature, a 'return to memory' characterizes the works of those who grew up between the 1980s and the 1990s, and the Years of Lead are one of the most revisited moments in the country's history (Antonello 2012, p. 147–149). It is surprising, then, that the new literature on the Years of Lead is still poorly explored. In fact, while the urge to revisit 1970s terrorism after a generation has attracted the interest of some historians (Lazar & Matard-Bonucci 2010, pp. 10–11; Ceci 2013, pp. 310–311) and literary critics (Vitello 2013a, p. 147; Ghidotti 2015, p. 6–8), it has never been examined in a systematic and comprehensive manner. The present thesis aims to fill this gap.

The duration of a generation is commonly considered to vary between 10 and 25 years[1]. However, as the French historian Pierre Nora wrote, the notion of generation 'has no operational or scientific interest unless clear and precise answers can be given to four sets of questions: temporal, demographic, historical, and sociological' (1996, p. 504); the paradox is that this notion 'would make a wonderfully precise instrument if only its precision didn't make it impossible to apply to the unclassifiable disorder of reality' (p. 506).

While being aware of these complexities, the generation of my corpus of works can be defined with some accuracy. In fact, this generation is peculiar in the country's recent history, one that experienced the transition between the so-called First and the Second Republic and the crisis of nation-states within the growth of a globalized environment. Most

---

[1]   Treccani.   (n.d.)   *Generazione*.   [Online].   Available   from https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/generazione/ [Accessed on 9 November 2020]

importantly, this generation found itself between two moments of eager political engagement and strong youth movements in Italy: the 1970s and the 2000s. The selected authors grew up in the years of the so-called *riflusso,* namely the retreat from civic and political engagement after the 1970s, and before the emergence of new, different, and global-scale protest movements in the new millennium.

To define more precisely the object of this study, I found it useful to draw on a 2016 report by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT 2016). This report framed the main demographic and social transformations in twentieth century Italy according to six main generations, among which it included the so-called 'transition generation' (2016, p. 47), namely those who were born between 1966 and 1980, entering their twenties between 1986 and 2000, and their thirties between 1996 and 2010: this generation, as the authors of the report write, 'marks the passage between the old and the new millennium; its members grew up between the end of the Soviet bloc and the eastern expansion of the European Union' (ibid.). With some flexibility related to the focus of this research, I selected the works of my corpus according to this classification. Drawing on the categories of the German sociologist Karl Mannheim, the first theorist of the notion of generation, the authors analyzed in this study are selected as a specific 'generational unit' inasmuch as its members were not only exposed to the same social dynamics, but they also shared a common response to those very dynamics (Mannheim 1952, p. 304), a response that the present study examines.

This common response was further exemplified by the formula "*generazione TQ*", through which a cluster of Italian writers and intellectuals born after the 1960s, including Nicola Lagioia, Christian Raimo, and Giorgio Vasta, defined themselves. The *generazione TQ* first appeared with an appeal launched in 2011 in the Italian newspaper *Il Sole 24 Ore* (Antonelli et al., 2011), followed by a meeting at the headquarters of the publishing house Laterza and the diffusion of a manifesto (Vv. Aa., 2011). In a postmodern spirit, the acronym TQ is open to different and disparate interpretations: first of all, 'Trenta-Quaranta' (Thirty-

Forthy), indicating the average age of the members; 'Tale e Quale' (As Such), indicating what members see as the lack of a distinctive identity with respect to the generation of their predecessors, 'Tanto Quanto' (As Much), indicating their common aesthetic of a postmodern synthesis between highbrow and lowbrow culture; or even 'Tarantino Quentin', indicating their shared pop and pulp cultural imagery (see Vv. Aa. , 2011).

In their manifesto, the members of the TQ generation see themselves as a generation of intellectuals who witnessed deep and substantial transformations within the social, political, and cultural fabric of their country, involving the decline of traditional ideologies, the ongoing crisis in the job market, and a fracture in the relationship between intellectuals and society. To these issues, the TQ manifesto offers a politically committed posture, anchored to a 'radical sharpness of duty' (Vv. Aa., 2011, p. 1) that its subscribers feel as contemporary intellectuals. Among its aims, this thesis sets out to historically contextualize this posture and to examine how it informs the expression of political commitment in the corpus considered, discussing and problematizing its outcomes. Although not all the authors of my corpus identify themselves with the TQ generation, they are part of the same *milieu* and, most importantly, the performance of authorship in their writing has a lot in common with the assertions of the TQ manifesto. While eliciting the critical danger of overlooking the distinctiveness of each work by looking at a corpus of twenty-one literary works, this thesis presents the first comprehensive study of the imagery of the 1970s by a generation of writers born after those years, and it aligns to previous critical endeavours to offer a comprehensive overview of literature on the Years of Lead (e.g., Conti 2013).

In this thesis, I focus particularly on the question of victimhood, looking at the construction of victims as literary characters and at how the authors in focus turned victimhood into a cultural paradigm for their generation. I chose to focus on the question of victimhood for the following reasons. First, as I will discuss more in detail in the general introduction to Part I, because in past Italian literature on terrorism, victims were often

overlooked and absent as literary characters. Several literary critics, particularly in Italian-speaking criticism, interpreted this absence as the sign of a lack of political commitment and realism in Italian literature on the Years of Lead. I wanted to explore if the latest generation of authors paid more attention to victims and, if so, whether this related to political commitment and realism. Second, I chose to focus on victimhood because, in the last two decades, the victims of the Years of Lead gained more public space, in what Ruth Glynn defines as a 'turn to the victim' in contemporary Italian culture (2013). After two decades in which former terrorists were in the limelight of television interviews (e.g., Zavoli 1995) and the subject of miscellaneous publications (Tabacco 2010), the relatives of victims and those who survived the attacks began to publish their memoirs and testimonies and to denounce the lack of truth about several episodes of terrorist violence during the Years of Lead. The corpus of this thesis shows that, in fact, the 'turn to the victim' turned victims into a meaningful part of the collective imagery of 1970s terrorism. Particularly when they depict the victims of right-wing terrorism, this generation of authors often seek to foster a moral reaction in their readers, engaging them in their denunciation of the *stragismo*.

3. Methodology and theoretical framework

In analyzing the victim as a literary character and a cultural paradigm in works by this generation of authors, I devised a composite theoretical framework spanning literary criticism, historiography, sociology, and psychoanalysis. Overall, my theoretical approach pursues the following aims, which also correspond to the three parts of the thesis: 1) I highlight the specific historicity of the literary works, showing how they enter in dialogue with the political and social background of the years in which they were conceived and written; 2) I comment on the resulting imagery on the basis of a number of theories, with further exemplification from primary sources to provide textual evidence; 3) I analyze the forms and language that shape this generational imagery, contextualizing this formal level within the

historical and cultural context described through points 1 and 2. To pursue these aims, I employ theoretical frameworks or notions whose pertinence to my primary sources is highlighted case by case, either by direct exemplification or through the voice of the authors in non-fictional contributions or interviews.

To contextualize my primary sources in their time, I combine the analysis of the depiction of the victim as a literary character with secondary sources that are useful to evidence its inspiration and interpretation. I examine the polarized and ideologically charged depiction of victims through the lens of Italy's 'divided memory', as John Foot defined it (2009). More particularly, I draw on Philip Cooke's research (2011) to discuss the central role played by the Italian Resistance in the characterization of victims as 'allies' or 'enemies', and on Giovanni De Luna's *La Repubblica del dolore* (2011) to illustrate how the ideologically driven magnification or condemnation of victims reiterates a divisive and emotionally charged victim-centred approach to historical memory in Italy between the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. Finally, to comment on the spectacular and, at times, dehumanizing depiction of innocence, I draw on some reflections on the representation of suffering by Susan Sontag (2003) and Judith Butler (2004), as well as on the notion of the 'ideal victim' introduced by the Norwegian sociologist and criminologist Nils Christie (1986) to describe the pragmatic function of victims' representation within political discourse. Overall, these secondary sources help to explore how, through a politically committed depiction of victims, the authors from this generation express their desire to be engaged, almost seeking to assimilate writing to a form of action.

To comment on this attitude, I analyse victimhood as a cultural paradigm for this generation of writers, describing how it emerges through three main patterns. The first is the display of political commitment through the model of Pier Paolo Pasolini as a victimized, prophetic, and unheeded intellectual. To discuss this point, I draw on studies that explore the performative dimension of victimhood in Pasolini's self-fashioning as an intellectual, as

analyzed in particular by Zigmunt Barański (1999), and I show how the authors of my corpus rework this dimension with a concern for action and direct intervention, partly misreading Pasolini's own ideas and actions. Here, I use Antonello's essay *Dimenticare Pasolini* (2012) to contextualize Pasolini's iconic status within contemporary Italian political culture. These authors model themselves on an authoritative and often pedagogical model of the intellectual that was key in the construction of Italy's national identity but has lost applicability today.

The second pattern through which our authors turn victimhood into a cultural paradigm of their generation is the reworking of the memory of the Years of Lead through the conflict of the 2001 G8 summit in Genoa. Using a notion coined by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in 1925, I use this conflict as a 'social framework of memory'. Through this notion, Halbwachs described how memory is socially conditioned and created collectively, within social structures, groups, or currents of thoughts that are located in the present in which the past is recalled and that influence the way in which the past is remembered. Halbwachs's notion of the 'social framework of memory' is fundamental to interpret the self-projection of our authors, as a 'victimized' generation, onto the memory of the Years of Lead. To examine how victimhood as a generational paradigm relates to the problem of police violence in Italy, I draw on Donatella Della Porta's and Herbert Reiter's study *Polizia e protesta. L'ordine pubblico dalla Liberazione ai «no global»* (2003), as well as on Antonio Gibelli's *Il popolo bambino. Infanzia e nazione dalla Grande Guerra a Salò* (2005).

This second pattern can also be contextualized as the product of a 'transition' generation, who grew up between the decline of the nation-state system and the growth of a globalized environment. Through examples from my primary sources, I show how the victim-centred projection of the G8 events onto the memory of the Years of Lead originates from a difficulty for this generation of intellectuals to reconceptualize the modes and strategies of political intervention in the globalized present. In particular, I show how the non-

comprehension of the so-called 'new global' movement (Della Porta 2003) – an intergenerational, globalized, less revolutionary and ideologically defined social movement – intertwines with a subtle admiration for the revolutionary movements of the 1970s. In this manner, the G8 'social framework of memory' casts light on a paradoxical trait of victimhood as a cultural paradigm, which runs through most of my corpus, namely a fascination with revolutionary violence as an epic rebellion against oppression. To further investigate this point, I elaborate on Daniele Giglioli's essay *Critica della vittima* (2014), which engages with a previous scholarly tradition that explored victimhood as a paradigm of cultural identity, as found in the work of the sociologists Richard Sennett (1980) and Christopher Lasch (1984). With regards to social and civic activism during the Genoa G8, I mainly draw on Vittorio Agnoletto and Lorenzo Guadagnucci's essay *L'eclisse della democrazia* (2011), whose reconstruction of the events is based on an accurate record of judicial sentences.

The fascination with violence finds full expression in the third pattern of victimhood as a cultural paradigm, namely the idealisation of leftist terrorists in the 1970s as a generation that 'made' national history, in contrast to the perception and depiction of present-day generations as passive, submissive, and lacking agency. My analysis of this last pattern is articulated through the theoretical notions of the 'disposability' (*Verfügbarkeit*) or 'makeability' (*Machbarkeit*) of history, coined in 1985 by the German historian Reinhart Koselleck to describe the modern idea of the human being as the 'agent' of the historical process. I also refer to two contemporary discussions of the classical notion of *hubris* in relation to modern political culture, respectively by the American sociologist Daniel Bell (1978) and the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (2003). Pierre Nora's monumental work *Les lieux de mémoire* (1996) is key to show how the idea of *making history* in a revolutionary fashion intertwines with European national culture and how it found its pivotal tension in the notion of 'generation'. Finally, to discuss how the rhetoric of generations and the 'makeability' of history took shape in the Italian context, I draw on Alberto Mario Banti's

Sublime madre nostra (2011), which explores the rhetoric, images, and myths that informed the Italian national discourse. Banti's analysis is central to showing how the glamorization of leftist terrorists in many works from the corpus bears the mark of this rhetorical apparatus.

Overall, these secondary sources helped me contextualize the cultural paradigm of victimhood as a construction of the 'transition generation'. My contention is that their perceived lack of agency originates from their interpretation of the globalized present through political and historical interpretive paradigms that are typical of modern nationalism. A key reference in the discussion of this perceived lack of agency is the French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky's notion of 'hypermodernity', coined in 2004 to indicate the 'consummation' of some characteristic traits of modern culture in the present (2015, p. 157). In my corpus, the 'consummation' of modern patterns of conflict dovetails with the depiction of the present as a time with no conflict and no future to imagine and aim for.

To discuss how the three patterns of victimhood found in the generational imagery of 1970s terrorism relate with the question of realism within the 'return to reality', I engage with the Lacanian notion of the 'disappearance of the father' (Lacan 1969), which the French psychoanalyst coined to describe the dissolution of the symbolic function of authority in modern culture. This notion was applied to the Italian Years of Lead by the Italian psychoanalyst Massimo Recalcati (2013), to whose reflections one of the authors of my corpus makes explicit reference, and to Italian literature on the Years of Lead (Vitello 2013). In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the father is linked to castration, and castration is linked to the entry into the symbolic order, comprising of language and signification.

By offering a non-gendered and non-patriarchal interpretation of this notion, I use Lacan's theory of the Symbolic – in part through some elaborations on realism by Roland Barthes (1968), Eric Downing (2000), and Walter Siti (2013) – to interpret the so-called 'return to reality' as a lack of symbolization of reality, which can be conceptualized as a traumatic 'repetition' (Lacan 1973) of the non-symbolized Real. I interpret the representation

of victims in the literature of the 'return to reality' as the reiteration, in language, of the reality of violence. By either monumentalizing the victims or reducing them to targets, our authors do not symbolize conflict, which rests on the recognition of alterity, but reiterate in language the non-recognition of alterity that characterizes violence. In this light, the difficulty of representing victims in literature on terrorism appears to have little to do with the choice to use literary realism (or not), but more with the lack of a symbolic recognition of conflict. Beyond the narrative of revolutionary movements, conflict denotes a wider relationship with reality, whose forms of representations vary and evolve but are always anchored to a recognition and negotiation of certain limits. As a radical alterity, the victim personifies these limits and compels the symbolic recognition of conflict in literature.

In the last chapter of this thesis, I focus on Giorgio Vasta's *Il tempo materiale* (2008) and Giorgio Fontana's *Morte di un uomo felice* (2014). These two works abandon a nostalgically patriarchal reading of conflict and stand out for their original and unconventional depiction of victims as radical alterities. Vasta and Fontana use two radically different modes of representation, respectively recognizable as fantastic and realistic. Drawing on some reflections on realism by Alberto Casadei (2011 and 2014), as well as on Lucio Lugnani's notion of the 'paradigm of reality' (1983), I argue that realism is not the only way to produce a politically relevant literary work: the political dimension of literature builds on literature's capacity to access, whatever the modes and forms employed, the symbolic order, signifying reality through language.

4. Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into three main parts. In Part I, which includes Chapter 1 and 2, I introduce in more detail my corpus, expanding on the debate on the so-called 'return to reality' and on my focus and selection criteria. I thus develop a close textual analysis of the representation of victims as literary characters in the works of my corpus, showing how this

representation interacts with the political and social background in which these works were conceived and written. This first part of my thesis is very descriptive and illustrates the rigid ideological polarization between 'good' (Chapter 1) and 'bad' (Chapter 2) victims in the works of my corpus. Part I, in particular, shows that victims are very present as literary characters and casts light on the strong authorial presence in the works of my corpus. The authors in focus depict victims through a variety of different modes of representation, the aim of which is to foster a moral reaction in their readers. In their works, victims may be seen as instruments to perform their committed authorship through references to real-life figures or events. In this light, the depiction of victims as literary characters illustrates one of the distinctive traits of this corpus as belonging to the so-called 'return to reality', namely the urge of writers of this generation to claim their role as intellectuals.

In Part II, which includes Chapter 3, 4, 5, and 6, I analyse more closely the tendencies through which such authorial presence shows in the corpus, arguing that a fundamental dimension of *impotence* underlies their expression of political commitment, a perceived condition of helplessness, of lacking 'potency', conceived as the ability to affect reality. I argue that this impotence reveals a common, generational problem, which can be precisely defined and historically contextualized by looking at victimhood as a cultural paradigm. Placing the theoretical part of my thesis after a purely analytical one was a deliberate choice: I did not want to impose from above a range of theories and theoretical notions on my primary sources. Rather, I wanted to extract some of the main lines of inquiry from my corpus and then develop the theoretical part of my study, so as to better understand the corpus.

In Chapter 3, 4, and 5, I analyze the three main patterns of victimhood as a cultural paradigm. Chapter 3 explores the iconic status of Pier Paolo Pasolini in the performance of authorial political commitment and the role it plays in assessing this commitment as unsuccessful. Chapter 4 looks at the G8 as a 'social framework of memory', showing how our authors rework the memory of the Years of Lead against the backdrop of police brutality

in the 2000s, developing a systematic narrative of state violence and generational victimization. Chapter 5 deals with the idealization of leftist terrorists in the 1970s as a generation that 'made history', showing how this narrative dovetails with the depiction of present-day generations as passive and submissive, with no active role in the country's history. These chapters contextualize the cultural paradigm of victimhood within the crisis of the nation-state and the growth of a globalized environment. As members of the 'transition generation', these authors mythologize the Years of Lead as years of great political action and struggle to acknowledge the conflicts of their own present, which are less ideologically defined and less related to a patriarchal frame of reference, in particular to the traditional narrative of 'killing the fathers' as a means of generational self-affirmation. In Chapter 6, I discuss the link between the sense of impotence expressed by the cultural paradigm of victimhood and hypermodernity, engaging with a Lacanian reading of conflict: in this corpus, a non-conflictual relationship with reality mirrors in a non-conflictual depiction of terrorism.

In Part III, which includes Chapters 7 and 8, I discuss how the corpus of this thesis illuminates the question of realism with respect to the so-called 'return to reality' in contemporary Italian literature, focusing on how victimhood casts light on this relationship. In Chapter 7, I comment on the anxiety that these authors have about the practical 'usefulness' of literature in society, and I argue that the 'return to reality' is hypermodern, not as a militant response to the postmodern but, rather, as a 'consummation' of a modern obsession with the adherence of literature to objective reality. Moreover, I show how the preoccupation with the practical 'usefulness' of literature that characterizes the 'return to reality' results in a literary reiteration of the pragmatic discourse of power. In Chapter 8, finally, I examine two works whose depictions of victims deviate from the main trends described in this thesis, discussing their political dimensions and relationship with literary realism. This final chapter helps to keep conclusions open, avoiding rigid generalizations

and calling attention to two authors from the generation of this corpus who symbolize conflict

in an interesting and original fashion.

PART I. THE VICTIM AS A LITERARY CHARACTER

Introduction

This section introduces the corpus of novels and short stories on which this thesis focuses.

I describe the debate on the 'return to reality' or 'return to realism', introduce my corpus of

works by expanding on my choice to adopt a biographical criterion, and present a corpus-

based analysis of the literary character of the victim on which this part of the thesis focuses.

Thus, I illustrate the articulation of the textual analysis that I carry out in Chapters 2 and 3,

where I explore the representation of victims as literary characters.

1. The 'Return to Reality' and Realism

The corpus of this thesis consists of a group of novels and short stories that differently deal

with the strategy of tension and the Years of Lead, by Italian authors who, because they

were born during or after those years, did not have direct experience of those events. These

works were published between 1999 and 2019 and are as follows: *Catrame* (1999) by

Giuseppe Genna; *Nel nome di Ishmael* (2001) by Giuseppe Genna; *2005 dopo Cristo* (2005)

by Babette Factory; *Buio Rivoluzione* (2006) by Valerio Lucarelli; *La compagna P38* (2007)

by Dario Morgante; *Confine di Stato* (2007) by Simone Sarasso; *Il tempo materiale* (2008)

by Giorgio Vasta; *Il tempo infranto* (2008) by Patrick Fogli; *Settanta* (2009) by Simone

Sarasso; *Il senso del piombo* (2011) by Luca Moretti; *Sangue del suo sangue* (2011) by

Gaja Cenciarelli; *La legge dell'odio* (2012) by Alberto Garlini; *Morte di un uomo felice* (2014)

by Giorgio Fontana; *Il senso della lotta* (2017) by Nicola Ravera Rafele; *Il brigatista* (2019)

by Antonio Iovane.

In my analysis, I also draw on works by authors of the same generation who do not

represent the strategy of tension and the Years of Lead directly, but rather deal with them

indirectly, and are of help when reconstructing the generational imagery of that decade that this thesis explores. These works are Christian Raimo's *Latte* (2001) and *Dov'eri tu quando le stelle del mattino gioivano in coro?* (2004), Alberto Garlini's *Fùtbol bailado* (2004), Demetrio Paolin's *Il mio nome è Legione* (2009) and the short story "Piombo" (2018), and Silvia Ballestra's *I giorni della Rotonda* (2009).

The corpus in focus is part of a broader flourishing of literary narratives on the Years of Lead published in the last twenty years, which has attracted the attention of a number of literary critics (Paolin 2008; Donnarumma 2010; Simonetti 2011; Vitello 2013a; Ghidotti 2015; Ward 2017) and that some ascribe to a 'return to reality' in contemporary Italian literature (Simonetti 2012, p. 116; Vitello 2013a, p. 31; Ghidotti 2015, p. 3). With 'return to reality', some contemporary Italian literary critics identify a new tension in the relationship between literature and politics in contemporary Italian prose writing, made possible by an increasing attention to recent Italian history and politics, and characterized by an increment of non-fictional features in several literary works published in the last two decades, which some critics relate to a renewed interest in literary realism.

The idea of a 'return to reality' stems from a publication by the Italian literary critics Raffaele Donnarumma and Gilda Policastro in issue 57 of the journal *Allegoria,* entitled 'Ritorno alla realtà? Otto interviste a narratori italiani'. Donnarumma and Policastro interviewed eight contemporary Italian writers on what they consider to be a renewed confidence in the possibility of literature to positively influence society, and on their relationship with literary realism (Donnarumma & Policastro 2008). Interestingly, when asked about their relationship with the tradition of literary realism, none of the eight writers interviewed by Donnarumma and Policastro showed an interest towards this mode of representation. Yet, these critics kept focusing their discussion of Italian literature of the new millennium around the question of realism, which they linked to a renewed interest in political commitment. In their view, this phenomenon should be chronologically located after the 9/11

attacks and marks the end of postmodernism, whose irony and playful attitude Donnarumma and other literary critics negatively judge as an expression of political disengagement and indifference towards social and political questions (Casadei 2007; Donnarumma 2008; Simonetti 2011 and 2012; Donnarumma 2014).

This view – challenged by scholars like Jennifer Burns (2001) and Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussgnug (2009) – can be summarized in Romano Luperini's vitriolic and Pasolinian assessment of postmodernism as 'cultural genocide' (2005, p. 128). Overall, Italian literary critics involved in the 'return to reality' debate see in it an alleged 'recovery' of the public function of Italian writers and intellectuals after the years of the so-called *riflusso,* namely the retreat from civic and political engagement after the 1970s*.* In the words of Gabriele Vitello,

> for a few years now we have been witnessing what many critics call a "return to the real" in Italian literature. In my view, this phenomenon expresses the shared urgency of giving back to literature and to the role of writers a social and cultural authority that was neglected in the past. (Vitello 2013b, p. 328)

In the years that followed the publication of Donnarumma and Policastro's interview, the idea of a 'return to reality' and realism in contemporary Italian literature attracted more and more critical attention (Wu Ming 2009; Spinazzola 2010; Ricciardi 2011; Serkowska 2011; Somigli 2013; Palumbo Mosca 2014), with the publication of two 'manifestos' that fleshed out this idea. On the one hand, in *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (2010), the American writer David Shields dismissed the traditional forms of fiction in favour of a new blending of fiction and non-fiction that could satisfy a new 'hunger' for reality in the twenty-first century. On the other hand, with the *Manifesto del Nuovo Realismo* (2012) by Maurizio Ferraris, a new philosophical trend known as 'New Realism' emerged in contemporary Italian philosophical thought, which was taken up by the literary critic Raffaele Donnarumma as a point of reference to contextualize the 'return to reality' and realism in literature (2014, p. 63n; p. 121n; p. 122n; p. 126n).

The critical debate about the 'return to reality' and realism is rather ill-defined and not very clear in its fundamental ideas, which makes it difficult to draw out some theoretical categories to apply to one or more literary works. This discussion rather interests us because it is symptomatic of some of the issues that this thesis explores with regards to the question of ethics and intellectual engagement in contemporary Italian culture.

To begin with, the debate on the 'return to reality' and realism lacks a definition of 'realism'. Critics like Donnarumma or Simonetti, from the journal *Allegoria* (which promoted this discussion)*,* vaguely define literary realism as the best mode of representation for subjects inspired by the socio-political context of our time, and the best way of expressing political commitment in literature. 'A realistic tension', Donnarumma argues, 'is perhaps what more than anything could restore meaning to literature, first and foremost against the lethargy that postmodern superfetation and self-absolution have generated in many.' (2008, p. 54); 'the more reality becomes artificial and displays its virtual quality, the more the armies of a new literary realism advance' (Simonetti 2011, p. 130). Donnarumma and Simonetti thus share a 'militant' conception of literary realism, seeing it as the best tool to promote the critical engagement of readers in with their surrounding world. More precisely, Donnarumma links realism to the public function of writers: 'Realism is a social operation: not only does it presuppose an agreement between the narrator and his public, but also the narrator's claim to his own mandate' (2008, p. 54).

Against this backdrop, Donnarumma and Simonetti rather seem to use the notion of literary realism to identify political engagement, whose forms and modes of actuation they do not specify in more detail. Yet, while an explicit and clear definition of realism is lacking in this discussion, it is possible to define a type of realism that is implicit in the 'return to reality' discussion. When he refers to the 'realist novel' and to the 'great historical novel' (Donnarumma 2010, p. 460), Donnarumma seems to point to a nineteenth-century's understanding of realism: as he himself writes, 'for me, realism has always to do with

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetics' (Donnarumma 2014, p. 2). More specifically, Donnarumma and the other critics from the journal *Allegoria* (which aims at a 'materialistic study of literature') seem to refer to a type of realism that recalls the theorizations on the subject by György Lukács' (Keller 1977), as Emanuele Zinato has recently highlighted (2015). Zinato discussed how the need for an 'agonistic' (Zinato 2015, p. 10) approach to reality brought Donnarumma and other Italian literary critics to recover a 1970s Lukácsian approach to the novel. Lukács' idea of literary realism built on a Hegelian and Marxist view of history and pointed to novels by authors like Tolstoi, Dickens, or Balzac, among others. Lukács' idea of literary realism lied not only in a credible rendering of everyday life in a work of art but also in the idea that a novel should tackle the problems and contradictions of the society and analyze a given historical period through the life of a problematic individual, a type, a 'peculiar synthesis which organically binds together the general and the particular' (Lukács 1964, p. 6). The following lines by Gabriele Vitello on the absence of victims in Italian literature on the Years of Lead, which he ascribes to a lack of realism, provide a good example of such an idea:

> the absence of victims in Italian novels reveals not only an ethical problem, but an eminently literary one, inasmuch as it casts light on the Italian novel's difficulty to recount the ordinary, namely… the «life of common individuals within their society, generally caught in the middle of problematic situations». (Vitello 2011, p. 176)

The 'return to reality' discussion thus appears to be underpinned by a strong ideological bias, or, as Daniele Giglioli highlighted (2016), by some 'anti-postmodern resentments' of a number of Italian literary critics. As Giglioli argued with regards to postmodernism, they seem to 'rage against the enemy's corpse' (Giglioli 2016, p, 3), hoping for the increasing interest towards subjects taken from contemporary history and society in Italian literature of the new millennium to revive literary poetics that were typical of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Such position is problematic and marked by a kind of nostalgia towards past literary models, which literary critics do not find in Italian literature of the new millennium. On closer

inspection, more than literary realism, the real issue at stake seems to be the political engagement of intellectuals and the possibility for writers today to have an impact on society: 'the only ethics of realism in which I believe and that I defend', Donnarumma writes, 'is that for which literature fights with the world' (2014, p. 5).

In my view, the discussion on the 'return to reality' – and the literary trend that this discussion identifies, of which my corpus is part – shall be seen as one of other facets of a more general 'turn to ethics' (Garber, Hanssnen & Walkowitz 2000; Davies & Womack 2001) within the humanities and social sciences, which sometimes involves the claim of a 'realist' departure from postmodern culture even in other disciplines (López & Potter 2001; Bryant, Srnicek & Harman 2011; Ferraris 2012). In the words of José López and Garry Potter, editors of *After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism* (2001),

> [p]ostmodernism is inadequate as an intellectual response to the times we live in. … critical realism offers a more reasonable and useful framework from which to engage the philosophical, scientific and social scientific challenges of this new century. (2001, p. 4)

This cultural climate emerged at the threshold of the new millennium in response to the great transformations brought about by the growth of a globalized environment and the digital revolution in the twenty-first century. As Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman wrote in their introduction to *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism,*

> phenomenology, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, and postmodernism have all been perfect exemplars of the anti-realist trend in continental philosophy. … In the face of the looming ecological catastrophe, and the increasing infiltration of technology into the everyday world (including our own bodies), it is not clear that the anti-realist position is equipped to face up to these developments. (Bryant, Srnicek & Harman 2011, p. 3)

I am not interested here in going into detail on these views or in discussing their validity. As Antonello and Mussgnug aptly point out in their essay on postmodern commitment, '[t]o speak of a shift from postmodernism to ethics … means to ignore the ways in which these two terms have become profoundly intertwined' (Antonello & Mussgnug 2009, p. 9), as well

41

as the ways in which postmodern thought did not 'end' with the 9/11 attacks (see Ceserani 2012). What interests me at this stage is that the discussion about the 'return to reality' and realism in contemporary Italian literary criticism, and the increasing interest towards subjects taken from history and politics in contemporary Italian literature, shall be seen as one facet of a wider, international, and interdisciplinary preoccupation with reality, which took shape between the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the new millennium. As Loredana Di Martino and Pasquale Verdicchio argue in their volume devoted to the 'return to reality' entitled *Encounters with The Real in Contemporary Italian Literature and Cinema* (2017), 'the geopolitical consequences of global capitalism have intensified the quest to transform a society of spectators into one of active thinkers and engaged citizens' (Di Martino & Verdicchio 2017, p. ix). Or, as David Ward put it, by only focusing on the 9/11 attacks,

> In such a … post 9/11 new world, into which reality had brusquely intervened in the form of terrorist attacks on a previously unheard of scale and of police wielding cudgels, it seemed that postmodern irony, playfulness and concern for text had little to say, was incongruous and even complicit. (Ward 2017, pp. 36–37)

The corpus in focus in this thesis is also part of this context. In the works under scrutiny, the characteristic trait of the so-called 'return to reality' is the politically committed posture of the authors and their desire to speak about reality. If we look at the words of two of the authors from my corpus, we can see that, for them, a radical break with postmodernism occurs mainly through the expression of their political commitment. In his narrative essay *Assalto a un tempo devastato e vile. Versione 3.0* (2010, pp. 259–260), Giuseppe Genna – author of *Catrame* (1999) and *Nel nome di Ishmael* (2001) – quotes an interview with the American author David Foster Wallace in the *Review of Contemporary Fiction* (Dalkey Archive Press 1993), in which he compares the postmodern to a party of teenagers who get drunk and take drugs while the parents are away and concludes by saying

is there something about authority and limits we actually need? And then the unesiest feeling of all, as we start gradually to realize that parents in fact aren't ever coming back – which means "we're" going to have to be the parents. (ibid.)

By the same token, in a lecture delivered at Wellesley College (USA) in which he presented *Confine di Stato* (2007), Simone Sarasso – author of *Confine di Stato* (2007) and *Settanta* (2009) – maintained:

> Il postmodernismo e in particolare il destrutturalismo… hanno… analizzato, frazionato, sezionato, sminuzzato ogni centimetro dell'opera scritta. L'hanno depotenziata, smascherata, si sono presi gioco di lei. Il postmodernismo, con quel suo onnipresente sfacciato sorriso, ha sotterrato la letteratura.… Il tempo dei sorrisi è finito. Basta sminuzzare, frantumare, disperdere energie. È tempo di rimettere insieme i pezzi, di costruire grandi storie, di guardare avanti e di fare sul serio. (Sarasso 2010)

As recently suggested (Serra 2011), there is a tendency among contemporary Italian intellectuals to engage with the notion of 'literature' as if it were a damsel in distress that they take the duty of rescuing from the brutality of her marginalization by capitalism. In the case of Sarasso, he claims that this needs to be done through a 'narrazione responsabile e popolare, … il più possibile "onesta" ….' (Sarasso 2010). Moreover, differently from Genna, Sarasso also maintains that an attempt to be credible and realistic is part of this effort: 'E "onesto" deve essere il linguaggio, la parola scritta, che deve tentare – almeno per come la vedo io – di restituire il reale (o il fantastico) nella maniera più verosimile possibile.' (ibid.).

The present study aims to explore the nature of this political engagement, examining the narratives, imagery, and rhetoric that shaped the so-called 'return to reality' in literary representation of terrorism. Analysing this corpus will help figuring out that, at least in relation to my corpus, the 'return to reality' has nothing to do with a desire to recover a specific kind of literary realism, but, rather, with a lack of symbolization and creative re-working and re-elaboration of reality. To discuss this point, the present study will draw on the psychoanalytic category of 'traumatic repetition', contextualizing it historically and culturally as a product of the so-called 'transition generation'.

2. The Generational Framework

Given the number of literary narratives on the Years of Lead published in the last two decades (Donnarumma 2010, pp. 463-465), there was more than one possible criterion to select a corpus of works to analyse. I could have adopted a thematic parameter, focusing on works portraying terrorism from the extreme left, from the extreme right, or dealing with specific episodes of the Years of Lead, such as the Moro case or the Piazza Fontana bombing. I could also have selected my corpus on a stylistic basis, looking at a specific literary genre, such as crime fiction or noir, both of them being very popular in the recent increase of literary representation of the Years of Lead (Pezzotti 2016, pp. 169-235).

Instead, I have used a biographical criterion, selecting works by authors from the first generation who, because they were too young or not yet born, did not have an active or direct experience of those years. My choice was driven by the fact that – in articles, interviews, or in their works – some of the authors I approach have openly expressed their interest in the Years of Lead on a biographical basis. The 1970s, Giorgio Vasta claims, were the years in which he was born and from which he received an indirect, but nevertheless significant, influence:

> Ho deciso di scrivere sugli anni Settanta per quella curiosità inconsapevole che si può avvertire nei confronti della propria origine. Gli anni in cui si è nati sono come un fantasma da cui non ci si emancipa e che paradossalmente si ha sempre davanti a sé. Ho deciso di scrivere sugli anni Settanta per un motivo biografico, più che politico.[2]

By the same token, in his autofictional short story *Piombo* (2018), Demetrio Paolin wrote:

> Sono nato nell'agosto del millenovecentosettantaquattro. … Il mio nutrimento è stato il piombo dei '70, mi hanno ingrassato un latte che sapeva di zinco e gli ormoni negli omogeneizzati; le mie ossa non sono altro che il risultato della crisi energetica e il sangue è quello dei poliziotti e dei terroristi mischiato insieme. Io sono venuto al mondo mentre ogni cosa esplodeva e l'aria sapeva di tritolo e di C4. Sono nato e i corpi come quello di mia madre venivano uccisi da pallottole vaganti. (p. 56)

---

[2] Vasta, Giorgio. (Personal communication, 3rd July 2020).

As these passages show, the authors in question describe the 1970s as an inherent part of their identity, to which they wanted to connect through literary writing. In other cases, writing on the Years of Lead was described as an attempt to 'conquer' a portion of history that was perceived as the exclusive 'property' of those who were there at the time. As Vasta maintains:

> Ho deciso di scrivere su quegli anni anche perché chi è 'arrivato dopo' quegli anni ha spesso l'impressione che quel tempo 'appartenga', in senso strettamente proprietario, soltanto a chi lo ha vissuto. Ma il tempo, nel momento in cui lo si trasfigura letterariamente, non appartiene a nessuno.[3]

Similarly, Giorgio Fontana describes as follows his thoughts while writing his novel on a judge killed by the extreme left in the Years of Lead:

> "Tu non c'eri": mentre scrivevo, questa obiezione – radicale e superficiale insieme – non smetteva di girarmi in testa. Sì, ovvio, non c'ero. Sono nato nel 1981, l'anno in cui Giacomo Colnaghi viene assassinato; non ho conoscenza diretta di quel periodo. ... Come fare? Come si è sempre fatto. Documentandosi con la massima cura e insieme provando a esercitare uno sguardo di pietà – di comprensione. Anche grazie al privilegio della nascita postuma. (Fofi 2015, p. 134)

The youngest among my authors, Fontana here reiterates some thoughts he already devoted on his age and the choice of writing on the country's past. In a short and polemic essay entitled *La velocità del buio* (2011), Fontana writes:

> La storia terminale di questo paese coincide con l'inizio della mia vita adulta. … È ciò che intendo quando parlo di un pensiero privo di nostalgia: il regno del rimpianto ci è precluso da sempre, e questo – ne sono convinto – dona un margine di lucidità diverso.… Per questo, per tutto questo è necessario che io scriva ora: perché voglio che queste siano righe precise ma feroci, piene di urgenza. (pp. 20–21)

Like Raimo, Fontana describes his generation as the one who came of age as the revolutionary ideals of the 1970s faded in the so-called *riflusso* of the 1980s. For this reason,

---

[3] Ibid.

he argues, his generation has a privileged, clear-minded perspective on the country's past, free from any sentimental nostalgia. Similarly, though in a more apocalyptic posture, in his lecture at Wellesley College, Simone Sarasso described his choice of writing on the Years of Lead as follows:

> Le mie storie nascono nel sangue. … Perché la mia generazione ha vissuto l'ultima coda della Guerra Fredda, ha visto crollare i muri, ha… guardato l'apocalisse dritta negli occhi. Ha deciso di descriverla in modo "giusto e serio", utilizzando tutto ciò che aveva a disposizione. Ha insegnato al polveroso mondo delle italiche lettere che c'è ancora spazio per le grandi storie, che in giro ci sono ancora spalle, cervello, rabbia e polmoni per raccontarle. … Quando ho cominciato a scrivere il mio primo romanzo, Confine di Stato, avevo ancora nelle orecchie il suono delle esplosioni.[4]

These are just some of the passages in which the authors addressed discuss their biographical engagement with the Years of Lead, and I will go through more of them later in this thesis. In different ways and with different approaches, these statements offer a picture where the authors describe the Years of Lead as part of their biographical and generational identity, and literary writing as the means to access it. This led me to formulate a comprehensive list of all the works published by authors of the same generation in order to explore their imagery of that decade. As the following chapters will show more extensively, the generational factor proved to be central in their representations and offered me a powerful angle of vision through which to examine the increasing interest in the Years of Lead within the so-called 'return to reality'.

Generally speaking, the most evident characteristic of my corpus lies in the politically committed attitude of the authors. In different ways, their representations are filled with explicit messages of social and political relevance: the authors of interest share a common necessity to perform their political commitment in their writing and to encourage their readers to critically engage with the subjects they describe. Through the depiction of the Years of

---

[4] Sarasso, Simone. (2010) Solve et coagula: *il futuro della letteratura italiana per come lo vedo io*. [Lecture] Wellesley College (USA), 10 November.

Lead, these authors engage with issues related to the country's history and contemporary politics, such as the lack of truth and justice concerning many episodes of the *stragismo* or the problem of police violence in the public management of dissent. To many extents, all this brought a new dimension to Italian culture exploring terrorism and marked a difference between this generation of authors and the previous one, who embraced a more reflexive and less opinionated perspective on the Years of Lead, aiming at comprehending the reasons of terrorists in pursued their armed struggle. As Pierpaolo Antonello writes,

> the «years of lead» were examined as the great black hole of the country's historical, civic, and political conscience—not so much by the generation of the fathers, who did little except stammer a few words about those events (Sciascia, Camon, Balestrini were the exceptions in that they tried to offer a narration in this regard), but by the sons. Although immersed in the phantasmagoria of the «society of the spectacle», the latter are trying – certainly also as a result of the *Zeitgeist* – to interrogate that history, and they do so through heterogeneous means, spanning literature, memoirs, cinema, and comics. (Antonello 2012, p. 149)

In some cases, our authors' interest in their country's politics and recent history is grounded in their biography and working experience. Both Giuseppe Genna and Luca Moretti, for example, have been directly involved in the political environment: Genna worked in the Chamber of Deputies in 1994–1995, during the years of the judicial inquiry known as *Mani Pulite* concerning the so-called *Tangentopoli* scandal, and during which a number of other inquiries into the strategy of tension and the scandals of the P2 Lodge were being carried out. As the literary analysis will show, this significantly shaped his thrillers. Luca Moretti, on the other hand, combines his activity as a writer with activism within social centres. As we will see more in detail ahead, his literary production is significantly engaged with the themes of state violence and police brutality. Other authors, like Christian Raimo, Giorgio Fontana, or Alberto Garlini, regularly contribute to Italian newspapers writing on current affairs and issues of topical interest. Christian Raimo, in particular, often contributes to political debates on television and has also written a number of newspapers articles and essays on the

themes of terrorism, memory, and reconciliation (2008; 2014; 2015; 2017b), to which I will return later in this thesis. By the same token, authors like Valerio Lucarelli and Demetrio Paolin have written essays on the Years of Lead (2010) and their representation in literature (2008), respectively, in addition to the novels and short stories included in my corpus. More generally, several authors considered here – like Genna, Sarasso, Fogli, or Cenciarelli – have devoted other novels to the country's recent history or to the so-called *misteri italiani*.

3. Victims as Literary Characters

In the corpus, the representation of victims is central to the authors' expressions of their political commitment. The depiction of victims as literary characters often dovetails with some of the most relevant messages that the authors convey in their works. This is a significant aspect of Italian literature dealing with the Years of Lead, one that contributes to make the works of this generation of authors as an interesting case study to explore. Italian literary critics argued that, overall, Italian writers representing the Years of Lead were generally reticent to directly portray victims, who were absent or barely represented in their works. As Demetrio Paolin states: 'the novels I explored do not give any narrative dimension to victims, which are left in the background' (Paolin 2008, p. 41). In his article on Italian literary representations of 1970s terrorism, on the other hand, Gianluigi Simonetti wrote that victims are either absent or appear in the form of 'simple targets, only useful to keep the plot going' (Simonetti 2011, p. 119). By the same token, in his preface to Vitello's study, Raffaele Donnarumma argues that Italian literature on the Years of Lead demonstrates

> a clear difficulty to listen to victims and let them speak. … whilst terrorists are good heroes for any kind of novel…, victims are weak figures, that are left in the background and only appear in order to disappear again. (Vitello 2013a, p. 18)

On the one hand, these critics refer to an actual absence, a non-representation of victims in Italian literary works on the Years of Lead. On the other hand, they refer to victims not having

a prominent role in literary representations of terrorism, and being often represented, as individuals going through a tragic experience of violence, in a dull and unoriginal manner. Literary critics generally interpreted this 'marginalization of victims' (Vitello 2013a, p. 85) as a failure of contemporary Italian writers to offer a politically relevant depiction of the Years of Lead. Critics also interpret the non-representation or scarce visibility of victims in Italian literature on 1970s terrorism as a lack of tragic (Paolin 2008) or as a lack of realism – to which, as previously stated, Italian literary critics tend to ascribe a political function.

Within this framework, the relevance of victimhood in the corpus is worthy of critical attention. For this reason, I decided to ground my textual analysis on the representation of victims as literary characters and, in the second part of this thesis, to explore the relationship between victimhood and political commitment in more depth, adopting an historical approach and looking at the cultural context in which these works were conceived. In the third and final part of my thesis, I will discuss how victimhood offers a good lens through which to approach the question of realism within the so-called 'return to reality' in contemporary Italian literature.

Through a close reading of the works, this first part of my thesis explores the role of victims in catalysing the authors' political commitment, casting light on the language, narrative, and imagery with which the authors engage when they portray victimhood. In particular, I show how the highly ideological involvement of the authors with the memory of the Years of Lead brings about a polarized representation of victims as 'good' and 'bad' victims; while the authors tend to depict 'good' victims through attributes of martyrdom and innocence, leading readers to sympathize with them and to condemn the perpetrators, 'bad' victims appear as enemies who deserve their persecution or whose victimization is neglected and ignored in the story. When this is the case, the non-representation of victims goes hand in hand with a greater attention to terrorists and their motivations for perpetrating violence. This kind of representation aims to bring readers to dislike the victims and to find

justification for, if not admire, the terrorists. In most cases, this polarization clearly arises from an ideological perspective: authors tend to represent victims as martyrs, heroes, or innocents when they die at the hands of right-wing terrorists or in the context of the *stragismo*, while they represent victims as enemies or even avoid representing them when they are victims of left-wing terrorism.

This kind of representation casts light on two main characteristic traits of this corpus: on the one hand, the depiction of victims illuminates a real urge for these authors to perform their political commitment, making their writing appear compelling and relevant to the social and political reality of their time. On the other hand, the textual analysis shows that this concern for the practical usefulness of literature makes the depictions of victims ideologically polarized and more similar to representation in political and media discourse than in literature. This prevents authors from exploring victimhood as a condition of individual suffering and vulnerability, fleshing out the complexities of conflict and its degeneration into violence. Victims appear as instruments, in the hands of the authors, to perform their commitment and express their political views. In these works, the stereotypical, often-spectacular, and ideologically charged polarization of 'good' and 'bad' victims reiterates what the historian Giovanni De Luna calls the 'victimhood competition' (2011, pp. 96–103), namely, the divisive and emotionally charged victim-centred approach to historical memory in Italy's political discourse between the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, when, like other European countries, Italy underwent a crisis of the nation-state system.

When devising the structure of my textual analysis, I sought to reflect this polarization. To this end, I found it useful to draw on Greimas's semiotic square (Greimas 1970). This conceptual tool offers a visual and graphic representation of a relationship of opposition between two terms and enables us to extend the structure of meaning that this founding binary opposition encompasses and produces. The Greimasian semiotic square is built from a relation of contrariety between two positions (S_1 and S_2), each generating its logical

contradiction (non-S_1 and non-S_2): these four terms compose the four corners of the square, crossed in the middle by the two contradictory axes. In the semiotic square, the combination of S_1 and S_2 forms the complex term S – a larger synthetic position that transcends the relation of contrariety and offers a frame of signification within which that opposition takes shape –, while the combination of non-S_1 and non-S_2 forms the neutral term ~S, which encompasses the two sub-contraries and where the two negations are assembled.
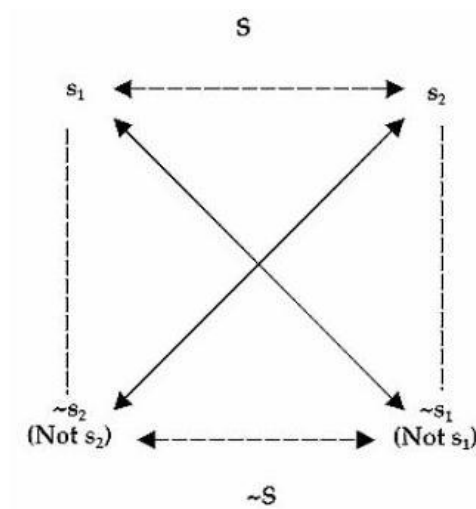
Fredric Jameson discusses the applicability of the semiotic square to narrative analysis in his foreword to the English translation of Greimas's *Du sens* (1987, pp. vi-xxii). On this occasion, Jameson points out that, although it builds on a binary opposition, the semiotic square encompasses far more than just the four primary terms, each one being polysemic and infinitively divisible into further articulations of meaning. At the same time, Jameson recognizes the suitability of the semiotic square in the representation of the effects of ideological closure:

> it constitutes a virtual map … of the closure of ideology itself, that is, as a mechanism, which, while seeming to generate a rich variety of possible concepts and positions, remains in fact locked into some initial aporia or double bind that it cannot transform from the inside by its own means. (Jameson 1987, p. xv)

It is in this latter sense that I relied on the semiotic square to structure my literary analysis. The next two chapters discuss the representation of victims as literary characters according

to a central opposition between 'good' and 'bad', each generating its contradictory term, 'non-good' and 'non-bad'. In these works, the authors tend to characterize 'good' victims as martyrs and heroes, whereby they die in defence of their beliefs and tower above other characters because of their moral standing, and 'bad' victims as enemies, deplorable individuals who deserve their victimization or who are unjustifiably praised and whose 'mythography' needs to be debunked. The contrary axis between the terms 'good' and 'bad' constitutes the complex term 'action', whereby in both cases the authors ascribe a form of agency to those victims, one for which their victimization occurs as a direct result of their actions, whether these are seen as admirable or despicable. On the other hand, the term 'non-bad' – contradictory to the term 'bad' and complementary to the term 'good' – identifies victims who die for no reason and whose death is in no way relatable to their conduct, whether positive or negative. The authors tend to depict this condition as one of pure innocence, aimed at generating a sense of pity and sympathy in readers. 'Non-good' victims, finally, are figures whose victimization is seen as negligible: the authors avoid representing their suffering, rather giving more narrative depth to the terrorists' reasons for carrying out their actions. The indifference surrounding this set of victims is inversely proportional to the great attention given to 'good' victims, and complementary to the depiction of 'bad' victims. Within the ideological frame of reference informing the representation of victims, these victims are seen as enemies. The sub-contrary axis between the terms 'non-bad' and 'non-good' constitutes the neutral term 'non-action', which assembles the essential passivity and lack of agency of both innocent and neglected victims.

ACTION

GOOD ←‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ contrariety ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ → BAD

complementarity

Contradictory

Contradictory

complementarity

NON-BAD ←‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ ‑ → NON-GOOD

sub-contrariety

NON-ACTION
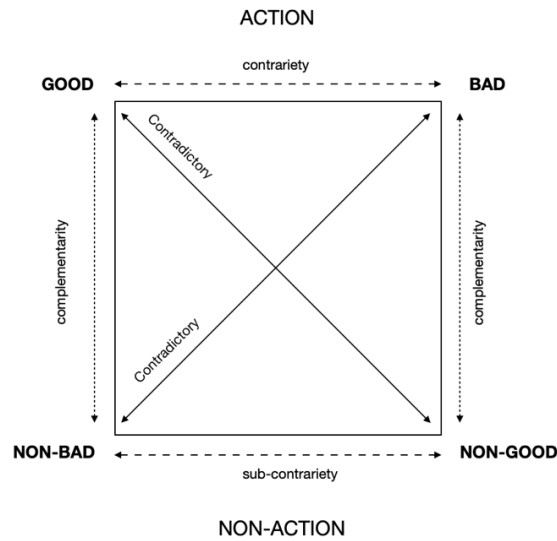
Chapter one will explore the representation of 'good' and 'non-bad' victims, namely, the two ways in which the authors under study offer a positive and favourable representation of victims that aims to foster a moral reaction against the perpetrators. Chapter two, on the other hand, will look at the representation of 'bad' and 'non-good' victims: in these cases, the depiction of victims aims to lead readers to adopt the perspective of the perpetrators. Needless to say, such neat categorization indicates what I identify as a main tendency in the construction of victims as literary characters. As such, it should not be intended as exhaustive of the corpus in its entirety: as the final chapter of this thesis will show, the corpus also includes two works representing victims in a more multifaceted and less ideologically inflected manner.

CHAPTER 1. Martyrdom and Innocence: The Construction of Ideal Victimhood

This chapter examines the representation of 'good' and 'non-bad' victims in the corpus, showing how their construction is central to the authors' expressions of their political commitment. By either highlighting the devotion of these victims to the beliefs for which they were killed or by emphasizing their innocence, the authors aim to foster in their readers a moral reaction against the perpetrators. This chapter looks at how this works, exploring the imageries and narratives with which these authors engage when devising the literary characters of victims. On the one hand, I focus on the rhetoric of militancy and martyrdom that informs the representation of 'good' victims. I show how the memory of the Resistance and the figures of real-life judges killed in the context of the strategy of tension play a central role in their representation, and how this latter interacts with the problematic relationship between politics and memory in the years of the Second Republic, when these works were conceived and written (Passerini 1999; Tota 2001; Cooke 2011). I also highlight the recurring references to the figure of Pasolini, on which I will focus more extensively in Chapter 3. On the other hand, I focus on the representation of 'non-bad' victims as innocent individuals who experience unmotivated violence. In the corpus, the depiction of innocent suffering anchors to a spectacular and dehumanizing (Sontag 2003; Butler 2004) staging of bodily suffering or to a stereotypical image of the 'ideal victim' (Christie 1986; Bouris 2007) as morally good and pure. In these works, the authors turn victims into instruments to perform their political commitment and reach their readers in impressive fashion. Examples will be taken from the following works: *Catrame* (1999) and *Nel nome di Ishmael* (2001) by Giuseppe Genna; *Confine di Stato* (2007) and *Settanta* (2009) by Simone Sarasso; *Il tempo infranto* (2008) by Patrick Fogli; *Il senso del piombo* (2011) by Luca Moretti; *La legge dell'odio* (2012) by Alberto Garlini; and *Il brigatista* (2019) by Antonio Iovane.

1.1 Partisans and Judges: The Victims of the Strategy of Tension

In the corpus, the so-called strategy of tension attracted the interest of more than one author. In the Italian context, the 'strategy of tension' refers to a number of crimes that took place during the Cold War years and that, during the Years of Lead, resulted in bombing massacres known as *stragismo* and often originated from connivances between right-wing terrorism and some military organs of the state. With regards to some of these crimes, the mandators remained unknown and the enquiries were obstructed by several cover-ups: the lack of truth and of an official historical account regarding those crimes is perhaps the first and primary cause of the divisive and troubled memory of the Years of Lead in Italy, a 'still-exposed raw nerve in the Italian body politic', as David Ward defines it (2017, p. 26). As Paul Ricoeur wrote, indeed, historical knowledge offers some 'architectures of meaning' (Ricoeur 2004, p. 498) that are able to arrange facts and events into a coherent framework of reference. To the lack of an official historical account of the strategy of tension is added the difficulty to access institutional sources (Bolis & Xerri 2014), which compelled a number of victims' associations to compensate for this void through historical research and civic activism. For decades until now, the quest for truth constituted the political flag of the victims, who accused the state of lacking transparency and accountability for the crimes. The attraction to the strategy of tension among our authors has to be read as part of this context. As Pierpaolo Antonello and Alan O'Leary highlight, the

> emergence of an array of discourses, narrative hypotheses and interpretations, in film and literature, has created the sense that history … could and should also be written and interpreted outside the courtrooms or historical archives. (2009, p. 10)

In the corpus of this thesis, authors like Genna and Sarasso devote their conspiracy stories to the strategy of tension and, as some critics highlighted (Boscolo & Jossa 2014; Pezzotti 2016; Ward 2017), their novels offer a critical and politically committed perspective on those events, one that encourages readers to take a stance. In the works I consider in this section,

this political commitment is closely tied to the construction of victims as literary characters. Consistent with the antagonist role played by victims in the public sphere, these authors anchor their accusation of the state's lack of transparency for the crimes of the strategy of tension to the figure of victims. Often, authors model these characters on real-life figures who died in mysterious circumstances, reading their deaths as killings that occurred because of their beliefs and political activity.

1.1.1 The Memory of the Resistance

In the construction of 'good' victims, the memory of the Resistance plays a central role. The 1943–45 partisan struggle against Nazi-Fascism is a key feature of the description of victims as individuals characterized by their high moral standing, who bear the consequences of their beliefs with strength and endurance. In my contention, the references to the Resistance to positively characterize these characters as courageous antagonists have to be read against the backdrop of the systematic denigration of the Resistance during the years of Berlusconi's government, when these works were conceived and written. One of the main ideological and cultural traits of *berlusconismo* lay in the denigration of the Resistance through a factious rhetoric of national reconciliation. This rhetoric was functional to the self-legitimation of the right-wing coalition that had been leading the country from 1994 onwards; the political party Alleanza Nazionale, with its roots in the neo-fascist MSI, was now leading a country whose constitution was anchored on antifascist principles (Cooke 2011, pp. 173–189).

In *Catrame* (1999), which narrates episodes related to the *stragismo*, Genna compares the widow of one of the victims to Anna Magnani, one of the most famous Italian actresses, particularly in Italian cinema of the postwar years. In Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1945), in which she plays the role of Pina, the bride-to-be of the antifascist typographer Francesco, Magnani became a symbol of the Resistance's opposition to the Nazi regime (Innocenti

2005). Pina helps the partisans in their fight against the occupation and witnesses the arrest of her beloved during a Nazi raid. She is shot dead in a moving scene in which she runs after Francesco as the Nazi soldiers take him away. Francesco will successfully escape the Nazis and pursue his partisan struggle. In Genna's novel, the author draws a comparison between Anna Magnani and the widow of Massimo Pessina, a former leftist activist killed during a cover-up by the secret services:

> La donna ricordava a Lopez Anna Magnani, più per il tono dolente e abbattuto, sonnambolico e orgoglioso al tempo stesso, che per l'aspetto fisico. Si vedeva che aveva affrontato una vita difficile, murata viva in quella forma di resistenza che a volte le persone condividono coi vegetali di frontiera, quelli che rompono il cemento e crescono, senza nutrimento, alimentandosi di chissà quale plancton. (Genna 1999, p. 39)

By making this comparison, Genna sets up an implicit correlation between Pessina and Francesco, the partisan of *Rome, Open City*. Moreover, the author re-signifies the figure of Magnani in the present: the widow of the victim becomes a symbol of resilience and survival, rendered through the image of the greenery gushing out of the road surface, and of passive resistance to the wicked networks of power that have killed her husband, and of which she keeps bearing the weight. The similarity between the wife of Pessina and *Rome, Open City*'s Magnani is based on a further implicit correlation: that between the Italian state orchestrating the *stragismo* and the Nazi regime. The author makes this explicit ahead in the novel, when representing the Secret Services and the discovery of a secret and compromising memorial containing important revelations about backroom politics and the secret services in Italy during the Cold War, found after the jailbreak of a former extreme-right terrorist, Gianni Cerfoglio. Like in other novels on the *stragismo* in the corpus, in *Catrame* the secret services can be considered a literary character acting *in absentia* and embodying the secret link between right-wing terrorists and the state. In this light, the author represents the victims and their relatives as individuals who endure the effects of an underhand system of power

which looks like an invisible dictatorship, where truth and justice have no place: 'Ma qui la dittatura non era visibile! Era invisibile!' (Genna 1999, p. 51).

Genna published this novel in 1999. The recovery of the compromising memorial following the jailbreak of a right-wing terrorist is to be read in relation to the national debates on the *indulto* that took place in Italy between 1996 and 1998. After the emergency of terrorism had passed, some opted for the possible granting of the *indulto* to those who had committed crimes of terrorism or for the lowering of the majority requirement in order to grant the *indulto* to those in jail. The associations of the victims and their relatives were very critical of these possibilities. On 2 August, 1998, on the twelfth anniversary of the bombing of Bologna's railway station, the president of the victims' association *Associazione 2 Agosto 1980* wrote:

> There is an attempt to make people believe that the Years of Lead could be filed away once and for all by simply releasing those who are still in jail. In our view, this strategy would distort the history of our country. Those years will only end with the truth, by unmasking and punishing the instigators and the political manipulators who used terrorism and massacres as tools for political struggle. (Bolognesi 1998)

Genna's depiction of Pessina's wife as a symbol of anguished resilience has to be read in this context. The often rhetorical and highly dramatic magnification of victims enables Genna to make his voice heard in the story, and to convey to readers his denunciation of the state's lack of transparency and connivances with right-wing terrorism. Here, it is worth quoting Genna's description of Enrico Mattei's widow in *Nel nome di Ishmael* (2001), the second novel by this author in the corpus:

> Era un giunco bianco, vistosamente segnata da un dolore senza limiti certi, e pure con una presenza negli occhi pesti, afflitti da borse scure: una presenza di orgoglio, di inaffidabile sentimento d'esserci … Eppure un'alterigia, quasi il morso di un'altra esistenza … La morte di lui pareva ricostruirla dall'interno, calcificarle all'interno un nuovo scheletro: lucido, solido, flessuoso. (Genna 2001, p. 404)

In this case too, the vivid comparison of the widow with a slender but very resistant plant growing in all sorts of climatic conditions suggests the idea of a suffered endurance of grief, which brings with it the author's denunciation of the lack of transparency surrounding the victim's death. In this novel, *Nel nome di Ishmael*, the partisan Resistance is all the more central in the construction of the literary character of the victim through a narrative of martyrdom and militancy.

In *Nel nome di Ishmael,* Genna focuses on the sudden and mysterious death of Enrico Mattei in 1962. The founder of ENI (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi), a multinational oil company owned by the Italian state, Mattei adopted an anti-Americanist model of leadership in his company, building alliances with countries of the Middle East, sustaining anti-colonialist movements and parties, and being on good terms with the USSR. His model of leadership was clearly in conflict with the economic and political interests of the North Atlantic Alliance during the Cold War. In 1962, Mattei died in a plane crash near Bascapè, in Lombardy. The event was passed off as an accident for thirty-five years, and all the hypotheses that it was an attack were refused and dismissed. In 1997, the investigation was reopened to reveal that Mattei's plane was destroyed intentionally and that he was a victim of a targeted attack.

Genna published *Nel nome di Ishmael* four years after these revelations: his novel dovetails with a denunciation of the lack of transparency around Mattei's death. Genna looks at this event as part of a broader US-driven strategy that aimed to establish a cultural and political hegemony in Europe during the Cold War. In a highly fictive literary re-elaboration of the facts, the author personifies this strategy in the shadowy figure of Ishmael, who never appears in the story, symbolizing the NATO-driven international operation 'Stay Behind', active in Europe during the Cold War.

The novel covers a time frame of four decades, from 1962 until 2001, in which a number of real-life events of political violence – included the killing of Aldo Moro (Genna 2001, p. 525) – are described as the work of Ishmael. Through this figure, Genna reads the

strategy of tension not only as a political phenomenon, but also a cultural one. In this novel, the figure of Ishmael embodies the penetration of American capitalist culture into Europe during the Cold War: 'Perché lei pensa che il livello politico sia l'ultimo livello. E non è vero. Ci sono altre realtà, superiori al piano politico. Sono realtà spirituali' (Genna 2001, p. 523). Against this backdrop, Genna describes the victims of Ishmael as individuals who courageously sought to oppose his conquest of Europe:

> Le vittime di Ishmael sono tutti esponenti politici o economici di alto livello: gente che lavora per un'Europa unita, staccata definitivamente dall'influenza degli Stati Uniti. La rete di Ishmael provvede a eliminare chi produce e tenta di realizzare questo distacco. (p. 524)

In this framework, Genna describes Enrico Mattei as Ishmael's first victim: 'Con la morte di Mattei, un'altra epoca stava iniziando. Ishmael stava prendendo vita. Aveva scelto l'Italia come ponte per l'Europa' (p. 474). In this case too, the memory of the Resistance is central to the depiction of the victim. In *Nel nome di Ishmael*, the Resistance is a red thread throughout the story: the novel begins with the discovery of a child's corpse under a memorial plaque to the Resistance at the Giuriati Sports Centre in Milan, where some partisans were shot dead in 1945. The reader will discover that that is a symbol of Ishmael's activity, all his murders being signalled by the dead body of a child in a location relevant to that killing. The real-life Mattei, indeed, participated in the Resistance as a partisan, and it is by delving into a dusty and tangled historical archive of the Resistance, where he bumps into the horrific mummy of a partisan (pp. 105–117), that the inspector Montorsi starts his investigation into the Bascapè attack.

Throughout this novel, Genna draws an implicit parallel between Ishmael and Fascism, and between Mattei's anti-Americanism and his antifascism. As a literary character in this novel, Mattei is an extremely unrealistic and idealized figure. A symbol of uncompromising resistance to capitalist dominance, Genna's Mattei is one who lost his life in the struggle to liberate Europe from the American yoke. His depiction takes on a martyrly

and Christological dimensions: 'Col suo jet solcava anzitutto le speranze di un popolo' (Genna 2001, p. 228),

> e la guerra che lui sta facendo è la costruzione di una salvezza. … Questo regno arido, sormontato da potenze e da angeli oscuri, è a tutti gli effetti l'America. … Bisogna salvare l'uomo. … Gli brillavano gli occhi. Nelle pupille si rifletteva la sfera grigio argento della Luna, ogni singolo cratere, ogni arido avvallamento, ogni domanda e ogni donna, ogni grigio argenteo sorriso di donna. (p. 32)

By the same token, the author describes his death through images of heavenly salvation:

> Lui sorrise come in un dolce addio. … finché si vide fuori di sé e il cielo prese di colpo a sorridere come sorrideva lui, una smorfia franca che traforava il tempo, emergendo da ere addietro dimenticate. (pp. 233–234)

Genna's Mattei is also a courageous man who does not fear power and stubbornly fights for his ideals: 'Doveva capire, carpire, battersi. … Era stato faccia a faccia con i Potenti, senza irriderli e neanche temerli: l'atteggiamento più ostile, ciò che i potenti non tollerano' (p. 228). It is, finally, through the voice of Mattei that Genna conveys the core message of his story:

> Io so, lo so benissimo a cosa condurrà questo esperimento continentale che è l'America. Esso condurrà alla sostituzione dell'uomo con l'americano. Ebbene, questo, signori, si chiama genocidio. Sarà pure silenzioso, sarà pure un genocidio mentale. Lo ammetto. Ma è un progetto infame a cui il signor Enrico Mattei – e cioè l'Italia – si opporrà ora e sempre. (p. 229)

In this passage, Genna adds another important dimension to his depiction of Mattei's victimhood. When defining the spread of American capitalist culture throughout Europe in terms of a 'genocide' and introducing this idea through the statement 'Io so', Genna very clearly quotes the words of Pier Paolo Pasolini in his newspaper articles now collected in *Scritti corsari* (1976), and in particular in the articles 'Il romanzo delle stragi' (Pasolini 1999, pp. 362-367) and 'Genocidio' (Pasolini 1999, pp. 511–517). Pasolini was one of the most vehement critics of the cultural influence of capitalist culture in Italy from the economic boom onwards, which he discussed as a cultural perpetuation originating from the same bourgeois mentality on which Fascism built its consensus.

In his famous article 'Genocidio', Pasolini quoted a speech delivered by Eugenio Cefis – the manager of ENI after the death of Mattei, who was suspected to be involved in Mattei's killing – at the Military Academy of Modena in 1972. On this occasion, Pasolini claimed that capitalism represented to all extents a new form of fascism and compared Italy to 1930s Germany (Pasolini 1999, p. 516). It is also in this light that Genna's insistence on the Resistance in his literary re-elaboration of the Mattei case has to be read. The reference to the figure of Pasolini, finally, is relevant because, as Pierpaolo Antonello highlights, the expression of his political commitment was deeply imbued with a narrative of victimhood and martyrdom (Antonello 2012, p. 110).

The relationship between victimhood and Pasolini is a central point in this thesis: I will explore this aspect in more detail in Chapter 3, where I discuss the reworking of the figure of Pasolini as one of the patterns of the cultural paradigm of victimhood for this generation of authors. The figure of Pasolini, indeed, is not only central to the construction of 'good' victims as literary characters for several of the authors considered in this thesis, but also to the performance of a politically committed authorship. In the case of Genna, the very idea of writing an enigmatic and imaginative novel about the Mattei case places him in Pasolini's footsteps. Pasolini's last and posthumous work, *Petrolio* (1992), was indeed inspired by the Mattei case and was left unfinished because of the author's murder in 1975.

The figure of Enrico Mattei also attracted the attention of Simone Sarasso, another author in this corpus, who – in the foreword to *Confine di Stato* – explicitly mentions Genna and the importance of his books for his writing: 'Se non avessi letto i suoi libri, probabilmente non avrei scritto i miei' (Sarasso 2007, p. 410). The author of *Confine di Stato* (2007) and *Settanta* (2009) – part of a trilogy on contemporary Italy with *Il paese che amo* (2013) –, Sarasso is, like Genna, concerned with the lack of truth in relation to many episodes of the strategy of tension. In a lecture he delivered at Wellesley College in 2010, in which he described himself as part of a generation of authors who abandoned the disengagement of

postmodernism to embrace a more politically committed approach to literary writing, Sarasso maintains that the aim of his trilogy was to cast light on all those unexplained crimes:

> Non è mai stato trovato il colpevole, insomma, dei peggiori crimini che hanno insanguinato il mio Paese. … Le vittime rimaste sul selciato invocano giustizia. Il volto del cattivo è sconosciuto. … ho scelto di fare ciò che la magistratura non ha mai potuto fare: ho dato una faccia e un nome a quel colpevole. (2010)

Like Genna, Sarasso devises a fictional character responsible for all the crimes of the strategy of tension, Andrea Sterling, a psychopathic and violent police officer who later becomes the head of the secret services. Like Genna, Sarasso anchors the expression of his commitment to a positive and idealized representation of the victims. In *Confine di Stato*, Enrico Mattei appears as Fabio Riviera. Like the other characters in the story, Riviera is highly fictional and unrealistic. His depiction is strongly influenced by comic book imagery, whose importance for his writing the author explicitly mentions in the afterword of the novel (Sarasso 2007, p. 411) and makes clear by introducing all of the principal characters through a number of stylised images in the first pages. Sarasso depicts Riviera as a courageous fighter, who, since his time as a partisan in the Resistance, is not afraid of death and who fiercely pursues a dream of liberation and independence for his country:

> Fabio Riviera aveva un sogno: l'indipendenza del suo Paese. ... Riviera non aveva paura di morire. Non l'aveva mai avuta. Nemmeno in montagna, durante la guerra. Era un capo nato, *lui.* E un capo non teme la morte. Non può permetterselo. Troppe cose dipendono dalla sua determinazione. ... Il suo sogno richiedeva tempo. La battaglia per l'indipendenza non si vince in un giorno. (p. 221)

Like Genna, Sarasso reads the strategy of tension as the political sign of the penetration of capitalism into Europe, and the representation of Mattei as a partisan of the Resistance is key to this reading. Riviera, Sarasso suggests, fought in the war of Liberation, and his fight against the supremacy of capitalism was a continuation of that struggle: 'Non si era mai piegato, non aveva mai smesso di lottare. ... Riviera era stato in montagna. Era stato

partigiano delle brigate bianche, le formazioni cattoliche.' (p. 286). In this case too, the depiction of Mattei takes on a Christological dimension, Sarasso depicting Fabio Riviera as a saviour of the people:

> La sua gente era con lui. Li aveva conquistati. ... Urla, applausi, grida. Riviera li guardò col sorriso stampato in faccia, le mani morbide lungo i fianchi. Poi alzò una mano. Li fece tacere. (pp. 276-277)

In this case too, the author crafts a literary character that is far from being credible or realistic, accentuating the fictive traits of the personage to reach his readers in an impressive and dramatic manner. As Sarasso wrote, his writing aims to fill in the 'abissali distanze tra lettore e storia' (2010) that, in his view, postmodernism created. Through this lens, we shall read the depiction of another victim of the strategy of tension: Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, the Italian publisher and leftist activist who died in mysterious circumstances in 1972.

After his enrolment in the American campaign to liberate Italy in 1944–45, the real-life Feltrinelli became a member of the Communist Party and decided to put his enormous wealth at the service of the communist cause. Besides initially supporting the PCI from an economical point of view, Feltrinelli was also very active in diffusing revolutionary ideals through his publishing house, as well as through his political activism. Feltrinelli was a close friend of Fidel Castro, he was arrested in Bolivia in 1967, and he founded, after the bombing of Piazza Fontana, the extreme-left group GAP (Gruppi d'Azione Partigiana), whose name recalled the Resistance and aimed to realize the revolutionary and communist ideals that, in its view, the PCI had betrayed. Feltrinelli died during an explosion on a high voltage pylon in Segrate, in the suburbs of Milan. His death was ruled as an accident that occurred during a sabotage operation aimed at causing a blackout in the north of Milan. After his death, however, a group of Italian intellectuals signed a public letter claiming that Feltrinelli was intentionally killed because of his political militancy, which was in conflict with the economic and political interests of the NATO Alliance, of which Italy was part, during the Cold War.

Through his depiction of Feltrinelli, known in the novel as The Publisher, Sarasso positions himself within this lineage of political commitment. Like Riviera, The Publisher is a victim of Andrea Sterling, and one who lost his life because of his ideas and beliefs. Like Riviera, The Publisher is a beacon of courage and a role model of resistance and uncompromising opposition to power. As Barbara Pezzotti writes, The Publisher is 'a highly grotesque figure', a 'Hollywood character', and he 'sounds more like the protagonist of a *Die Hard* film than the victim of one of the unsolved mysteries of Italian history' (Pezzotti 2016, p. 194). He is the one who foresees the possibility of a *coup d'état* in Italy, and who incites students, workers, intellectuals, and citizens to join his struggle against the connivances between the Italian state and the extreme right. A revolutionary dreamer, he puts the political cause ahead of his personal life, as the stereotypical dialogue between the hero and his beloved woman shows:

> aveva la morte nel cuore, l'Editore. Dopo piazza Fontana non ci sarebbe stato più spazio per loro due. Occorreva fare il proprio dovere. Niente sentimenti né legami a rallentare la rivoluzione. (Sarasso 2007, p. 370)

In this novel, Sarasso adds The Publisher to a pantheon of heroes who lost their lives in the struggle for freedom, and the representation of his death is consistent with such a grandiose portrayal. Sarasso compares Feltrinelli's sabotage to the French Revolution; the end of his life, the end of the day, and the end of the novel all converging in one point:

> Ora, il comunista più ricercato d'Italia se ne stava davanti a un traliccio dell'alta tensione nella campagna milanese. L'indomani sarebbe iniziata la guerriglia. ... Il *Black-Out* sarebbe stato rivendicato. … Un colpo di Stato senza carrarmati. Una nuova rivoluzione francese, l'eliminazione dei potenti uno dopo l'altro. … l'Editore non ebbe il tempo di dire una parola, non ebbe il tempo di pensare. Crepò e basta. ... Poi rimase solo il buio senza stelle. (pp. 406–408)

The ending of Sarasso's novel recalls the ending of Nanni Balestrini's *L'Editore* (1989) – 'Poi ha un ultimo rantolo forte e poi non sente più nulla.' (Balestrini 2006, p. 134) – to which Sarasso also refers by calling his character 'The Publisher'. Like Genna, Sarasso refers to

a credible author from the generation of his predecessors in the performance of his authorship. In *L'Editore*, Balestrini, a militant intellectual who took part to the extra-parliamentary movements of 1968 and promoted the neo-avantgarde group *Gruppo 63,* chorally wove together a number of different perspectives on Feltrinelli's death, highlighting its public and collective relevance, and, as Vincenzo Binetti writes (2009, pp. 267–276), problematizing the official narrative.

In fact, this was also Sarasso's aim. As he himself writes in his contribution to Claudio Milanesi's *Il romanzo poliziesco, la storia, la memoria* (Milanesi 2009, pp. 567–579), *Confine di Stato* originated out of in-depth research into the historical archives, resulting from his dissatisfaction with the acquittal of the defendants for the Piazza Fontana bombing in the conclusion of the trial[5]. With his work, Sarasso argued, he wanted to render justice to the memory of the victims and aligned with other writers of his generation whose choice to write about the country's past was driven by a duty to memory (p. 578). 'Rendere accessibile il ricordo dei civili caduti alle nuove generazioni – Sarasso wrote – è un dovere etico' (p. 579). As one can see from the tone and rhetoric of these lines, the notion of generation and the sense of national history are central to the expression of the author's political commitment. This is a central aspect of the exploration of victimhood in this corpus of works, to which I will return in more detail in Part II.

1.1.2 Militant Judges

In the summer of 1992, two magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino were brutally assassinated by two bombs exploding in their cars. Since the 1980s, they had been working together at the *maxiprocesso* (maxitrial) against some Mafia bosses and their associates. Tony Gentile's picture of Falcone and Borsellino sharing a joke at Palace

---

[5] Corte di Cassazione (2005) *Udienza pubblica del 3/05/2005. Sentenza n° 470.* [Online] Available from https://www.csm.it/documents/21768/146316/Corte+di+cassazione+3+maggio+2005/2c5ce5c2-04c4-470e-b0c4-a00bf62de65b [Accessed on 24 July 2020].

Trinacria (Palermo) has become, perhaps against their will, a symbol of the fight for justice at large. Today, that image often appears on signs and posters in a wide range of marches and civil demonstration protests. Between the 1990s and the 2000s, judges became one of Silvio Berlusconi's favourite targets; one of his most used communication strategies was to represent himself to his electors as a victim of a network of judicial conspirators. Berlusconi often accused judges who brought charges against him of being moved by partisanship and political biases, often referring to judges and magistrates with the expression *toghe rosse* (red robes).

In the years in which this generation of authors conceived and wrote their works, in sum, the figure of the judge became increasingly 'politicized' and came more to embody an opposition to power than a figure of power itself. Moreover, the Years of Lead saw the killing of a number of judges (Consiglio Superiore della Magistratura 2015), some who were murdered while investigating the link between right-wing terrorism and institutional power, such as the Judge Vittorio Occorsio, or who were left alone in their investigations despite their requests for protection, as it was the case for the judge Mario Amato. In this light, the figure of the judges holds an important place within the problematic memory of the Years of Lead as part of the strategy of tension. The lack of transparency around the circumstances of some of their deaths contributed to surround these figures with an imagery of militant antagonism.

All this should be kept in mind as we approach the representation of judges as victims in some of the works from my corpus. In the construction of 'good' victims, namely those who die in defence of their beliefs and tower above other characters for their moral standing, authors often draw on the figures of real-life judges who lost their lives during the Years of Lead. The representation of judges is a distinctive trait of the works by this generation of authors, one that introduces an element of novelty to Italian literature on terrorism. As

Gabriele Vitello notes, 'the censure on victims affects all figures of the institutions: judges, policemen, and above all politicians.' (Vitello 2013b, p. 185). 'In this context,', Vitello argues,

> it seems meaningful to note that no writer dared to write a judiciary novel on the years of lead, one that narrates the lives of public men involved in the difficult process of establishing the truth. (p. 187)

Patrick Fogli's *Il tempo infranto* focuses on the bombing of Bologna's railway station on 2 August 1980 and revolves around the figures of two judges: Dario De Luca – modelled on Mario Amato, killed by the NAR (Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari, a right-wing terrorist formation) on 23 June 1980 – and Emilio Ferri, a purely fictional character who investigates the facts of Bologna in 2007. One of the most dreadful and controversial events of the Years of Lead, the bombing of Bologna cost the lives of eighty-five people. The judicial inquiries confirmed the neo-fascist responsibility for the attack, but the mandators of the massacre remained unknown and the trials proved several attempts to obstruct justice by members of the SISMI (Servizio per le Informazioni e la Sicurezza Militare, a branch of the Italian secret services) and of the P2 masonry lodge.

An author from Bologna who devoted other works to politically relevant episodes of criminality in the country's recent history, in *Il tempo infranto* (2008) Fogli interweaves the really-existing event of the Bologna bombing with an invented story in 2007, when the son of a victim of the 1980 attack traces the history of his father while working on a master's thesis on the 9/11 attacks. In fact, he will discover that his father did not die in the attack, and that he was a former secret agent now persecuted by the state after he decided to autonomously investigate the connivances between the extreme right and the state. Running to more than six hundred pages, the story describes the Years of Lead as a never-ending nightmare and is extremely detailed and well researched through deep consultation of official proceedings.

The question of truth is absolutely central to this novel, as is the role played by victims, to whom Fogli dedicates his work, acknowledging the association of the families of the victims of Bologna's railway station massacre in his afterword (Fogli 2010, pp. 659–660). Once more, the question of victimhood is key to the expression of political commitment from the author, whose voice is distinctively heard in the story:

> Le vittime pagano due volte. La prima con l'atto in sé, la seconda con la rimozione della loro esistenza in quanto vittime. Nessuno si ricorda di loro, nessuno perpetua la loro memoria. ... Perché oltre l'atto terroristico in sé, le vittime e la loro memoria, c'è la vita di quelli che restano. Di quelli che sopravvivono a quanto è successo senza riuscire a spiegarlo, senza avere risposta né consolazione né verità. (pp. 517–518)

The depiction of the two judges has to be read through this lens. Both are obstinate and courageous individuals who spend all their energy in investigating the truth behind the Bologna bombing and who are killed for this reason. Differently from Genna and Sarasso, Fogli aims to be realistic and true-to-life. Yet, like those of Genna and Sarasso, his literary characters look more like abstract emblems of good than credible and convincing characters. De Luca, for example, appears like a beacon of tenacity and perseverance, and his representation is often highly rhetorical:

> Vorrei che per i miei figli ci fosse la possibilità. … di non dover vedere questo schifo. … Perché non ho scelta se non cercare di combatterlo. Capisci? Combatterlo. Non so se vincerò e nemmeno se avrò la forza di farlo tutti i santi giorni ancora per molto. Ma finché ce la faccio, vado avanti. Avanti. E avanti. E avanti. Forse sono pazzo. So che qualcuno lo pensa, anche in procura. Ma la mia coscienza è tutto quello che ho. (pp. 241–242)

In this case too, the author draws on the figure of Pier Paolo Pasolini to express his political commitment through the voice of the victim. In the following passages, respectively from the beginning and middle of the novel, De Luca revives his motivation to pursue his struggle for truth and justice by thinking of Pasolini's words in 'Il romanzo delle stragi' (1999, pp. 362-367), which Fogli quotes at some length:

> Chiude gli occhi. Il mondo svanisce nel buio. Ma dura poco. Il tempo di ricordare un brano che Pasolini ha scritto oltre quattro anni fa – dopo Piazza della Loggia e l'Italicus – sul «Corriere della Sera». … "Io so i nomi del vertice che ha manovrato", ripete fra i pensieri aprendo gli occhi. "I neofascisti… Io so tutti questi nomi e so tutti i fatti. Ma non ho le prove. Non ho nemmeno indizi." (Fogli 2010, pp. 66–67)

And also:

> *Io so. ...* il testo di Pasolini è il sottofondo a ogni respiro. Ogni parola un gesto d'impotenza. Ogni frase un grido di rabbia. Ogni segno di punteggiatura un tentativo disperato, inutile e forse suicida di resistere, di ribellarsi, di non arrendersi mai. Avrebbe voluto citarlo, all'inizio dell'audizione al CSM. (p. 340)

Through the words and thoughts of the Judge De Luca, the author makes his voice heard in the story and engages his readers with the core messages of his book. The same happens with the representation of the Judge Emilio Ferri. Like De Luca, Ferri is extremely committed to the cause of truth. A survivor of a terroristic attack in 1979, Ferri empathizes with the cause of the victims and is characterized by an incorruptible drive for justice. Thus, he pursues his investigations despite being ostracised by high-ranking members of the state, and he does so by fiercely maintaining his leftist ideological belonging: in a dialogue with L'Onorevole, a powerful politician who orchestrates the links between the state and terrorists, Ferri is accused of being 'il solito giudice comunista' (p. 574), an accusation which clearly recalls Berlusconian political rhetoric. In response, Ferri proudly asserts his progressive political beliefs: 'rivendico fortemente l'essere di sinistra. Non l'ho mai mescolato al mio lavoro e … ne sono fiero. Ma sono fiero anche delle mie idee e di quello che hanno rappresentato' (ibid.).

Ferri's proud assertion has to be read in light of the controversies and debates that, since the beginning, characterized the commemoration practices related to the Bologna attack. These debates revolved around two memorial plaques that celebrated the victims of the attack as 'victims of Fascist terrorism'. This epithet was chosen before the end of the trials and gave a clear ideological orientation, which eventually confirmed the responsibility

of neo-fascist terrorists for the execution of the bombings. Since the beginning, the Right advocated for the removal of the word 'Fascist' and kept doing so even after the ascertainment of the neo-fascist responsibility for the attack, especially after 1999, when Bologna elected its only right-wing mayor Giorgio Guazzaloca. A heated dispute took place between the council and the association of victims. This contention gained a national dimension and reached the Parliament, where it was established that the word 'Fascist' was not to be removed from the plaques; this, the parliament members maintained, would have represented a 'cancellation of memory' and 'rewriting of history' at the core of potential 'new lacerations and conflicts' (Italian Chamber of Deputies 2001).

An author growing up in Bologna in the 1990s and writing in the 2000s, Fogli is no stranger to these controversies. Ferri's proud and energetic assertions, as well as De Luca's strenuous fight for truth, have to be read against this backdrop. These two characters differently give voice to the increasingly public and politically engaged role that the association of victims gained throughout the 1990s (Tota 2001, pp. 216–235) and that turned them into active subjects on the 'battlefield of memory', as Luisa Passerini describes it (1999, p. 289), characterizing the country's recent history. As in the case of the other works, an extremely polarized representation of victims as 'good' individuals that aims to foster the admiration of readers enables the author to achieve his primary goal: namely, that of reaching his audience through suggestive and emotionally resonant depictions of victimhood that qualify his writing as politically engaged.

To the works staging judges as 'good' victims who die for their ideals and beliefs, we should lastly add Luca Moretti's *Il senso del piombo* (2011). Like Genna, Sarasso, and Fogli, Moretti presents himself as an *autore impegnato* and opens his work with a quotation from Pier Paolo Pasolini's article 'Fascismo' (1999, pp. 518–522), now collected in *Scritti corsari*. *Il senso del piombo* is a first-person narrative in which a former terrorist tells his son about the Years of Lead. Once more, the question of intergenerational transmission of memory is

central to the representation of that decade[6]. At the end of the story, the reader will discover that the mother of the child to whom the story is told was a victim who died in the Bologna attack in 1980. Moretti creates a paradoxical perspective in which terrorists and victims stand together against the only real villain of the story: namely, the state. The author represents the Years of Lead as a civil war promoted from above, in which an already existing youth extremism was exploited to create public disorder and instability in order to justify repression and secure control of the territory. Although terrorists materially execute the murders represented, the author focuses on the responsibilities of the colluding politicians and the military organs of the state, which commissioned those crimes or did nothing to prevent them.

An extreme pessimism perspective permeates this novel, one in which the struggles of 'good' characters are fundamentally in vain. With their losing heroism, the literary characters of Il Giudice and Totonero – this latter recalling with bitter irony the *totocalcio,* a state-run Italian football betting system, and suggesting the idea of justice as a dangerous game – epitomize this negative perspective. Respectively inspired, as in the case of Fogli, by the figures of Vittorio Accorsio and Mario Amato, these two characters embody the impossibility for the honest side of the state to pursue principles of justice and legality.

As in other cases, these two characters are neither very credible nor realistic, but rather typify some general traits of bravery and courageous service to the cause of justice in which the author seeks to engage his readers. They do not even have a name: coherently with the representation of this character, 'Il Giudice' comes to represent all those who fought and died for justice: 'Quel Giudice era troppo ligio al dovere, amava troppo la verità, aveva cominciato a infilare il naso dove non doveva' (Moretti 2011, p. 41). Two indefatigable

---

[6] Similarly, in the afterword of *Settanta*, Sarasso argues that the novel originated by the 'speranza che il lettore (specie quello più giovane) parta dalla finzione per appassionarsi alla vera e tragica storia di questo Paese martoriato.' (Sarasso 2009, p. 685).

workers like Fogli's Ferri and De Luca, Il Giudice and Totonero spend all their energy on their investigations:

> La luce di quel piccolo ufficio non si spegneva mai, la scrivania era perennemente ricoperta di ritagli, faldoni, scartoffie. ... Gente cocciuta quella che per forza vuole capire, gente pericolosa, gente poco malleabile ai dettami della Volontà. (p. 56)

Both characters tower above the others for their moral standing, and it is through their depiction that the author expresses his indignation for the state's involvement in the strategy of tension. Generally speaking, the theme of state violence is central to Moretti's production: an author who combines his activity as a writer with social activism, he wrote on the death of Stefano Cucchi, the young man who died in 2009 in custody of the Italian *carabinieri*, and on the death of the young protester Carlo Giuliani at the G8 Genoa summit in 2001. As we will see more in detail in Chapter 4, the G8 is central to the link between victimhood and the reworking of the memory of the Years of Lead in works by this generation of authors.

1.2 The Spectacle of Innocent Suffering

In her recent essay *La lotta e il negativo* (2018), Emanuela Piga Bruni explores the relationship between history, memory, and literary fiction in contemporary historical novels. Piga Bruni draws on the two notions of 'lotta' (conflict) and 'negativo' (negative) to identify the two chief principles animating the contemporary rewriting of history. On the one hand, the term 'lotta' indicates the variety of ways in which contemporary literature approaches the trope of conflict, of social and political struggles, and in which authors most explicitly express their engagement with subjects related to history and politics. To this realm, Piga Bruni ascribes the narrative category of the 'epic'. On the other hand, the term 'negativo' points to literary representations of the most traumatic and distressing outcomes of history, such as individual experiences of violence, sorrow, psychic fragmentation, and the involvement in disruptive events that destroy the subject's mental stability. To the 'negativo', Piga Bruni

ascribes the narrative category of the 'tragic'. Thus, Piga Bruni argues that the 'negativo' encompasses the representation of traumatic events that are unexplainable and resist processing and comprehension. To make this point, on more than one occasion she draws on the Lacanian notion of the Real, namely that which remains foreclosed to the realm of signification and language. The Lacanian Real is an important notion for the analysis of my corpus, to which I will return in more detail in Part III.

Piga Bruni's notion of the 'negativo' and its relationship with the tragic offers a good framework through which to explore the second trend in the representation of victims in the corpus of this thesis. Namely, that of 'non-bad' victims, whose innocence the authors emphasize to foster a moral reaction in their readers towards the perpetrators. Contrary to the 'good' victims, these victims are non-combatant individuals, uninvolved in the political networks at the origin of their victimization. Hence, their innocence could be read, as Cristina Savettieri defines it when discussing the link between innocence and the tragic in the modern novel,

> not in a moral sense, as a condition deriving from goodness, virtue, or even sanctity, but rather in a neutral sense, as the absence of responsibilities within the development of a range of circumstances" (Savettieri 2017, p. 6)

In our semiotic square, the 'non-bad' is part of the neutral term 'non-action': the victims described here suffer an unmotivated violence, which they incur for no comprehensible reason, and in which there is no direct correlation between their actions and their suffering. As Savettieri has discussed, the non-action of innocence is a 'blind spot' (p. 12) of modern morality, in which will and action, more than endurance (Williams 1993, p. 41), are seen as the grounds of human subjectivity.

Savettieri's reading of innocence as a 'blind spot' is particularly relevant to the corpus of this thesis. With their concern for action and direct intervention and their urge to participate in the country's political life, the authors of this corpus struggle to symbolize the trauma of

unmotivated violence. The depiction of 'non-bad', innocent victims illustrates this point well: in different ways, the authors I mention in this section fill the depiction of innocent suffering through a number of stereotypical, spectacular, and, at times, dehumanizing narratives and imageries, often taken from the media and political discourse. The urge to perform their political commitment ultimately results in the impossibility of imagining the non-action of innocent suffering.

1.2.1 The Dehumanization of Victims

At the beginning of her 2003 essay *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag quotes a passage from Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1938) about war photography. In her essay, Woolf mentions a 'photograph of what might be a man's body, or a woman's; it is so mutilated that it might, on the other hand, be the body of a pig' (Woolf 1952, p. 20) and makes the claim that shocking images of war, where it is almost impossible to make out mutilated subjects, can be used to foster greater militancy against war in those who cannot directly witness it. In Woolf's view, there can be a political purpose to showing images of mutilated bodies, as the resulting horror and disgust might 'vivify the condemnation of war, and may bring home, for a spell, a portion of its reality to those who have no experience of war at all' (Sontag 2019, p. 8).

If we look at the representation in my corpus of large-scale bombing massacres of the *stragismo*, a vivid depiction of bodily suffering is precisely the means by which some of our authors seek to impress their readers, arousing their indignation towards those responsible for the attacks. In the cases of indiscriminate bombings, like those of Piazza Fontana or of Bologna's railway station, indeed, the authors cannot express their political commitment through an ideologically connoted magnification of victims and their political struggles. In fact, those who died in bombings were simple casualties, people who were totally uninvolved in the political networks at the origin of their victimization. There is, in sum, no correlation

between their actions and their death: thus, the authors of my corpus seek to impress their audience through gruesome images of body parts torn apart by the explosion, as if making that suffering more vivid and concrete in their eyes. The following is a passage from Simone Sarasso's *Confine di Stato*, where the author represents the bombing of Piazza Fontana, with which the novel begins:

> Due corpi volano insieme ai frammenti. Si abbattono sul marciapiede. Rantolano e respirano ancora. … Maschere di sangue. Ventri squarciati, brandelli. … Un uomo, all'altezza della clavicola, ha un ammasso di sangue. Il braccio non c'è più. Staccato di netto. … Una donna completamente carbonizzata è un tutt'uno coi suoi vestiti. Solo il viso è stato risparmiato dalla vampa. E piange mentre striscia. (Sarasso 2007, p. 18)

In both *Confine di Stato* and *Settanta,* the representation of large-scale bombings consists of detailed and spectacular portrayal of physical destruction and mangled bodies. This is the case for the bombing of Piazza della Loggia (Sarasso 2009, pp. 307–308) as well as for the bombing of Bologna's railway station (pp. 661–662). Similar depictions of the large-scale bombings during the Years of Lead occurs in other novels from my corpus. In Antonio Iovane's *Il brigatista,* for example, the author represents the bombing of Piazza Fontana through the eyes of a journalist. In the following lines, the depiction of the bomb's devastating impact goes hand in hand with a metaliterary reflection on the representability of that suffering:

> Vede i portantini traghettare le barelle con i corpi smembrati. … *Ho visto un vigile del fuoco raccogliere una mano.* Oppure *braccia sbalzate al secondo piano* oppure *uomini ridotti a tronchi* oppure *una testa, solo una testa per terra.* … A breve avrebbero dovuto scrivere, raccontare. Ma come si racconta tutto questo? … *Una mano. Solo una mano che sembrava incollata al muro.* … *Mi si è aggrappato a una spalla, era senza un braccio.* (Iovane 2019, pp. 61-62)

By the same token, in *La legge dell'odio,* Alberto Garlini seeks to arouse the pity of readers by describing the explosion of Piazza del Monumento (Piazza Fontana) as follows:

> Un arto roteò nell'aria. Pantaloni strappati, scarpe. … Il profumo di morte era orribile. Polvere, fiori rinsecchiti, merda, naftalina. Stefano non riusciva a distogliere gli occhi

dalle fiamme alte e minacciose, ma ora attutite, quasi avessero pietà della povera carne che avevano bruciato. (Garlini 2012, p. 487)

Finally, in *Il tempo infranto,* Patrick Fogli describes the bombing of Bologna from the perspective of a young woman who suffocates under the rubble caused by the explosion (Fogli 2010, pp. 403–405). The vertical layout of the text, the detailed description of the impossibility of breathing, of her pain and blood, and of the screams in the background: all contribute to impress the reader and to make grief and suffering as explicit and vivid as possible, and thereby to make more effective and persuasive the denunciation of the state's connivances with right-wing terrorism.

With their explicit and direct representation of violence, such works differ significantly from earlier Italian literature on the Years of Lead, which – as Paolin (2008, pp. 113–115) and Vitello (2013b, p. 176) argue – tended to avoid a direct and straightforward representation of violence. As Ruth Glynn highlighted, a marginalization of victims informed, more generally, the cultural imagery of the *anni di piombo*: both during the after the events of the Years of Lead, terrorists and former terrorists were the only ones to narrate those years, and things have changed only recently, with the emergence and greater diffusion of autobiographical accounts written by the children of victims, as well as of public interviews to the relatives of victims or to survivors of terrorist attacks. Glynn defined this shift as a 'turn to the victim' in Italian culture (2013), made of victim-centred texts that promoted 'a new consciousness of the injustice of that marginalisation has emerged in Italian culture' (Glynn 2013, p. 374). As 'militant[s] of the truth' (p. 378), victims offered a new perspective on the dreadful events of the 1970s.

In relation to the novels by Simone Sarasso, perhaps the most explicit of our authors, the direct, straightforward, and militant representation of victims' bodily sufferance has been welcomed as a way of giving voice to the victims, one that 'reminds the reader that the victims of terrorism were not just names in newspapers but people of flesh and blood' and

that 'contributes to the personalization of this tragic event' (Pezzotti 2016, p. 193). In my understanding, this view fails to capture an important aspect of the representation of innocent victimhood in the works I have mentioned. In fact, the explicit and at times spectacular depiction of bodily suffering is highly sensational and tailored to patterns derived from a Hollywoodian, cinematic aestheticization of violence, made of slow motion and close-ups, which the authors I mentioned echo and reiterate in their writing. In my view, such purely visual spectacularizing of bodily suffering – in which language descriptively mimics image – prevents readers from embracing, as the authors would like, a sympathetic compassion for the victims, who appear in the form of bloody lumps of flesh rather than as human beings who suffer a sudden and unmotivated violence.

In this respect, I suggest engaging again with Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others,* whose central argument is that the overexposure to images of violence and atrocity neutralizes the possibility of an active reaction to those atrocities. The visually spectacular staging of suffering, Sontag argues, dehumanizes victims, making them unknown to us: 'Those… with their stunned faces, their emaciated torsos… remain an aggregate: anonymous victims. And even if named, unlikely to be known to 'us.'' (Sontag 2019, p. 53). Sontag claims that images differ from language inasmuch as, while images have the power to shock the viewer, they do not offer any understanding of that suffering:

> harrowing photographs do not inevitably lose their power to shock. But they are not much help if the task is to understand. Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us. (p. 78)

This is one of many other critiques of the use of images to make the vicarious experience of suffering more real and direct in the eyes of spectators. In this respect, and for the purpose of this analysis, it is also worth mentioning Judith Butler's *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), to whose reflections on victimhood we shall return later in this thesis. In this essay, Butler is concerned with defining the human in relation to its

precariousness, namely to the fact of being vulnerable and potentially exposed to uncertain and uncontrollable conditions that might destroy the subject. Butler sees precariousness as a basis for a global ethics of non-violence and, in her essay, she wonders how best to represent human grief and suffering according to this premise.

Butler argues that the representation of grief is successful when it humanizes the victim, namely when it suggests something about her/his precariousness and gives us the possibility of identifying with her/him. In this light, she criticizes the dominant modes of representation as dehumanizing in their referential ambition to 'capture' the human in its entirety through standardized images (Butler 2004, pp. 144–145). Thus, Butler writes that representation

> must not only fail to capture its referent, but *show* this failing. … The reality is not conveyed by what is represented within the image, but through the challenge to representation that reality delivers'. (p.146)

Against this backdrop, the ambition for a total and persuasive representation of physical suffering in these works from the so-called 'return to reality' fails to accomplish the task of fostering a critical reading of reality. In fact, the anxiety about how to persuasively connect with readers and to perform the authorial political commitment leads to the echoing and repetition in writing of a set of representations that are typical of other expressive languages, whose aims and ultimate functions differ from those of literature. As I will discuss in more detail in Part III, whatever the modes of representation employed, literature brings about an effort to signify, and not only describe, reality through language and the written word.

1.2.2 Stereotypes of Innocence

A spectacular staging of bodily suffering is not the only way in which these authors emphasize the innocence of non-combatant victims, aiming to foster the indignation of their readers. In works dealing with the large-scale bombing massacres of the *stragismo,* authors

also depict innocent victims through a stereotypical narrative of moral goodness and purity, widening the moral gap between victims and their perpetrators. By doing so, they offer a moralistic reading of innocence, one that fills the 'blind spot' (Savettieri 2017, p. 12) of innocence by means of rhetoric and narratives that are typical of the political discourse.

In 1986, the Norwegian sociologist and criminologist Nils Christie introduced the notion of the 'ideal victim', describing how, in our societies, socially accepted individuals who suffer an offence are automatically represented through attributes of moral goodness, in a sharp opposition to their offenders. In 2007, in a book entitled *Complex Political Victims*, Erica Bouris used the formula of the ideal victimhood to illustrate how, in post-conflict contexts and peacebuilding processes, the political discourse draws on gripping and, at times, simplified representations of victims as morally good and pure to make sense of the conflict and to address issues of compensation and reparation that are strategic for the coexistence of all individuals and the maintenance of public order.

This was also the case for Italy: once the emergency of terrorism had passed, and particularly from the beginning of the new millennium onwards, institutions started celebrating the victims of terrorism through memorial practices and public occasions of various kinds. In his essay *La Repubblica del dolore* (2011), the historian Giovanni De Luna interpreted the public limelight on victims from a transnational, European perspective as a symptom of a crisis of the nation-state at the end of the century, arguing that such victim-centred rhetorical magniloquence turned the public sphere into a 'Republic of grief'. To some extents, this victim-centred celebratory rhetoric could also be seen as compensatory to the lack of truth regarding the involvement of the state in some of the massacres that took place during the Years of Lead.

In some of the works from my corpus in which the authors present victimization as undeserved and unjust, the rhetoric of the 'ideal victim' plays an important role. In these cases, the authors construct the figure of the victim through attributes of moral purity and

goodness to provoke the pity of their readers and their resentment towards those responsible for the attack. When depicting the massacre of Piazza del Monumento (Piazza Fontana) in *La legge dell'odio,* for example, Alberto Garlini devises a scene in which Lorenzo, one of those responsible for the attack, encounters a little girl just before the explosion of the bomb at the National Agricultural Bank:

> Una bambina accompagnata dalla madre si fermò, incantata da quel ripetersi di luce e di tenebra. Arrivava a malapena alla vita di Lorenzo, era bionda e gioiosa. Al petto stringeva come un trofeo una borsetta bianca, da adulta, che probabilmente i genitori le avevano comprato dopo molte insistenze. ... Batteva le mani facendo dondolare la borsetta da donna. La madre si scusò sorridendo. Era felice di scusarsi di avere una bambina così vivace. Strinse la mano della figlia ed entrò in banca. (Garlini 2012, p. 485)

A few lines later, Garlini describes the explosion and focuses on the escape of Stefano, another of the terrorists: 'vide cadere sull'asfalto la borsetta bianca della bambina. Era aperta. Oscena. Batté sull'asfalto sporco di nebbia e fuoco. Una striscia di sangue la percorreva in diagonale' (p. 487). The image of a joyful and harmless child followed by a visually powerful detail suggesting her murder enables the author to convey his moral condemnation of the offenders and to encourage readers to adopt his perspective. As Susan Moeller highlights,

> the image of an endangered child is the perfect "grabber". … Children dramatize the righteousness of a cause by having their innocence contrasted with the malevolence … of adults in authority. … for what … kind of human is capable of harming the so obviously helpless? (Bouris 2007, p. 38)

Images of children also occur when the authors describe victims within their affective and relational life. In both Garlini's and in Fogli's novels, for example, the authors represent two individuals who the readers know are going to be killed as loving fathers of their children, who are uninvolved in their parents' activities and will soon suffer an undeserved loss. This is the case for the moving depiction of Judge De Luca's children in Fogli's novel (Fogli 2010, p. 351) as well as for the marshal Bertola in Garlini's novel, soon killed by a group of right-

wing terrorists, who fondly cuddles his children shortly before his death (Garlini 2012, p. 685). In other cases, these authors put the emphasis on the familial bonds of the victims, seeking to trigger an emotive response in their readers, creating a connection with them and making their authorial engagement evident and clear. This is the case for Garlini's character Gerolamo Sperandeo (2012, pp. 253–254), whom the author represents in a happy familial environment, or for the depiction of the grief and sorrow of those who lost their relatives in the Bologna bombing in Fogli's novel (2010, pp. 412–413).

The construction of ideal victimhood can also be noticed when the authors anchor the virtue and goodness of the victim to a full acceptance of suffering, to the fact of being non-combatant and, for this reason, morally superior to the offenders. In Garlini's novel, this is the case for Sperandeo, just before he is killed by the protagonist Stefano Guerrera:

> non pietiva, non piagnucolava. Parlava da uomo a uomo. … Quell'uomo era così leale che gli toglieva perfino l'imbarazzo di ucciderlo. ... Senza un urlo, senza una parola. La muta preghiera degli animali da preda perché siano lievi i denti dei predatori. (Garlini 2012, pp. 255–256)

This is also the case for Mauro Castelvetro, a young literature student killed by Guerrera:

> Mauro alza lo sguardo. Gli occhi azzurri, prima sorpresi, mutano espressione in una sorta di allegria, che si apre in un sorriso e in parole di saluto … Non c'è stata battaglia. Il morto non era un guerriero. ... La predisposizione da vittima di Mauro. La morte di un innocente è uno sgarbo all'onore. (pp. 71–72)

In Simone Sarasso's *Settanta,* it is Francesco Argento, a stand-in for Aldo Moro, who plays the role of the ideal, non-combatant innocent. In this novel, the author describes Moro's killing as part of a plan orchestrated by L'Omino, namely Giulio Andreotti, who is also responsible for several large-scale bombing massacres during the Years of Lead. As with Sarasso's stylized approach, the description of Argento's obedience and submission to the will of terrorists is willingly exaggerated and rhetorical:

> Umanoide senza volontà nelle mani del commando.

> Abbassa la testa, docile.
> Non fiata.
> Non piange.
> Non urla.
> Non oppone resistenza. (Sarasso 2009, pp. 535-536)

Throughout the description of Argento's captivity, the author monumentalizes Moro as a tragic hero who openly embraces his destiny and, for this reason, towers above his killers for his moral superiority, as the following dramatic lines show: 'Gli occhi del prigioniero: stiletti di ghiaccio piantati nel cuore' (pp. 557–558); 'Il prigioniero lo fissa dritto negli occhi: «Io muoio comunque». *Silenzio*.… Gli occhi del prigioniero: fieri e disperati' (p. 561). Through catching sentences, powerful visual details, and sensational tones, the author describes Argento as a moral beacon and the bearer of a tragic innocence.

Sarasso's Moro is a two-dimensional character. In this respect, Sarasso's portrayal of Aldo Moro happens to be very similar to that offered by government-controlled newspapers in the 1970s, which made of Moro a martyr and a tragic hero who had died for the sake of the reason of state[7]. Thus, despite his intentions to offer a militant and antagonistic narrative of the past – as well as of being credible and realistic in his writing (see introduction to Part I) –, the author ends up retracing the dominant, and pragmatically driven, discourse of power. Finally, the construction of ideal victimhood takes shape in the celebration of the Italian people's endurance of the suffering inflicted by those who orchestrated the large-scale bombing attacks: 'la forza di tutta quella gente che non sembra avere nessuna intenzione di arrendersi. Bologna che continua a vivere, che si ostina a vivere. Malgrado tutto' (Fogli 2010, p. 414). Or, else, from Garlini's novel:

> Dignità nel dolore. Fermezza. Uomini fieri di non essere belve assassine. Una cosa semplice. Ma commovente. … Molti cittadini erano accorsi a donare il sangue. Alcuni medici volontari stavano affluendo dall'Emilia e dal Piemonte. … L'eccesso di violenza

---

[7] On the depiction of Aldo Moro as a martyr and tragic hero, and on the other "emplotments" (White 1973) of the Moro case in Italian culture, see, for example: Wagner-Pacifici 1986; Marini-Maio 2006; O' Leary 2007; Lombardi & Glynn 2012; Glynn, Lombardi & O' Leary 2012; Scolari 2019. On the depiction of Aldo Moro in Italian newspapers of the 1970s, see Pellegrini De Luca, Alessandra. (2015) Il caso Moro: la controcronaca letteraria di Leonardo Sciascia. Master thesis, University of Bologna, Bologna.

non aveva provocato paura, ma uomini maturi, improvvisamente seri. Uomini che sapevano badare a loro stessi senza leggi speciali. (Garlini 2012, pp. 492–493)

In these lines, the author retraces what the historian Giovanni De Luna describes as a celebratory rhetoric of victimhood in the Italian public discourse at the threshold of the new millennium, in which

> The proposed "shared memory" fundamentally builds on expiation and reparation rituals, by searching – through the grief sparked by national tragedies – for the 'persistence of civic passions, devotion to work for the common good, reliability and commitment to duty, the consolation of feelings, and humanitarian values', as if the victims' testimony could serve as catharsis for a wounded community, which expresses its sense of national belonging modeled on the image of a *Mater dolorosa.* (De Luna 2011, p. 83)

In the case of Sarasso, the celebration of the Italian people's innocence takes the shape of an explicit and outspoken denunciation of the networks of power behind terrorism in the Years of Lead, in which the author steps in and expresses his view on the topic: 'La strategia della tensione: il terrificante, irriverente tributo alla religione assoluta del centro. Ancora una volta, sul selciato, sangue innocente. Vittime senza colpa. Carne senza peccato' (Sarasso 2009 p. 668). Such is the desire to make the authorial engagement evident and clear that, in these lines, the author is almost didactic in instructing his readers about what their moral reaction to his representation should be. If we are to criticize this authorial approach through the words of Pasolini, who is one of the most quoted authors in this corpus, we might define Sarasso, and other authors of the 'return to reality', as a 'viscous' (*vischioso*) author. In an essay on Mario Soldati collected in *Descrizioni di descrizioni* (Pasolini 2008, pp. 2174–2179), Pasolini borrowed the notion of *vischiosità* from a Hungarian psychoanalyst who used it to describe the possessive attitude of the male frog in the coitus, applying it to the context of literary criticism. By praising Soldati for the lack of 'viscosity' in his writing, Pasolini defined as 'viscous' those authors who, in his view, established a vertical and possessive attitude towards their readership, namely, authors who conceive their writing as authoritative and

guide their readers through its interpretation, precluding the symbolic dimension of the text, which engages readers in a potentially endless search for meaning. As we will see in more detail in the last part of this thesis, the interplay between writing, reality, and symbolic imagination is central to the critical interpretation of the so-called 'return to reality'.

CHAPTER 2. Fascination for Violence: The Victim as the Enemy

The previous chapter showed how some of the authors from my corpus express their political commitment through a positive and favourable representation of victims as literary characters, by leading readers to either admire or pity them. I highlighted the ideological inflection of this representation, in which the Resistance, the figures of 'leftist' judges, or the words of Pasolini are central to the authors' performances in their accusation of the criminal activities of the state throughout the strategy of tension and the so-called *stragismo*. I also showed how the authors seek to foster a moral reaction towards the perpetrators through a spectacular depiction of innocent suffering. This chapter explores the other side of the polarized representation of victims as literary characters, namely that of 'bad' and 'non-good' victims. By either describing victims as mediocre or even contemptible individuals or by neglecting and ignoring their victimization in the story, the authors encourage readers to condone the actions of the perpetrators, if not to admire them. The chapter discusses the ideological premises of this representation, showing how 'bad' and 'non-good' victims emerge when the authors depict left-wing violence. I show how, when depicting the victim as the 'enemy', these authors engage with an imagery related to their time, for example through the figure of Silvio Berlusconi or of violent policemen, depicting the victim as a mere target of a justified violence. In the works I explore in this chapter, there is a clear tendency to project the memory of the 1970s onto the present, as well as a real fascination with leftist revolutionary violence, one that to which I shall return in more detail in Chapter 5. This chapter engages with the following works: *Latte* (2001) and *Dov'eri tu quando le stelle del mattino gioivano in coro?* (2004) by Christian Raimo; *2005 dopo Cristo* (2005) by Babette Factory; *Buio Rivoluzione* (2006) by Valerio Lucarelli; *La compagna P38* (2007) by Dario Morgante; and *Sangue del suo sangue* (2011) by Gaja Cenciarelli. In these works, too, there is no connection between the so-called 'return to reality' and the use of a realistic mode of

representation: the authors draw on a variety of different styles, often unrealistic and openly fictional, to represent the victims. In this case too, what compounds these works is the authors' display of their political commitment and their desire to present their writing as compelling and relevant to the social and political reality of their time.

2.1 The Critique of the Victim

I borrow this formula from Daniele Giglioli's *Critica della vittima* (2014), to which I will return in Part II. In this pamphlet, Giglioli criticizes victimhood as a 'mythological machine' (p. 13) of our times. In the works I examine here, this idea underpins the depiction of victims as mediocre or even despicable individuals who were unjustifiably praised and whose 'mythography' needs to be debunked.

In Christian Raimo's short story 'Coma morfico', published in *Dov'eri tu quando le stelle del mattino gioivano in coro?* (2004, pp. 122–137), for example, the protagonist, easily recognizable as Raimo himself, criticizes the way Marco Bellocchio represented Aldo Moro in his film *Buongiorno, notte* (2003). The movie was based on the memoir by Anna Laura Braghetti (1998) – one of the terrorists who took part in the kidnapping and murder of the president of Christian Democracy in 1978 – and depicted Moro's 55-days captivity and eventual murder at the hands of the Red Brigades. An extremely dramatic film, *Buongiorno, notte* favoured an introspective over an ideologically-oriented portrayal of the terrorists and the victim, depicting Moro's developing awareness of his destiny through his letters, as well as the interior evolution of Chiara, a stand-in for Braghetti, in relation to her comrades' decision to kill Moro.

Raimo published *Dov'eri tu quando le stelle del mattino gioivano in coro?* one year after Bellocchio's film was released in cinemas. Like his other collection *Latte* (2001), *Dov'eri tu quando le stelle del mattino gioivano in coro?* offers a portrayal of Raimo's own generation, for which frequent and recurrent references to the Years of Lead are central. In

'Coma morfico', the protagonist criticizes Bellocchio's film for not focusing enough on the ideological significance of the Moro case, and for overemphasising the emotional and psychological aspects of the events:

> Fa i conti con la storia come se fosse dall'analista a risolversi un trauma suo personale e non un pezzo di storia che ancora sanguina .... Crepassero, esatto, questi film che vogliono parlare esclusivamente delle *emozioni*. (Raimo 2004, pp. 130–131)

The protagonist thus places Bellocchio among a generation of directors who, in his opinion, left behind a politically relevant narration of reality – 'Perché, dimmi, perché un'intera generazione di registi ha rinnegato completamente la politica delle ragioni?' (p. 131) – and accuses him of having neglected the terrorists' motives for carrying out their actions:

> È una scelta in malafede o *irresponsabile* – Irrispettosa – E per chiunque. Per i terroristi che li fa vedere come dei videodipendenti psicotici totalmente a digiuno di coscienza politica. Dei pazzi, tipo 'Grande Fratello', che decidono di passare due mesi chiusi in un appartamento come esperimento psicologico .... (p. 130)

The harsh critique of Bellocchio's movie culminates when the protagonist comments on Bellocchio's comparison between Aldo Moro and the partisans of the Resistance, in a scene in which the terrorist Chiara compares the statesman's letters to those of the partisans condemned to death under Fascism:

> Le lettere dei condannati a morte della resistenza come le lettere di Moro ai compagni di partito? Ma quelli dicevano *muoio con voi,* non *vaffanculo democrazia cristiana ipocriti di merda salvatemi.* (ibid.)

The comparison between the victim and the partisans, Raimo suggests, excessively ennobles the image of Moro, a coward who evaded his political responsibilities. As we shall see, Raimo is an important voice in my corpus, whom I consider to be representative of the dominant tendencies of the generational imagery that this thesis explores, and who has often discussed his interest in the Years of Lead on a generational basis. A contributing writer to the left-wing newspapers *Liberazione* and *Il Manifesto*, he has devoted much

thought to the theme of political violence, writing on the diffusion of right-wing extremism among young Italians (2018) as well as on the relationship between terrorism, memory, and reconciliation (2008; 2014; 2015; 2017). The critique of Bellocchio's ennobling representation of Moro as a victim of terrorism has to be seen as part of Raimo's wider concern with the question of victimhood, which found particular expression in two articles: 'La vittima, la memoria, l'oblio' (2008), published in the online journal *Nazione Indiana*, and 'È possible capire i terroristi?' (2015), published in the journal *Internazionale*.

In both cases, Raimo problematizes the relationship between victimhood and public commemorative practices. In his 2015 article, he criticizes the use of victimhood as a strategy of power and a tool to divide society into the guilty and the innocent and, therefore, to justify forms of harsh repression. In his 2008 article, on the other hand, Raimo drew on a dispute between Adriano Sofri, a former left-wing activist from the group Lotta Continua who was charged with the killing of the police commissioner Luigi Calabresi in 1972, and Mario Calabresi, his son, following a commemorative event for the victims of terrorism organized by the UN in New York. On this occasion, Raimo criticizes the limelight placed on victims in commemorative practices, claiming that it fosters an emotive rather than cognitive approach to history. Victims, Raimo claims, are inadequate to mirror the reality of history: '[w]itnesses, victims, survivors in place of the heroes, or those militants, winners who until recently used to make history and politics.' (2008). I will return to heroism and to the question of *fare la storia* in Chapter 5, where I will explore the last pattern of victimhood as a cultural paradigm for this generation of authors.

The unjustified praise of victims is also the backbone of Gaja Cenciarelli's *Sangue del suo sangue* (2011), which revolves around the fictional character of Margherita, the daughter of Rodolfo Scarabosio, a general of the Carabinieri killed by the Red Brigades during the Years of Lead. The novel starts with the murder of Scarabosio and later shifts to 2006, when Margherita becomes the honorary president of a committee of support for the relatives of

the victims of the Red Brigades. The committee is part of the electoral campaign of Bruno Chialastri, a rich entrepreneur running in the 2006 Italian elections in a centre-right coalition and who is later murdered by the New Red Brigades[8]. In this novel, Cenciarelli refers to the really existed national elections in 2006, where the centre-left coalition, headed by Romano Prodi, won by a handful of votes against the centre-right coalitions, headed by Silvio Berlusconi.

The overarching theme of *Sangue del suo sangue* lies in the discrepancy between the public image and the private reality of the victim. Rodolfo Scarabosio, publicly celebrated as a father of the nation, is a violent, abusive, and repressive man. He beats his wife, sexually abuses his daughter, and forces his son to become like him. When a short and telegraphic paragraph states that he is shot dead by the Red Brigades (Cenciarelli 2011, p. 27), readers are driven to welcome his murder as a deserved destiny. When representing Scarabosio's killing, moreover, the author devises a highly degrading image of his death:

> Prima che la sventagliata di mitra lo inchiodasse al sedile posteriore, il pene rattrappito aveva orinato copiosamente nei pantaloni della divisa, annerendoli fino a metà coscia. … L'ultima immagine del generale Scarabosio aveva immortalato lo scandalo del suo tentativo di fuga, il braccio sinistro lungo il fianco, il braccio destro piegato sotto la schiena, i pantaloni neri e fetidi. (p. 29)

Margherita's inner thoughts on the death of her father are also illustrative of Cenciarelli's attempt to deconstruct the positive image of Scarabosio's victimhood:

> Margherita aveva riflettuto su un fatto: a suo padre non avevano sparato subito. Era stato costretto ad assistere all'assassinio dell'autista. A poco a poco, quel pensiero era diventato così bello da strozzarle il respiro. E se i brigatisti avessero ammazzato prima l'autista per far morire di terrore suo padre, sbattergli in faccia la sua fine, ucciderlo due volte? Quale sarebbe stata la colonna sonora ideale? (p. 31)

---

[8] *Nuove Brigate Rosse*, a term identifying a number of really existed leftist terrorist groups re-enacting leftist terrorism in Italy between 1999 and 2003, who were responsible for the killings of the two jurists Massimo D'Antona and Marco Biagi in 1999 and 2002.

The incongruity between Scarabosio's public image and the reality of his life becomes all the more glaring when the author stages his public commemorations as a victim of terrorism:

> 'Cosa vorrebbe dire agli assassini di suo padre?' Margherita sa che dovrebbe rispondere: 'Che li perdono, ma che non dimentico, perciò sono qui'. … Le viene da sorridere, sente incresparsi le labbra. Abbassa rapidamente la testa. 'Che…' Vorrebbe dire 'Grazie'. (p. 143)

Cenciarelli here draws on the solemn and magniloquent rhetoric of the commemorative ceremony:

> *Un uomo integerrimo, un difensore della legalità che ha sacrificato se stesso alla causa dell'Italia, senza mai lasciarsi intimidire, un padre di cui i figli saranno orgogliosi. E anche noi. Permettici, generale, di sentirci tutti figli tuoi.* (p. 115)

By doing so, Cenciarelli recalls, and implicitly criticizes, one of the opening sentences of the first Italian Remembrance Day for the Victims of Terrorism that took place on 9 May 2008 at the Palazzo del Quirinale (Rome) and was broadcast on Italian television. On that occasion, the journalist Paolo Mieli redundantly compared the victims to the 'founding fathers' of the country:

> Vittime come martiri e padri fondatori della nostra storia …, tutte persone pacifiche, padri di famiglia, che avevano sempre operato per il bene della comunità, e questo ne fa dei martiri il cui sangue per la Repubblica ha saputo risollevarsi e vivere stagioni successive di democrazia. (Mieli 2008)

The degradation of the image of the victim – and, most significantly, the revenge dimension of such degradation – is one of the most evident aspects of the critique of victimhood in the works in focus in this chapter. In Cenciarelli as in other works, the projection of revolutionary violence of the Years of Lead onto the present gives expression to a form of generational resentment, one for which the present is seen as a time of crisis, and violence as a cathartic solution to it. To many extents, 'bad' victims act like scapegoats, and the imagery of violence during the Years of Lead is key to this process. In this light, a fitting epistemological

framework to look at this could be found in the thought of the French anthropologist René Girard, particularly as expressed in his works *Violence and the Sacred* (1972) and *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (1978). Girard's theory lies in the idea that human institutions have violent origins, and that collective mechanisms of persecution and victimization are central to these origins. According to Girard, sacrificial scapegoating provides a mechanism of cathartic reconciliation for societies that finds themselves in what he calls 'mimetic crises', that is, escalations of endogenous violence that perpetuates by imitation, retaliation, or revenge. In such contexts, Girard argues, victims are chosen for 'mythical' (arbitrary and false) reasons, and their victimization is collectively represented as legitimate. The sacrificial murder, Girard argues, is facilitated through an altered collective representation of the victim, one that strips the victim of his/her humanity and turns him/her into something alien, whose expulsion thus looks justified. Girard's theory has been applied to the imagery of terrorism of the Years of Lead in contemporary Italian culture by Pierpaolo Antonello (2009), particularly in relation to the representation of the killings of Aldo Moro and Pier Paolo Pasolini. In relation to the works in focus in this chapter, Girard's theory aptly describes the revenge dimension of the degradation of the image of the victim and the social and political context in which this degrading representation occurs. This mechanism becomes even more apparent when the authors of my corpus mobilize the figure of Silvio Berlusconi to re-read the Years of Lead. Let us look at this aspect more in detail.

2.1.1 Killing Berlusconi

Contrary to the authors considered in the previous chapter, Raimo and Cenciarelli are critical of a victim-centred approach to the memory of the Years of Lead. In both cases, this critique bears a clear ideological connotation, through which the authors reread 1970s leftist terrorism in the political context of their time. In this respect, it is worth looking at the role played by the figure of Silvio Berlusconi in the construction of the victim as 'enemy'. In both

Cenciarelli's *Sangue del suo sangue* and in Babette Factory's *2005 dopo Cristo*, both published while Berlusconi was Italy's prime minister, Berlusconi plays a central role in the reworking of the memory of 1970s terrorism. Overall, the figure of Berlusconi attracted the interest of more than one author among those considered in this thesis: beside Babette Factory and Cenciarelli, Giuseppe Genna modelled the figure of 'Il Proprietario' (The Owner) in his novel *Fine Impero* (2013) on Berlusconi, and Christian Raimo (2010 and 2017a) and Giorgio Fontana (2011) respectively wrote two articles and a pamphlet in which they criticized the cultural and political consequences of almost twenty years of Berlusconi's governance of the country.

In Cenciarelli's novel, the literary character of Bruno Chialastri, a victim of the New Red Brigades, is explicitly modelled on Berlusconi. 'Una specie di Berlusconi in miniatura' (Cenciarelli 2011, p. 313), Chialastri is a rich entrepreneur who owns a company linked to the main Italian broadcast companies and banks. A repugnant and almost caricatural character, Chialastri personifies the corruption and clientelism that characterized Berlusconi's Italy. Above all, through this character Cenciarelli criticizes the ideological exploitation of historical memory that informed Berlusconi's propaganda: like Berlusconi, Chialastri describes himself as one that seeks to liberate Italy from 'uno schieramento politico che ha fatto della repressione violenta la sua storia, il cui nome – comunismo – evoca in tutto il mondo sangue e atrocità' (p. 217). Chialastri's speeches are modelled on Berlusconi's anti-communist rhetoric, which involved the denigration of the Resistance, the denunciation of a 'storiografia … ancora macchiata da un filomarxismo che oscura la verità' (p. 225), and the exploitation of leftist terrorism in the Years of Lead: 'Il comunismo è stato responsabile dei nostri anni più bui, gli anni di piombo. Non dimentichiamo che le Brigate Rosse sono il frutto più avvelenato delle viscere del comunismo' (p. 221).

As part of his electoral campaign, Chialastri creates a committee of support for the relatives of the victims of the Red Brigades, of which Margherita finds herself the honorary

president. Embracing the cause of victims enables Chialastri to gain consensus by appealing to the emotions:

> L'emozione è la carta vincente. … Una figlia che non si è mai ripresa dalla morte del padre. Una famiglia spezzata. … La forza dietro al dolore. La sincerità. Cosa può esserci di più potente? (p. 138)

Moreover, Chialastri builds on victimhood to promote a repressive political agenda. When devising the literary character of Chialastri, indeed, Cenciarelli draws on a rhetoric of security and zero tolerance, one in which the defence of victims goes hand in hand with a harsh view of punishment for the offenders: 'Bisognerebbe metterli in galera e buttare via la chiave! E lasciarli marcire in silenzio!' (p. 224). Here, Cenciarelli portrays the 'strong revenge dimension' as well as the 'suffocating presence of emotions' (De Luna 2011, p. 16) characterizing the ideologically driven exploitation of victimhood. As Giovanni De Luna wrote in his essay *La Repubblica del dolore,*

> The memory triggered by the victims, however, is essentially the memory of a criminal past, one with culprits to punish and innocents to compensate, in an endless sequence of reparatory acts, a hectic motion of unpunished crimes and unpaid debts. (p. 88)

Chialastri's words can also be read against the backdrop of two heated debates that inflamed the Italian political arena between 2006, when the story is set, and 2008. On the one hand, a further debate on the *indulto* took place in 2006[9]. On the other hand, in 2007 the progressive politician Giuliano Pisapia and his ministerial commission presented a reform of the Penal Code (Associazione Antigone 2007), which aimed to mitigate the conditions in prison and make them more appropriate to the principles of the Italian Constitution. The reform never became an actual law because of the end of the legislature in 2008, after the Italian government received a vote of no confidence from the Italian

---

[9] Italian Chamber of Deputies. (2006). *XV Legislatura – Discussioni – Seduta del 26 Luglio 2006 – N. 32.* [Online]. Available from http://leg15.camera.it/_dati/leg15/lavori/stenografici/sed032/pdfs003.pdf [Accessed on 16 February 2019], p. 40 and after.

Senate. In the same year, two right-wing politicians proposed a draft law on the same topic. In both cases, the political debate saw a polarization between leftist politicians, more liberal and in favour of the reintegration of criminals into society, and right-wing politicians, who advocated for harsh and punitive prison conditions. Recalling the leftist terrorism during the Years of Lead was part of their argument (Italian Senate 2008, p. 3). Through the literary character of Chialastri, Cenciarelli reiterates these ideologically polarized debates in her novel. Above all, she takes a side on them; like the other works in this corpus, *Sangue del suo sangue* is permeated by a politically engaged perspective, through which the author seeks to foster a critical awareness in her readers.

This perspective dovetails with the literary character of the leftist terrorist Milla, to which I will return later. It is mainly through her eyes that we, as readers, get to know, and despise, the figure of Chialastri. In this case too, his victimization is presented as the only possible solution, and it appears to us as justified, if not deserved. Like that of Scarabosio, finally, the depiction of Chialastri's death is degrading and about as far from the ennobling and grandiloquent depictions of the suffering of 'good' victims as is possible: 'Guarda Chialastri, sguaiatamente disteso a terra. "Era indecente da vivo, figuriamoci da morto…" pensa di sfuggita.' (Cenciarelli 2011, p. 339).

In *2005 dopo Cristo* (2005) by Babette Factory, the authors refer even more explicitly to the figure of Silvio Berlusconi when constructing the victim as the 'enemy'. In this work, the real-life Berlusconi, prime minister of Italy at the time of the novel's publication, is the victim of a terrorist attack. Like Raimo's collections of short stories, as well as the works by Cenciarelli, Lucarelli, Ravera Rafele, and Paolin, this novel is set in the 2000s and portrays the generation to which Raimo himself belongs. All these works contain references to the Years of Lead, often in the form of a real re-enactment of the violence of those years.

2005 dopo Cristo combines a parody of conspiracy with the anthropological narrative of the ritual regicide, blending together a wide range of different styles and imageries, and

interweaving realistic and anti-realistic representation: because of the variety of styles, imageries, and modes of representation employed, Massimo Ercolino defined *2005 dopo Cristo* a 'maximalist' novel (2015). The plot revolves around a *coup d'état* organized by the rich and old Sinisgalli, who has secretly pulled the strings of Italian politics since the times of the Years of Lead. In 2005, because he thinks the country is sinking politically and culturally, he plots the killing of the prime minister Berlusconi, who he himself brought to power and now considers unfit to lead Italy. As we shall see, one of the core themes of this book, in which the authors draw on Pasolini's words to express their political commitment, lies in the incapability of younger generations to take on the task and kill Berlusconi.

From the beginning, the terrorist attack against Berlusconi is charged with a number of symbolic meanings, all contributing to depict his homicide as deserved and needed. In order to kill Berlusconi, Sinisgalli hires a man called Raul Cabrini, very much recalling the figure of Raul Gardini, an entrepreneur who killed himself in the summer of 1993 when his involvement in the *Tangentopoli* corruption ring came to public attention (Crainz 2009, pp. 199–203). Gardini was not the only one to commit suicide at that time: in an article published in the daily newspaper *La Stampa* the day after Gardini's suicide, the journalist Ezio Mauro named the summer of 1993 as the 'Italian summer of suicides' (Crainz 2009, p. 200) because other managers and politicians killed themselves following the judicial proceedings of *Tangentopoli.* The summer of 1993 marked the end of the First Republic: as such, it represented a long-awaited opportunity for the Left to lead the country for the first time since 1947, building on the corruption of previous parties, of which those suicides were a symbol. The entry into politics of Silvio Berlusconi, however, thwarted this possibility: by naming Berlusconi's designated killer after the figure of Gardini, the authors present his homicide as a sort of *pena del contrappasso,* namely as a punishment that resembles, by analogy or contrast, his sins.

In this novel, Sinisgalli sets the date for the killing of Berlusconi as the 25th of April, namely on the anniversary of the Liberation. Once again, the memory of the Resistance comes to play a central role in the construction of the victim as a literary character, one that either glorifies or degrades the victim depending on the ideological origin of the violence. In this case, the scheduling of Berlusconi's killing on 25 April draws a clear parallel between the latter and Mussolini, therefore representing the victim as a tyrant and terrorist violence as a legitimate act of justice against oppression.

In this highly pessimistic novel, however, no liberation is possible: throughout *2005 dopo Cristo*, the authors of Babette Factory insist on the role played by Berlusconi's media empire in building his hegemony over the Italians, who became entirely subdued to his will and unable to emancipate themselves. The Italians, Sinisgalli claims when plotting the killing of Berlusconi from above, are now unfit to engage in a revolution, collective whining and self-commiseration being their characteristic traits: 'Il risentimento. È il risentimento il sentimento collettivo. Il piagnisteo, il vittimismo. Ho a che fare da anni con una massa di individui puerili e queruli' (Babette Factory 2005, p. 10). Thus, Sinisgalli devises a highly sensationalistic media campaign – '*decerebrante*' and 'cripto-nazista' (Babette Factory 2005, p. 64) – to communicate the killing of Berlusconi to the Italian people, one that annihilates their ability to think critically and enables a full reversal of the political scenario: 'Serve la commozione di milioni di persone …. Una volta portata l'emotività di un Paese a questo livello, è possibile qualsiasi tipo di manipolazione' (pp. 161-162). The authors of Babette Factory here give expression to what Pierpaolo Antonello, in his essay entitled *Dimenticare Pasolini* (2012, pp. 79–82), defined the 'myth' of Berlusconi in progressive Italian culture, which tended to overestimate his media power and its relationship to his political success.

When the attack on Berlusconi eventually takes place, the authors highlight again the subjection of the Italian people to this figure, describing the crowd gathering in piazza

Venezia – where Mussolini had his headquarters and used to deliver his speech to an adoring crowd – and mourning over Berlusconi's death as follows:

> Il corteo del funerale era «tipicamente italiano», una massa stipata di persone senza una direzione dove far convergere il cordoglio …. L'amore liminale del popolo per il suo leader cominciava a emergere dal presupposto che sono sempre i migliori quelli che se ne vanno …. (p. 276)

In fact, we discover that Berlusconi did not die in the attack but was mistakenly saved by a young student who happened to be in the tunnel where the car crash took place, and who took Berlusconi hostage and took him to a cave along the way.

The third and last part of *2005 dopo Cristo* offers a grotesque and parodic depiction of Berlusconi's kidnapping in the backseat of a car, resembling the iconic image of Aldo Moro in the boot of a Renault in Rome's via Caetani. The 'abbiosciato | sacco di già oscura carne' (Luzi 1998, p. 531) turns here into a 'feto maiuscolo sul sedile posteriore' (Babette Factory 2005, p. 265), and the entire description of the kidnapping consists of a material 'deconstruction' of the Cavaliere's public image as a political leader. The authors turn the youthful and cosmetic appearance of Berlusconi into the image of an old man severely injured by the car crash: from being 'L'uomo, che … in virtù della magia cosmetica di prodotti da donna per sgrassare la pelle, sembrava il fratello minore di se stesso' (p. 235), Berlusconi becomes 'un quadro di Bacon, storto, sporco, sgualcito, unto, ricoperto di strati di vestiti lacerati e macchiati' (p. 268); the 'lifting e calvizie, il sorriso di plastica, i tacchi rinforzati' (p. 24) through which he appears at the beginning of the novel turn into 'capelli radi dietro il collo [che] sembravano una lanugine appiccicata con la coccoina' (p. 373).

Berlusconi's proverbial attention to his physical appearance and the role it played in his political image has attracted the attention of more than one scholar (Parotto 2007; Boni 2008; Belpoliti 2009). Among these, Marco Belpoliti titles his essay, *Il corpo del capo*, after *Il corpo del duce* by Sergio Luzzatto (1998), which focused on the body of Mussolini and looks at its relevance in relation to the history and legacy of Fascism in Italy. 'Berlusconi –

Belpoliti writes – is the first Italian politician, since the end of WWII, who crafted his image with the same continuity and perseverance as Mussolini' (2009, p. 23). Belpoliti discusses how, after the sacralization of the body of Mussolini during Fascism and its violent desacralization through the exhibition of his mutilated corpse in Piazzale Loreto, Italian politicians kept a low profile in terms of physical appearance:

> The phase that saw the obsessive display of the Duce's body… was followed by another phase in which politicians… concealed their physical presence: discreet, almost invisible, they avoided the spotlight and the photographers' flash… Togliatti, but also Fanfani and Moro were almost bodiless. (p. 24)

With Berlusconi, Belpoliti argues, the leader's body returned to the centre of the attention. The politician who dispatched the so-called 'fotoromanzo' – a magazine containing one hundred and thirty pages of pictures portraying the Cavaliere in both public and private contexts – in order to persuade Italians to vote for him at the 2001 elections, Berlusconi was characterized by an 'overwhelming narcissism' (p. 15) and paid great attention to his physical appearance. In his study, Belpoliti focuses on some recurring physical details on which Berlusconi built his image, such as his smile and the position of his hands (28–58). In Babette Factory's novel, these are precisely the details on which the authors insist throughout their 'deconstruction' of Berlusconi's cosmetic image: 'Berlusconi con la faccia completamente insanguinata.' (2005, p. 259); 'Un Presidente del Consiglio svenuto, mezzo ustionato in faccia, con la mano tumefatta, qualche falange in meno.' (p. 262); 'La mano di Berlusconi si era sgonfiata e imbruttita' (p. 300);

> Il sangue sulle mani si era rappreso, e le croste si erano seccate anche sul resto del corpo. … un taglio longitudinale sulla guancia sinistra, un'incisione netta come una linea di trucco cinematografico: e sull'altra guancia un ematoma che continuava a scurirsi. … gli si erano staccati tre pezzi di dita dalla mano sinistra: non staccati di netto, ma come raschiati. (pp. 265-268)

The 'deconstruction' of Berlusconi also occurs on a psychological level. The authors turn the jovial, optimistic, and self-confident image that Berlusconi constructed for himself into that

of a sick, old man – 'Berlusconi stava assaporando per la prima volta la paura, una fase necessaria di espiazione. Paura della morte, paura della malattia … Berlusconi era un povero vecchio, un povero vecchio malato' (pp. 346–347) – who talks nonsense and asks for help:

> Quello continuava a delirare come un computer affetto da un virus che apre un pop-up dietro l'altro. … Il respiro era quello di un malato con qualcosa ai polmoni, un raschio eccessivo, mugugni frammentati. (pp. 373–374)

When constructing Berlusconi's victimhood in these terms, the authors of Babette Factory give voice to what one of them, Christian Raimo, defined a 'performative' critique of Berlusconi (2010): namely, a discursive resistance to Berlusconi's power, one that overturns its narratives and rhetoric. In an article entitled 'La performatività vuota di Berlusconi – idee per un nuovo discorso di sinistra' (2010), Raimo claims that, because Berlusconi built his success on his image and communication skills rather than on some political ideals, an appropriate form of resistance was to be conceived in the same terms:

> una battaglia politica che combatta al livello performativo quello che non può essere combattuto nella normale dialettica. … Facciamo un esempio: mettiamo che invece di provare a opporre delle ragioni logiche … noi scoprissimo le carte di questo stile pubblicitario: esasperandolo, parodizzandolo, prendendolo alla lettera. … Berlusconi è brutto, Berlusconi puzza, Berlusconi è vecchio, Berlusconi non sa l'inglese, Berlusconi si mangia le parole, Berlusconi c'ha le orecchie a sventola, Berlusconi c'ha la pelle grassa, Berlusconi ha la forfora …. Questo non è abbassarsi al suo livello, questo è comprendere il suo habitus linguistico. (2010)

Raimo's article offers us a lens to read the depiction of Berlusconi as a 'bad' victim in *2005 dopo Cristo*: through the parody and caricatural deconstruction of Berlusconi's public image, the authors of Babette Factory charge their writing with a clear ideological purpose, to which the projection of the memory of 1970s leftist terrorism onto the present is central. Yet, the ending of *2005 dopo Cristo* unveils the sense of impotence beneath such a purely performative critique of power, which aims at '[combattere] al livello performativo quello che non può essere combattuto nella normale dialettica' (Raimo 2010).

After a long and exhausting kidnapping, the young student who took Berlusconi hostage, full of thinking and indecision, is unable to transform his initial intentions to kill the politician into material action. 'Noi non abbiamo avuto il comunismo, non abbiamo conosciuto il fascismo, pensava Ilaria. … Non sappiamo come si festeggia la morte.' (Babette Factory 2005, p. 263), says one of the young protagonists while contemplating the failure of Berlusconi's killing; 'L'enorme errore della sinistra negli ultimi anni è stato la rimozione della violenza' (p. 315), says another one. The novel ends with people gathering around the car in which Berlusconi was held hostage. Because he survived a terrorist attack, Berlusconi gains respect and reverence. Through his condition of victimhood, he re-establishes his supremacy over the Italian people:

> Nessuno si riferisce a lui con un nome: né il suo nome di battesimo, né con i vari termini per indicare il ruolo, la deferenza. La folla, ma anche i poliziotti, i militari, le figure ufficiali, ne parlano semplicemente in terza persona, quasi avessero paura a colpirlo a pronunciare il nome. La cosa importante che dicono è che è ferito, il che è un modo rassicurante per dire, comunque, che non è morto. Poi, prima che qualcuno lo tocchi, e mentre la luce cambia velocemente tono come nei pannelli pubblicitari, lui dice qualcosa. Dice: - Pregate per me. (p. 401)

In this case too, the authors of Babette Factory recall the narratives through which Berlusconi constructed his political image. As Giuliana Parrotto (2007) highlights, Berlusconi often drew on religious imagery in his self-construction. Moreover, the rhetoric of victimhood was key for him to gain consensus. As Giovanni De Luna puts it,

> the victimary expedient was … successfully used by Silvio Berlusconi, who tied his unstoppable rise to power to a 'narrative' filled with perpetrators and persecutors (communists, judges, the press, the Constitution, the Constitutional Court etc.), urging the electorate to side with him. (2011, p. 137).

2.1.2 Mocking the Victim

Alongside the ways that the authors characterize the victim as the 'enemy' in their works, leading readers to adopt the perspective of the perpetrators, there is also the representation

of victims in a ridiculous and caricatural manner. To some extent, the representation of Bruno Chialastri in Cenciarelli's *Sangue del suo sangue,* as well as of the 'nanopelato' Silvio Berlusconi in Babette Factory's *2005 dopo Cristo* (2005, p. 239), can also be read through this lens. This kind of representation, however, becomes evident in Dario Morgante's *La compagna P38* (2007), which recounts the story of Ermes, a young leftist militant who joins the *colonna romana* of the Red Brigades in the 1970s. The title of Morgante's novels recalls Fabrizio Calvi's *Camarade P.38* (1982), in which the journalist Calvi reconstructs the radicalization of the killers of Walter Tobagi, a journalist killed by a leftist terrorist group in 1980. Another novel that interweaves the memory of leftist terrorism in the 1970s with that of the Resistance, like Sarasso's novels, *La compagna P38* is largely influenced by the imagery and language of comics.

An author of comics himself, Morgante devises his characters through a sharp distinction between 'good protagonists', namely leftist terrorists, and the 'bad adversaries', namely their victims. When it comes to the representation of violence, this distinction is mirrored in two radically different registers: when the author describes violence at the hands of leftist terrorists, he draws on a farcical and comic register, portraying victims in a caricatural and grotesque manner. In contrast, as we shall see in more detail later, when terrorists die or suffer violence at the hands of law enforcements, the author resorts to a radically different and more dramatic register, providing characters with greater psychological complexity. In this respect, Morgante aligns with other authors in this corpus in offering an ideologically inflected representation of victims, through a precise political and ideological framework, with respect to which the author takes side and leads his readers to do the same. In the story, Ermes and his comrades carry out two attacks against, respectively, a former member of Christian Democracy and an architect who designed a maximum-security prison. Their representation is so caricatural as to become a ridiculous

parody of victimhood. The first victim, the former DC member Romano Staperini, begs to be spared as follows:

> «Oh dio no, vi prego», piange. «Vi prego risparmiatemi, io ho una famiglia, tre figli, se mi ammazzate come faranno, vi prego, vi prego, oh Signore, vi scongiuro». … e a tratti invoca la madre e prega la madonna di salvarlo. (Morgante 2007, p. 96)

By the same token, Morgante represents the architect Vittorio Morini in extremely ridiculous terms: '«Era una gara d'appalto … Un lavoro come un altro … io non sono cattivo» […]. «Non mi sparate», singhiozza, «non mi sparate». […] Morini urla, piange, si piscia addosso' (pp. 152–153). In both cases, it is hard for readers to take these two characters seriously.

The caricatural representation of victims also emerges in the depiction of policemen who are shot dead by terrorists. Police officers are a red thread running through *La compagna P38.* In the iconic, comics-inspired imagery of this novel, policemen prevent Ermes and his comrades, 'street heroes' fighting for a better world, from pursuing their goals. A violent clash between them and the police opens the story (pp. 1–19). From the beginning, the author refers to the law enforcements through appellatives borrowed from the vocabulary of outlaws: 'gli sbirri' (the coppers); 'le guardie' (the guards); 'carruba' (a slang misspelling of 'carabinieri'). Morgante represents policemen mainly through symbols of oppression and prevarication, such as batons, rifles, tear gases, and riot gears, but their representation is far from being serious, or in any way scary. They look caricatural: the adjectives describing their appearance – 'sogghignanti'; 'accaniti'; 'innervositi' (p. 18); 'con degli occhialetti tondi e una barbetta fascista sotto al mento' (p. 22) – lead readers to visualize sketchy faces of comics villains rather than real-life figures. The author also gives them an intellectual characterization and describes them as ignorant and stupid individuals: 'il cretino con la paletta' (p. 22); 'quello si agita, muove la mitraglietta di qua e di là' (p. 21); 'Mai visto uno sbirro che conosca una lingua' (p. 120). When the law enforcement officers speak in the novel, their statements sound artificially authoritative, as the iteration of verbs at the end of

the sentence, typical of the spoken language, suggests: 'Statti fermo lì, statti. … Ma vi sistemo io, vi sistemo' (pp. 21–22).

When Ermes and their comrades shoot them dead, the policemen get blasted to pieces like puppets: 'Ho visto uno sbirro cadere di sotto mentre bruciava' (p. 15); 'A una ventina di metri dall'incrocio vedo il primo sbirro morto' (p. 24); 'La testa dell'agente salta …. Un altro agente va a terra' (p. 141). In this case too, it is impossible for readers to suspend incredulity and take the representation seriously. Against this backdrop, I would not describe, as Andrea Hajek did (2009, pp. 5–7), Morgante's *La compagna P38* as a realistic and credible novel, one that successfully portrays the complexity and tragic nature of the Years of Lead from the perspective of the terrorists, including their interior conflicts about perpetrating violence. In my view, *La compagna P38* rather aligns with the other works described so far in its ideologically inflected depiction of victims, in which the authorial voice and political views are distinctively heard and overshadow the exploration of victims as embodied alterities within conflict.

2.2 Negligible Victims: The Non-Representation of Victimhood

This last section looks at the non-representation of victims in some of the works from the corpus. As previously stated, the absence of victims was generally considered to be a distinctive trait of Italian literary representations on the Years of Lead. In this corpus, where victims play a central role, authors do not represent victims in only a few cases, which in our semiotic square corresponds to the depiction of 'non-good' victims, namely, those whose victimization is presented as negligible, and the authors pay greater attention to leftist terrorists and their motivations for engaging in the armed struggle.

Victims are absent in Nicola Ravera Rafele's *Il senso della lotta* (2017), in which a young man living in the 2000s investigates the story of his parents, two leftist terrorists during the Years of Lead. As we shall see in more detail later, this novel offers a mythologizing and

glamorizing portrayal of leftist terrorists in the 1970s, one which builds on a comparison between the Years of Lead as a decade of great revolutionary ambitions and the present as a time of crisis and immobility. Within this framework, victims find no space. Victims also do not appear in Valerio Lucarelli's *Buio Rivoluzione* (2006): like Cenciarelli and Babette Factory, Lucarelli imagines a re-enactment of leftist terrorism in the 2000s, projecting the memory of the Years of Lead onto the present.

In particular, Lucarelli sets his story between 2001 and 2008, within the context of anti-globalization protests and explicitly elaborates, as we shall see, on the Genoa G8 events and the killing of Carlo Giuliani. In the story, a leftist terrorist commando kidnaps Chris Clier, the daughter of an important British politician, while she is on holiday in Italy. The novel stages the kidnapping and the investigations of the antiterror agent Maurizio Lupo, a benevolent and progressive policeman who seeks to understand the reasons behind the radicalization of terrorists. In line with the highly pessimistic tone of the novel, which also begins with a quote by Pier Paolo Pasolini, Lupo will eventually discover that – unbeknown to the majority of terrorists, deluded individuals who embrace a desperate attempt to rebel against the state – they were driven by the secret services.

Despite the kidnapping of Clier being the main event in the novel, she barely appears in the story, if not in the words of others or through newspaper headlines. Chris Clier acts *in absentia,* and her absence has the function of casting light on the reasons why the terrorists carry out their actions. In a dialogue with John Clier, the British politician and father of Chris, Lupo explains the reasons behind the attack on his daughter. As a victim, Chris suffers the consequences of social discontent resulting from her father's economic policies:

> la figlia subiva l'effetto di un odio nato quando, non curandosi di milioni di persone che manifestavano in piazza il loro dissenso, si era eretto a paladino delle più importanti compagnie petrolifere inglesi. Le stesse che, mentre la coscienza del mondo si spaccava su quella guerra, iniziavano a spartirsi i più importanti giacimenti mondiali. (Lucarelli 2006, p. 27)

The critique of the globalization of neoliberal capitalism and the denunciation of state violence constitute the backbone of *Buio Rivoluzione.* This, as we will see, provides Lucarelli with the groundwork to project the memory of the Years of Lead onto the present, glamorizing leftist terrorists as far-sighted forerunners of today's struggles. In this case too, the author performs his political commitment by rereading the terrorism of the 1970s through the ideological polarizations of the present, and this latter heavily influences the representation of victims as literary characters.

PART II. THE VICTIM AS A CULTURAL PARADIGM

Introduction

Part I explored the representation of victims as literary characters, showing how this representation interacts with the social and political background of Italy during the 2000s, and how the authors' performance of their political commitment results in an ideological polarization of 'good' and 'bad' victims. Through a close reading of my primary sources, I showed how, as part of the so-called 'return to reality', these works are characterized more by a concern for the political relevance of literature than by an actual enactment of realistic modes of representation. Through the literary characters of victims, which they devise in a range of different styles, our authors seek to directly engage with their readers: they rework the memory of the Years of Lead in highly opinionated terms and they engage with some divisive political issues – such as the memory of the Resistance, the lack of truth on the *stragismo*, the figure of Berlusconi, or the G8 events –, taking an outspoken stand on them through the depiction of the victims. The authors' urge to demonstrate the political relevance of their writing, I suggested, leads an underdeveloped portrayal of victims as suffering individuals. In the hands of our authors, victims are mere instruments to express one or another political view. In this second part of my thesis, I explore the relationship between victimhood and political commitment in more depth. In particular, the following chapters will examine some dominant tendencies of the authorial presence within the works of my corpus, which, I argue, can be treated as generational inasmuch as they unveil a common, generational problem.

1. A Generational Narrative of Impotence

The concern for the usefulness and political relevance of literature that, I suggested, permeates the works examined so far casts light on a shared narrative of impotence. This

term identifies a perceived condition of helplessness, of lacking 'potency' conceived as the ability to affect reality through some sort of action. In the previous chapters, I highlighted some recurring patterns in the depiction of victims, such as the glorification of losing opposition, the spectacular staging of innocent suffering, as well as a noticeable fascination with leftist revolutionary violence of the 1970s. A closer look at the imageries informing these patterns shows that, behind the authors' outspoken performances of political commitment, lies the perception of being unable to persuasively conduct a critique of the *status quo* or to intellectually engage in the conflict with the power structures that this commitment demands.

In the last decade, the notion of impotence was used by some Italian intellectuals to describe a crisis of the subject's relationship with reality. In his book *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility* (2017), the political theorist, former *sessantottino* and former activist of the 1977 movement Franco 'Bifo' Berardi identified in impotence a condition of impossibility, in the face of contemporary power structures, to actualize conflict and to implement change. Similarly, the Italian literary critic Daniele Giglioli recently described contemporaneity as follows:

> If there is one shared experience today …, it is precisely a widespread sense of impotence, a lack of grip on events, an inhibition to praxis. … Reality exists, and I know something about it. I feel its weight, except that I can do next to nothing about it, haunted as I am by the suspicion that I might be the one who doesn't really exist—who doesn't exist in a meaningful manner, that is. (Giglioli 2015, pp. 3-4)

With his reflections on the crisis of agency, Giglioli is one of the critics involved in the debate on the 'return to reality'. Like Antonio Scurati and Walter Siti, Giglioli opposes the enthusiastic idea of a militant departure from postmodernism in the name of a more critical engagement with reality. Giglioli argues that, in fact, contemporaneity has rather widened the gap between the subject and reality, which is now unintelligible and traumatic. Interestingly, Giglioli links this condition of impotence to a mythologization of some of the most distressing events of the past century by younger Italian writers:

a similar compensatory drive appears in the overt nostalgia with which many writers of the latest generations look at the tragic history of the twentieth century. … None of them fails to see just how the twentieth century was … the century of action: back then there was indeed something to say. Even the most atrocious sorrow had meaning, that same meaning that today seems to have evaporated. … The real mourning is over today's paralysis. (pp. 2-3)

2. Patterns of Victimhood

In the corpus of this thesis, the impotence permeating the authors' expression of political commitment emerges through the transformation of victimhood into a cultural paradigm for their generation. This paradigm shows through three main patterns, as the first three chapters of Part II illustrate: these are the display of political commitment through Pasolini-as-icon, the reworking of the memory of the Years of Lead through the Genoa G8 as a 'social framework of memory' (Halbwachs 1925), and the idealisation of leftist terrorists in the 1970s as a generation that 'made' national history (Kosellek 2004, pp. 192–204). In all these cases, the authors depict their generation as oppressed and lacking in agency.

The self-perception of victimhood in this generation of authors fits with a wider rhetoric of victimhood in contemporary Western culture. In the 1990s, the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard spoke about a 'new victim order' (1996, pp. 131–141) and defined the West as a 'victim society' (1998, p. 15). As Fatima Naqvi argued in a recent book that explores how authors, filmmakers, artists, and philosophers in contemporary Western Europe developed this victim talk, with the exception of specific social groups 'common sense indicates that the West is still, in economic and political terms, in a position of superior power and, if anything, victimizer rather than victim' (Naqvi 2007, p. 1). Yet, the narrative of impotence characterizing this generation of writers contributes to building up this Western self-victimizing picture, fleshing it out with further articulations.

The following chapters discuss how this happens, adopting a historical approach to comment on this rhetoric of victimhood. My contention is that this latter illustrates the inability

of this generation of writers and intellectuals to reconceptualize the modes and strategies of intellectual, political, and historical agency in the globalized present. When appropriating the words of Pasolini as a victimized *intellettuale vate*, projecting the memory of the Years of Lead onto police violence in the 2000s, or echoing the myth of generations as vehicles for the 'making' of national history, these authors rely on some of the historical and political interpretive paradigms that are typical of modern nationalism and no longer useful to understand the present. In this light, I draw on Lipovetsky's notion of hypermodernity (2004) – which is seen as the cultural background for the 'return to reality' (Donnarumma 2014) – to indicate a 'consummation' (Lipovetsky 2015, p. 157) of some characteristic traits of modern culture in the present.

The last chapter of Part II comments on the generational impotence that is illustrated by this paradigm of victimhood, bridging it with the last part of this thesis, which focuses on the link between realism and the depiction of victimhood. I argue that, rather than providing the groundwork for a militant departure from postmodernism, hypermodernity encompasses a condition of perceived impotence, whereby the present is seen as a time of inaction, with no conflicts in which to engage. To make this point, I draw on the Lacanian notion of the disappearance of the father (1969) and I discuss how conflict relates to imagination and the signification of reality.

CHAPTER 3. 'To bear witness to the scandal': Pasolini as Icon

This chapter explores the first pattern through which victimhood emerges as a cultural paradigm for this generation of authors: namely, the iconic status of Pier Paolo Pasolini in the performance of authorship and political commitment and the role it plays in assessing this commitment as unsuccessful. Like a thread binding the front and the rear of a seam that runs across the corpus, the voice of Pasolini unites the words of 'good' victims and those of the authors in a unitary narrative of a defeated, but uncompromising, opposition to power and its structures. The poet persists in this corpus through the romantic image of a prophetic, unheeded, and persecuted intellectual, whose voice returns from the afterworld and still resonates with the force of truth. By reworking the performative dimension of Pasolini's self-construction as a victimized intellectual (Barański 1999), our authors turn Pasolini into a generational icon and combine a narrative of authoritative intellectual commitment with an idea of being resourceless in the face of power. I show how this leads to a misinterpretation of Pasolini's understanding of impotence as a 'scandalous' condition (Di Biasi, Gragnolati & Holzey 2016; Annovi 2017) of being 'exposed' to power (Hardt 1997; Bazzocchi 2017). Where Pasolini saw a form of agency, our authors see the lack of it; where Pasolini saw a form of resistance, they see a defeat; where Pasolini saw a form of power – which, in his vocabulary, meant a form of violence –, they see the possibility of potency, of being able to affect reality through action. Finally, I contextualize Pasolini's iconic status in my corpus within modern Italian political culture: in their works, our authors take as their point of reference an authoritative and often pedagogical model of the intellectual that was key to the construction of Italy's national identity (Antonello 2012).

3.1 Passion for Victimhood

Scholars have explored the *mito pasoliniano* in different ways (Golino 1995; Barański 1999; Antonello 2012). One of the most famous intellectuals in postwar Italy and a clear-minded observer of Italian modernization, Pasolini was also an all-round artist, whose creative activity spanned poetry, prose writing, cinema, theatre, and painting. Pasolini always imbued his work with explicit political messages and, as a communist intellectual and a homosexual man in Cold War and post-Fascist Italy, his commitment was inherently bound to his personal experience as an 'outsider' (Barański 1999). Victimhood, in particular, played a central role in the construction of the Pasolinian myth. As Pierpaolo Antonello argues,

> the real cognitive tool for Pasolini was neither his body nor his sexuality nor his ideology, but his own constant *persecution*: … Pasolini thus became a real *homo sacer* in the society of 1970s Italy. (Antonello 2012, p. 110)

Victimhood was also central to the way Pasolini performed his identity as an author: his self-sacrificial ethics of intellectual work, in which life coincided with writing, is well exemplified by a passage from the autobiography in verse 'Poeta delle ceneri', published in 1980: 'Bisogna impegnarsi nello scrivere … ingenui come bestie al macello, torbidi come vittime' (Pasolini 2009, pp. 1270–1271).

The circumstances of his brutal murder at the Ostia seadrome tragically provided Pasolini's self-construction as a victimized intellectual with an actual implication. Although it officially resulted from a homosexual misadventure, Pasolini's death was interpreted by many as a politically motivated murder. This seemed all the more probable from the fact that Pasolini's death left unfinished his 'progetto di romanzo' (Pasolini 1999, p. 363) entitled *Petrolio* (1992)*,* in which he aimed to portray the political and economic context behind the murder of Enrico Mattei. *Petrolio* was published posthumously in 1992, and currently consists in a manuscript redaction ordered into 133 'notes'. In this work, for which Pasolini

collected an impressive amount of material, he also imagined – and, in fact, anticipated – a bomb at Bologna's railway station. When the manuscript of *Petrolio* was found among the poet's belongings after his murder in Ostia, the hypothesis of a political murder surfaced quite spontaneously. Within the intellectual discussion, the murder tightened the link between Pasolini as a victim and Pasolini's literary authorship. As Barański argues, the Ostia murder was the tinder for the *mito pasoliniano*:

> Given that, for years, Pasolini had been vehemently warning his fellow-citizens that the world in general and Italy in particular were swiftly speeding to disaster, there seemed to be a powerful "logic" to the theory that he had become a victim of the times – specifically, that he has been killed because of his opinions. Credit began to be given to the idea that Pasolini had been silenced because he had been telling the "truth". … To be accepted, Pasolini had to die …, he had to die in order to continue living. (Barański 1999, pp. 18-20)

Victimhood was also used as a lens for reading Pasolini's writings. In an essay discussing Pasolini's political journalism, Paolo Valesio describes Pasolini as a passive 'symptom' of his times rather than as an active 'sign': 'He expresses the situation without controlling it. He is the passive symptom of it; he is its victim' (Valesio 1992, p. 155). In my corpus, that of the 'victim of the times' – who was killed because of his quest for truth, a victim of political violence, in fact – is precisely the image on which some of our authors draw when devising the literary characters of 'good' victims, namely, those who lose their life within the strategy of tension and the *stragismo* because of their opposition to state-sponsored violence, and who authors depicted through a rhetoric of martyrdom. In Chapter 1, I showed how the words of Pasolini *corsaro* – that is, of Pasolini's articles in the daily newspaper *Il Corriere della sera* and now collected in *Scritti corsari* (1975) – were central to the depiction of both Giuseppe Genna's Enrico Mattei and Patrick Fogli's Dario De Luca (a stand-in for the judge Mario Amato): while Genna projects *a posteriori* the image of Pasolini onto his far-sighted and heroic Enrico Mattei, who opposes the 'mental genocide' of neo-capitalist culture in Europe and, in Pasolini's words, exhorts his audience to an uncompromising resistance, the

Pasolinian anaphora *io so* is a refrain that Patrick Fogli's Dario De Luca repeats to himself for strength and courage, while isolated by the state as it systematically obstructs his investigations.

Among the authors of my corpus, the depiction of Pasolini as a victim becomes explicit in a novel by Alberto Garlini, the author of *La legge dell'odio* (2012), which focuses on the bombing of Piazza Fontana. In *Fútbol bailado* (2004), the author turns Pasolini into a real literary character. Garlini imagines the last months of Pasolini's life as well as the circumstances of his death, arguing that a cluster of neo-fascist killers lured Pasolini to the Ostia seadrome with a homosexual encounter where he was ambushed and murdered. Pasolini's death is the centre of this literary work, and the author fills it with allegorical and symbolic meaning.

As a victim of a neo-fascist conspiracy, Pasolini is not only *a* victim; he becomes *the* victim *par excellence*. In the author's view, Pasolini's death marks Italy's loss of innocence, on the brink of collapse between terrorism and the ever-growing expansion of neo-capitalist culture. In Garlini's reinterpretation of the facts, Pasolini dies by burdening himself with the sins of the country: his death is sacrificial, and his figure highly Christological[10]. References to the figure of Jesus Christ are interspersed throughout Garlini's depiction of Pasolini, who is characterized since the beginning by a strong spirituality: 'Adorava il simbolo della croce, piangeva ammirandolo, si sentiva unito a quel dolore, a quella sofferenza' (Garlini 2004, p. 41). Like Jesus Christ, Garlini's Pasolini exhibits a sacrificial disposition towards death, which the author describes in the form of a religious obedience to a superior duty, comparing Pasolini to a Lamb of God on more than one occasion. The physical descriptions of his body, too, draws on a Christological imagery: 'È magrissimo: tra il sudore che gli appiccica la

---

[10] For this reason, Garlini's work was discussed by Pierpaolo Antonello through René Girard's theory, as one of the examples in which contemporary Italian writers have drawn on the sacrificial narrative as a privileged hermeneutical mode to make meaning of political terrorism in the 1970s, particularly in relation to the killings of Aldo Moro and Pier Paolo Pasolini (see Antonello 2009).

maglietta al petto, si vedono, in evidenza, le costole, come in un sudario' (p. 21), as well as the religious implications of his death: 'Il 2 novembre 1975, quando si trovò nudo, esposto, sanguinante, di fronte agli sguardi di tutti, era domenica' (p. 42).

The violence against Pasolini, finally, takes on an openly sacrificial dimension: 'gli ferirono la carne. … Come in una liturgia cantava le lodi di questa sofferenza, la santificava.' (p. 42). When representing Pasolini's murder, Garlini brings this highly rhetorical depiction of Pasolini as a victim close to the 'ideal victim' I described in Chapter 1. Pasolini offers his own body to violence without any resistance: 'Mai vista una così forte determinazione a morire. Mai vista una regalità e una impassibilità così strenuamente sostenuta. Una gentilezza così sfrenata nella morte' (Garlini 2004, p. 453). Pasolini dies on the night between the All Saints' and the All Souls' days. In this case too, Garlini compares him to Jesus Christ: 'Il due novembre è il giorno dei morti, l'ostia è il corpo di Cristo' (p. 22); 'Il figlio di Dio sta morendo coronato di uccellini che cantano felici sulla sua ultima agonia' (p. 455). Garlini's depiction of Pasolini as a victim brings to highest expression the victimary implications of Pasolini's myth, as well as of Pasolini's self-construction. Overall, *Fútbol bailado* provides an accurate depiction of the *mito pasoliniano* as described by Barański:

> the image which Pasolini had constructed for himself – most famously through the figure of Christ – [was that] of the persecuted *iustus* bravely proclaiming his uncomfortable convictions to a hostile and uncaring world. … Pasolini was transformed into a national "hero", the persecuted witness, the "honest" conscience of a "dishonest" society, … a veritable character of myth. (Barański 1999, pp. 19–20)

3.2 *Io so*: Authorship and the Inadequacy of Literature

The tight link between victimhood and authorship that characterizes the figure of Pasolini offers a good angle onto a further facet of victimhood in this corpus: not only do the authors refer to Pasolini when devising the literary characters of 'good' victims, but they also use him as a model for their own performance of authorship. By doing so, they appropriate and re-enact a performative dimension that, as Gian Maria Annovi has recently shown (2017),

was central to Pasolini's authorship. In my corpus, nearly all the authors who devote one or more literary works to the strategy of tension and the *stragismo* refer to the words of Pasolini, particularly from *Scritti corsari* and *Petrolio*. Besides Giuseppe Genna and Patrick Fogli, this is also the case for Valerio Lucarelli in *Buio Rivoluzione* (2006, p. 7), Luca Moretti in *Il senso del piombo* (2011, p. 5), and Antonio Iovane in *Il brigatista* (2019, p. 7): all three novels begin with a quote from Pasolini. In other cases, as we shall see in this section, the authors incorporate their references within the plots of their work. By engaging with the words of Pasolini when representing the events of the *stragismo*, these authors turn Pasolini into an 'intellectual father', positioning themselves under his aegis and demonstrating the importance of his legacy today, a legacy they relate to the memory of victims, because this is where the problem of truth and justice lies. As Pierpaolo Antonello argues,

> What emerges from these post-Pasolinian narratives is … a form of *impegno* … that is grounded in memory [and] that takes shape … as a memorial redemption of those who suffered injustice, abuse and persecution—the players in historical tragedies who demand a form of justice that … takes root in society's moral and civic fabric. (Antonello 2012, p. 121)

In his essay *Ipermodernità* (2014), the literary critic Raffaele Donnarumma draws on Roberto Saviano's quasi-literal quotation of the famous Pasolinian statement *io so* (Saviano 2006, p. 234) to introduce his discussion of the 'return to reality' after postmodernism. In Donnarumma's view, the reference to Pasolini testifies to the renewed confidence of contemporary Italian writers about the political relevance of literature (Donnarumma 2014, pp. 11–18). In relation to my corpus, however, I believe rather that the reference to Pasolini in the performance of authorship conceals an assertion of insufficiency. At the beginning of his autofictional novel *Il mio nome è Legione* (2009), Demetrio Paolin recounts an episode from his childhood, describing his mother crying at the sight of Aldo Moro's corpse. The author draws on Pasolini's *io so* to assert the necessity, for his generation, to overcome a familial and private approach to historical memory and to embrace a public and politically

engaged perspective of the Years of Lead. In line with other authors from this corpus, Paolin

describes the 1970s as part of his biographical identity, and writing as the means to access

it:

> Non so se sia vero ma la prima volta che vidi mia madre piangere fu per l'uccisione di Aldo Moro. Non so se la mia sia una memoria collettiva camuffata per personale, oppure se sia la verità, ovvero che mia madre pianse quando vide il corpo dell'onorevole Aldo Moro nel bagagliaio della R4. … Mia madre e mio padre non soffrono di dolori generali: e questa cosa l'hanno passata a me come i vermi i passeri ai loro piccoli. Mio padre piange solo guardando una trasmissione dove le persone si incontrano dopo anni. … Io non ho le prove, ma so. … Per molto tempo ho accudito un sentire che riguardava soltanto la mia famiglia. … La storia maiuscola, invece, permette una disperazione trasparente. … Io voglio dire che ho avuto un'infanzia d'acqua torbida, di cui ricordo un pianto e un urlo. (Paolin 2009, pp. 10–11)

In fact, when quoting Pasolini, the author assesses his sidereal distance from the 'storia

maiuscola', namely from what he considers the public and politically relevant dimension of

one's existence in history. I will return to the 'storia maiuscola', a concept that happens to

hold great generational relevance in the corpus, later. Now, let us look at how, in these lines,

Pasolini gives voice to a frustrated desire to become emancipated from a condition of

political marginality and intellectual incapacity to embrace memory in its public and political

relevance. The inversion in the order of words of the original Pasolinian sentence 'io so, ma

non ho le prove' (Pasolini 1999, p. 363) shows a difference between the two positions: when

Pasolini writes, in his 1974 article, 'Io so, ma non ho le prove', he places all the emphasis

on the 'io so' segment of the sentence. 'Io so' – 'I know' – is the anaphora that rhythmically

structures the whole article, at the core of which lies an energetic assertion of the political

agency of writers and intellectuals. As an 'impotente intellettuale' (p. 367), Pasolini

anaphorically lists all the things that he knows and for which he has no evidence, arguing:

> Io so perché sono un intellettuale, uno scrittore … Tutto ciò fa parte del mio mestiere e dell'istinto del mio mestiere. … Credo inoltre che molti altri intellettuali e romanzieri sappiano ciò che so io in quanto intellettuale e romanziere. (p. 363)

In Pasolini's article, the sentence 'non ho le prove' highlights, in contrast, the strength and vehemence of the 'io so' assertion. In his reworking of Pasolini's words, Paolin turns the 'Io so' into a sequence of 'non so', at the end of which the Pasolinian segments 'io so' and 'ma non ho le prove' switch positions and 'non ho le prove' becomes the independent clause in the period: 'Non so. … Non so. … Io non ho le prove, ma so.' (Paolin 2009, pp. 10–11). By doing so, Paolin openly assesses the impossibility for him as a writer to embody a credible and authoritative voice. Similarly, as Daniele Giglioli highlights in his essay *Senza trauma* (2011), the writer Babsi Jones introduces her novel *Sappiano le mie parole di sangue* (2007), with some reflections on the Kosovo war: 'Che cosa scrivo, finzione o realtà, fiction o fact? Io non lo so. Io non so i nomi dei responsabili, e non li so perché non sono un intellettuale.' (Babsi Jones in Giglioli 2011, p. 69). According to Giglioli,

> [t]he «I do not know» passage is crucial here, as the last link of a chain that started with Pasolini's 'processo al Palazzo' (I know but I have no evidence), and was revived by Saviano (I know and I do have evidence …). (Giglioli 2011, p. 69)

In his essay, Giglioli highlights how this assessment of authorial impotence becomes apparent in the literary genre of the autofiction, as used by Paolin, as well as other authors in my corpus, such as Giuseppe Genna and Christian Raimo. Drawing on Lasch's reflections on narcissism (1979), Giglioli argues that the performative staging of authorship in contemporary Italian literature conceals a fear of dissolution:

> Whether or not he tells the truth does not matter; what matters is for him to say "I", to put himself out there. The golden rule of autofiction reads: I know, I saw, I remember, I think, I was there and I take responsibility for it… It takes but one overview to realize that the majority of these works stages a relationship to reality in which the more the subject talks about himself, the more he appears to step aside and draft the report of his own marginality, impotence and non-existence. (Giglioli 2011, pp. 53-55)

In fact, other re-elaborations of Pasolini's writing by our authors illustrate concerns about their own credibility and the possibility of their writing to affect the reality they address. A second example comes from some reflections on authorship by Giuseppe Genna, who wrote

Catrame and *Nel nome di Ishmael.* In the latter, which focused on the killing of Enrico Mattei and provided this character with a Pasolinian voice (see Chapter 1), Genna implicitly presents himself as the inheritor of Pasolini, whose last, unfinished, and posthumous work, *Petrolio* (1992), indeed, was inspired by the Mattei case and argued, like Genna, that the death of Mattei had to be read as a politically motivated murder.

Five years after publishing *Nel nome di Ishmael,* in his autofictional novel *Dies Irae* (2006)*,* Giuseppe Genna returns to Pasolini, mentioning a passage from *Petrolio* in which the writer, quoting the American poet Ezra Pound, reflects on the role of the author to guide his readership: 'Ho infatti dovuto imparare, per lunga e logorante esperienza, che, nella presente imperfetta condizione del mondo, l'autore DEVE guidare il lettore' (Pasolini 1992, p. 182). To this quote, Genna adds: 'Ecco, no. L'autore non guida più il lettore' (Genna 2014, p. 102). Later in this novel, Genna expresses his own dissatisfaction with all his past literary production: 'Sono mortalmente deluso – Genna writes – da questa mia *produzione*' (p. 697). In particular, Genna judges his thrillers negatively because, by aiming to tell the truth about a number of unsolved crimes in the nation's recent history, they sparked in readers 'un desiderio fondamentale, radicale, pericolosissimo: che è quello di conoscere *direttamente* la verità' (p. 699). Such a factual and pragmatic understanding of literature, Genna argues, is unsuccessful: the events represented ended up fostering a

> sfiducia nell'esperienza personale e collettiva della realtà, nella possibilità effettiva di mutamento. … Piuttosto, ne deriva sfiducia, un cattivo nichilismo, la sensazione d'impotenza, la percezione che, rispetto al gigantismo di quegli eventi, tu, individuo, non puoi nulla …. (p. 700)

In these lines, Genna stages himself moaning over the worthlessness of his activity as a writer up to that moment. What interests us here – and we shall return to this point when looking at the question of realism – is that Genna blames his aspiration, as a writer, to assimilate literature with a factual description of truth. His literary works, he argues, were

unworthy because he charged them with the wrong task: namely, to expose the truth and filling the void of justice.

If we look at works in which the authors refer to Pasolini to perform their political commitment, they share a common aspiration to offer their readers a factual interpretation of one or more unsolved crimes in the country's recent history. This is the case for Fogli, Lucarelli, Moretti, and Iovane. Beside Pasolini's opening quote, in his novel *Il brigatista* Iovane also offers some metaliterary reflections through the literary character of the journalist Paolo Galbiati. When witnessing the bombing of Piazza Fontana and the grief of the victims, which he depicts through the sensational tone that characterizes other works in the corpus – 'si muove tra i lenzuoli bianchi stesi sui corpi, osserva i parenti inginocchiati, studia quelle pietà moderne' (Iovane 2019, p. 184) –, Galbiati reflects on his role:

> trovare il filo che attraversa questa tragedia, che unisce il pianto, il sangue e le grida, la pioggia, il silenzio … perché è questo che fa il giornalista: distingue, separa, individua il senso specifico delle cose. (ibid.)

Here, Iovane indirectly quotes a famous passage from Pasolini's 'Il romanzo delle stragi':

> Io so perché sono un intellettuale, uno scrittore, che cerca di … immaginare tutto ciò che non si sa o che si tace; che coordina fatti anche lontani, che mette insieme i pezzi disorganizzati e frammentari di un intero coerente quadro politico, che ristabilisce la logica là dove sembrano regnare l'arbitrarietà, la follia e il mistero. (Pasolini 1999, p. 363)

The same passage is even more explicitly quoted by Simone Sarasso – author of *Confine di Stato* (2006) and *Settanta* (2009) and the creator of the 'good' victims Fabio Rivera and L'Editore as well as many 'non-bad', innocent victims – in his lecture '*Solve et coagula:* il futuro della letteratura italiana per come lo vedo io' (2010). Like Genna and other authors from my corpus, Sarasso addresses victims and charges his writing with the task of truth:

> Le vittime rimaste sul selciato invocano giustizia. … Ho scelto di mettere insieme i pezzi, di costruire una trama complessa e articolata, di raccontare *come sono andate le cose*. … *Coagula,* metti insieme i brandelli di verità, costruisci una storia plausibile, dai un volto all'uomo nero. Questo è quello che faccio, questo è il mio mestiere. (Sarasso 2010)

Like Genna and others, Sarasso also assimilates the imaginary nature of what is 'true' in literature with the factual, descriptive nature of these notions within the judicial discourse. In this light, he conveys a highly pragmatic notion of literature, one that seeks to address reality factually rather than symbolically. Above all, when referring to Pasolini, Sarasso misinterprets his understanding of literature and its relationship with reality: as we shall see in more detail in Part III, Pasolini devoted much thought to the relationship between literary imagination and reality. In his view, these two levels were in dialogue with each other precisely by virtue of their difference. In *Petrolio*'s note 103b, Pasolini describes as follows the distance between imagination and praxis, which he conceptualizes as a politically relevant difference between imagination and power:

> Ciò che in questo libro sta ora per essere narrato è, ancora, 'qualcosa di scritto'. … Ora, 'qualcosa di scritto' racconta, letteralmente, una iniziativa delittuosa del Potere (anzi, dello Stato, per essere precisi). …: il potere è sempre, come si dice in Italia, machiavellico: cioè realistico. Esso esclude dalla sua prassi tutto ciò che possa venir conosciuto attraverso Visioni. … ed è solo qui, dunque, in questa stessa sede, che l'intelligenza del potere deve fare i conti con le visioni. … La posposizione di una serie di delitti (realistici) a una Visione – posposizione che irride la logica del machiavellismo e del realismo politico, rendendola spaventosamente antiquata – è però tuttavia – sia chiaro – un atto di accusa. (Pasolini 1992, pp. 461-462)

When they refer to Pasolini to perform their authorial self, our authors overlook his energetic affirmation of literature's specificity and differentiation from the pragmatic discourse of power. My contention is that, precisely because they fail to capture this important aspect of his poetics, their shared reference to Pasolini cannot be read as a sign of their confidence in the political relevance of literature. In fact, the references to Pasolini in Paolin's and Genna's autofictional novels consist of an open assertion of their inadequacy, as writers, before the reality of power. On the other hand, Sarasso and the other writers who present themselves as inheritors of Pasolini use his words as a 'label of credibility' when reconstructing the 'truth' behind the unsolved crimes in the nation's recent history.

A closer look at the iconic status of Pasolini in this corpus thus shows how our authors refer to his words when seeking to demonstrate the public worthiness and importance of their work as writers, or, in other cases, when explicitly discussing the complexities and difficulties of achieving this task. In this light, the performance of authorship is more a performance of impotence than one of potency, and the reworking of Pasolini's self-construction as a victimized intellectual provides this performance with an authoritative model. Against this backdrop, at least in relation to my corpus, the relationship between Pasolini's legacy and the 'return to reality' shows the latter to be more a 'self-reflective' and 'self-referential' approach to authorship rather than a militant departure from the 'self-reflective' and 'self-referential' postmodernist understanding of literature. Rather than a renewed confidence in the relationship between reality and representation, the 'return to reality' here exposes a different issue, namely, a question about whether literary representation can still find a place in reality.

3.3 Impotence as Scandal: Misreading Marginality

Before drawing conclusions about Pasolini's iconic status in my corpus, let us look at another two examples where authors draw on Pasolini's words to convey their political commitment. Here, too, a concern for action and direct intervention goes hand in hand with a narrative of impotence, and this results in a misinterpretation of Pasolini's understanding of his role as a writer.

In the autofictional short story 'Piombo (un'autobiografia)' (2018), Demetrio Paolin again draws on the Pasolinian statement *io so*. In the story, Demetrio is a schoolteacher who expresses a deep discouragement about the ignorance of his pupils, who have no memory of the tragic events that occurred during the Years of Lead. In this short story, the image of the victimized intellectual dovetails with the pedagogical role of the intellectual, an aspect to which I will return shortly. The short story recounts the conception and actualization

of a suicidal terrorist attack: the protagonist lists a number of victims who lost their lives during the Years of Lead and argues that it is only through a new and tragic experience of violence that their memory can be saved from oblivion. His mission, he says, is a last, desperate attempt to act for the public good:

> io so e ho le prove di quello che è accaduto in questi anni; e le prove stanno nella purezza del mio sentire cristallino. Il disastro di questo nostro stato è la sua assenza di memoria. … Così entrato in doccia ho concepito ciò che sto andando a compiere. L'ho pensato nei dettagli, anche più minuti. … Io so quello che sono, io sono lo strumento per cui ognuno di voi finalmente tornerà a sapere ciò che è stato …. Alcuni di voi patiranno il male, affinché si sappia finalmente cosa significa soffrire: solo dalla sofferenza, dalla profonda e radicata sofferenza ci sarà una vera nuova consapevolezza. … Io sono il vostro servo Demetrio Paolin. (Paolin 2018, pp. 56–62)

This short story provides another example of the perceived insufficiency of intellectual work, which culminates in an urge to actively *do* something *practical* with regards to the issues addressed in literary writing. Most importantly, in this short story the combination of victimhood and political commitment becomes apparent; such is the author/protagonist's frustration about the ineffectiveness of his work, that he describes his suicidal attack as the only solution to make a difference and do something relevant for his community. Once again, this happens under the aegis of Pasolini. Here, Paolin reworks an important dimension of Pasolini's self-construction, which also informs Garlini's *Fùtbol Bailado*: by making his own body an instrument of denunciation, the protagonist retraces the principle of 'exposure' (Hardt 1997; Bazzocchi 2017) on which Pasolini constructed his artistic identity. Namely, his conscious and deliberate self-offering to the violence of power, which he presented – especially in his late works, *Salò* (1975) and *Petrolio* – through a shameless exhibition of sexual perversion, of the obscene and the deviant, in an open provocation to the dominant, bourgeois morality.

In this case too, however, the appropriation of Pasolini's words to perform impotence results in a misinterpretation of his understanding of his role. For Pasolini, the principle of exposure was linked to freedom and was charged with erotic, religious, ethical, and political

implications that converged in a 'pure affirmation' (Hardt 1997, p. 584) of his self. This idea was also linked with the notion of 'scandal'. When Pasolini writes, in his poem entitled 'La crocifissione' (1948–1949), 'Bisogna esporsi (questo insegna | il povero Cristo inchiodato?) | … Noi staremo offerti sulla croce, | … per testimoniare lo scandalo.' (Pasolini 2009, pp. 467–468), he charges the scandalous exposure of those on the cross with the task of bearing testament to the violent reality of power, the 'scandal' of power and its violence, rather than the impotence of those on the cross. One of the most important words within the Pasolinian lexicon (Di Biasi, Gragnolati & Holzey 2016), 'scandal' aptly summarizes the way Pasolini conceives his relationship with power:

> The author, Pasolini believed, must aim to scandalize, in the sense of the term used by apostles Peter and Paul (Romans 9:33; I Peter 2:8). … Pasolini uses it to create a parallel between the persecution of the author and that of the early Christian, whom the apostle asked to make themselves a "rock of the scandal." (Annovi 2017, p. 10)

Within Pasolini's poetics, in sum, the 'scandalous' performance of victimhood brought with it a purposeful self-exclusion from the banquet of power, as it was precisely to exclusion, exposure, and impotence that Pasolini anchored his understanding of political and intellectual agency. In contrast, in our authors' re-elaboration of Pasolini's words, to be 'scandalous' – namely, to be outrageous and to raise indignation – only apparently refers to the set of conditions that the author denounces, such as the lack of truth on the *stragismo*, the connivances of the state, or the lack of memory on those years. On closer inspection, what they are denouncing is their impotence and marginality as intellectuals: namely, their being resourceless before such conditions and their impossibility to do something practical to make a change and play a role within the 'storia maiuscola' (Paolin 2009, p. 11). This sense of exclusion from a political 'praxis' can only be assimilated, the words of Simone Sarasso suggest[11], by assimilating literature to existing forms of action, like that of justice.

---

[11] '... ho scelto di fare ciò che la magistratura non ha mai potuto fare: ho dato una faccia e un nome a quel colpevole.' (Sarasso 2010)

The appropriation (and misreading) of Pasolini's notions of impotence and victimhood find further evidence in a last example in which our authors draw on his words to express their political commitment. At the beginning of Babette Factory's *2005 dopo Cristo*, the old Sinisgalli is plotting to kill Silvio Berlusconi. A question immediately arises:

> In un tempo così piagnucoloso e pacifico la questione che si poneva era però sempre la stessa: gente intraprendente, intelligente, anche senza scrupoli. Ma avrebbe saputo sparare?, avrebbe imparato a uccidere un uomo? (Babette Factory 2005, p. 12)

A comparison between younger generations in the 1970s and those in the 2000s follows:

> Trent'anni fa questi spostati pronti a farsi bruciare in piazza, a entrare in clandestinità sull'onda di un afflato emotivo …: a vent'anni avevano già dei figli e una P38. Adesso questi loro figli, diventati presuntuosi e imbelli, il desiderio di autodistruzione se lo portavano dietro per tutta la vita, come una malattia del sistema immunitario. (ibid.)

A few pages later, the focus is directed towards Andrea Abate, a young activist famous for his sensationalistic and purely theatrical performances of violence. In *2005 dopo Cristo*, Abate is a caricature of the incapability of younger generations to engage in revolutionary violence: 'Hai presente quando Pasolini parla dei capelloni figli di papà che giocano alla rivoluzione?' (Babette Factory 2005, p. 15). In these pages, the authors of Babette Factory bring into play the figure of Pasolini to make their point about the impossibility of revolution. As Valentina Fulginiti has noted,

> The reprise of Pasolini's vitriolic assessment of the 1968 protest, famously voiced in the poem 'Il PCI ai giovani!', is an important cue in this context. … By integrating Pasolini's voice into its narrative, the Babette Factory collective takes a clear political stance: the authors clearly seek to position themselves within a lineage of civic engagement and political commitment, and they do so by gesturing to one of Pasolini's most famous formulas. (Fulginiti 2016, p. 114)

A first relevant aspect of these pages is the definition of younger generations as 'intelligenti' and 'imbelli'. To a certain extent, we could even read the presence of Pasolini in these works as paradoxically echoing a narrative of the '*intellettuale imbelle*' (Bellassai 2012, p. 76–79):

namely, the anti-intellectual pedagogy of virility that was successful in Italy during Fascism that considered intellectual activity to be at odds with action:

> «Acting» … and «not thinking too much»: here, in essence, is the vision that already informed antebellum avant-gardes, and that found its concretization in violence under the aegis of virility. (Bellassai 2012, p. 76)

A second aspect worthy of attention is the reference to the 'capelloni figli di papà'. With this formula – which he coined in a 1973 article now collected in *Scritti corsari* (Pasolini 1999, pp. 271–277) –, Pasolini notoriously identified the protesters of '68. Moreover, as Fulginiti highlighted, his critique of '68 found caustic expression in the poem 'Il PCI ai giovani!' (1968), which Pasolini wrote after the so-called 'battle of Valle Giulia', where violent clashes between leftist protesters and the police took place in Rome, on March 1, 1968. On that occasion, Pasolini sided with the police by making the scathing claim that, contrary to the policemen, the protesters were bourgeois kids and were consequently part of the same system they claimed to oppose. In these provocative – and 'brutti', as the author himself wrote (Pasolini 2008, p. 1446) – verses, Pasolini accuses young protesters of an ambition for power:

> Sì, i vostri slogans vertono sempre | la presa di potere. | Leggo nelle vostre barbe ambizioni impotenti | … smettetela di chiedere il potere. | … siete una nuova | specie idealista di qualunquisti come i vostri padri, | come i vostri padri, ancora, figli. (Pasolini 2008, pp. 1442–1444)

In these verses, Pasolini certainly did not sympathize with or support the protesters, nor did his invective praised revolutionary violence as a solution to impotence: in fact, it was precisely in the protesters' ambition to emancipate themselves from impotence that he saw a quest for power. For Pasolini, the 'capelloni' became a synonym of power, or a 'right-wing' quest for action, as he himself wrote in his article 'Il «discorso» dei capelli' (1973):

Cosa dicevano, essi, ora? … «… la preminenza che noi silenziosamente attribuiamo all'azione è … quindi sostanzialmente di destra». … Insomma capii che il linguaggio dei capelli lunghi non esprimeva più «cose» di Sinistra …. (Pasolini 1999, pp. 274–275)

When they refer to Pasolini's verses on '68, the authors of Babette Factory overturn their original meaning and adapt them to an opposite aim, namely, to express regret about the end of violence as the only tool left to the 'impotent ambition' to change the *status quo*. In this novel, the reversal of Pasolini's reading of impotence becomes apparent. Moreover, the examples taken from Paolin's and Babette Factory's works illuminate a pivotal and paradoxical trait of the cultural paradigm of victimhood that this part of my thesis discusses: that is, an implicit but fundamental fascination with violence, on which I will focus in more detail in the next two chapters. In fact, this fascination highlights that, unlike Pasolini, our authors do not recognize any agency in their condition of marginality.

To better understand this point, let us look at a passage in which Pasolini problematizes the notion of 'impotence' in relation to intergenerational relationships. In *Petrolio*'s note 67 – entitled 'Il fascino del Fascismo' (Pasolini 1992, pp. 262–264) and offering perhaps the best explanation for the poem 'Il PCI ai giovani!' – Pasolini argues that power rests on an imitative relationship with the past. Fascist power, writes Pasolini, makes sons believe they can re-enact the experience of the fathers in their own lives, which, he writes, is impossible because of what Pasolini calls the 'mistero della vita dei padri' (p. 262), namely, the irreducible subjectivity of human experience, in which 'ci sono delle cose – anche le più astratte o spirituali – che si vivono *solo attraverso il corpo*" and that "vissute attraverso un altro corpo non sono più le stesse' (ibid.).

Power, Pasolini writes, rests on the illusion of a duplicability of experience: sons adhere to their fathers' will, obey and serve them, benefiting from their power and participating in it, with the aim, one day, of inheriting it. The powerless, writes Pasolini, the *impotenti*, the victims, are those who refuse to comply with this mechanism of imitation and propagation: 'il Fascismo è l'ideologia dei potenti, la rivoluzione comunista è l'ideologia degli impotenti.

… I potenti sono anche i carnefici, gli impotenti sono anche vittime' (p. 263). The powerless are those who wish to 'distruggere il passato' (ibid.), those excluded 'dal gran banchetto paterno del potere' (p. 264), this exclusion being voluntary and deliberate.

The equivalence between power and the figure of the father was central in Pasolini's production alongside the critique of power in all its forms. This latter was so radical that it often overcame the boundaries of a precise and identifiable ideology and was perhaps at the origin of the ideological 'adaptability, vagueness, imprecision and ambiguity' (Barański 1999, p. 21) of many of Pasolini's positions. For Pasolini, impotence meant the absence of power and a voluntary and deliberate self-exclusion from the 'banchetto paterno del potere': in this light, he sought to create forms of association and solidarity among those powerless: 'e cerco alleanze che non hanno altra ragione/ d'essere, come rivalsa, o contropartita,/ che diversità, mitezza e impotente violenza:/ gli Ebrei… i Negri… ogni umanità bandita…' (Pasolini 2009, p. 1116).

3.4 Intellectuals and The Nation: A Generational Performance

This chapter has shown how, in my corpus, the figure of Pasolini dovetails with an imagery of victimhood and how several authors refer to this writer when performing their authorship, whether by presenting their works to readers or expressing their political commitment. I showed how our authors often rework the rhetoric of persecution and victimization on which Pasolini constructed his authorial self to assess their own political commitment as unsuccessful. Despite the great display of political commitment in their works, our authors refer to Pasolini to lament their marginality and impotence: as writers and intellectuals, they feel incapable of directly affecting the public domain through their activity.

To better understand the iconic status of Pasolini in my corpus, we shall read this latter through a contextual lens, addressing the complexities of the so-called 'transition' generation, who grew up during the crisis of the nation-state and the growth of a globalized

environment. In my view, this provides the main key to the reading of victimhood as a cultural paradigm for this generation of authors. In *Dimenticare Pasolini* (2012), Pierpaolo Antonello addresses the 'mythologization' of Pasolini in the contemporary Italian intellectual debate. Antonello argues that such mythologization occurs as a result of a long-standing commonplace among contemporary Italian intellectuals: the disappearance of the so-called *intellettuale vate,* namely, the pedagogical, authoritative figure of the politically engaged intellectual who plays a central role in the nation's public sphere. In Antonello's view, Pasolini's image of the victimized intellectual fits well within the lament about the disappearance of intellectuals, which he contextualizes in relation to the fundamental transformations of Italian society between the end of the twentieth century and the new millennium.

In his essay, Antonello highlights the relevance of these transformations in Italy, particularly for intellectuals and their relationship with the public sphere, as it took shape since the formation of the Italian nation. As is known, the geopolitical foundations of the modern Italian nation were extremely weak as Italy did not have a common territory and only a small percentage of the Italian population – made of educated politicians and intellectuals – spoke Italian and had knowledge of a common Italian cultural background. Thus, a powerful rhetorical apparatus, on which we will focus in greater detail in Chapter 5, was devised to compensate for this weakness in order to 'make' the nation. This apparatus built on the only thing that the different parts of Italy had in common, namely culture and the arts: in this light, intellectuals played a pivotal role in the creation of an Italian national identity.

In Antonello's view, this made of Italian culture the ideal groundwork for the development of a 'myth' of the *intellettuale vate*, namely, someone who, by virtue of being an intellectual, takes on an authoritative and often pedagogical role within society. In this light, Antonello also suggests that, by virtue of this conception of intellectual activity, contemporary Italian intellectuals found themselves unprepared for the radical

transformations introduced into the country's cultural sphere in the twenty-first century, in which a range of new media fostered a less vertical and more democratic cultural circulation.

It was against this backdrop, Antonello argues, that Pasolini was turned into a 'myth'. The image of the outsider and of the victimized and persecuted intellectual fitted well with the apocalyptic tones of contemporary Italian intellectual debate, which developed a narrative of the decline and fall of a long-lost Eden in which the 'father-intellectuals' used to play a role in politics and society. It is interesting to note that this rhetoric constitutes an important part of the critical debate around the 'return to reality', whereby Italian literary critics see in a more politicized literature a redemption for Italian writers and intellectuals. If we limit ourselves to our authors and to the outcomes of the so-called 'return to reality' in literature, the works examined so far show how the figure of Pasolini provided our authors with a credible and powerful archetype to posture as unheeded and excluded voices within the public sphere. In his essay, Antonello emphasizes a recurring trend in such reworkings of Pasolini, which adapts well to the case study of this thesis:

> Thanks to a—to say the least—gross trivialization, Pasolini is often linked to one page, *just one page*, of the seventeen thousand collected in Mondadori's *Meridiani: "*Il romanzo delle stragi*"*—an article published in the Corriere della Sera on November 14, 1974, which turned into a *leitmotif* of his civic and moral legacy ...." (Antonello 2012, p. 120)

In particular, Antonello highlights the success of the *Pasolini corsaro* among the *TQ generation*, namely the generation of interest in this thesis:

> What is instead 'pathological', in contrast to a healthy intergenerational dialectic, is the difficulty that younger generations have in developing a language and a perspective of their own. In fact, they continue to internalize the clichés of their fathers. It is astonishing to hear people—intellectuals, literary critics, writers—who were born in the 1970s and 1980s and who still talk about a 'cultural genocide', expressing nostalgia for eras that *they never lived through,* indulging in a sort of intergenerational 'ventriloquism'. (p. 23)

A far-sighted intellectual and clear-headed observer of the country's cultural transformations from the economic boom onwards, Pasolini was one of the most important intellectuals in

post-war Italy. In relation to the strategy of tension, moreover, his 1974 article 'Cos'è questo golpe?' expressed in a powerful manner an issue that still stands largely unsolved in the present, namely the achievement of a judicial truth regarding one of the darkest pages of Italian history. For sure, the permanence of Pasolini's 'corsair' voice in the present shall be read through this lens, whereby his words cannot be shelved until the book of the *stragismo* is closed. As Maurice Halbwachs wrote in his essay *La mémoire collective* (1950):

> Each period is apparently considered a whole, independent for the most part of those preceding and following, and having some task – good, bad, or indifferent – to accomplish. Young and old, regardless of age, are encompassed within the same perspective so long as this task has not yet been completed, so long as certain national, political, or religious situations have not yet realized their full implications. As soon as this task is finished and a new one proposed or imposed, ensuing generations start down a new slope, so to speak. (Halbwachs 1980, p. 81)

Yet, Pasolini's fortune among contemporary Italian writers illuminates another issue, which this part of my thesis aims to explore, namely, a sense of impotence and self-victimization that originates from this generation's nostalgic reliance on models of intellectual and political agency that are no longer useful for reading the present. In the case of Pasolini, I showed how the reworking of his legacy through this lens leads to a radical misinterpretation of his role as an intellectual, particularly in relation to questions that are still relevant to the present, such as the interplay of literature and power. The appropriation, rather than the re-signification, of Pasolini's words arrives at an actual neutralization of his arguments about literature's potential for opposition. This process, and its paradoxical relationship with victimhood, can be explained trough the words of Barański, which are worth quoting at some length:

> Paradoxically, the less Pasolini has been present in the weave of works of others …, the more he has continued to "live" in the collective memory. The "myth" of the victimized *poeta-vate* … thus ignores what is truly important in Pasolini: his linguistic and stylistic originality; his fusion of the lyrical and the political; his feverish attempts to deal with the discrepancies between life and art, which led him to formulate and reformulate theories of realism; his "mancanza di reticenza", which challenged the idea that commitment and subjectivity were somehow at odds; his awareness of the complexity of Italian culture; his sense of the precariousness of art as evidenced by his obsessive reworking of his

own texts and those of others; his willingness to "re-invent" himself. Where the "myth" sees stability and constancy, there is in fact flux and uncertainty. Ironically, a "myth" which presents its subject as "victim" can itself be accused of "victimization", of distorting and exploiting his achievements for its own ends. (Barański 1999, pp. 33-35)

CHAPTER 4. Victimhood in the Genoa G8 as a 'Social Framework of Memory'

This chapter examines the second pattern through which victimhood shows as a cultural paradigm for this generation of authors: namely, the Genoa G8 as a 'social framework of memory' (Halbwachs 1925). By reworking the memory of the Years of Lead against the backdrop of police violence in the 2000s, the authors of my corpus develop a systematic narrative of state violence, intertwining their display of political commitment with a narrative of generational victimization. I show how implicit and explicit references to the G8 events shape the representation of 1970s terrorism in some of the works from my corpus, highlighting the role they play in the ideologically driven representation of victims as literary characters as well as in the depiction of the police. I also discuss how the depiction of conflict between protesters and the law enforcement officers is imbued with a narrative of generational victimization, which casts light on the problematic legacy of Fascist culture in post-war and present-day Italy (Della Porta & Herbert 2004; Gibelli 2005). Thus, I discuss how, when rereading the Years of Lead through the lens of the G8, our authors present their generation as resourceless and lacking in agency. As in the case of Pasolini, this narrative of impotence dovetails with an outspoken concern for action and direct intervention, which leads to a paradoxical fascination with revolutionary violence, sometimes expressed explicitly through references to the figure of Carlo Giuliani. I discuss how the Genoa G8 as a 'social framework of memory' casts light on a fundamental dimension of victimhood as a cultural paradigm, namely its use of victimhood as a 'dispositive' of power (Butler 2004; Giglioli 2014). Commenting on this point, I discuss the findings of this chapter in light of the difficulty, for this generation, to reconceptualize the modes and strategies of political intervention in the globalized present (Della Porta 2003).

4.1 The Genoa G8 and the Mobilization of Memory

In 1925, with one of the most important contributions to contemporary sociological thought, the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs coined the notion of 'social frameworks of memory' (*cadres sociaux de mémoire*). With this notion, Halbwachs indicated a number of *milieux* – such as family, religion, or social class – that, as frameworks of collective thought, mediate individual memories of the past. 'No memory – Halbwachs wrote – is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections' (1992, p. 43), individual memories always being constructed within social structures, groups, or currents of thoughts that are located in the present in which the past is recalled, and that influence how the past is remembered. Memory, Halbwachs argues, is socially conditioned and it is created collectively.

Despite the seminal importance of this theory, the notion of 'collective memory' is in itself problematic. In her afterword to the Italian edition of Halbwachs's *La mémoire collective* (2001, pp. 189–195), Luisa Passerini highlights how Halbwachs ran the risk of approaching individual memory as a mere reproduction of 'supra-individual' (p. 194), deterministic structures. Moreover, in the case of Italy the very notion of 'collective memory' is highly questionable. A country on whose 'divided memory' many have written (Passerini 1999; Tota 2001; Ventrone 2006; Pivato 2007; Foot 2009; De Luna 2011), Italy is characterized by a contested and conflictual relationship with its past, where, as Foot writes, 'the state and other public bodies have rarely been able to build durable and commonly agreed practices of commemoration [and] there has been no closure, no "truth," and little reconciliation.' (2009, p. 1). Commemorations of important events of the country's history – suffice to think of the unification of Italy or of the Liberation from Fascism – often give rise to heated debates between different political factions, if not to ideological exploitations of history for political ends. It is, perhaps, precisely in this sense that Halbwachs's theorization of the social

conditioning of memory applies to the case of Italy, where the recollection of the past is more often than not driven by the needs and interests of the present.

But Halbwachs's notion of the 'social frameworks of memory' also applies to the case of Italy in another sense. As Alessandro Portelli wrote about Italy, 'Memory is divided, lacerated, within itself, within the unreconciled double consciousness of individuals and social groups.' (2006, p. 38): by virtue of its 'divided memory', Italy is characterized by different groups offering diverse and conflicting narratives of the past. The notion of 'social group' was key to Halbwachs's reflections on the way in which being part of a given *milieu* influences the recollection of past: it is in this sense that I apply the notion of 'social frameworks of memory' to the case of the Genoa G8. Since the beginning, the memory of those events was highly contested, and became central to the identity of a specific social group, that of the generation of progressists who were contemporary to Carlo Giuliani, who was born in 1978. This is the generation to which our authors belong and – as Karl Mannheim, a teacher of Halbwachs and a theorist of generations as social groups, would have noted – it constitutes a 'generational unit' inasmuch as not only its members were exposed to the same social dynamics but they share a common response to those very dynamics (Mannheim 1952, p. 304).

In 2001, the G8 summit – an annual political forum that brought together the leaders of the richest industrialized countries to discuss economic, political, social, and environmental issues of global interest – took place in Genoa. On that occasion, the worldwide 'new global' (Della Porta 2003)[12] community, coordinated by the *Genoa Social Forum*, gathered to protest against the summit, and clashes between protesters and the police escalated to violence. Three events in particular turned the protests in Genoa into a

---

[12] As Della Porta pointed out, 'new global' – rather than anti-global or 'no-global', a misleading term used by most of the Italian press (Della Porta et al. 2006, p.3) – is the appropriate definition for the protest movement born in Seattle in 1999. This movement, indeed, does not oppose globalization. Rather, it opts for a 'new and 'different' globalization. Namely a globalization of human rights, social policies, and environmental solutions in place of a globalization of neoliberal economy.

tragedy. On 20 July, the *carabiniere* Mario Placanica shot dead the 23-year-old demonstrator Carlo Giuliani. The following night of 21 July, the Italian *Polizia di Stato* burst into the 'Diaz' school – the coordinating centre of the *Genoa Social Forum* – and violently beat up unarmed demonstrators, severely injuring sixty-two of them, who were taken to hospital in critical condition. Finally, the police committed a range of physically and psychologically violent acts against the demonstrators who were transported from the Diaz school to the Bolzaneto barracks (Genoa) for identification. The armed forces humiliated, insulted, and forced those arrested to sing Fascist songs and shout Fascist slogans. These events were met with great indignation and a number of criminal proceedings followed. The European Court of Human Rights condemned the actions of the 'Diaz' school as a crime of torture and Amnesty International described those in Bolzaneto as one of the most serious violations of human rights in Europe's recent history (Agnoletto & Guadagnucci 2011). A number of law enforcement officers faced sentences for their disproportionate use of violence against demonstrators, but this was not the case for Placanica: in fact, the judges ruled that he had acted in self-defence and no condemnation followed.

From the beginning, the Genoa G8 events were a divisive and controversial topic in the political debate. On the one hand, the Right defended the actions of the police and identified Giuliani (and the entire network of movements demonstrating in Genoa) with the so-called 'black bloc'*,* a group characterized by violent and riotous manners and who encountered nearly no resistance from the police. On the other hand, the Left maintained that the events of Genoa testified to a suspension of democracy and human rights in the country and made of Giuliani a symbol of the struggle against state violence: as we shall see more in detail later on, his death rooted in the highly problematic transition of the country

from Fascism to the Republic. For this reason, it spilled beyond the boundaries of news, encompassing a debate over the country's political values.

It is against this backdrop that the Genoa G8 became, by borrowing an expression from the French historian Pierre Nora (1996), a *lieu de mémoire.* Namely, an entity that, over the time, has become symbolic of the memorial heritage of a given community. In progressivist discourse, Carlo Giuliani's victimhood became a lens through which the country's past was retrospectively read in militant terms. The G8, for example, was mobilized to reread the Resistance, and the representation of Giuliani as a *partigiano* spanned across documentary films, songs, commemorative practices, graphic novels, and literary narratives (Pellegrini De Luca 2020). The escalation of violence that occurred in Genoa, as well as the political nature of the protests, also brought back to memory the 'lead' of the 1970s. In a stunning irony, the Years of Lead were already part of Giuliani's genealogy: son of activists, Giuliani also happened to be the nephew of Elena Angeloni, who died in 1970 while placing a bomb in front of the US embassy in Athens, while in the company of the Greek student Giòrgos Tsikouris.

This curiosity aside, the intersection between Giuliani's killing during the Genoa G8 summit and the Years of Lead found expression in commemorative practices (Hajek 2013, pp. 86-96; Per non dimenticare 2012) as well as in a number of cultural productions. In 2005, for example, the writer Paola Staccioli edited two literary anthologies on the Years of Lead. The first, entitled *Piazza bella piazza,* collected a number of short stories in which fifteen Italian writers who experienced the 1970s narrated the political struggles of those years. An afterword by Haidi Giuliani, Carlo's mother, closed this anthology. In the second anthology – entitled *In ordine pubblico* and dedicated 'to Carlo Giuliani, to all those fallen in the long struggle for emancipation and social justice' (Staccioli 2005, p. 7) – ten writers reread the stories of ten young leftist protesters killed by the police during the Years of Lead in the light

of the G8 events. In the preface to this anthology, Staccioli wrote that the rationale behind this initiative was to preserve the memory and identity of a specific social group:

> All the short stories are dedicated to 'our' comrades, in part to reject any attempt to equate the human and historical paths of the oppressed with those of the oppressors … any attempt to put two opposed and incompatible worldviews on the same level. (p. 12).

As these lines show, the divided memory of the G8 fits well within Halbwachs's conception of the 'social frameworks of memory', which

> are not … empty forms where recollections coming from elsewhere would insert themselves. Collective frameworks are, to the contrary, precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society. (Halbwachs 1992, p. 40)

4.2 Revisiting the Years of Lead as a Victimized Generation

Before exploring more closely the generational dimension of the G8 as a 'social framework of memory', let us consider how the events of Genoa shaped our authors' perspectives on the Years of Lead. Unlike Pasolini's, Giuliani's victimhood was not a matter of self-construction. Giuliani was not a famous and well-known intellectual whose killing could be narrated as the culmination of an intellectually courageous life entirely devoted to the critique of power and its structures, nor did he leave behind records of which people outside of his family relatives, friends, or comrades in activism might have knowledge. A 23-year-old activist, Giuliani entered the public sphere as a dead body lying on the road in a white tank top and a ski mask: his life, as the songwriter Francesco Guccini wrote, was 'tutta una vita da immaginare' (Guccini 2004). Moreover, Giuliani belonged to the same generation as our authors: a *ragazzo*, as he is usually remembered in commemorative practices, a 'brother'

more than a 'father', Giuliani lacked Pasolini's 'authority' and left no words to perform as *intellettuali impegnati.*

The G8 is often seen as one of the reasons behind the increasing interest of Italian writers in the 2000s, in the Years of Lead (Donnarumma 2010, p. 448; Vitello 2013a, pp. 30–31; Ward 2017, p. 36). Some of the authors included in my corpus, moreover, addressed the G8 in their career. Together with the rapper Duke Montana, for example, Luca Moretti published *Roma violenta* (2011), a part of which focused on the G8 and the death of Giuliani and was also published, in the same year, in the November edition of the journal *Repubblica XL*. This is not the only work Moretti devoted to police violence: with the cartoonist Toni Bruno, Moretti published *Non mi uccise la morte* (2010), which focused on the death of Stefano Cucchi, a 31-year-old man who died in jail after having been beaten up by the police. Christian Raimo addressed the G8 and the killing of Giuliani in his activity as a columnist (2015 and 2016); Valerio Lucarelli wrote about the G8 and the question of police violence in his essay *Vorrei che il futuro fosse oggi* (2010, p. 192), to which I will return later, and Giorgio Fontana wrote about both Giuliani and Cucchi in his essay on contemporary Italy entitled *La velocità del buio* (2011, p. 131). Moreover, as we shall see, Nicola Ravera Rafele devoted some reflections to the G8 and the role it played in his generation's interest in the Years of Lead.

In my corpus, there are both implicit and explicit references to police violence during the G8. Let us leave aside for a moment the explicit ones: we will consider them shortly. For now, let us look at the depiction of police violence in some of our works, considering how it reverberates with the events of Genoa and how it describes terrorism as the rebellion of a 'victimized generation'. While the reference to Pasolini informs the representation of 'good' victims, the G8 'social framework of memory' constitutes an implicit but fundamental dimension of depictions of 'bad' and 'non-good' victims. Both the representation of victims as 'enemies' or the non-representation of victims, indeed, often involve policemen or law

enforcement officers (see also Jansen 2010), and it often entails the representation of terrorists through a narrative of victimhood, in which their violence is seen as defensive. In his essay on Italian literature on the Years of Lead, the literary critic and writer Demetrio Paolin mentions a '*vizio di forma*' (2008, p. 117) in the representation of the enemy. Paolin argued that the ideological involvement of the authors in the memory of the Years of Lead emerged from an unbalanced representation of violence suffered and perpetrated: in some literary works, Paolin argues, those who died at the hands of the police in the 1970s should be read as *figurae* of Carlo Giuliani. Paolin refers here to Auerbach's notion of 'figura' (1938) conceived as the prefiguration of fulfillment. Let us consider this aspect in more detail.

In the first part of this thesis, when I examined the representation of 'bad' victims, I showed how Dario Morgante's *La compagna P38* offers a caricatural depiction of the police, one that leads readers not to take seriously terrorist violence against policemen. When, instead, the author depicts the violence *of* the police, the register radically changes, becoming more realistic and dramatic. In one passage, Morgante depicts a dialogue between a young woman, Virginia, and the *colonna romana* of the Red Brigades, in which Virginia asks to join the terrorists in their armed struggle. In this dramatic dialogue, Virginia says that she was a victim of the police, who arrested and later harassed her, and that, for this reason, she decided to join the Red Brigades (Morgante 2007, p. 160–163). Virginia's description of the circumstances of her arrest, as well as of the violence she suffered at the hands of the police, very much recall the events of Genoa, particularly what occurred within the Bolzaneto barracks (Agnoletto & Guadagnucci 2011; Corte di Appello di Genova 2009): Virginia says she was arrested during an anti-nuclear demonstration – while environmental demonstrations were not part of leftist terrorists' agenda during the Years of Lead – and later suffered a number of abuses comprising of rape threats, sexist insults, brutal beatings, and being forced to shave her head, to get naked and stay hours in a stinky cell wrapped in a filthy blanket. By the same token, in Antonio Iovane's *Il brigatista,* the author, who touched

upon the G8 in his career as a journalist (Anonymous 2015), describes a long interrogation in which two policemen torture and perform other acts of violence on two young terrorists of the Red Brigades (Iovane 2019, pp. 383–386). In this case too, the sexual offenses and abuses against Elisabetta, one of the two, carries to the extreme the violence suffered by those arrested in Bolzaneto. Since the beginning, the accounts of those who were assaulted by the police in Bolzaneto had a great resonance in the public sphere and gave rise to profound indignation among those who were critical of the behaviour of the police.

In Raimo's short story 'Quel fiore siete voi' (2001, pp. 150–182), finally, the author explicitly interweaves the representation of anti-globalization protests in the 2000s with the memory of the Years of Lead, the 1970s acting as a subtext for the killing of the police commissioner and right-wing politician Adelmo Mele at the hands of protesters. The non-representation of Mele, who is only mentioned twice, is counterbalanced by an extensive description of the violence suffered by Gianni, who is unfairly charged with the killing of Mele and makes a theatrical display of all the wounds and bruises caused by the police charge (Raimo 2001, pp. 162–163). The short story addresses the criminalization and repression of anti-globalization protests by the state and law enforcements and, as we shall see in greater detail later on, the bewilderment and victimization of the author's generation. In this short story, Adelmo Mele is even compared to Aldo Moro: his picture, indeed, appears in the headlines of the daily newspaper *La Repubblica* the day after his murdering and the author compares those headlines to those related to Moro's killing in 1978 (Raimo 2001, pp. 166–167), stressing a comparison between the actions of 1970s terrorists and those of 2000s protesters, and rereading the Years of Lead in the light of present-day ideological divisions.

The reference to the G8 and the depiction of leftist terrorists as a 'victimized generation' become explicit in Lucarelli's *Buio Rivoluzione,* one of the novels in which the author does not represent the victims of terrorism. In this novel, the terrorists' background is in the context of pacifism, solidarity, environmental-friendly associations, and scout movements (Lucarelli

2006, pp. 74–75), creating a paradoxical situation in which terrorists appear as innocent pacifists who are forced to hate and violence by the external circumstances of oppression and social inequality. One of the protagonists, Mara a young terrorist and member of the New Red Brigades – whose name recalls that of Mara Cagol, one of the founders and leaders of the Red Brigades in the 1970s – claims that she decided to join the armed struggle after the killing of Giuliani during the G8 summit in Genoa:

> Il G8 … con tutta la sua violenza, i suoi clamorosi non sensi e la morte di un ragazzo innocente ammazzato a sangue freddo senza motivo. Con le irruzioni, le perquisizioni, le manganellate, le sevizie fisiche e psicologiche, il lasciare che cento scalmanati vestiti di nero distruggessero liberamente una città mentre vagonate di poliziotti caricavano migliaia di persone che manifestavano legittimamente il loro dissenso verso quelle logiche, discusse dai potenti del pianeta. … quella rappresentò per me la svolta. (Lucarelli 2006, p. 81)

A few lines later, the author positions the events of Genoa in a broader history of police violence in Italy. The G8 becomes in this novel a 'social framework of memory' to revisit the so-called *eccidio di Avola* (Avola massacre), in which, on 2 December 1968, the police bloodily repressed a protest of farmers in the poorest districts of Avola (Sicily), killing two:

> Un minimo di conoscenze storiche bastava per spiccare delle similitudini tra i fatti di Genova e quelli che trentatré anni prima si compirono in terra di Sicilia …. Quegli avvenimenti spinsero uomini e donne ad intraprendere percorsi che in seguito li avrebbero portati a compiere una scelta dissennata, quella della lotta armata. … Potevano i fatti di Genova aver risvegliato antichi malesseri e costituire l'ideale trampolino di lancio di una nuova escalation di violenza? (Lucarelli 2006, p. 83)

In this novel, the author draws on the G8 events to revisit the Years of Lead in a way that describes leftist terrorist violence as a defensive choice. In his non-fictional essay *Vorrei che il futuro fosse oggi* (2010), focusing on the history of the NAP (Nuclei Armati Proletari) – an extreme-left terrorist organization that was particularly active against state repression and violence in jail in the 1970s –, Lucarelli writes:

> L'esperienza nappista porta alla luce le tante facce del sistema democratico. Un modello che come un virus, nel tempo evolve e cresce in aggressività. Dai "Cinque dell'Ave

Maria" [a group of policemen that caused a stir because of their violent and torture-resembling methods of managing the interrogatories to former terrorists] rivelati da Salvatore Genova, alla "macelleria messicana alla Diaz" descritta dal vicequestore Michelangelo Fournier nel processo per i fatti accaduti al G8 del 2001. (Lucarelli 2010, p. 192)

The G8 and Giuliani also appear in Babette Factory's *2005 dopo Cristo.* When Sinisgalli's plan to kill the 'bad' victim Berlusconi fails, the focus turns to a cluster of young activists with revolutionary ambitions who grieve for their inability to penetrate violence as young revolutionaries of the 1970s used to do: 'l'enorme errore della sinistra negli ultimi anni è stato la rimozione della violenza.' (Babette Factory 2005, p. 315). A few lines later, in a self-victimizing posturing, they mention Giuliani as the emblematic expression of a generational impotence to resist power:

> *i giovani sono i nuovi ebrei … e Abate* [a young activist famous for his sensationalistic and purely theatrical performances of violence] *è il loro Dreyfus* …. Ha un grande carisma. È come Carlo Giuliani. Che è morto. Ma a noi ci serve qualcuno vivo.' (ibid.)

Like the figure of Pasolini, the G8 'social framework of memory' casts light on an implicit but fundamental dimension of impotence lying behind the authors' performances of their political commitment: while they draw on the memory of the Years of Lead to convey messages of political relevance, our authors suggest that, in fact, nothing practical can be done against the issues they address. Hence, their desire to speak about reality lies more in the literary expression of this frustrated ambition than in a renewed confidence in the possibility of literature to affect reality.

4.2.1 Fascist Legacies in Italian Culture: on Police Violence

In his essay 'Generation' (1996), the French historian Pierre Nora looked at the notion of 'generation' as a modern *lieu de mémoire* and explored it in relation to modern political culture. A 'crucial condition for the formation of a generational consciousness' – Nora wrote – 'is precisely a sense of persecution' (Nora 1996, p. 513). As we will see, the relationship

between generations and modern political culture is central to the transformation of victimhood into a cultural paradigm by this generation of authors. In the case of police violence and the G8 'social framework of memory' for the Years of Lead, however, some further considerations peculiar to Italy need to be made.

In 2001, the killing of Carlo Giuliani brought to the surface a deeply rooted and still unresolved legacy of Fascism in the Italian Republic, one to which the link between youth and victimization is central. What made the most noise after the days of the G8 – especially outside of Italy – was the fact that policemen forced those arrested to sing Fascist slogans, as well as the rumours that some of the members of Italian law enforcements themselves belonged to neo-fascist groups. In fact, all this resulted from deeper and much less debated problems related to the Italian armed forces. There is an historical and legal tradition, if not a real culture, of police repression in Italy. Donatella Della Porta, one of the most experienced scholars in the field of social movements and the author, with Herbert Reiter, of the most comprehensive study of the Italian law enforcements, *Polizia e protesta. L'ordine pubblico dalla Liberazione ai «no global»* (2003), described the historical and cultural underpinnings of this issue. Della Porta discussed how protest policing was a key aspect of modern democracies and a task of fundamental importance for the modernization and professionalization of law enforcement in modern Europe. Compared to other European nations, Italy displayed, since the beginning and without any significant evolution, a highly authoritarian model of protest policing.

This was due to a number of reasons, among which the fact that, notwithstanding the police reform by Francesco Crispi in 1889, the notion of 'public order' remained vaguely defined until the institution of the TULPS (*Testo Unico delle Leggi di Pubblica Sicurezza*) in 1931. Enacted in the middle of the years of Fascism and aimed at managing public dissent, the TULPS provided the country with a highly detailed legislation on the maintenance of public order – whose meaning came to coincide with an 'ideal' understanding of order from

a Fascist perspective – by law enforcements. Notwithstanding the Liberation and the end of Fascism in Italy, the TULPS was left unchanged until 1981: episodes like the Massacre of the United Foundries in Modena, on 9 January 1950, or the bloody clashes between protesters and the police known as the 'Facts of Reggio Emilia' on 7 July 1960, or, finally, the Massacre of Avola on 2 December 1968, all saw Italian law enforcement firing indiscriminately into crowds of protesters or striking workers, killing some, until the 1970s, a decade characterized, both within and outside of Italy, by a high level of conflict between opposition and the established order.

In Italy, a fundamentally Fascist management of public dissent surrounded these conflicts, which contributed to transform the 1970s into the so-called 'Years of Lead'. The 1981 reform, called partly by policemen themselves (Fedeli 1981), introduced significant changes, the first being the demilitarization of the police force, which brought about a more democratic and peaceful model of protest policing. The process towards a real democratization of law enforcements in Italy, however, remained largely unfinished: today, the legal asset of police codes is still characterized by the scarce accountability of police behaviour, which remains highly discretional and not easily for magistrates to appeal against. The political fight for the possibility to identify policemen by identification numbers on helmets is still an ongoing one, and the complaint procedures for citizens are complicated and difficult to access.

Most importantly, decades of militarization within the armed forces created a real 'police culture' (Della Porta 2003, p. 35), which requires more than just policy and legal measures change. This culture was, and still is, imbued with authoritarianism, machismo, aggressivity, a spirit of military comradeship, a tendency to perceive themselves as a closed group acting against other groups, with little sense of individual responsibility and, above all, a tendency to see constitutional laws as something at odds with the maintenance of public order. Most importantly, a stereotypical and targetable image of the protester developed

within professional police culture: the typical 'agitator' was young, male, communist, and led a loose and alternative lifestyle, deviant from the norms of order and decorum. The 'bad apple' in the family, the protester is seen as a 'prodigal son' who needs to be redressed, rectified, and brought back to order.

Deeply imbued with a parental and generational rhetoric – which, as we will see, characterizes the Italian national discourse in general – this narrative reveals how much Italian police culture aligned with a discourse that was crucial for the organization of consensus during the Fascist regime, as the historian Antonio Gibelli shows in *Il popolo bambino. Infanzia e nazione dalla Grande Guerra a Salò* (2005). In line with a generally patriarchal approach to youth in post-1850 Europe, the Fascist regime heavily relied on the symbolic potential of childhood and on the idea that the people were seen as 'children to be educated' (Gibelli 2005, p. 4). What survives to this day is precisely a kind of coercive relationship with all those who 'deviate' from norms of order and diligence derived from a bourgeois morality. In fact, this is what a number of victims of police violence in Italy during the 2000s have in common: individuals like Carlo Giuliani, Stefano Cucchi, or Federico Aldrovandi, to name the most well-known – either as leftist protesters, individuals who had drug problems, or simply 'disturbers of the peace' – all fell outside restrictive and coercive norms of conduct as conceived by a bourgeois morality on which Fascist culture built its consensus and that largely survived in Italy after the end of Fascism. As such, the police dealt with them with authoritative and punitive coercion, putting all of them to death. A song written by the Italian songwriter Alessandro Mannarino, awarded in 2015 with the Amnesty International Italia Prize and dedicated to Stefano Cucchi exemplifies how police violence can still be read through the lens of this Fascist-derived parental vision of public order maintenance[13]. By the same token, a recent film on Stefano Cucchi, entitled *On My Skin*

---

[13] 'Il detenuto/ è come un figlio da educare/ finché abbassi per sempre/ gli occhi della sfida./ E di un figlio/ che non riconosce il padre/ faremo un morto/ che non può riconoscere/ l'omicida.' (Mannarino 2014)

(2018), modelled the scene of Cucchi's death on that of Ettore's death in *Mamma Roma* (1962) by Pier Paolo Pasolini, who, as previously discussed, always identified power with the paternal figure and was a clear-minded interpreter of the symbolic dimension of power within Fascism and bourgeoise morality, which he saw in close connection.

It is also against this backdrop that the intrinsically generational nature of the G8 'social framework of memory' has to be read, as well as the fact that Carlo Giuliani's victimhood was mobilized to re-read the Resistance. Finally, this is also what gives to Giuliani's epithet *ragazzo* an historical and political dimension. *Per sempre ragazzo* is the title of an anthology of poetry and short stories that Paola Staccioli dedicated to Carlo Giuliani in 2011; 'Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo' is inscribed on a commemorative stone in Piazza Alimonda, where Placanica shot him dead; finally, *Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo* is also the title of a documentary by Francesca Comencini (2002).

4.3 Victimhood as a Dispositive: Impotence and the Need for Action

In 'Transnational subjectivities and victimhood in Italy after the 2001 Genoa G8 summit' (2020), Monica Jansen argues that the traumatic events of the Genoa G8 in 2001 contributed to the formation of a transnational and generational subjectivity of victimhood based on the idea of 'precariousness', used in a Butlerian sense to indicate a non-violent ethics of interdependency and shared vulnerability. Looking at a range of cultural products that deal with the Genoa G8, Jansen maintains that this new, generational identity crosses the boundaries of nations and ideologies – 'an idea of collectivity based on 'other' grounds, found in affects rather than in ideologies, and situated in the in-between space of transnational mobilities' (Jansen 2020, p. 345) – and frames all this within the so-called 'new realism' after the end of postmodernism. Jansen argues that, by virtue of this shared, transnational, and ethically relevant generational identity of victimhood, 'the local and the

global can meet outside the boundaries of the national paradigm of victimhood and move, instead, towards a transgenerational subjectivity inspired by affective realism' (p. 359).

This section discusses how, in relation to my corpus, victimhood is not seen as a new basis for an ethics of non-violence: in their 'return to reality' after postmodernism, our authors express the impotence and frustration for their lack of practical means against power. Moreover, I argue, this impotence builds precisely on the non-comprehension of the globalized, post-ideological and transnational context in which present-day forms of political activism take shape. The impotence and frustration with which our authors tend to read the G8 emerges in various ways. In an article entitled 'La mia generazione' (2017a), Christian Raimo, one of the members of Babette Factory, argues that the events of Genoa acted as a watershed for the end of political hopes of the younger generations:

> La rabbia che la generazione post-2001 aveva maturato era una rabbia non ingenua, ma una specie di rabbia disincantata. Se noi quarantenni è come se non ci fossimo ancora ripresi dalla ferita di Bolzaneto, Diaz e Carlo Giuliani, per quelli che hanno dieci o vent'anni meno di noi non c'è stato, pare, nemmeno un processo di disillusione. È come se il disincanto fosse già la condizione originaria. (2017a)

On the other hand, Nicola Ravera Rafele, author of *Il senso della lotta* (2017), maintains that, after Genoa, his generation felt shocked and unable to respond to the violence suffered. In the author's words, this contributed to his interest in the Years of Lead, a decade characterized by great political turmoil and the rebellion of young people:

> invidio molto chi ha avuto venti o trent'anni negli anni Settanta perché … la lotta era infinitamente più facile. Oggi lottare è diventato complicato …. In Italia, secondo, me abbiamo molto sottovalutato la cesura che è stata Genova, il G8 del 2001. Almeno per la mia generazione è stata una cosa tremenda. … ci hanno sparato addosso e non ci siamo più ripresi …: ci piace pensare che la violenza generi eroismo, che faccia nascere, per reazione, voglia di combattere. Purtroppo non è vero. La violenza di Stato fa paura. … chi era di sinistra e ha la mia età è morto quel giorno alla Diaz[14].

---

[14] Ravera Rafele, Nicola. (Personal communication, 7th September 2020).

This sense of generational impotence also emerges in a dialogue between a young man and his grandfather in Raimo's short story 'Tutte queste domande', collected in *Dov'eri tu quando le stelle del mattino gioivano in coro?* (2004, pp. 86–102), published three years after the G8 events, and which hints at the killing of Giuliani in the following passage:

> Nonno, mi dice mio nipote,
> nonno
> posso chiederti una co sa, …: Secondo te, che faccio, ci vado a Genova?
> Alzo le spalle, almeno immagino di farlo, Che c'è a Genova?, chiedo.
> Ma non stai dormendo, allora, dice.
> Ho sete, dico, un automatismo.
> La manifestazione, no', i paesi riu-, ah, -cial forum, ah, -ntri con la polizia, la roba che ti leggevo prima sui giornali.
> … mi riaddormento qualche altro minuto, lieve lieve, poi mi scuote la voce di mio nipote, che … mi dice: Hanno ammazzato uno.
> Ho sete, gli dico.
> Nonno, hanno ammazzato uno, a Genova.
> Ho sete. … E che ci vuoi fare, dico, ne ammazzano tanti…
> … Ma stai dormendo nonno?
> No, ti sento, un po' ti sento: quanti anni aveva?
> Te l'ho detto, ventitré. … Ma perché non tieni gli occhi aperti?
> Perché così, mi riposo. … Non sento quello che mi dice. (Raimo 2004, pp. 92–101)

Through the use of blanks, of text interruptions, and the confused combination of questions and answers, this dialogue displays the communication difficulties between two different generations. In particular, it features the grandson's frustrated attempts to be heard and heeded by his grandfather while seeking to engage him with an event of great political relevance for him and his contemporaries: the G8 protests and the killing of Giuliani. The use of the point of view – where the narrator-protagonist is the grandfather, a sick old man on the threshold of sleep – also contributes to make the grandson's voice distant and incomprehensible. His attempts to be heard are in vain, and his identity – which, by association, becomes that of his contemporaries and of protesters in Genoa – remains vague and out of focus. A highly problematic intergenerational relationship, in which the younger protagonists struggle to affirm themselves in the dialogue, runs like a seam throughout all the stories contained in this collection, whose title – *Dov'eri tu quando le stelle del mattino*

gioivano in coro? – quotes a line from the Book of Job from the Old Testament, providing an archetypical example of this tormented relationship with the fathers.

In that passage from the Old Testament, God speaks from a whirlwind and powerfully overwhelms Job with a list of rhetorical questions highlighting the divine paternity of the universe, in whose creation Job did not play any role. The dramatic passage contrasts Job's weakness and impotence with the omnipotence of God, the Creator of the universe and the father *par excellence*. As in the case of Raimo's previous collection *Latte* (2001), all the stories stage people in their twenties and thirties in the midst of major identity crises, with no distinctive values and no established priorities, as the words of the bewildered protagonist-narrator of the short story 'Il segno di Giona' demonstrate:

> Ho aperto a caso la Bibbia e mi è venuto fuori il pezzo in cui Gesù dice: *Questa generazione è una generazione malvagia: essa cerca un segno, ma non le sarà dato nessun segno fuorché il segno di Giona.* E che segno è?" (Raimo 2004, p. 167)

The title of this short story, 'Il segno di Giona', refers to the Hebrew prophet Jonah, who disobeyed God and, for this reason, was punished with a raging tempest, following which he was eaten by a giant fish, inside which he spent three days and three nights until his eventual submission to the will of God. In Raimo's collections of short stories, which are filled with references to fathers and grandfathers, there is a real obsession with authority, the lack of which is seen as a characteristic trait of the author's generation.

This also emerges in the regret expressed by the young protagonists of Babette Factory's *2005 dopo Cristo*: 'Ha un grande carisma. È come Carlo Giuliani. Che è morto. Ma a noi ci serve qualcuno vivo' (Babette Factory 2005, p. 315). Because he is dead, they claim, Giuliani is useless: as a victim, he cannot do anything practical. In their stark pragmatism, these lines powerfully express how our authors, with their concern for action and direct intervention, do not ascribe any agency to victimhood, and how this leads to a fascination with violence as a radical solution to impotence. 'L'enorme errore della sinistra ...', the

protagonists of Babette Factory's novel maintain, 'è stato la rimozione della violenza. Tutti a inseguire un moderatismo delle idee …, dell'estetica, e a lasciare il monopolio della prassi, dell'aggressione, della potenza alla peggiore destra populista' (ibid.).

In fact, the coincidence between victimhood and the perpetration of violence appears in more than one work in my corpus, in which terrorists are often described through a narrative of generational victimhood. In Lucarelli's *Buio Rivoluzione,* for example, the re-emergence of leftist terrorism after the G8 is read as follows:

> Mara era una vittima, cercava solo di afferrare di cosa. … Ecco di cosa era vittima Mara, di un legittimo quanto utopistico desiderio di cambiamento. La voglia di sovvertire l'ordine, o magari il disordine costituito, si era impossessata di lei così come di tanti altri giovani di generazioni passate, presenti e future, conducendola in un sentiero pericoloso, senza ritorno. (Lucarelli 2006, p. 122)

Lucarelli reiterates these views in his essay on the NAP, where terrorism is described as a generational, defensive reaction to state violence: 'è il carcere a generare i Nap' (Lucarelli 2010, p. 151); 'da una vita assaggia l'onta delle vessazioni, il dolore degli emarginati, la sofferenza degli ultimi…. La sua è una primitiva sete di giustizia' (p. 176), Lucarelli writes about Antonio Lo Muscio, a young terrorist in the NAP. Among the cultural reference points of the *nappisti*, Lucarelli mentions the figure of George Jackson (p. 117). An Afro-American prisoner charged with the murder of a prison guard, Jackson engaged in revolutionary activity becoming a member of the Black Panthers Party and a point of reference for the black civil rights movement. The figure of George Jackson also appears in the description of terrorists in Dario Morgante's *La compagna P38* (Morgante 2007, p. 63).

As it was the case with Pasolini, violence is described as a radical and desperate solution to impotence. To an extent, this narrative reiterates the rhetoric of victimhood on which leftist terrorists in the 1970s built their image: to gain social acceptance in a post-terrorist context, former terrorists narrated themselves as a victimized generation, forced to

violence by external circumstances. The following are the words of Renato Curcio, a famous leftist terrorist in the 1970s and one of the founders of the Red Brigades:

> I want to say it without reserve: today I feel a great *pietas* towards myself and my defeated generation. [This *pietas*] stems from the realization that my generation and I… have not been able to live in the way we would have liked to because the previous generation brutally blocked our path asking us to either renounce our difference or die. So some of us died with weapons in their hands, many others with heroin in their veins, the majority lived by killing inside themselves their desire for change. (Curcio in Cento Bull & Cooke 2013, p. 119)

In the works I mentioned in this chapter, our authors clearly reiterate this narrative, adapting it to the present and to the impotence that the cultural paradigm of victimhood expresses. To better understand this paradoxical trait of victimhood as a cultural paradigm – namely, the fact that it intertwines with a fascination with violence – it will prove useful to draw on Daniele Giglioli's essay *Critica della vittima* (2014), where he discusses how the performance of victimhood intertwines with the exercise of power. A clarification is needed: in his essay, Giglioli refers more to the performativity of victimhood than to an actual condition of 'being victim' of some sort of violence or prevarication. In other words, Giglioli refers to contemporary cultural and political practices in which one or more subjects exploit symbols, imageries, and narratives related to victimhood as a means of self-affirmation. Thus, it is perhaps useful to draw a distinction that the Italian language allows more easily than English, namely the distinction between *vittimismo* as a performative act and the status of being a *vittima* as the actual condition of being oppressed. It is to the former that I refer to when I apply Giglioli's reflections to the case of my corpus. Among other aspects, Giglioli highlights how the performance of victimhood can be used as a tool for power by those who see no possibility of agency in the condition of being vulnerable. A 'general principle', Giglioli writes, lies behind the performance of victimhood as a tool of power: namely, the idea that

> human beings are not characterized by what they do with their innate incompleteness (since that can never be determined), but rather, by a primordial insufficiency which, as it recognizes no power within itself, can only be protected through the acquisition of power. (Giglioli 2014, p. 39)

In this light, Giglioli defines victimhood as a 'dispositive' – 'the victimary dispositive' (2014, p. 29) – to indicate the importance of victimhood within contemporary practices of power. In contemporary intellectual discourse, Michel Foucault brought the notion of *dispositif* to attention by relating it to the practice of power (Agamben 2006). As an apparatus of power, a dispositive makes possible the act of disposing, being among the meanings of this verb those of regulating, governing, ordering, controlling, and commanding. Self-presenting through a narrative of victimhood is one of the traditional means by which power affirms itself. As Giglioli wrote, 'The victim's argument is always indisputable' (2014, p. 80), and 'the leader who poses as a victim offers an implicit and sometimes explicit emotional deal, an identification that hinges on the power of resentment.' (p. 28).

Giglioli's reflections on victimhood and the exercise of power interest us here because they illustrate how pragmatic the logic of power is, whereby no agency is ascribed to those victimized: since victims cannot *act* or do something practical against power, they are impotent, and it is only through the acquisition of power that they can redeem themselves. It is in this sense that, as Pasolini wrote, 'il potere è sempre … realistico' (1992, p. 461) and 'esclude dalla sua prassi tutto ciò che possa venir conosciuto attraverso Visioni' (ibid.). These reflections offer a good angle from which to consider the 'return to reality' in the poetics of the latest generation of 'sons' writing on Italian terrorism.

If any connection between realism and the 'return to reality' can be made in relation to my corpus, I believe this builds on a factual and pragmatic understanding of what is 'real' and worthy of attention and imagination. In my view, this says much about the depiction of victims as literary characters in this corpus: with their concern for action and direct intervention, our authors do not ascribe any agency to the condition of being a victim. Hence,

while paying great attention to victims, they depict them mainly by reiterating the language of power in literary form.

4.4 The End of Agency: Apocalyptic Perspectives in a Post-National Context

In his essay on victimhood, Daniele Giglioli ascribes the contemporary cult of victimhood to the contemporary crisis of the subject's relationship with reality and contextualizes this crisis within the so-called 'end of ideologies'. This expression appeared in Western intellectual discussion towards the mid-1940s and grew in popularity after 1960, with the publication of *The End of Ideologies: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* by the American sociologist Daniel Bell. The 'end of ideologies' describes the progressive decline of the comprehensive systems of beliefs that characterized the political life of Western industrialized nations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In his essay, Giglioli writes:

> The mythology of victimhood is a response to what has been called the end of the "great narratives". … the philosophies and ideologies that allowed for a rational connection between cause and effect, means and ends, by determining the course of events, have been in crisis for some time; that possibility was taken away by the system, and all that remains to individual initiative is a token role …. (Giglioli 2014, pp. 91–109)

In his essay, Giglioli argues that the end of those 'grand narratives' of the past entails *per se* the end of any possibility of purposeful political action, which Giglioli claims, is only possible through collective ideologies: 'human praxis cannot exist in the absence of ideologies' (p. 113). In this light, Giglioli sees the present as a time in which 'a credible and positive idea of what is good' (p. 11) has disappeared. Despite the accuracy of Giglioli's analysis of the relationship between the performance of victimhood and the exercise of power, his interpretation is in danger of being apocalyptic and of ignoring the possibilities of collective agency in the present, as well as its actual existence and political potential. In fact, the narrative of the so-called 'end of ideologies' often conceals a difficulty about re-

conceptualizing the way in which progressive values take shape in a new and more globalized context. As Judith Butler writes,

> various routes lead us into politics, various stories bring us into the streets, various kind of reasoning and belief. We do not need to ground ourselves in a single model of communication, a single model of reason, a single notion of the subject before we are able to act. (Butler 2004, p. 48)

As a conclusion to this chapter, this last section discusses how the authors from my corpus share a difficulty to conceptualize the modes and strategies of political activism in a globalized and post-national context, beyond a traditional ideological framework. In my view, their reworking of the G8 as a 'social framework of memory' offers a powerful example of this issue.

With the G8 summit in Genoa, for the first time Italy came into contact with a global-scale social movement that radically differed from previous forms of political mobilization. Born in 1999 in Seattle on the occasion of an official meeting of the WTO (World Trade Organization), the 'new global' movement comprised of more than a thousand different groups – among which were NGOs, environmentalist groups, trade unions, and some religious associations too – protesting against the globalization of neoliberal economy and its effects on social equality and the environment. A variegated and multifaceted entity, the 'new global' movement was born as a democratic, non-violent, and anti-authoritarian protest.

For a number of different reasons, the 'new global' movement significantly differed from previous social movements: its aims and goals were global rather than national, and the organization of the protests involved different states; it brought together people from different generations; it was not linked to a specific political party; there was no traditional 'ideology' behind its political agenda. Since its coinage by the French philosopher Antoine-Louis-Claude Destutt de Tracy at the end of eighteenth century, this notion (ideology) took on

155

different meanings, sometimes even contradictory[15], the most neutral and general being that of a coherent belief system providing an explanation for social and historical processes aimed at orienting the social, political, and economical behaviour of individuals. In fact, the members of the 'new global' movement came from very different backgrounds but shared a common interpretation of (and opposition to) the social and environmental consequences of neoliberalism. Because of the 'open' nature of this movement, it was difficult to situate it within previous models of collective political action, and this was also the reason why even social scientists were late in comprehending it (Della Porta et al. 2006, pp. 10-18).

In Italy, the preliminary criminalization of the movement (Agnoletto & Guadagucci 2011, pp. 41-59), which significantly affected the public comprehension of its aims, as well as the escalation of violence in Genoa with all that followed, considerably prevented the movement from gaining political ground. Moreover, at an institutional level, leftist parties remained very marginal in the protests and, most importantly, were totally absent and silent with regard to police violence and the following proceedings (Agnoletto & Guadagnucci 2011, pp. 212–215). No political battle for reform of the police corps was carried out from the left at an institutional level. From the beginning, the Italian anti-globalization movement was left to itself, and so it was with the legal battle for the ascertainment of the truth about police abuses on the days of the summit. It was thanks to the pool of judges guided by Enrico Zucca and to a network of committed citizens that, despite the heavy obstructionism toward the judicial inquiries (Agnoletto & Guadagnucci 2011, pp. 67-97), after nine years those responsible for illegal acts eventually had to take responsibility for their actions.

For sure, the harsh violence in Genoa and the absence of institutional support played a role in the victim-centred narration that this generation of authors develops through the G8 as a 'social framework of memory', one in which no agency is seen in non-violence. At the

---

[15] If we limit ourselves to Marxism, 'ideology' identified both a 'false consciousness' through which a given social group dominates other social groups, and a belief system constituting the 'consciousness' of the oppressed within the liberating revolution.

same time, I believe that the novelty of the transnational and 'post-ideological' 'new global' movement has played a role in fuelling the sense of impotence of a generation that – as the reworking of Pasolini as an *intellettuale vate* showed and as the following chapter will discuss – is anchored to a deeply national and pre-global model of intellectual and political agency. In fact, as members of a generation that grew up in the 1980s and the 1990s, our authors came immediately after the social and political ferment of the 1970s and the affirmation of new forms of political activism during globalization, finding themselves stuck between two moments of eager political engagement and strong youth movements in Italy: the 1970s and the 2000s. The non-comprehension of the novelty of the 'new global' movement – of its ideological diversification, its lack of appointed leaders, the worldwide provenience of its members – is well exemplified in the following passages from Christian Raimo's *Latte*, where the author describes the anti-globalization protests during which the protagonist finds himself erroneously charged with the killing of a police commissioner:

> una spinta ideologica bassa, un'assoluta diversità di provenienza politica in senso stretto, uno spirito libertario di fondo, innestato con le anime più disparate neoluddismo, pacifismo postremo, boyscoutismo, psicogeografia, filoterzomondismo, antiglobalizzazione… … il movimento acquistò legittimazione politica, che voleva dire televisioni e giornali che non ne parlavano come un fumo infinitesimo e folkloristico di estemporanea rabbia sociale, ma tentavano di renderne conto in maniera quanto meno scolastica. Genova, Napoli, Bologna, di nuovo Napoli, Torino, Assisi, Palermo, e la grande manifestazione di Roma furono i luoghi, le tappe di una crescita che, in mezzo a una disarmante assenza di qualsiasi dramma politico, trovava sempre più attenzioni da parte dei media e delle forze dell'ordine …. (Raimo 2001, pp. 151–152)

Within this framework, the bewildered protagonist Gianni 'provava a spiegare perché la protesta sugli alimenti modificati fosse importante' and concludes that 'era importante per lui *vivere* qualcosa di collettivo' (p. 158). Finally, in the midst of comparisons to the Years of Lead, the author discusses the relationship between this new, pacific, and non-violent protest, the institutions and the media as follows:

l'elemento di novità che si era aggiunto a questa protesta era quello del rapporto con la parte avversa e con i media. Le manifestazioni in America avevano avuto un successo superiore a quello che ci si aspettava e l'unica ragione era l'ottima riuscita, la visibilità che avevano ottenuto sui mezzi d'informazione. … Si cominciò a diffondere una sorta di vademecum … su come comportarsi con le telecamere e i taccuini. Parlare chiaramente. Essere sintetici, non dilugarsi oltre un minuto. Citare dati e cifre. Essere cordiali ma risoluti. Chiedere data e modo di pubblicazione. … per la prima volta infatti alla figura storicamente outsider del contestatore veniva richiesto un sapere professionale di base … Qual è l'azione più *autentica* se la maggior parte del tempo in cui agisci hai qualcuno che ti riprende con una telecamera? (Raimo 2001, pp. 176–177)

Raimo's short story is a powerful illustration of how the globalized, 'post-ideological' present is seen as an age of no agency, where there is no possibility to oppose the injustices of power through political action. To show how these considerations apply to the other authors of my corpus, the next chapter will explore how they depict the idea of being 'agents' in politics and history, of holding the ability and 'potency' to affect reality through actions, showing how nationalism plays a role in assessing this 'potency', seen as lacking in the present. As we will see, an obsession with being the protagonists of History (with a capital H) leads to an incapability of deciphering today's reality and to a generational narrative of impotence, of which the cultural paradigm of victimhood is an expression. In this respect, it is worth concluding with a few lines from the journalist and blogger Leonardo Tondelli (born in 1973) on the G8. The post, published on his blog is entitled 'Passa la storia, fai ciao con la manina', and reads as follows:

It is time to admit it: we are not the protagonists of Genoa. … We wish we had been, at least once in our lives. … the risk of going down in History was high. But once again the events passed us by, and left us far behind. Genoa was the demonstration of the guys in blue uniforms …. Genoa was the demonstration of the rule of law…. All this is very interesting, even if at the end of the day what we are left with is disappointment. The disappointment of those who saw History pass in front of helmets and batons and struck a pose, hoping to have a front-row seat. But no. We were just the predestined victims of the usual Italian game, too difficult to understand, impossible to articulate.[16]

---

[16] The full text is available in Tondelli, Leonardo. (2011) Passa la Storia, fai ciao con la manina, blog post, 9 July. [Online] Available from https://leonardo.blogspot.com/2007/07/passa-la-storia-fai-ciao-con-la-manina.html [Accessed on 11 November 2019]. I found this reference in Wu Ming. (2011) Pensando alle rivolte del 2011. Tamburi a Genova (nell'anno del decennale), blog post, 3 January. [Online]. Available from https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/2011/01/pensando-alle-rivolte-del-2011-tamburi-a-genova-nellanno-del-decennale/ [Accessed on 11 November 2019].

CHAPTER 5. Terrorist Violence and the Modern *Hubris*: Generations and the 'Makeability' of History

This chapter explores the last pattern through which the generation of authors born during and after the 1970s and writing on the Years of Lead turned victimhood into a cultural paradigm: namely, the idealization of leftist terrorists in the 1970s as a generation that 'made' history (Koselleck 2004, pp. 192–204), which is proportional to the depiction of present-day generations as passive, submissive, and lacking agency. I problematise this feeling of generational impotence by engaging with contemporary discussions of the classical notion of *hubris* (Bell 1978; Ricoeur 2004). In the context of the formation of modern nation-states, *hubris* can be applied to the construction of a generational 'structure of feeling', to borrow from Raymond Williams (1961), whereby each generation feels compelled to 'make' its portion of history in a revolutionary fashion (Nora 1996). I show how a sacrificial rhetoric informed the Italian national discourse, in which younger generations had to live up to their fathers by giving their life for the making of national history (Banti 2011). Thus, I show how the glamorization of leftist terrorists in many works from the corpus bears the mark of this 'structure' or rhetorical apparatus. These authors idealise the Years of Lead as a time in which, contrary to what seems possible today, younger generations contributed to a revolutionary process and to the making of national history. In their works, impotence is the feeling of a generational lack of agency; for them, the traditional, modern paradigms for interpreting politics and history are no longer useful to understand the present; victimhood provides them a better paradigm to express themselves, while the action of terrorists is idealized as generational revolution.

5.1 Impotence and the Idealization of Violence

In a recent book entitled *Un paese senza eroi* (2013), Stefano Jossa explores the relationship between literary characters and national culture in Italian literature. Jossa argues that, contrary to what happened in other European countries, Italian literature played no role in developing characters that later became 'national heroes' like, for example, Robin Hood, Wilhelm Tell, and d'Artagnan. Jossa interpretes this 'anti-heroic' tension of Italian literature as an inherent 'resistance' (Jossa 2013, p. ix) to the symbolizations and exploitations of power. By the same token, focusing more specifically on terrorism, in *All'ordine del giorno è il terrore* (2007), Daniele Giglioli discusses the power of literature to deconstruct the modern mythological 'machine' (Giglioli 2007, p. 11) of terrorism. Whereas modern societies constructed themselves in opposition to terrorism, which represented the obscure and terrifying danger of their own destruction, Giglioli argues, literature has always played the role of 'profaning' (p. 17) this myth, debunking it through anti-mythological and anti-heroic depictions of terrorists as literary characters.

In fact, nearly all the works in my corpus that deal with extreme-left terrorism offer idealized and heroic depictions of leftist terrorists, which, as we shall see later in this chapter, often echo the rhetorical structures of modern nationalism. The idealisation of leftist terrorists as part of a generation who 'did something' to change things epitomizes the quest for action and direct intervention that characterizes the 'return to reality' in this corpus. In this light, it is precisely by presenting itself as militant and antagonist that this literature ends up echoing, rather than deconstructing, the two myths that have consistently informed modern political culture: nationalism and terrorism.

As former protagonists of the Years of Lead, in some cases leftist terrorists preserved an aura of legitimacy and authority: their description as 'beautiful losers' suggests that they were the last to believe in the possibility of reacting against authority. The following examples come from Genna's *Catrame* and Raimo's short stories, where the protagonists

happen to meet two former terrorists in prison. In both cases, the dignity and moral standing of the terrorists emotionally engages the protagonists. In Genna's novel, the following passage describes Stefano Fogli, a former leftist terrorist:

> L'uomo era seduto nella sala mensa, vuota, del carcere di Opera, inondato di luce, una sagoma buia in fondo. … Una nota quasi morale era soffusa intorno a lui, una specie di refrattarietà che era il contrario della disillusione. Lopez percepì nettissima la sensazione, quando lo sguardo del grande terrorista incontrò il suo, muto, ancora una volta silenzioso. … la commozione fu tenuta a bada dalla vergogna di Lopez …, sotto l'animale, ancora, si intuiva l'uomo. (Genna 1999, pp. 57–60)

Everything in the description of Fogli points to his high moral standing, which overawes and touches the investigator Guido Lopez. With less serious and more ironic tones, Christian Raimo represents an encounter with a former terrorist in jail in a short story entitled 'Giovanni Gabrini Impilota', from the collection *Latte* (2001, pp. 71–99). The story stages a parody of a real jailbreak that takes place during a reality show. Like Genna's *Catrame*, this short story was written immediately after the debate about the *indulto* (see Chapter 1). The discussion about the possibility of releasing terrorists from jail brought the memory of the Years of Lead to public attention. In their writing, both Genna and Raimo are critical of the way in which the public authorities handled the issue of 1970s terrorism. While Genna addresses the lack of truth and justice concerning the *stragismo*, Raimo denounces the lack of a serious discussion about what brought so many to engage in terroristic violence, as the narrative expedient of the reality show suggests:

> Un giudizio non solo tribulanesco, non solo storico, ma un confronto sulle ragioni umane era stato così tante volte rimandato da essere diventato un niente, ma un niente ulceroso, in cancrena. (Raimo 2001, pp. 85–86)

Like Genna, Raimo stages the protagonist of his story feeling emotionally overwhelmed by the moral standing of the former leftist terrorist. In the following passage, the terrorist Ernesto S. fiercely refuses to be released during a reality show: he stoutly asserts his desire to be consistent with his own beliefs and principles, and this moves the protagonist to tears:

così no, … così è una merdata. Per me è come dire prendi cinquant'anni della tua vita e bruciali, così, con un solo gesto. … Io sono contrario alle cose che non decido io, mi spiace, ostile di natura proprio, allergico, respirò, ai compromessi. Mi dispiace. … Ma questo non lo irritava, anzi … e la sua unica intenzione interna, *vera, autentica,* era di commuoversi. (Raimo 2001, pp. 96–97)

In both cases, there is an emotional involvement with the figures of leftist terrorists, which brings the two protagonists to feel moved by the encounter with former terrorists: 'la condivisibilità almeno empatica di alcune analisi politiche delle BR', says a character in another of Raimo's stories while brooding over the misfortunes of his generation (2004, p. 60). Through their descriptions, Genna and Raimo seem to suggest that 1970s leftist terrorists were the last who refused to resign themselves to conditions that they perceived as unacceptable, actively fighting for a better world. The degeneration of the country's political system, these authors suggest, proved their ambitions right and – as 'beautiful losers' in captivity – they now stand out for their moral stature.

In other cases, leftist terrorists of the 1970s are seen as far-sighted forerunners of present-day political struggles. If we look at the works in my corpus that re-actualize leftist terrorism in the present – such as Cenciarelli's *Sangue del suo sangue,* Babette Factory's *2005 dopo Cristo*, or Lucarelli's *Buio Rivoluzione* – such generational involvement with leftist terrorists of the 1970s becomes even more explicit. Particularly in Cenciarelli's and Lucarelli's works, terrorists are young people who refuse to resign themselves to the conditions of their time and, although controversially, decide to act.

The authors represent terrorism as a generational choice, the protagonists taking action with their coevals and in the name of common principles, and the engagement in violence is seen as comprehensible, if not justifiable, as resulting from the lack of other means. These stories are filled with explicit references to the present in which they were written – both Cenciarelli and Babette Factory refer to Berlusconi, while Lucarelli mentions the G8 and the killing of Giuliani –, and the authors establish a parallel between terrorism and the affirmation

of justice. '[S]e fossi nato dieci o quindici anni prima, avrei fatto o il terrorista o il magistrato' (Lucarelli 2006, p. 70), says Lupo in Lucarelli's novel, while the terrorist attack on Berlusconi in Babette Factory's novel takes place on the anniversary of the Liberation.

In these novels, the protagonists take 1970s leftist terrorists as role models, following their path in reaction to oppression. There is a proportional relationship between the authors' critiques of the present and the magnification of leftist terrorists: these latter appear as a generational point of reference, far-sighted forerunners of present-day struggles, individuals to admire and imitate. In Cenciarelli's novel, Milla and her comrades 'citavano i brigatisti. I loro eroi. Ne parlavano con venerazione, ben consapevoli di essere solo una manciata di epigoni' (Cenciarelli 2011, p. 57). By the same token, Lucarelli's Mara argues:

> Quando trent'anni fa i compagni riconoscevano il nemico nel SIM, lo Stato Imperialista delle Multinazionali, erano un bel pezzo avanti! Anticipavano il concetto di globalizzazione, prevedevano l'annullamento della diversità, schiacciata dal rullo compressore dell'omologazione. Mettevano a nudo l'obbligo dei governi di sottomettersi ai diktat dei veri potenti, degli industriali, dei petrolieri, dei banchieri e di tutti gli altri figli di puttana che insozzano questo pianeta con i loro escrementi. E noi, cosa si resta a fare? (Lucarelli 2006, p. 166)

There is, in sum, a deep fascination with terrorist violence as a radical solution to a sense of helplessness before the challenges of the present. In the case of Valerio Lucarelli, this fascination finds expression also beyond the boundaries of literary fiction. As we shall see in more detail in this chapter, Lucarelli, in *Vorrei che il futuro fosse oggi*, describes the terrorism of the NAP as a just, generational rebellion against state violence, linking the validity of the struggle to the problem of police violence in the present. In fact, the idealization of leftist terrorists paradoxically builds on the fundamental narrative of impotence permeating this corpus. As Giglioli argues, 'terrorism and impotence, contrary to what common sense suggests, are twins united at birth' (2015, p. 8). In the works explored in this chapter, the glamorization of violence has its roots in the sense of a lacking agency, as a generation, before the issues and challenges of the present. 'Noi non abbiamo avuto il comunismo, non

abbiamo conosciuto il fascismo, pensava Ilaria. … Non sappiamo come si festeggia la morte'

(Babette Factory 2005, p. 263), says one of the young protagonists contemplating the failure

of Berlusconi's death.

5.2 What Agency? The Modern Disposability of History and Terrorism

Depicting present-day generations as deprived of political agency leads to a fascination with

terrorist violence as a radical solution to impotence, and this results in the glamorization of

leftist terrorists as generational heroes. But what sort of 'agency' do terrorists embody, and

according to which parameters do authors set the boundary between the 'impotence' of their

victimized generation and the possibilities of 'agency'? Some contemporary discussions of

the classical notion of *hubris* can help us to answer this question by defining more clearly

the third and last pattern of victimhood as a cultural paradigm and the political imagery on

which this paradigm builds.

In classical Greek literature, the term *hubris* indicates an overbearing presumption of

humans towards the Gods, as well as the behaviour of those who assert their superiority by

dishonouring another person. The word *hubris* persists in modern languages to mean pride,

presumption, over-confidence, and arrogance. In recent decades, this notion was used to

describe some of the characteristic traits of modern culture. In *The Cultural Contradictions

of Capitalism*, the American sociologist Daniel Bell defines the modern *hubris* as follows:

> the modern hubris is the refusal to accept limits, the insistence on continually reaching
> out; and the modern world proposes a destiny that is always beyond – beyond morality,
> beyond tragedy, beyond culture. (Bell 1978, pp. 49–50)

In addition, in his seminal and last work *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004), Paul Ricoeur

describes as hubristic the relationship that modern culture establishes with history once man,

and not God, is seen as the 'agent' of the historical process. In particular, Ricoeur elaborates

on more than one occasion on the '*hubris* of total reflection' (2004, p. 24): namely, on the

164

equation between history and reason in the modern epistemology of history, which led to see history as subjected to human control and human action as fundamentally unaccountable. In Ricoeur's view, such 'grandiose ambition of historical self-knowledge' (p. 296) is linked to 'the pretentious *hubris* that would make us masters and possessors of nature', and by which 'our entire being-in-the-world is shaken' (p. 423).

In different ways, Bell and Ricoeur criticize some of the characteristic traits of modernity as an age of secularization and emancipation, arguing that those traits are still very much with us. A little digression is needed before we apply Bell's and Ricoeur's reflections to our case study. Defining the present as 'modern' is debatable: some have argued that modernity is over (Vattimo 1991), and have labelled contemporaneity as 'post-modern', implying the abandonment of modernity. Others, however, argue instead that modernity is still with us: in 2004, for example, the French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky coined the notion of 'hypermodernity' (Aubert 2006; Charles 2007; Aubert 2011), arguing that the globalization of the capitalist economy and of digital technologies had brought to full accomplishment some pillars of modern culture:

> Far from modernity having passed away, what we are seeing is its consummation …. A second modernity, deregulated and globalized, has shot into orbit …, resting essentially on three axiomatic elements constitutive of modernity itself: the market, technocratic efficiency and the individual. (Lipovetsky 2015, pp. 157–158)

In this chapter, I refer to Lipovetsky's idea of modernity: namely, a set of cultural and political conditions that originated in modernity and still influence our time, particularly in the idea of human action as unaccountable and boundless, which some criticize as 'hubristic'. I will return to the notion of 'hypermodernity' later in this thesis, both in relation to impotence and in relation to the 'return to reality'. Now, in order to understand how the 'modern *hubris*' relates to my corpus, let us engage with Paul Ricoeur's reflections on modernity and history.

In his discussion of the hubristic 'ambition of historical self-knowledge' in modernity (Ricoeur 2004, p. 296), Ricoeur engages with a notion coined in 1985 by the German

historian Reinhart Koselleck, namely the 'disposability' (*Verfügbarkeit*) or 'makeability' (*Machbarkeit*) of history (Koselleck 2004, pp. 192–204), with which Koselleck describes the modern idea of man as the 'agent' of the historical process. Ricoeur ascribes this idea to the French Revolution, 'the mother of all ruptures' (p. 301) and argues: 'that someone makes history is a modern expression unthinkable before the eighteenth century, one ratified, so to speak, by the French Revolution and Napoleon' (p. 297).

The 'makeability of history' is particularly relevant in relation to terrorism and to my corpus. In the last decade, several scholars have tackled political terrorism from a more 'historical' perspective[17], exploring its relationship with modernity (Miller 2013; Ferragu 2014; Ceci 2016). On the one hand, they claim, 'terrorism … is a phenomenon essentially linked to *modernity* and rooted in modern culture' inasmuch as it was 'exactly between the end of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century that the term came into being' (Ceci 2016, p. 893). On the other hand, political terrorism could only emerge within a set of political conditions that were peculiar to the modern age, such as the centralization of the state and its entitlement to the use of force as well as the advent of mass society. Most importantly, and this is the point on which my thesis focuses, political terrorism is 'modern' insofar as it builds on the conviction that 'it lies within the will power of men to remake [history], to establish a completely new political order'. (Ceci 2016, p. 894). Behind a terrorist act, there is the conviction that a single individual could change, with a single action, the course of history. To an extent, we could consider terrorism as the culmination of a modern 'delirium of omnipotence' that can only be shared, as Enzensberger highlights, by power itself:

> Individual terror is based on the conviction that history is made by emperors, kings, and presidents; a conviction that is shared by emperors, kings, and presidents. No bomb thrower can change the great and anonymous social forces: the technical and industrial potential, the aggregate conditions of the classes, the relationship of wealth to the lack of it and the administrative apparatus. (Enzensberger 1974, p. 76)

---

[17] In the field of terrorism studies, this is a relatively new trend (see Ceci 2016, p. 889).

The 'incomparable feeling' of the terrorists to be masters of 'their own fate, that of the victim and that of their entire cause … lifted them outside themselves and above everyone else' and 'no ruler in this world could be haughtier than this. The sovereignty which became his was boundless ….' (p. 99). The Italian songwriter Fabrizio De Andrè successfully describes the 'hubris' of terrorists – who consider themselves antagonists but, in fact, share the boundless overbearance of power – as follows:

> e se tu la credevi vendetta/ il fosforo di guardia/ segnalava la tua urgenza di potere/ mentre ti emozionavi nel ruolo più eccitante della legge,/ quello che non protegge:/ la parte del boia. (De Andrè 1972)

In my corpus, the ability to 'make' history is one of the narratives through which authors represent 1970s leftist terrorists as part of a generation who, contrary to what seems possible to do today, refused to succumb to the conditions of their time: 'una generazione che … si rifiuta di restarsene immobile a osservare il precipitare degli eventi' (Lucarelli 2010, p. 27). In Raimo's short story 'Giovanni Gabrini Impilota', from the collection *Latte* (2001, pp. 71–99), when the protagonist feels emotionally touched by an encounter with a former terrorist, he later remembers an interview with another terrorist as follows:

> Gli rivenne in mente un'intervista rilasciata anni prima da un terrorista …. L'eroe mancato e pentito raccontava i momenti appena prima delle azioni di sangue, il dubbio razionale, l'esitazione dei nervi. … Rendere se stessi partecipi di un ordine in parte superiore a quello degli uomini, far parte di gente che è nella storia *di più*, essere sopra le altre teste: mutati, ideologizzati, autosantificati. (Raimo 2001, p. 86)

An 'eroe mancato e pentito', the former terrorist takes on a mythological dimension from the perspective of someone living in the 2000s. By the same token, in Nicola Ravera Rafele's *Il senso della lotta* (2017), leftist terrorists claim: 'La storia la scriveremo noi' (Ravera Rafele 2017, p. 272): 'era una sensazione di grandezza, eravamo dentro alla storia che si faceva. … c'era questo bisogno di vivere tutto, sfidare il limite' (pp. 315–316). In this novel, to which we will return shortly, the author explores the memory of the Years of Lead from the

perspective of Tommaso, a man in his thirties during the 2000s. The story is built on a ceaseless comparison between the two generations. This comparison digs out the deep implications of what Koselleck describes as the modern 'makeability' and 'disposability' of history and that, in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur further discusses in terms of *hubris* (2004, p. 304). Namely, the idea of disposing of history not only from the perspective of action, but also from that of intellectual practice:

> [i]f the notion of the makeability of history is so tenacious, this is doubtless because it aims at aligning our twofold relation to history – making history and the making of histories (*faire l'histoire et faire de l'histoire*). (Ricoeur 2004, pp. 297–298)

In Ravera Rafele's novel *Il senso della lotta*, the same idea emerges when the author compares present-day intellectuals with those of the 1970s. The following is a dialogue between the protagonist, a young journalist at the *Corriere della sera,* and a retired publisher who had lived the 1970s:

> "Come eravate voi?"
> "Sempre incazzati. E tremendamente seri. Discutevamo per ore di tutto. Stavamo riscrivendo la storia."
> "E i giovani scrittori che ospiti oggi? Di che parlano?"
> "Quasi sempre di calcio. Ridono molto […]. Hanno bisogno di pareri continui, mi fanno leggere tutto, vogliono essere rassicurati. Mi chiedono: Sandro, questa roba per te funziona? Funziona? Non funziona? Per loro la letteratura è come un interruttore..."
> (Ravera Rafele 2017, pp. 136–137)

There is a real anxiety of performance, the author suggests, in present-day writers. Unlike writers in the 1970s, any possibility of producing a persuasive critique of the *status quo* seems lost to contemporary writers. As we will see ahead, this anxiety of performance – which we have partly explored in the form of Pasolini-as-an-icon – is also the point of connection between the cultural paradigm of victimhood and the so-called 'return to reality'.

5.3 Constructing Generations

What role do generations play within the modern *hubris*, and how does Italy fit into this framework? We have seen how our authors convey an idealised representation of 1970s leftist terrorists as a generation that was an 'agent' of history. Drawing on some contemporary critiques of modern culture, I defined this understanding of agency as 'hubristic' and anchored to a modern idea of history as something that can be 'made'. In this section, I discuss how the modern *hubris* and the 'makeability' of history relate to generations and nationalist culture. I show how, in the case of Italy, the rhetoric of nationalism built on a rhetorical apparatus in which the notion of generation was central, and whose legacy, as we shall see, still informs our authors' imagery of revolutionary violence during the Years of Lead.

5.3.1 "Pure memory": Generations in Modern Cultural Heritage

In *Memory, History, Forgetting,* Ricoeur explores the role of memory in the perception of historical experience and in the production of historical narrative. Memory, Ricoeur argues, is where values, images, myths, and beliefs are stored: it is, therefore, the vehicle through which the cultural heritage of history emerges. In this light, Ricoeur discusses the role of the intergenerational transmission of memory in the consolidation of history's cultural heritage: 'Every society', he writes, 'has the burden of transmitting from one generation to another what it holds to be its cultural acquisitions.' (Ricoeur 2004, p. 60). When discussing this point, Ricoeur engages with Pierre Nora's essay 'Generation' (1996), which I previously mentioned in relation to the Genoa G8 as a *cadre social de mémoire*. Although both draw a close connection between generations, memory, and cultural heritage, Ricoeur and Nora differ in their approach. While the philosopher Ricoeur saw in generational narrative a

'resistance of memory to its historiographical treatment' (Ricoeur 2004, p. 396), the historian

Nora is more critical:

> [w]ith the idea of generation one … enters into the realm of pure memory …. Pure memory is memory that thumbs its nose at history, that ignores lapses of time and chains of cause and effect, that forgets the prose of the quotidian and the obstacles to progress. It advances in "flashes", powerful images, jumping from one stalwart mooring to the next. (Nora 1996, p. 525)

The 'constructed' nature of memory provides Nora with the starting point for the writing of *Les lieux de mémoire,* where he explores the entities that, over time, have become symbolic of the cultural heritage of modern France. In this work, Nora approaches the notion of 'generation' as a *lieu de mémoire.* Nora's central argument is that, after 1789, the cultural heritage of Atlantic and, particularly, European modernity has been inherently bound up with the 'construction' of generations as the driving force for the 'making of national history' in a revolutionary fashion. The concept of 'generation', Nora argues, has grown in popularity since 1968, following the international youth rebellion that has been interpreted as the first 'worldwide generation gap' in history (Nora 1996, p. 499).

The 'fabrication' (p. 500) of the '68 generation, he argues, was revelatory of the symbolic status of generations in French modernity: since the beginning, it was imbued with a highly 'symbolic malleability', a 'historical elasticity' and a 'characteristic tendency to ascribe greater importance to the subjective experience … than to the objective substance of facts' (p. 500), which constituted it as a *lieu de mémoire.* According to Nora, some characteristic traits are evident in the construction of generations in modern European culture. Firstly, there is a revolutionary ambition. As he writes:

> whether in an international context or a more specific French one, the culmination of the idea of 'generation' in '68 can only be understood by returning directly to the root of the phenomenon, the French Revolution. (Nora 1996, p. 501)

That is, to borrow again from Ricoeur and Koselleck, the moment in which the idea of history as something to be 'made' found political realization. 'The Revolution', Nora argues, 'was intrinsically generational' (p. 502), and 'established the notion of a generation' (p. 503) itself. Since the beginning, this latter was tied up with the idea of a just rebellion against authority and tyrannical rule: a 'crucial condition for the formation of a generational consciousness', Nora writes, '[is] precisely a sense of persecution' (p. 514). In this light, 'A generation embodies and epitomizes the principle of equality out of which it was born' (p. 508), establishing a horizontal view of the social bond. In its inherently egalitarian nature, the notion of generation was therefore linked to the political project of modernity, that of democracy: '"The generation" is the daughter of democracy and of the acceleration of history' (p. 508).

A second characteristic trait of the modern construction of generation is an enduring conflict with fathers. As Nora writes, the revolutionary, horizontal ambition of generations brings with it a conflictual self-proclamation. This infused modern political culture with 'a rhythm with a perceptible generational pulse' (p. 503), in which each new generation felt compelled to 'remake' history with new premises. Daniel Bell comments that

> [i]t was the hubris of classical liberalism, and of socialist utopianism as well, to believe that in each new generation, in a new social contract, men could start afresh, discard the past, and redesign institutions anew. (Bell 1978, p. 90)

The modern dynamic of generational replacement leads to a third pattern of the modern construction of generations as Nora discusses it, namely, a ceaseless confrontation with the past, which leads to an obsession with the burden of history, a sense of being overwhelmed by the history that previous generations had 'made' in the past. Because of the relevance of Nora's words in relation to our case study, it is worth quoting his argument at length:

> The moments that loom largest in a generation's consciousness of itself are invariably moments of despair and helplessness in the face of history's overwhelming, inaccessible majesty, its penchant for denying those who aspire to its tragic grandeur. The Revolution

171

for the romantics; the entire nineteenth century for the "fin-de-siècle" generations; World War I for the generation that fought it as well as the Depression generation; World War II for postwar generations; the Revolution again, together with all the wars they did not fight, for the generations of '68 and afterwards. … At the inception of a generation there is a sense of lack …. Generational memory is stocked with remembrances not so much of what its members have experienced as of what they have not experienced. … generational memory … therefore becomes an interminable discourse about origins, an endless saga. (Nora 1996, pp. 524–525)

Nora's analysis of the modern construction of generations already gives us some basis for interpreting the fascination with revolutionary violence that permeates many of the works in my corpus. The 'mythologization' of terrorist violence as a revolution of younger generations – as well as the narration of 1970s leftist terrorists as those who 'made history' – faithfully mimics the saga of generations in European modernity. Moreover, the glamorization of terrorist violence from the perspective of today's impotence illustrates a generational obsession with what was not experienced in past history. The following passage, for example, describes the thoughts of Manuela in Lucarelli's *Buio Rivoluzione*. When she decides to join the New Red Brigades, it is a sense of discouragement and generational frustration that drives her engagement in violence:

Il destino l'aveva fatta nascere proprio negli anni in cui si andavano costituendo le Brigate Rosse … Tante volte aveva pensato di essere nata in ritardo di alcune generazioni. Avrebbe desiderato vivere e veder combattere Mohammed Alì nel cuore dell'Africa nera. Avrebbe voluto unirsi alle centinaia di migliaia di giovani che in piazza manifestavano contro la guerra in Vietnam. E invece in sorte le erano toccati anni permeati dal cinismo, segnati dalla caduta dei muri e di tutte le barriere ideologiche. (Lucarelli 2006, pp. 132–133)

In fact, the works from this corpus that stage a re-enactment of leftist terrorism in the 2000s all represent individuals from today's generations appropriating the narratives of the generation who experienced the Years of Lead. In these works, the 'fathers' are idealized, as if filling a perceived void of political agency in the present with the revolutions of the past. Before looking more closely at this aspect, however, let us consider the rhetoric, narratives, and images that informed the modern construction of generations in Italy.

5.3.2 The Making of the Italian Nation: Family, Sacrifice, and Reproduction

In his essay 'Generation', Pierre Nora discusses what he calls 'the historical construction of the model', arguing that 'in every country one generation has served as a model and pattern for all subsequent generations' (Nora 1996, p. 511). In France, this model corresponded to the romantic generation of the *enfants du siècle,* as the French poet Alfred De Musset called the generation of the Romantics, namely those who had witnessed the 1830 July Revolution (p. 512); but each country, Nora writes, has its own way of constructing the model of a generation that was representative of a crucial and particularly significant moment of national history. In Italy, this model was the generation of the Risorgimento. Not only in light of the inherently 'constructed' nature of memory as compared to history, but also because of the narrative aspects of the Risorgimento itself, Nora's reflections on the generation as a 'construction' are particularly relevant to the case of Italy.

In Italy, the unification was not the result of a revolution; and this latter survived in our culture more as a narrative construction than as a reality itself. As discussed in relation to the myth of the *intellettuale vate,* Italian unification required a great narrative effort from intellectuals and politicians. Italy's linguistic and political diversity was at odds with the very idea of a common nationhood. In this light, a powerful rhetorical apparatus was devised to compensate for the geopolitical weakness of the Italian nation, one that could reach the people by gripping their emotions and that heavily relied on the arts to convey its symbolic and iconographic dimensions. The notion of 'generation', in all its 'constructed' nature, was central to this apparatus.

In a study entitled *Sublime madre nostra* (2011), the historian Alberto Mario Banti explores the rhetoric, images, and myths informing the Italian national discourse in detail, as well as its legacies after unification. Banti's research was one of a number of studies published in 2011, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Italian unification. In his

analysis, Banti identifies three main '*figure profonde*' (Banti 2011, pp. vi-ix) namely three main allegorical and symbolic structures through which the people were engaged with the values of the Risorgimento. The notion of 'generation' was central to all of them.

Firstly, the national narrative saw the nation as a familial community (pp. 15–21): a biological belonging, the family-nation was to be honoured by 'living up' to the fathers in the contribution to its formation and evolution. The second figure represented the nation as a sacrificial community (pp. 28–37). This enhanced a real cult of death as a moral and aesthetic event, which younger generations had to welcome as their tribute to the 'making' of national history. This included fundamental praise of sacrificial violence, of the 'beautiful death', of conflict as an initiation rite, as well as the cult of Garibaldi as a national saint. The third symbolic construction relied on the nation as a sexualized and gendered community (pp. 38–50). This rhetorical structure hinged on a clear performance of gender, one in which young men learned to see themselves as virile and heroic and young women as chaste and fertile, and in which the sexual interaction between the two culminated in the realization of the political project of the unification, namely, in the 'generation' of children for the fatherland.

Although it was fostered considerably 'from above', such discourse ended up implying the real involvement of the people in the unitarian vision. Moreover, in any historical context, love and affective relationships are never immune from some sort of social conditioning, and they partly build on values that channel and incarnate the most intimate feelings and sentiments into a given 'spirit of the age' made of shared values and visions of the world, without this being perceived as imposed from above. What I suggest, however, is that the Italian national discourse 'constructed' the notion of generation in all its 'biological, psychological, moral, religious, and messianic connotation' (Nora 1996, p. 502), as Nora discusses it in relation to France.

In his study, Banti highlights the persistence and reworking of these rhetorical structures after unification. The Italian construction of generations, indeed, kept informing

the collective imagery of nationhood even after 1861. It had great success in the interventionist campaign in 1915 and, most importantly, in the context of Fascism. With great 'pedagogical' investment in younger generations, the regime heavily relied on the rhetorical apparatus of Italian nationalism – nation as a family, nation as a sacrificial community, nation as a sexualized and gendered body – to build its authority and political strength, turning those narratives, in all respects, into the language of power.

As Pasolini writes in *Petrolio*'s note 67 entitled 'Il fascino del fascismo' (Pasolini 1992, pp. 262–264) – which I already quoted in Chapter 3 –, Fascism had a highly intergenerational dimension, which built on an imitative relationship with the past and on the ambition of the sons to conquer the power of the fathers. Once more, the generation–revolution link turns out to be central in the rhetoric of Italian nationalism. Fascism, indeed, presented itself as a revolution aiming to complete the unfinished process of the Risorgimento. As Emilio Gentile highlights in relation to the rhetoric of Fascism as an 'anthropologic revolution' (2005),

> when Fascism came to power, the myth of … the 'new man' already occupied a fundamental place in Italy's culture and politics. During the Risorgimento onwards, it was associated with … the 'conquest of modernity' by the new Italian nation. (Gentile 2005, p. 23)

The myth of the 'palingenetic' revolution, to which the notion of generation is central, was recognized by many as a characteristic trait of Italian political culture, as the title of a recent study suggests: *Ribelli d'Italia. Il sogno della rivoluzione da Mazzini alle Brigate Rosse* (Buchignani 2017). Through this lens, some historians – the most well-known being Richard Drake (2003) – saw the outburst of political violence in the 1970s as the manifestation of an inherent desire for revolution in the modern Italian political tradition. On their part, leftist terrorists in the 1970s presented their violence as a generational revolution against 'capitalist tyranny', aiming to establish a new and more egalitarian society. On its part, Luca Moretti, author of *Il senso del piombo* (2011) in my corpus, whose online edition is prefaced

by the former leftist terrorist Barbara Balzerani, describes the Italians as 'figli … della rivoluzione mancata' (Moretti 2011, p. 127). Historians commonly ascribe the myth of the palingenetic revolution and the lack of a reformist culture to the fact that Italy has never had a revolution. As Pierre Nora has highlighted, it is typical of conservative systems to fuel a 'culture of revolt' (Nora 1996, p. 521). Be that as it may, a revolutionary ambition in the imagery of generations deeply permeates the literary works in the corpus of this thesis that address terrorism from the extreme left.

5.4 Terrorism as Fatherhood and Masculinity

In this section, let us consider how the rhetoric of fatherhood, sacrificial martyrdom, and productive masculinity that shaped Italian national discourse informs the depiction of leftist terrorists in my corpus, and, most importantly, the role it plays in assessing the lack of agency through which our authors define their generation.

In the corpus of this thesis, authors often depict terrorists through an imagery of fatherhood. Italian literary critics claim that the representation of terrorism as a generational issue, in which terrorists appear in the role of fathers, sons, or relatives, has to be seen as a 'privatization' of terrorism, one that overlooks its political and historical dimensions (Donnarumma 2010, pp. 458–461; Vitello 2013). With regards to the 1970s, I do not believe that a sharp distinction can be made between a 'private' and a 'political' representation of facts. The Years of Lead were, for sure, a generational phenomenon, and have been studied as such by historians and sociologists (Ceci 2013, pp. 76–77). The intergenerational conflict is, in sum, central to the interpretation of those years, and in no way reductive of their historical and political relevance. Moreover, I believe that this critical position suffers from a bias: to some extent, literary critics lamenting the lack of epic in the literary representation of

terrorism themselves retain an 'epic' image of the Years of Lead and refuse to look at the most problematic aspects of that decade. In this respect, it is worth quoting Gabriele Vitello:

> in fact, the upsurge of terrorism in the new millennium rekindled our hopes, leading us to believe that History was setting itself in motion again, in order to tear us from our role as mere spectators … . (Vitello 2013a, p. 199)

As the next chapter will discuss in more detail, the Years of Lead – which both literary critics and writers tend to idealize as the 'golden age' of conflict – rather represented the end of conflict and its degeneration into violence. My contention is that the question of 1970s terrorism in the so-called 'return to reality' casts light on a certain mythologization of those events in Italian collective imagery, which this thesis aims to problematize. With regards to terrorism as a 'generational affair', finally, this chapter has illustrated how modern European culture has filled intergenerational relationships with history and politics. It is my contention that, in works by the latest generation of authors, the 'public' relevance of generational kinship is all the more evident.

Through the strong intergenerational dimension of several works in my corpus, the choice of terrorism can be described as a way of 'living up' to the fathers' participation in the country's political life. When authors employ the coming-of-age theme, for example, like Antonio Iovane in *Il brigatista* or Dario Morgante in *La compagna P38,* becoming a leftist terrorist is one with being part of a lineage of fathers and predecessors who participated in crucial moments of national history. In this light, our authors reiterate leftist terrorists' self-narratives as partisans of the Resistance. One of the most controversial aspect of the Years of Lead, that of the 'betrayed Resistance' was a founding 'political myth' – which Christopher Flood defines as an 'ideologically marked narrative which purports to give a true account of a set of … political events and which is accepted as valid in its essentials by a social group' (2001, p. 44) – for the extra-parliamentary left. In the 1970s, leftist terrorists made the partisans the forerunners of their armed struggle and presented their actions as the result of

an intergenerational passing of the baton[18]. This comparison is suggested in Babette Factory's *2005 dopo Cristo,* whereby the terrorist attack against Silvio Berlusconi is planned for 25 April, and explicitly devised by Iovane and Morgante.

Iovane's *Il brigatista* is filled with references to the Resistance. The terrorist group of which Jacopo Varega is part counts among its members Rocco, a former partisan from the Resistance who decides to join them. In this novel, being part of a leftist terrorist group is one with competing over who can boast a partisan among his ancestors and who cannot, which is also a measure of one's virility:

> Lo guardai bene, era un ragazzo bello, la barba corta già dura come se la fatica della fabbrica l'avesse corazzato e i capelli che nelle giornate agitate s'alleavano al vento. Suo padre era stato partigiano e ne aveva ammazzati sei, forse sette …. Il mio non aveva fatto la Resistenza e io, come può vedere, non sono così bello. Ero magrolino anche allora e nemmeno saprei dire da dove cercavo le forze con cui azionavo la fresa. (Iovane 2019, p. 57)

In *Il brigatista*, generational belonging determines a clear hierarchy in the group: the old Rocco is the most authoritative figure, followed by some real-life protagonists of 1970s leftist terrorism like Renato Curcio and Alberto Franceschini, and, lastly, by the main character Jacopo Varega. The youngest of the group, Varega is radicalized under the watchful eyes of the elder members, the '*padri della rivoluzione'* (p. 66, original italics), admiring them, learning from them, and wishing to achieve their authority: 'Poi l'intervento di Armando zittiva tutti: lui aveva il tono definitivo del leader. Armando, alias Renato Curcio …. Avrei volto essere come lui o concreto come il compagno Alberto Franceschini ….' (Iovane 2019, p. 65). In this context, engagement in terrorist violence is presented as a sort of rite of initiation, of which the gun is the symbol:

> Osservai il cielo. Ero solo un ragazzo che non aveva mai preso in mano un'arma. In pochi mesi sarei diventato un clandestino, un regolare. Avrei lottato anch'io con ogni mezzo

---

[18] For a more detailed examination of this point, see Cooke 2011, pp. 118-23 and Cento Bull & Cooke 2013, pp. 118-27, both of which I summarized in Pellegrini De Luca 2020, pp. 103-5.

per la rivoluzione. … Cominciai a dormire con la mia Beretta sotto il cuscino, chi mi avrebbe mai fermato se davanti avevo una pistola? (Iovane 2019, pp. 69–82)

The *topos* of the child entering adult age through possession of a gun is old and already belonged to the 'pedagogy of emotions' (Banti 2011, p. 79) of representations of the Risorgimento. In the early Italian movie *Il piccolo garibaldino* (1909), for example, a young boy leaves his house to fight for the unification alongside his father with only a gun, an Italian flag, and a uniform.

A young boy's sentimental attachment to a terrorist gun is also a leitmotif in Dario Morgante's *La compagna P38.* Ermes and his comrades also take the Resistance as their point of reference when joining the group: 'la città dovrebbe essere come la montagna per i partigiani' (Morgante 2007, p. 209); 'Sarà come la guerra partigiana? Entreremo nelle città in testa a colonne armate di compagni?' (p. 65). Moreover, Ermes' enrolment in the Red Brigades closely resembles that of the young Pin in the partisan brigades in Italo Calvino's *The Path to the Spiders' Nest* (1947). In the same way that Calvino's Pin steals a gun and engages in the armed struggle after meeting the elder and courageous partisan Lupo Rosso, indeed, Morgante's Ermes finds a gun while hiding during some clashes and joins the armed struggle after meeting Mario Moretti. Despite these similarities, Morgante's representation of terrorism differs significantly from Calvino's representation of the Resistance. As Calvino himself wrote in the famous 1964 preface to *The Path to the Spiders' Nest*, through the eyes of Pin he wanted to distance himself from an epic and hagiographic narration of the Resistance (Calvino 1991, p. 1192). In contrast, Morgante plays on the magnification of the Years of Lead as years of great political action.

With regards to the reworking of the Resistance in the representation of terrorism, it is worth mentioning some passages from Valerio Lucarelli's *Vorrei che il futuro fosse oggi.* In this non-fictional essay, the author elaborates many of the views that inform his novel *Buio*

Rivoluzione, bringing to full expression a mythography of leftist terrorists. Lucarelli opens his essay on the NAP with an excerpt from a poem by Bertolt Brecht entitled 'To those who were born later'. The poem originally addressed future generations living after WWII and exhorted them to remember the value of the Resistance to Nazism. In the excerpt quoted, Brecht begs posterity to sympathetically remember those who made use of violence, clarifying that it was an inescapable choice:

> Voi, che emergete dalla marea/ nella quale noi siamo annegati/ ricordate/ quando parlate delle nostre debolezze/ anche i tempi bui ai quali voi siete scampati./ … Ah, noi/ che volevamo preparare il terreno per la gentilezza/ noi non potevamo essere gentili./ Ma voi, quando sarà venuto il momento/ in cui l'uomo è amico dell'uomo/ ricordate noi/ con indulgenza. (Lucarelli 2010, p. 6)

Lucarelli adapts the words of Brecht to leftist terrorists, creating a comparison between members of the NAP and the partisans. Like the partisans, leftist terrorists addressed future generations, like Lucarelli's, by exhorting them to the duty of memory. With a good dose of paternalism, leftist terrorists describe themselves as the fathers of today's freedom and, to all extents, as national heroes who gave their life for a better world. Despite Lucarelli's programmatic intention not to develop an 'aurea mitizzante' and to 'scivolare in un'epopea deformante', to rather 'comprendere, merabolizzare, crescere' (Lucarelli 2010, p. 110), the lexicon and rhetoric he employs to talk about the NAP is passionate and highly rhetorical. Lucarelli describes the NAP as 'un gruppo di giovani che rifiuta i titoli di coda della propria esperienza e non è disposto a recedere di un sol passo' (p. 160). 'In quegli anni', he writes, 'era un'intera generazione a ribellarsi' (p. 167). Their 'desiderio inappagato di giustizia' (p. 168) was a 'frammento di eterna ribellione' (p. 197) which gave new impulse to the 'eterna rivolta degli ultimi' (p. 190).

Lucarelli's words lead us to a core aspect of the idealisation of leftist terrorists of the Years of Lead, namely, its centrality in the assessment of today's impotence. There is a ceaseless comparison, in my corpus, between the 'national epic' of the Years of Lead and

the present. A book filled with political fervour, *Vorrei che il futuro fosse oggi* ends with some highly pessimistic considerations on the present. 'Non è ancora scoccato', writes Lucarelli, 'e chissà se mai scoccherà, il tempo in cui l'uomo è amico dell'uomo. … forse viviamo nuovi tempi di sola ingiustizia' (p. 191). 'Svanita per sempre l'illusione che l'uomo, che tutti gli uomini, tornassero al centro dell'universo … si apre per gli ultimi la prospettiva finale. Quella del baratro' (p. 196), he concludes, with some rhetorically apocalyptic overtones.

The NAP, Lucarelli suggests, were part of the last generation who believed in the possibility of changing things for the better. Their violence originated from a just rebellion against state violence, an issue that Lucarelli links to his time through the death of Stefano Cucchi (p. 185), the G8, and the Diaz events (p. 192). But the present is unready to inherit their legacy; victimhood no longer leads anymore to rebellion: 'questo non appare certo come il tempo della rivolta. Rassegnazione e scoramento tiranneggiano' (p. 194). In his essay, Lucarelli ascribes the incapability of his generation to 'act' against injustice to the fact that it never experienced a time of war. By quoting Enzensberger[19], he writes:

> io che ho vissuto la dittatura e la guerra so che in una situazione di emergenza tutto cambia. … le nuove generazioni … non avendo vissuto grandi crisi sono come assenti. (ibid.)

Here, Lucarelli reiterates the sacrificial rhetoric of the modern saga of generations, in which the possibility of giving life for a cause determines the historical 'agency' of a generation. In this light, not having fought a war and not having risked life appears almost as a generational guilt, a stigma to bear, and, above all, as a condition of historical 'uselessness'. To further illustrate this narrative, it is worth quoting a passage from Ravera Rafele's *Il senso della lotta,* in which Tommaso, the son of a leftist terrorist, broods over the condition of his generation, describing the very fact of being alive as a generational guilt:

---

[19] Lucarelli does not mention his primary source, which is an interview to Enzensberger published on the Italian local newspaper *La Gazzetta di Parma,* following the publication of Enzensberger's book *Hammerstein oder Der Eigensinn* (2008). See Mannoni 2008.

Sono vivo perché non mi si è impigliato un piede nella fune dell'àncora mentre la lanciavo in mare.
Sono vivo perché quello spigolo mi ha soltanto sfiorato.
Sono vivo perché il Monte Bianco non è franato mentre lo guardavo.
Sono vivo perché l'esodo di Ferragosto è diventato un flipper di macchine mentre io ero già sulla spiaggia.
Sono vivo perché il serpente fuggito dallo zoo è stato appena catturato dalla Protezione Civile.
Sono vivo perché il gorgo e il mulinello erano appena un po' più in là.
Sono vivo perché ero troppo giovane per la battaglia della Marna.
Sono vivo perché l'Isis mi ha mancato.
Sono vivo perché ero troppo a ovest per Srebrenica, Chernobyl, per la guerra in Ossezia.
Sono vivo perché ero troppo a est per finire in una sparatoria a Ciudad Juárez, a Bogotà, o in un college texano.
Poi c'è chi muore perché se la cerca, e io non appartengo a quella categoria.
Gli esploratori, i lanciatori di coltelli, gli incantatori di serpenti, i militari di carriera, i piloti di motociclismo, i rapinatori. E i terroristi. (Ravera Rafele 2019, pp. 259–260)

Compared to the political turmoil of the Years of Lead, the present is seen as an everlasting aftermath of great political moments, a time in which everything has been done and there is no future to fight for. In my corpus, the comparison between the Years of Lead and the present is also a comparison of virility. In this case too, the authors reproduce an imagery that was central to the construction of generations in the Italian national discourse, where the sacrificial contribution to national history was proportional to masculinity. Forever relegated to the status of 'sons', with no war to fight and no active role in the country's political life, in my corpus the male characters living in the present, often the biological sons of terrorists, suffer from complexes of a sexual nature. This comparison brings to full expression the biological implications of the notion of 'generation', as well as the underlying implications of the 'impotence' through which this generation of authors perceives the present. In this light, the protagonist of Ravera Rafele's *Il senso della lotta* is a man in his late thirties who suffers from anxiety, has an unsatisfying social life, and bears the burden of his 'leggendario padre terrorista' (2017, p. 363):

Immagino che lei sia stata una delle molte amanti di mio padre, una delle tante ragazzine adoranti che pendevano dalle sue labbra durante le assemblee.
Già. Gli anni Settanta.

> Mi piace l'autoindulgenza che emanano loro quando pronunciano la locuzione "anni Settanta".
> Quelli della mia età hanno lo stesso sguardo quando dicono la parola "crisi". Ogni epoca ha le sue parole-confessionali. (Ravera Rafele 2017, p. 375)

Similarly, in the short story 'Il segno di Giona' (Raimo 2004, pp. 144–201), collected in *Dov'eri tu quando le stelle del mattino gioivano in coro?*, Raimo devotes a long, detailed, and imaginative account of all the ways in which the protagonist, who talks in the first person, has learned to masturbate (pp. 163–166). This long description is framed with an assertion of a parricidal desire, 'a turno consideravo di uccidere mio padre' (p. 164), and an unsatisfied drive to become a revolutionary:

> era l'età in cui cominciavo a pensare a me stesso come un *dissidente*. A scuola studiavo la rivoluzione francese e quella industriale. Di notte pensavo di essere Ned Ludd, l'eroe che spacca le macchine. (p. 166)

These examples highlight all the gender implications of the idealisation of revolutionary violence and of the problematic self-comparison that this idealisation brings with it. These characters undergo a crisis of masculinity assessed according to rigid parameters in which 'revolutionary agency' plays a central role: 'La rivoluzione aveva cancellato l'interiorità. Voi oggi siete diversi. Per la tua generazione è tutto il contrario: siete ossessionati dal privato, da tutto ciò che è emotivo' (Ravera Rafele 2017, p. 129).

In such troublesome construction of terrorists through an imagery of fatherhood, the self-construction of leftist terrorists of the 1970s should also be taken into account. The following is a passage from an interview with the terrorist Mario Moretti by the journalists Carla Mosca and Rossana Rossanda, in which Moretti describes the so-called 'Comune di Piazza Stuparich', in Milan:

> Non c'era scissione tra vita politica e vita personale, preparare un volantino e badare ai bambini. … A un certo punto, quasi ci fossimo dati un segnale, le coppie si sono messe a fare figli. … Lia, la mia compagna di allora, e io mettiamo in cantiere Marcello e quasi contemporaneamente altri hanno la stessa idea. Il risultato è che la Comune si riempie di neonati. Mettiamo assieme anche una dozzina di marmocchi dei compagni che girano

intorno alla Comune e organizziamo un asilo nido in piena regola. Me ne sono occupato anch'io, per qualche tempo. (Moretti 2019, pp. 72–73)

In this passage, Moretti validates his actions by presenting himself as a 'father', where 'fatherhood' appears to be intrinsically intertwined with being a revolutionary. In these lines, political activism and sexual fecundity interpenetrate each other: Moretti describes himself as a politically and biologically 'productive' man, who undertakes the responsibility of parenthood and takes care of the 'dozzina di marmocchi' in the Commune. He presents, in sum, the very act of becoming a father as a material consequence of his political action, a duty to take things upon himself, and in which life appears at the service of politics and not the other way around, as indicated by the 'builder' metaphor – 'mettere in cantiere' – that the SIT-Siemens worker/Moretti uses to describe the act of conception. Moretti's words demonstrate how normativity ironically permeates the language and imagery of those who had the ambition of dismantling the system, as Pasolini wrote in his poem 'Il PCI ai giovani!' (Pasolini 1972, pp. 157–158) and in *Petrolio*'s note 67 (Pasolini 1992, pp. 262–264).

In their stories, Raimo and Paolin also formulate their troubled relationship with leftist terrorists in the 1970s in terms of Oedipal envy, namely of a resentment and rivalry towards those who are identified as 'fathers', that cause the sons' frustration because of their possessions. In his preface to Massimo Recalcati's *Patria senza padri* (2013), to which I shall return in the next chapter, Raimo makes the claim that his generation experienced a void of political dreams after the end of ideologies, suffering a number of injustices without means to react. For this reason, he argues, he ended up hating the fathers:

una generazione come la mia, quella dei nati negli anni Settanta, … ha sperato che un altro mondo fosse possibile per essere costretta ad assistere al massacro della polizia in una scuola e all'assassinio di un ragazzo di vent'anni, ha accettato di vivere in un'età postideologica, [è] insomma una generazione disillusa che, stretta dalle spirali della storia, non è mai riuscita a coltivare alcun incanto politico. … si è risolta a essere scettica di fronte a coloro che invece raccontano di un tempo diverso, non dominato dalle passioni tristi, in cui si lottava per le strade, in cui cambiare il mondo era una possibilità

a disposizione non solo dell'immaginazione ma anche dell'azione …. Per questo da bravo Edipo ho odiato questi padri …. (Raimo in Recalcati 2013, pp. 7–8)

Similarly, in his autofictional *Il mio nome è Legione* (2009), Paolin stages an encounter between himself and the terrorist Renato Curcio, whom he compares to his father 'Curcio con la sua Lacoste …, pensa allora Demetrio … rassomiglia a suo padre e potrebbe benissimo essere sposato con sua madre' (Paolin 2009, p. 45). In these pages, Paolin imagines meeting Curcio at the Torino Book Fair, where the former terrorist is presenting his last memoir. The author recounts his dissatisfaction at seeing Curcio turned into a celebrity and perfectly integrated into the market system (pp. 44–46), describing how this caused a myth to collapse, as if Curcio, the 'idealised father' disappointed his expectations:

Sarebbe stato meglio per Curcio … crepare rivoluzionario e sbagliato …. Fosse morto in uno scontro a fuoco o per le angustie della vita carceraria sarebbe stato meno patetico. … È Renato Curcio, purtroppo ancora vivo. (pp. 45–46)

Thus, the author problematizes the sense of impotence that he and his coevals felt as 'sons' of Curcio and his comrades: 'Questo è il mio dopoguerra e Renato Curcio ne è la causa … : lui è il colpevole politico come i miei genitori sono i colpevoli privati' (pp. 46–47). In this case too, Paolin draws on the figure of Oedipus, asserting the need for his generation to emancipate itself from the idealization of and the envy towards their fathers: 'Ma noi non faremo come Edipo' (pp. 48–49). In particular, Paolin suggests, his generation should not feel guilty for the failure of those revolutionary dreams: 'Nella città si è liberata la peste. E di questo, davvero, noi non abbiamo colpa' (ibid.). Raimo and Paolin are the only authors from my corpus who explicitly draw on the Oedipus complex to problematize their relationship with the protagonists of the 1970s. Yet, their reflections offer another useful insight into the link between the idealization of leftist terrorists of the Years of Lead and the rhetoric of self-victimization through which our authors describe their generation.

In this respect, it is worth concluding this chapter with a passage from Raimo's short story 'Quel fiore siete voi', from the collection *Latte* (Raimo 2001, pp. 150–182), where the author intertwines the memory of the Years of Lead with the representation of his generation's bewilderment and victimization during some anti-globalization protests in the 2000s. In this short story, the author exemplifies the condition of disorientation and helplessness of his generation through the literary characters of Berta and Gianni, who are expecting a baby but are reluctant at the idea of becoming parents; Berta wants to have an abortion. Here, the author does not tackle the abortion as a matter of female self-determination, but as the result of a mutual feeling of being unready to take responsibility for a new life: 'forever sons', Berta and Gianni feel incapable of becoming parents. They suffer a perennial Peter Pan syndrome and experience a condition of existential immobility with no potential for a new beginning, no propulsion towards the future.

In the story, Raimo imagines a sort of *deus ex machina* intervening in the story to break the deadlock of the situation. This *deus ex machina* has the name and the voice of Pier Vittorio Tondelli, the writer who gave voice, in the 1980s, to the first generation living after the Years of Lead. In the story, Berta dreams about having a conversation with Tondelli, who blames her for her self-victimizing rhetoric and encourages her to believe in the possibility, for her generation, of becoming emancipated from the past and looking to the future. Raimo draws here from Tondelli's words in a 1985 article published in the journal *Linus*, which gives the title to his short story. In this article, Tondelli draws on the image of a flower taken from a story by John Cheever to exhort his generation to revive from the past, devastating past decade and to imagine a new future. In the following passage, characterized by moralizing and patronizing tones, Raimo turns Tondelli's words into an explicit accusation of his own generation for adopting a posture of self-victimization and for being 'unproductive':

Berta, la tua idea di innocenza è diventata l'ideologia dell'innocenza! … Pura, innocente, preferisci essere infelice come una bestia sterile piuttosto che colpevole di qualsiasi cosa. … Ti ricordi, aveva detto, quel pezzo che avevo scritto sugli scarti? … dicevo, Quel fiore sta lì, quel fiore siete voi. Ora, dopo dodici anni, sai cosa è successo? Che quel fiore sta ancora lì, che magari è cresciuto su una terra radioattiva …, e allora? Che cosa vuoi fare distruggere i fiori perché forse non sono puri e innocenti come vorresti? E tenerti il deserto? (Raimo 2001, pp. 180–181)

CHAPTER 6. Hypermodern Impotence: Conflict and Signification

The previous chapters examined the three patterns through which our authors turned victimhood into a cultural paradigm for their generation, which they depict through a narrative of impotence and lack of agency. I suggested that this narrative originates from a difficulty, for this generation of writers, to reconceptualize the modes and strategies of intellectual and political participation in the globalized present. When appropriating the words of Pasolini as a victimized *intellettuale vate,* reading the first global movement through a rhetoric of victimization and lack of agency, and idealising leftist terrorism as generational revolution as opposed to the 'void' of the present, our authors rely unsuccessfully on paradigms of interpretation for politics and history that are typical of national political culture no longer useful to understand the present. The present, as Ricoeur writes, is a time in which 'the primary reference of historical memory continues to be the nation' (2004, p. 396) but in which the growth of a globalized environment has hastened the need to reconceptualize many of our paradigms of interpretation of the world. From this perspective, I suggested that these works from the 'return to reality' are 'hypermodern' because they exaggerate and 'consummate' (Lipovetsky 2015, p. 157) some characteristic traits of modern culture, not because they abandon postmodernism in a militant fashion (Donnarumma 2014).

To discuss how the generational imagery of 1970s terrorism, as illustrated by the three patterns of victimhood, relates to the question of realism in contemporary Italian literature's 'return to reality', this chapter examines the relationship between impotence and hypermodernity in more detail, engaging with the Lacanian notion of the 'disappearance of the father' (1969). The French psychoanalyst uses this notion to describe the dissolution of the symbolic function of the authority in modern culture. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the father is linked to castration and castration is linked to the entry into the symbolic order,

comprising language and signification. Here, I discuss how the Lacanian psychoanalysis has been applied to the Italian Years of Lead by the Italian psychoanalyst Massimo Recalcati (Balicco 2011; Recalcati 2013) and how one of the authors, whom I consider an important voice in my corpus, refers to Recalcati's elaboration of Lacan as one of the sources of inspiration in relation to his work on the Years of Lead and the impotence felt by his generation. Hence, I discuss how, in literary works by authors of the so-called 'transition' generation, the 'return to reality' refers to the literary expression of a hypermodern non-conflictual relationship with, and the consequent non-signification of, reality.

6.1 The Lacanian Disappearance of the Father

In a brief note following an intervention by Michel De Certeau at the Freudian School of Paris in 1968, during the contestation years, the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan coined the notion of the 'disappearance of the father' (*évaporation du père*) (Lacan 1970, p. 84). Through this formula, Lacan identified a cultural process that started in the seventeenth century, with the rise of modern science, which consisted of a dissolution of the symbolic principle of authority and of the consequent experience of castration. Drawing on Freud, Lacan identified authority in the symbolic figure of the father, which he saw as the Law as opposed to desire, namely, as the experience of castration in the subject's drive to self-satisfaction.

In Lacanian theory, Law and desire are two structural cornerstones of the subject's identity: desire is a vital impulse that can only survive in a ceaseless, conflictual tension with the Law. Lacan argues that it was only by virtue of this tension that the subject could access the Symbolic. One of the three fundamental dimensions of human psychic subjectivity, together with the Imaginary and the Real, the Symbolic comprises the linguistic and cultural sphere. It is the register of signification, in charge of producing sense and making meaning of existence. With the disappearance of the Law, namely of a recognizable experience of a

limit to the subject's drive to self-satisfaction, the subject experiences a collapse of the tension between Law and desire, and a consequent crisis in the symbolization of reality. This lack of symbolization, Lacan argues, causes the experience of reality to be traumatic, and to find expression in the form of a 'repetition', a notion to which I will return more extensively in the next chapter.

In Lacan's view, the disappearance of the father is the product of modern progress, whereby the subject has been emancipated from the experience of castration, of encountering limits to its drive towards self-satisfaction. In his essay *La famille* (1938), where he also writes on the decline of the paternal function, Lacan argues that this decline constitutes the great psychological crisis of modern times, and that it was at the origin of the very emergence of psychoanalysis itself (Lacan 2001, pp. 60–61). Most importantly, in this essay Lacan describes the effects of the decline of the Law in terms of impotence and utopia: the main neuroses of modern times, he argues, impotence and utopia both consist in the perceived impossibility, for the subject, of encountering and signifying reality:

> Sinister godmothers at the cradle of neurosis, impotence and utopia enclosing his ambition – whether it stifles in him the creations awaited by the world into which he came, or whether in the object he proposes for his revolt – he fails to recognize his own movement. (Lacan 1981, p. 200)

The Lacanian idea of the decline and disappearance of the father can help us to define more precisely the relationship between the generational narrative impotence, discussed in the previous chapter, and realism. Before I explore this point further, however, let us consider how the Lacanian notion of the disappearance of the father relates to Italian political terrorism of the 1970s. Moreover, let us look at how this notion has been applied to Italian

literature on the Years of Lead and at how it can be applied to the specific corpus of this thesis.

6.2 Reading the Years of Lead Through Lacan

The Lacanian psychoanalysis has been applied to the Italian Years of Lead by the Italian psychoanalyst Massimo Recalcati (Balicco 2011; Recalcati 2013). Recalcati argues that revolutionary violence in the 1970s constituted a refusal of a conflictual relationship with the Law, whereby violence lays in the attempt to uncompromisingly satisfy the revolutionary ideals without engaging in constructive conflict with authorities and institutions (Recalcati in Balicco 2011).

In *Cosa resta del padre? La paternità dell'epoca ipermoderna* (2011), Recalcati discusses the difference between conflict and violence as follows (pp. 67–69). Contrary to violence, Recalcati argues, conflict belongs to the symbolic order – namely to the realm of signification – and it builds on a recognition of alterity rather than on its annihilation. Conflict, Recalcati writes, originates from the collision between the drive to self-satisfaction and the limits of this drive, these limits constituting the alterity within conflict. As such, conflict builds on an imaginative tension beyond the reality of facts, which makes conflict a constitutive part of culture. In contrast, Recalcati writes, violence actuates a refusal of the symbolic order, inasmuch as it rests on the elimination of any obstacles to its realization. Once again, this idea proves the righteousness of Pasolini's claim that 'il potere è sempre … realistico' (1992, p. 461) and 'esclude dalla sua prassi tutto ciò che possa venir conosciuto attraverso Visioni' (ibid.).

Violence, Recalcati argues, aims at eliminating the tension between Law and desire, in a full and uncompromising ambition to satisfy desire at all costs. In this light, Recalcati argues, violence acts out in reality what it is refused within the symbolic order. Through this lens, Recalcati approaches Italian political terrorism in the 1970s. In his book entitled *Patria*

senza padri. Psicopatologia della politica italiana (2013), consisting of a long interview with the writer Christian Raimo, Recalcati writes:

> Not only has terrorism been the revolt of sons against fathers—a revolt that remains confined within an Oedipal and neurotic framework. Terrorism introduces a break, a hole in the symbolic. Terrorism takes shape outside of a democratic dialectic, and is reified as a deranged paternity without fathers (courts without judges, death sentences without trials…) that acts out in reality what it rejected on a symbolic level. (Recalcati 2013, p. 47)

According to Recalcati's interpretation, terrorist violence constitutes a negation of the symbolic relevance of conflict, seen not only as political struggle, but also as a wider relationship to reality, a way to react to the limits that reality imposes upon us. As Recalcati writes on the '77 movement: 'perversion lies in the inability to imagine a possible alliance between law and desire, by identifying the law as the enemy, the obstacle to the fulfillment of desire … .' (in Balicco 2011, p. 168). As I discussed in Chapter 5, modern political culture conceives of conflict through a distinctively patriarchal frame of reference, whereby each generation feels compelled to symbolically 'kill' the fathers as a means of self-proclamation. Within this frame of reference, the Lacanian Law – that is, the limit that defines desire and carries an ethical function – coincides with the generation of the fathers. Recalcati's reading of the Years of Lead illustrates how the configuration of Italian political terrorism as parricidal takes this modern understanding of conflict to an extreme.

Among the authors of my corpus, Silvia Ballestra describes the 'post-traumatic stress disorder' that follows this escalation. In her novel *I giorni della Rotonda* (2009), which only indirectly mentions terrorism, Ballestra portrays the failure of the revolutionary ideals that animated the 1970s and the diffusion of heroin throughout the 1980s: 'certe volte nella storia', Ballestra writes referring to the 1970s, 'si creavano delle accelerazioni, dei vortici

scuri, in grado di ingoiare tutto, il bene e l'assurdo male insieme, e lasciare solo vuoto e silenzio' (Ballestra 2009, p. 36).

Against this backdrop, Recalcati's reading of Italian political terrorism in the 1970s can help to give a first interpretation of the impotence felt by the authors of this thesis, which they express by turning victimhood into a cultural paradigm for their generation. In their works, these authors express the impotence and consequent crisis in the symbolization of reality that characterizes the end of conflict. For them, the encounter with reality is traumatic, and the cultural paradigm of victimhood illustrates this trauma. My contention is that, in this corpus, the so-called 'return to reality' provides this trauma with literary expression grounded on the traumatic repetition of what has not been symbolized.

6.3 The Consummation of the Patriarchal Conflict

The Lacanian notion of the disappearance of the father has been applied to Italian literature on 1970s terrorism by the literary critic Gabriele Vitello (2013a), who adapted it to describe the decline of the authoritative and pedagogical role of intellectuals in contemporary Italy. In his monograph, Vitello focuses on some literary representations of terrorism within a familial frame of reference – namely when authors represent terrorists as relatives or lovers – and criticizes this representation as a refusal, by the authors, to deal with the public and political relevance of Italian political terrorism. In Vitello's view, this results from a crisis of the authoritative and pedagogical role of writers and intellectuals in Italian culture: the 'privatization' of terrorism, he argues, testifies to 'writers and intellectuals giving up their traditionally pedagogical role' (p. 52).

To support this thesis, Vitello engages with the Lacanian notion of the disappearance of the father, adapting it to the decline of the authoritative and pedagogical role of intellectuals in contemporary Italy, and making the paternal function coincide with the public function of intellectuals. By doing so, Vitello relies on an archetypal and gendered notion of

193

the father as the one responsible for the public and cultural sphere as opposed to the private, instinctual domain of the mother: 'unlike the maternal principle', Vitello writes,

> whose nature is fundamentally instinctual, the paternal principle is a cultural factor, which results from the taming of the male animal. The paternal principle is not a natural factor, but rather an adoption that requires intention and awareness. (p. 47).

Quoting the psychoanalyst Luigi Zoja, Vitello discusses the relationship between culture and the male figure as follows:

> the beginning of human society coincides with a revolution brought about by males …. … the proto-men did not agree, as Freud argued, to attack the patriarch who monopolized the females, but rather, they agreed to stop attacking each other and share the females in an organized fashion. (ibid.).

As these lines show, Vitello defines the Lacanian paternal function according to a patriarchal and gendered cultural apparatus. Moreover, Vitello shares with other critics – and several of our authors, as the chapter on Pasolini showed – a preoccupation with the pedagogical, authoritative figure of the politically engaged intellectual who plays a central role in the nation's public sphere. In the present study, I suggest reading this notion in a more neutral and less gendered way, as the encounter of a limit in the experience of reality, which triggers a conflictual tension and, with it, a process of signification of reality.

A neutral and non-gendered reading of the paternal function was already in Lacan's theorizations. In his seventeenth seminar, Lacan argues that the signifier of castration is attributed to the father, but that it may take 'whatever form' (Lacan 2007, p. 130): 'Castration', Lacan writes 'is a real operation that is introduced through the incidence of a signifier, no matter which, into the sexual relation [*rapport du sexe*].' (pp. 128–129, original italics) and this operation constitutes 'the only cause of desire' (p. 129). Namely, of the drive that, in its conflict with the Law, enables the subject to make meaning of reality. As Massimo Recalcati

also suggested, 'the Father is not a matter of gender or blood ties' (2011, p. 6), but rather consists of 'the virtuous experience of limit' (p. 5).

With regards to the attribution of the castration signifier to the phallus – which has drawn criticism from more than one feminist thinker[20] –, for Lacan, the phallic signifier is neutral and attributed to the male figure through associations related to the Oedipal drama, in which 'the maternal and paternal Oedipal personas are psychical-subjective positions, namely, socio-cultural (i.e., non-natural, non-biological) roles that potentially can be played by any number of possible persons of various sexes/genders.' (Johnston 2018). '[P]hallus', Lacan writes in *Écrits* (1966), 'forms without regard to the anatomical distinction between the sexes' (Lacan 2006, p. 576). As Isabelle Alfandary recently discussed (2019), some might see in his thought an almost 'Butlerian *avant la lettre*' (p. 37) distinction between sex and gender, for which the gender identity is not necessarily shaped by biological anatomy. Lacan's theoretical apparatus, in sum, already offers the basic principles to define the paternal function as the experience of a limit, a bound that cannot be exceeded if not by means of transgression, a prohibition that fuels desire and, because of this, carries ethical and epistemological significance.

Such a definition of the Lacanian father is important for my own application of Lacan's psychoanalysis to Italian literature on the Years of Lead, which differs from that offered by Gabriele Vitello. In the works by authors from the 'transition' generation, the impotence and traumatic experience of reality arise from the authors' inability to conceptualize castration and conflict beyond a purely patriarchal frame of reference. As Recalcati writes, the present is a time in which conflict takes shape in new and different forms, and in which the need for new ethical paradigms fosters a re-establishment of the Law on a new basis: 'our moment,

---

[20] See, for example, Luce Irigaray (1975 and 1977); Judith Butler, who criticized the Lacanian thought as 'marked as masculine, and, hence, [as] the basis for an anthropocentric and androcentric epistemological imperialism' (Butler 1993, p. 75); Rosi Braidotti, who described Lacan's theory as 'out-dated as a polaroid shot of a world that has since moved on' (Braidotti 2013, p. 189).

Recalcati writes, 'forces us … to update this Oedipal model of the relationship between Law and Desire' (Recalcati 2013b, p. 70).

Among the authors of my corpus, Christian Raimo engages with Recalcati's Lacanian reading of Italian politics. In his preface to Recalcati's *Patria senza padri*, Raimo claims that he is a voracious reader of Recalcati's essays, books, and articles (Raimo in Recalcati 2013, pp. 6–7). Raimo goes as far as to say that, over time, Recalcati's re-reading of Lacan had become with years 'necessary' for him (p. 6) and that the book *Patria senza padri* originated from an explicit request he made for Recalcati to write an expressively political book, that he considered to be a generational request more than an individual one (p. 7).

In the preface to this book, Raimo also maintains that, when looking back to the 1970s, his generation felt impotent and lacking in agency. In this paragraph filled with nostalgic tones for the never-experienced decade of the 1970s, Raimo makes the claim that his generation felt an Oedipal envy towards those who experienced the contestation years:

> una generazione come la mia, quella dei nati negli anni Settanta, … non è mai riuscita a coltivare alcun incanto politico. … si è risolta a essere scettica di fronte a coloro che invece raccontano di un tempo diverso, non dominato dalle passioni tristi, in cui si lottava per le strade, in cui cambiare il mondo era una possibilità a disposizione non solo dell'immaginazione ma anche dell'azione …. Per questo da bravo Edipo ho odiato questi padri…. Da novello Telemaco sono andato in cerca di padri che sapessero reinterpretare un ruolo diverso: Massimo Recalcati è uno di questi. (Raimo in Recalcati 2013, pp. 7–8)

Among the authors of my corpus, Christian Raimo is perhaps the most open and outspoken on the generational condition that this part of my thesis examines. Yet, his words offer a powerful lens onto the other works in my corpus, both in relation to the urge to demonstrate the importance and public authority of writers and, more specifically, to the projection of the Years of Lead onto the present. In fact, what the works I examined so far share is a common inability to conceive of conflict beyond a patriarchal frame of reference. The following passage, in which one of the protagonists of *2005 dopo Cristo* broods over the kidnapping

of Berlusconi, exemplifies how the mythologization of 1970s political terrorism brings with it an incapability of signifying the present, of seeing spaces of agency within it:

> Non ricordava di essere mai scappata di casa e di aver mai detto a suo padre che era un uomo di merda. *Ci dev'essere un errore,* Cresciuta senza uccidere i suoi genitori, affrontava il nulla: cosa c'è domani? … ma Dateci Le Armi. (Babette Factory 2005, p. 264)

By the same token, the following passage from Christian Raimo's *Latte* shows how the Years of Lead are seen to be the last moment in which younger generations experienced conflict, leaving those of the present with no means to make meaning of their life experience:

> Quando l'avevo conosciuto stava preparando una tesi in scienze politiche …. Il titolo era: La morte di Moro e di Berlinguer nell'immaginario collettivo, iconografico, e psicanalitico italiano. … riscriveva la storia degli anni Settanta e inizio anni Ottanta come una sorta di periodo di latenza di un popolo che soffre di un atroce complesso edipico. E la nostra, dieci anni dopo, era una storia piccola, lunga e sottilmente vissuta, di quelle in cui ci si scambia metri cubi e metri cubi di anidride carbonica, intrisa dei batteri che cambiano ogni stagione, in cui quando uno dei due si scorda chi è, l'altro sta lì a un passo per rispiegargli tutto il personaggio da capo. (Raimo 2001, pp. 34–35)

Along the same lines, we can read the characters of Raimo's short stories. Sometimes recognizable as Raimo himself, these characters bask in a state of inertia and eternal adolescence. Depression, self-centred brooding, and self-flagellation are the main motifs of these stories. Characters spend their time idly, in a 'dimensione d'ovatta senza identità e senza tempo' (Raimo 2004, p. 60). Their 'sonno ricalcato, un'ipnosi eterizzata a forza di abitudine. Nessuna inclinazione reale' (Raimo 2001, p. 143) brings them to wonder 'e se … il segreto della vita fosse solo di annoiarsi?' (Raimo 2001, p. 138–139) and to eventually conclude that 'A nessuno interessa niente, … è solo questione di stimoli nervosi. … Siamo stimoli, accumuli di stimoli con la capacità di chiederci perché' (Raimo 2001, p. 139), or even to refuse the very idea of existing: 'Alle volte non vorrei essere un uomo, non vorrei essere neanche un vertebrato, nessun tipo di animale senziente' (Raimo 2004, p. 66), if not to lazily speculate on the idea of suicide: 'Sarebbe illuminante il suicidio soltanto se dopo si potesse

muginarci' (Raimo 2001, p. 142). In both of Raimo's collections, all this is presented as a collective, generational condition: 'mi sentivo parte di un unico spirito, un unico spirito stupido e immondo' (Raimo 2004, p. 180).

The Lacanian notion of the disappearance of the father provides us with a meaningful lens to read the 'hypermodern' nature of the impotence that this generation of authors expresses. Because these authors unsuccessfully rely on a modern, patriarchal reading of conflict, they perceive the present as a time with no conflict. For them, the experience of reality is traumatic and impossible to signify, and the cultural paradigm of victimhood expresses this condition.

In my view, this hypermodern impotence can be taken as an interpretive key for the 'return to reality'. When I first introduced this critical debate and literary trend, I mentioned how Raffaele Donnarumma considers this trend to be a hypermodern, militant response to the postmodern: 'if hypermodernity consists primarily of a disenchanted and critical response to postmodern illusions, there is no shortage of clues in literature.' (Donnarumma 2011, p. 22). In his view, contemporary Italian writers' interest in political topics, of which political terrorism in the 1970s is one, offers a 'sharp inversion compared to previous decades', in which 'writers and intellectuals increasingly [feel] the need to speak out directly (i.e. without ironic or metaliterary disguises) about the present.' (ibid.).

In the light of the considerations expressed above, I suggest tackling hypermodernity from a different perspective, as Massimo Recalcati did in his essay *L'uomo senza inconscio. Figure della buona clinica psicanalitica* (2010), which Raimo claims to have, like many others, devoured (Raimo in Recalcati 2013, p. 6). In this essay, Recalcati took Lipovetsky's definition of hypermodernity as the main framework for his analysis (pp. 1–70), describing hypermodernity as a condition of impotence (Recalcati 2010, pp. 45–46). Drawing on Freud and on his recovery by Lacan, who argues in his eleventh seminar (1973) that 'the unconscious is structured like a language' (Lacan 1998, p. 20), Recalcati defines the

'unconscious' as the realm of signification. Hence, he defines the 'man without the unconscious' as the subject living after the disappearance of the father, in the hypermodern absence of limits against which to exercise the imaginative tension of desire, with no access to the signifying dimension of the Symbolic. In the next chapter, let us examine how the 'return to reality' provides the hypermodern condition with literary expression, and how this literary expression relates to realism.

PART III. TERRORISM AND REALISM IN THE 'RETURN TO REALITY'

Introduction

In the last two chapters of this thesis, I examine how my corpus relates to the so-called 'return to reality' in contemporary Italian literature, discussing how the question of victimhood casts light on this relationship. Chapter 7 discusses how, in the corpus under scrutiny in this thesis, a preoccupation with the practical usefulness of literature informs the expression of political commitment by this generation of authors. Drawing on some discussion on realism by Roland Barthes (1968), Eric Downing (2000), and Walter Siti (2013), I argue that the so-called 'return to reality' in unrelated from the recovery of some kind of literary realism. Rather, in this corpus the 'return to reality' consists of a lack of symbolization of conflict, leading to a reiteration, in literary depictions of victimhood, of the reality of violence, with a stereotypical and underdeveloped depiction of the victim as the 'other' in the conflict and a 'limit' to self-affirmation.

Chapter 8, finally, introduces two examples in the corpus in which the authors devise the literary character of the victim in an original and unconventional manner, deconstructing a stereotypical imagery of victimhood. In their works, Giorgio Vasta and Giorgio Fontana symbolize conflict by conceptualizing the victim as an obstacle to the realization of violence and a source of imagination. I highlight the ethical and political dimensions of this representation, showing how, in fact, they do not necessarily relate to literary realism.

CHAPTER 7. Return to Reality and the Return of the Real: Realism and Repetition

When I examined the depiction of victims as literary characters, I showed how the authors of this corpus draw on a variety of different styles and modes of representations, often unrealistic. In this light, I suggested that it would be inappropriate to see a renewed interest in literary realism in the so-called 'return to reality' and that, in relation to my corpus, the 'return to reality' rather lies in a lack of symbolization and a poor figurative re-working of reality. To explore this point more closely and figure out how this lack of symbolization can be conceptualized as a traumatic 'repetition' of the reality of violence, I will in this chapter draw on some critical examinations of the notion of literary realism, respectively by Roland Barthes (1968), Eric Downing (2000), and Walter Siti (2013).

In different ways and referring to different periods in literary history, Barthes, Downing, and Siti focused on the notion of literary realism to discuss how the effort of signifying reality takes shape in literature. In particular, they discussed how writers employing realism negotiate between the compulsion to reproduce a previously encountered reality, depicting reality 'as it is', and the resistance to this compulsion, re-working of reality's evidence through the exploration of its less evident and visible aspects: a conflictual interplay from which, in their view, literary realism stems.

Barthes and Downing based their discussion of realism on a corpus of nineteenth-century writings, referring to French authors like Gustave Flaubert and Jules Michelet (in the case of Barthes) and to the Austrian, Swiss and German authors Adalbert Stifter, Gottfried Keller, Theodor Storm, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer, and Wilhelm Raabe (in the case of Downing). In both cases, Barthes and Downing contextualized the realist novelists' first drive to reproduce reality 'as it is' within modernity conceived as the age in which technological progress and capitalist society fostered a more objective and pragmatic conception of reality. Walter Siti, on the other hand, applies Barthes's examination of realism to Italian literature

of the twenty-first century, criticizing the ambition of many contemporary Italian writers to show the usefulness and political relevance of their works. In Siti's view, the urgency to demonstrate the value of their writing prevents the authors from exploring and deconstructing the existing and often stereotypical discourses surrounding reality. Thus, Siti argues, several contemporary writers end up reiterating in their writings those stereotypical discourses.

This chapter engages with Barthes, Downing, and Siti's elaborations on literary realism to discuss how the corpus of this thesis relates to the so-called 'return to reality'. Building on Siti, I argue that the anxiety that these authors have about the practical 'usefulness' of literature in society builds on a factual and pragmatic understanding of what is 'real' and worthy of attention and imagination. A 'cult of action' (Calvino 1986, p. 93) – a preoccupation with the practical 'usefulness' of literature that characterizes the 'return to reality' – permeates the corpus of this thesis. With regards to the depiction of terrorist violence and victims, this leads most of the writers in focus to reiterate, in their works, the pragmatic reality of violence, in which victims are seen as passive objects rather than as active subjects. By either monumentalizing victims or reducing them to targets, our authors do not symbolize conflict, which rests on the recognition of alterity as a 'limit' to the realization of one's will, but reiterate in language the non-recognition of alterity that characterizes violence. To make this point, I engage in this chapter with the Lacanian notion of 'repetition' (1973), arguing that, at least in relation to this corpus, the 'return to reality' is hypermodern not as a militant response to the postmodern but, rather, as a 'consummation' of a modern obsession with the adherence of literature to objective reality.

7.1 The Cult of Action: Ethical Concerns of the 'Return to Reality'

In the previous chapters, I argued that there is a close connection between the impotence felt by our authors and the task they assign to their literary works. These authors seek to

assimilate their writing to a form of action and direct intervention, as if compensating with literature a sense of helplessness, as intellectuals, before the deep and significant changes introduced to contemporary culture and society by the growth of a globalized and digital environment. Hence, I suggested that, in the corpus of this thesis, the 'return to reality' identifies a real anxiety, so to speak, about the performative 'usefulness' of literature, as the following passage from one of our novels exemplifies: 'i giovani scrittori [di] oggi … Mi chiedono: Sandro, questa roba per te funziona? Funziona? Non funziona? Per loro la letteratura è come un interruttore...' (Ravera Rafele 2017, p. 81).

In my view, this anxiety intensifies and brings to a culmination what Calvino, in a famous lecture on literature and politics entitled 'Right and wrong political uses of literature', delivered in the United States in 1976, defines as the 'cult of action' (1986, p. 93) in politically engaged literature. In this lecture, Calvino is critical of Italian writers and intellectuals who, concomitantly with the great transformations of Italian society after the economic boom of the 1960s, urged literature to be more directly and explicitly political. Calvino's words are particularly apt when applied to the present: when discussing the deep cultural changes brought about by the economic boom in contemporary societies, indeed, Calvino foresaw a number of conditions that found their fulfilment with globalization in the twenty-first century:

> we could say that the notion of man as the subject of history is finished – the antagonist who has dethroned man must still be called man, but a man different from what he was before. Which is to say, the human race of "big numbers" in exponential growth all over the planet; … the claiming of full rights by the outcasts, the repressed, the forgotten, and the inarticulate. All the parameters, categories, and antitheses that we once used to define, plan, and classify the world have been called into question. And not only those most closely linked to historical values, but even the ones that seemed to be stable anthropological categories – reason and myth, work and existence, male and female …. (Calvino 1986, pp. 90–91)

In the face of such enormous changes, Calvino argues, a sense of insufficiency and inadequacy began to affect young intellectuals, and this led them to transfer onto literature the task of 'action' that belongs to politics, as if to compensate with the former the

shortcomings of the latter. A 'cult of action' (p. 93) opposed to the abstractness of literature took shape, one in which writers were concerned with the political relevance of their work, and to which a performative staging of authorship was central – in that case, too, particularly inspired by the figure of Pasolini (p. 95).

Calvino criticizes the cult of action as 'a sign of self-limitation, of narrow horizons, of an inability to perceive the complexity of things' (p. 93). In his view, conceiving literature as a substitution of political action should be seen as a wrong political use of literature: literature and politics, Calvino argues, live in a ceaseless dialogue with each other, but differ significantly from each other in their language and methods. The usefulness of literature, he writes, is 'very indirect, undeliberate, and fortuitous' (p. 98), not to say that the best way to really understand the power of literature is to reckon with its inherent *uselessness,* 'to treat it' – in Calvino's words – 'as counting for nothing' (p. 96). The power of literature, Calvino maintains, is extraneous to the realm of action, and belongs to that of language, to its

> ability to impose patterns of language, of vision, of imagination, of mental efforts, of the correlation of facts, and in short the creation … of a model of values that is at the same time aesthetical and ethical, essential to any plan of action, especially in political life. (pp. 98–99)

Calvino's reflections provide us with a good angle of approach to the 'return to reality' as a hypermodern expression of impotence and non-signification of reality. In fact, the authors considered so far deal with the deep transformations that globalization introduced to their paradigms of interpretation of reality by sharing a common preoccupation for the political relevance of their writing, as if trying to assimilate writing and action, pushing language as near as possible to a 'perceptible' act of commitment.

7.2 Realism and Imagination as Desire

In the works of this corpus, the 'return to reality' builds on the endeavour to bring literature as close as possible to what is 'real' – to politics, to history, to really-existing figures and

events –, while considering the 'real' in its most factual and pragmatic aspects. This endeavour involves not only writers, but also literary critics. Raffaele Donnarumma, for example, refers to the philosophical 'new realism' (Ferraris 2012) as the point of reference to contextualize a militant and hypermodern 'return to reality' in literature after postmodernism (2014, p. 63n, 121n, 122n, and 126n). The philosophical 'new realism' offers an extremely factual and objectivist notion of 'reality' and was widely criticized for being simplistic and reductionist (Rovatti 2011; Vattimo 2012; Jedlowski 2012; D'Agostini 2013).

Most importantly, however, the endeavour to assimilate literature and reality affects the authors who are part of the so-called 'return to reality'. To understand in which sense, it will prove useful to draw on some reflections on realism by the French semiologist Roland Barthes. In fact, rather than on the enactment of literary realism, the 'return to reality' can be seen as a realization of what Barthes – in his essay on literary realism entitled 'L'effet de réel' (1968) – called the 'obsessive reference to the 'concrete'' (p. 146) of many modern realist novels.

Barthes coined this notion by referring to the French authors Gustave Flaubert and Julius Michelet, whom he took as exemplary of other nineteenth-century Western realist authors. In Barthes's view, their realism rested on a 'referential illusion' (Barthes 1989, p. 148), namely, on the illusion to represent directly and truthfully reality while, in fact, their literary representation was always constructed through a set of artificial codes. In Barthes's view, such realist ambition could not but develop within the ideology of modernity as the age of reason and technological progress, in which an objective and pragmatic idea of reality nurtured the idea of the existing as self-sufficient, and of the access to reality as transparent:

> it is logical that literary realism should have been … contemporary with the regnum of 'objective' history, to which must be added the contemporary development of techniques, of works, and institutions based on the incessant need to authenticate the 'real': the photograph …, reportage, exhibitions of ancient objects …, the tourism of monuments and historical sites. All this shows that the "real" is supposed to be self-sufficient …. (pp. 146–177)

Whilst 'classical rhetoric had in a sense institutionalized the fantasmatic as a specific figure, … by imparting to representation all the luster of desire' (pp. 145–146), Barthes writes, modern literary culture rested on an understanding of reality as self-evident: 'the disintegration of the sign', Barthes writes, 'seems indeed to be modernity's grand affair' (p. 148). Barthes's reflections on realism can help us defining more precisely how the corpus of this thesis relates to the so-called 'return to reality': in fact, Barthes's notions of 'reality effect' and of 'referential illusions' have been applied to this trend, by the Italian literary critic Walter Siti in his essay *Il realismo è l'impossibile* (2013).

In this essay, Siti criticizes the ambition of many contemporary Italian writers to be politically committed at all costs, showing how their literature directly and straightforwardly addresses the social and political reality of their time. Drawing on both Barthes's notion of 'reality effect' and on the Lacan psychoanalysis, Siti defines realism as 'the slight tear, the unexpected detail' (p. 8) that fosters our imaginative tension towards what is not immediately given to our gaze. Siti writes that he entitled his essay after a comment made by Pablo Picasso when looking at Gustave Courbet's *L'origine du monde* in the country house of Jacques Lacan, who had bought the painting in 1955. 'Reality, the impossible', Picasso apparently said, after a contemplation of Courbet's work of art (Siti 2013, pp. 22–23). Courbet's ambition of being extremely and scandalously realistic in the depiction of female sex, Siti argues, required a 'decapitation' of the upper part of the body, which Courbet portrayed only partially, as if it was impossible to represent it in its entirety. In Siti's view, this anecdote is paradigmatic of how a literary work can be successful in signifying reality:

> the representation of reality is effective inasmuch as it seems to always hide another layer of reality …. The illusion of reality is an asymptotic approximation whose unavoidable byproduct is… precisely the encumbrance of the real. (p. 25)

Here – and this is of interest for us in this chapter – Siti draws on a Lacanian vocabulary and introduces a distinction between 'reality' and the 'real'. In Lacanian theory, the notion of 'the

Real' is perhaps the most difficult to define, Lacan having continuously revised and re-elaborated on its definition, which in itself is revelatory of what the Real is. Namely, that which is traumatic and resists symbolization, the 'impossible', which cannot be imagined, conceptualized, or signified through language. As Daniele Giglioli has put it,

> [the real] is what stubbornly resists any symbolization attempt. It is a hole in the symbolic order, the 'thing' that remains unavoidably lost, speechless, dull, elusive, impredicative. It is … the place in which language – that language which structures reality as we know it – runs out, fails, loses its power. The Real is what happens, not what makes sense— or rather, it is a senseless, traumatic happening, to the extent that it cannot be elaborated, symbolized, or made nameable. (Giglioli 2011, pp. 16–17)

By making the claim that the illusion of a descriptive adherence of literature to reality brings with it the unavoidable the 'encumbrance of the real', Siti looks at the 'return to reality' as a non-signification of reality. Reality, Siti suggests, can only be signified by means of a conflictual interplay between reality and an imaginative tension towards what is not immediately given to our gaze. In Siti's view, in the works of many contemporary Italian writers – among which he mentions those on Italian crime (Siti 2013, pp. 65–79) – the authors' urgency to demonstrate the relevance and value of their works prevents them from a meaningful exploration of the reality they address. As a result, Siti writes, many of these works miss the dimension of the symbolic, reiterating a number of stereotypical and pre-established narratives surrounding the topics and themes they address: 'the death of realism', Siti argues, 'is to make of one's own writing a reified object.' (p. 79).

7.3 The 'Return to Reality' as the Repetition of Violence

In conclusion to this chapter, let us now consider how these critiques to literary realism can help to define the so-called 'return to reality' as a 'return of the Real', namely as a traumatic repetition of non-symbolized events, providing the hypermodern impotence discussed in Part II with literary expression. To this aim, it will prove useful to draw on a last notion from Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, namely that of 'repetition', which, in his eleventh seminar

(1973), Lacan defines as one the four fundamental concepts of psychanalysis. A concept that Lacan drew from Freud, 'repetition' identifies the way in which the non-symbolized Real manifests to the subject, the expression of 'the avoided encounter, of the missed opportunity' (Lacan 1998, p. 128) to signify reality. In its resistance to symbolization, Lacan argues, the Real returns to the subject by movement of a traumatic repetition: 'the real is that which always comes back in the same place – to the place where the subject … does not meet it' (p. 49). In this light, the repetition is a screen concealing a missed entry into the symbolic order, and the opportunity for the subject to signify reality.

The psychoanalytic notion of repetition was applied to literary realism by the American scholar Eric Downing in *Double Exposures: Repetition and Realism in Nineteenth-Century German Fiction* (2000). Like Barthes, Downing carried out his reflections on literary realism by focusing on a 19th-century corpus (of German, Austrian, and Swiss authors in this case). Like Barthes, Downing discussed literary realism as originating from conflictual interplay between the compulsion to reproduce a previously encountered reality and the resistance to this compulsion, contextualizing this latter within modernity as the age of capitalism and technological progress. Drawing on narratology, critical theory, and psychoanalysis, Downing thus devises a theoretical model for reading literary realism as characterized by a double, conflictual nature. Whilst tending towards the repetition of reality 'as it is' or relying on pre-established codes of reality's representation, Downing argues, realism also resists that repetition, as if undoing and challenging it: 'realism is not only grounded in a repetition or redundancy of the dominant discourse, but also in its resistance' (Downing 2000, p. 13).

To comment more on the compulsion to reproduce a previously encountered reality, Downing builds on the notion of 'repetition' as discussed by Freud and Lacan, grounding his model for the double and conflictual nature of literary realism on their theorizations. On the one hand, Downing draws on Freud's discussion of repetition as linked to the return of the repressed twofold – with its disruptive effect of reintroducing the irrational in an uncanny

manner, and to the repetition compulsion, namely, to the subject's 'death drive' and impulse to repeat the repressed through a uniform, reassuring, and stable apparent reality, made of mimetic copies. On the other hand, Downing draws on Lacan's reflections on the mirror-stage, which consists of the child's attempt 'to compose or forge a unified, singular, and encompassing identity through a complex specular process of equating models and copies' (Downing 2000, p. 20). Downing also addresses Lacan's reflections on the role of desire in sustaining an uninterrupted search for lost reality, in undoing the effects of repetition and promoting, by access to the Symbolic, a 'move out of the "illusion" of wholeness, stability, and coherence … in which the subject becomes defined not specularly but instead by being taken up into a system of difference' (ibid.).

Against this backdrop, Downing argues that literary realism in itself can be approached as a 'pathological construction' (p. 17), in which a missed encounter with reality dovetails with the quest to signify that reality, which perpetuates desire and the access to the symbolic order. Literary realism, Downing argues, occurs when the author acknowledges his failure to reproduce and signify reality. It occurs only by means of a 'break with the dominant modes of representation and signification' (p. 260), when the drive to signify reality undoes repetition, this latter being the 'dependency and redundancy of the established iconographies of social and literary conventions' (p. 260), the reproduction, in Lacanian language, of the lost object.

Together with the critiques of realism by Barthes and Siti, Downing's re-elaboration of Lacanian psychoanalysis can help to understand how, in the corpus of this thesis, the 'return to reality' builds more on a traumatic 'repetition' of reality than on literary realism. In the corpus examined, the authors' urgency to demonstrate how their works directly and straightforwardly addresses the social and political reality of their time brings to an extremely factual and pragmatic understanding of what is 'real' and worthy of attention, one that lacks the conflictual tension between the reiteration of reality 'as it is' and the perpetuation of an

imaginative tension with less evident and meaningful aspects of reality. The hypermodern endpoint of a modern parabola anchored to an 'obsessive reference to the 'concrete'' (Barthes 1989, p. 146), the 'return to reality' expresses a return of the Real, a traumatic repetition of what, in lack of desire, resists symbolization.

In my view, this missed symbolization finds a clear expression in the depiction of victims as literary characters. In the works examined so far, despite the great attention given to victims, the authors often reiterate in their works the pragmatic reality of violence, in which victims are seen as passive objects rather than as active subjects. As literary characters, victims are underdeveloped: their depictions are dichotomic, often stereotypical, and often relying on a pre-established iconography and imagery of victimhood, as part I of this thesis described. In this light, the 'return to reality' in the literary representation of victimhood can be seen as a traumatic repetition of the non-symbolized trauma of terrorist violence: by either monumentalizing victims or reducing them to targets, our authors do not symbolize conflict, which rests on the recognition of alterity as a 'limit' to the realization of one's will, but rather reiterate in language the non-recognition of alterity that characterizes violence. As Recalcati put it,

> What is the difference between violence and conflict?... Conflict is indeed a way of turning violence into a symbol, in order to inscribe violence into a discourse, while violence is the break of every discoursive barrier, as it is always, literally, outside of any discourse. In other words, conflict is the symbolic order of the reality of violence.... While violence demands…a pleasure not marred by castration, conflict always entails an acknowledgment of the Other in his otherness. (Recalcati 2011, pp. 67–68)

Perhaps here lies the trauma of the Years of Lead – the 'black hole' in Italian history (Moro 2007, p. 147), a fashionable and inscrutable decade that triggered a flourishing of rhetoric in the public sphere but that remains largely incomprehensible. Perhaps, the threadbare and indulgent refrain of terrorists embodying the 'guilty conscience' of the country precisely identifies a cultural inability to acknowledge the symbolic value of conflict and, most importantly, to reconceptualize conflict within a new, interconnected relationship with the

horizontal 'other', who activates and limits our desire and, for this reason, carries an ethical

significance. Let us explore this aspect further, in the next and final chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER 8. Alterity as the Law: Victimhood Imagined and Signified

In this last chapter, I focus on two literary works that represent the literary character of the victim in original and unconventional ways, discussing their relationship with realism. Giorgio Vasta's *Il tempo materiale* (2008) and Giorgio Fontana's *Morte di un uomo felice* (2014) differ from other works in this corpus because they deconstruct the stereotyped depiction of victimhood: both these authors flesh out the literary characters of victims in such ways that their works successfully symbolize the complexities of conflict and its degeneration into violence. Through a close reading of these texts, I show how this happens, discussing the ethical and political dimensions of these two novels. Contrary to other authors in this corpus, Vasta and Fontana abandon a nostalgically patriarchal reading of conflict, anchoring conflict to the encounter with a horizontal and vulnerable alterity. In this light, I argue that these two works convey a timely and compelling reading of conflict in the context of the unprecedented interconnection of our times, which brought to the fore in an urgent fashion the question of the relationship with alterity, fostering new conflicts and, with them, the need for new ethical paradigms. In the two works addressed in this chapter, the depiction of the victim as the 'other' – the lowercase 'other' indicating the 'other' person, the intersubjective other – and the limit to self-affirmation provides a good lens through which to symbolize conflict in a timely and compelling way. In conclusion to this chapter, I show how the ethical and political dimensions of these two works are not necessarily linked to literary realism. Vasta and Fontana make use of two radically different modes of representation, respectively recognizable as fantastic and realistic. Through Alberto Casadei's reflections on realism (2011 and 2014) and Lucio Lugnani's notion of 'paradigm of reality' (1983), I conclude that there is no one correct way to write a politically relevant work, and that the political dimension of literature dovetails with its capacity to access, whatever the modes and forms employed, the symbolic order. In the case of these two authors, this happens with a recovery of conflict

through the recognition and signification of alterity, embodied in the literary character of the victim.

8.1   The Symbolization of Conflict: Two Case Studies

Vasta and Fontana share a biographical interest in the 1970s with the other authors considered in this thesis. When I first introduced the corpus, I mentioned how the writers discussed their choice to write on the Years of Lead on this basis (see introduction to Part I). Whilst Vasta was born in 1970, Fontana was born in 1981: hence, these two figures encompass the beginning and end of our generational parabola. Unlike the other authors considered in this thesis, however, Vasta and Fontana do not share the urge to perform their authorial commitment, to make their writing appear compelling and relevant to the social and political reality of their time. In their works, the authorial presence is less visible, and it is easier for readers to enter the text imaginatively, reflecting on the events represented. In what I consider to be a consequence of this attitude to literary creation, Vasta and Fontana give their victim characters a literary depth, deconstructing a stereotyped or pre-established narrative of victimhood, especially as conveyed by power, and rendering the complexity of alterity as a limit to self-affirmation.

8.1.1 The Reality of Silent Bodies: Morana and Wimbow in Giorgio Vasta's *Il tempo materiale*

Vasta's debut novel, *Il tempo materiale* (2008), tells the story of three eleven-year-old boys – Nimbo, Volo, and Raggio – who establish a terrorist cell in emulation of the Red Brigades and later kill their schoolmate Morana. The story takes place in Palermo, Sicily, in 1978, when Aldo Moro was kidnapped and killed. Vasta plays with some recurring patterns in the depiction of terrorism, such as the intergenerational admiration of leftist terrorism, the quest for action, and the coming-of-age theme, questioning and re-elaborating these in an original

fashion, and metaphorizing Italian political terrorism 'as an immature, brutal, purposeless undertaking, an outdated and ominously excessive rite of passage' (Vito 2013). From the beginning, the choice to narrate the Years of Lead through the eyes of a child offers an estranged perspective on the topic, one that enables the author to explore terrorism in its less evident and more meaningful aspects:

> [a]ffinché lo scandaglio sia più esatto è necessario che questo spazio venga attraversato da un cursore, un corpo mobile che tramite le sue percezioni consente di accumulare dati. Un corpo inadatto e fuori luogo. Quello di un ragazzino che oggi compie dodici anni e che si chiama Nimbo. (Vasta 2008, p. 293)

In this light, Vasta draws on a narrative expedient that was used by, among others, Italo Calvino in *The Path to the Spiders' Nest* (1947). In his famous 1964 preface to this novel, Calvino claims that adopting the perspective of a child enabled him to narrate the Resistance from a distant and estranged point of view, and this enabled him to portray the complexities and contradictions of those events (Calvino 1991, pp. 1199–1201). In Chapter 2, I already mentioned Calvino's *The Path to the Spiders' Nest* (1947) as a possible source of inspiration for Dario Morgante in *La compagna P38* (2007): but whilst in Morgante's case this literary reference contributes to a mythologization narration of leftist terrorism, in Vasta's novel this legacy rather debunks this. In Vasta's novel, the unrealistic image of the protagonists – 'Undicenni lettori di giornali, ascoltatori di telegiornali. Della cronaca politica. Concentrati e abrasivi. Critici, tetri. Preadolescenti anormali' (Vasta 2008, p. 21) – offers an estranged perspective on the Years of Lead. The novel, finally, is interspersed with dialogues between Nimbo and some fantastic creatures of his imagination – a prehistoric pigeon, a puddle, a mosquito, and a crippled cat – that are central to his evolution.

Through this perspective, Vasta addresses and problematizes some of the core narratives related to Italian political terrorism that this thesis has addressed, particularly in Chapter 5, such as those of terrorism as sexual fecundity or as fatherhood. From the beginning of his radicalization process, Nimbo compares the ideology of terrorists to sexual

activity – 'la parola lotta contiene sesso, rabbia e sogno' (p. 74); 'i volti delle brigatiste colmi di bianco, le bocche piene del seme brigatista – amaro e fecondativo, ideologico e glorioso' (p. 43); 'l'erezione eroica, l'erezione del pensiero brigatista, il sesso che penetra nell'ideologia' (p. 93) – and opposes it to the asexuality of the victim: 'Gli osservo la forma dei genitali sotto il costume; sembrano grandi, si vede la pressione, ma anche quella è inerte, una formazione tumorale' (p. 143). Through the imaginative eyes of Nimbo, moreover, Vasta addresses the narrative of terrorism as fatherhood. In fact, Nimbo and his comrades construct their image as little terrorists by relying on a narrative of productive fatherhood, to which the victim is central:

> La stessa produzione di un ferito grave – sono le parole che usa – è significativa. … *Farci carico,* l'espressione … è, nella sua assurdità, Bellissima. … Ma soprattutto esprime qualcosa di paterno, la coscienza di doversi prendere cura di qualcuno. Parlando di come alla radio abbiano attribuito al nostro nucleo la responsabilità dell'attentato, Volo ha usato proprio la parola *paternità.* È come se attraverso le nostre azioni stessimo generando dei figli e trasformando noi stessi in piccolissimi padri. … Vedo l'immagine concreta del nostro bersaglio, di questo nostro figlio da catturare e da nascondere. (p. 228)

The very fact of presenting these narratives as the product of a hyperactive kid's visionary fantasy places them at a distance, relativizing their validity. Moreover, through the infantilization of terrorism the author overturns the narrative of terrorism as an assumption of responsibility. In fact, the protagonists are kids who lose control of the situation:

> [s]ta accadendo qualcosa che va oltre … la nostra responsabilità. … Mentre il sudore ci si asciuga sulla schiena e sul petto, ce ne stiamo davanti allo spettacolo dell'ideologia che brucia nutrendosi delle nostre vite …. (p. 202)

The adoption of a child's perspective, finally, enables Vasta to problematize a generational fascination with terrorist violence: through the eyes of Nimbo and his comrades, he addresses the appeal of fundamentalism within the context of the decline of traditional ideologies. In the following passage, Nimbo justifies his fascination with violence on the

basis of a sharp opposition between ideology on the one hand and cynicism and irony on the other:

> Perché ce n'è sempre di più, troppa, la nuova ironia italiana che brilla su tutti i musi, in tutte le frasi, che ogni giorno lotta contro l'ideologia, le divora la testa, e in pochi anni dell'ideologia non resterà più niente, l'ironia sarà la nostra unica risorsa e la nostra sconfitta, la nostra camicia di forza, e staremo tutti nella stessa accordatura ironico-cinica, nel disincanto, prevedendo perfettamente le modalità di innesco della battuta, la tempistica migliore, lo smorzamento improvviso che lascia declinare l'allusione, sempre partecipi e assenti, acutissimi e corrotti: rassegnati. (p. 24)

Nimbo seeks to dissociate himself from the irony and disenchantments of his time, from the farcical 'manierismo, piccola posa', the '[i]gnobile teatrino del costume' (p. 92) of his time, and defines himself as 'un ragazzino ideologico, concentrato e intenso, un ragazzino non ironico, anti-ironico, refrattario. Un non-ragazzino' (p. 24). From the beginning of the story, Nimbo embodies a radical and fundamental desire to signify the existent, of delving into its deepest aspects by avoiding superficiality.

8.1.1.1 Hunger for Reality and the Prison of Language

In the story, this radical quest for signification relates to Nimbo's obsession with language, whose relationship with ideology and violence constitutes one of the central themes of this novel. A hyper sensible kid, Nimbo finds in language a solution to the 'hunger' he feels for reality: 'la mia volontà di linguaggio, questa febbre della gola' (Vasta 2008, p. 13); 'Avere bisogno di parlare. Trovare il modo di tradurre la fame in parole. Se non trovo un linguaggio, la fame resterà fame' (p. 180). On more than one occasion, Nimbo defines himself as a 'mythopoietic' kid, a 'fabbricatore di parole' (p. 14) who seeks to escape from the prison of language. A kid who sniffs television in order to catch the smell of those appearing onscreen and who carves every surface with barbed wire, Nimbo has an urgency to experience the world primordially, through bodily experience, in an unmediated manner and without the interposition of language. At the same time, Nimbo is trapped into an obsession with

language as the only tool he has to signify the existent, providing his 'hunger' with a means of expression. Through Nimbo's obsession with reality, experience, and language, Vasta carries out a metaliterary reflection on the very act of writing, one in which, as Pasolini puts it, words 'put a sort of symbolic wall …, a screen of words' (Pasolini 1999, p. 1413) between the subject and reality. In fact, one of the distinctive traits of *Il tempo materiale* lies precisely in the work that the author does on language, which makes this novel very original from a stylistic point of view.

Nimbo and his comrades' fascination with terrorist violence has to be read within this framework. They are obsessed by the idea of taking action and they feel trapped in the abstractness of language: 'colpevoli di linguaggio' (Vasta 2008, p. 61), they see in terrorist violence the possibility of taking action, of overcoming the boundary of language that separates them from reality. Nimbo, Volo, and Raggio look up to the Red Brigades as those who 'non si limitano al linguaggio. Agiscono. … Le Brigate Rosse *agiscono*. Compiono azioni. … sono le uniche ad aver capito che se il sogno resta da solo diventa secco' (p. 74). The Red Brigades, says one of them, '[d]anno materia all'immateriale' (ibid.). Thus, Nimbo and his comrades decide to create a terrorist cell, claiming that 'è fondamentale cominciare a fare qualcosa di concreto. Che è arrivato il momento … di escogitare delle azioni a realizzarle' (p. 181). Through the eyes of Nimbo, Volo, and Raggio, Vasta also addresses the language used by the Red Brigades, with which the boys are deeply fascinated:

> a prima vista la lingua delle Br è un animale mitologico. Un unicorno. Muscolare, sanguigno, poderoso, falliforme. Con il corno avvolto a spirale sulla fronte, acuminato e indistruttibile. Una lingua che corre nel testo, svelle e divora, racconta la rabbia e la trasformazione. I brigatisti sono sempre accesi, sempre apocalittici. (pp. 78–79)

The language of the Red Brigades appears to be pragmatic and univocally directed towards taking action. For this reason, it immediately fascinates Nimbo and his comrades: '[l]e frasi delle Br fanno il morto. Le frasi delle Br *sono* il morto' (p. 79). However, Nimbo realizes that this action-oriented language is oversimplistic:

> Ogni frase semplifica, dico. … Come quando si divide in due la lavagna con il gesso per segnare i buoni e i cattivi. … La lingua delle Br, penso, è un animale mitologico inservibile, un unicorno degradato: il suo corpo è rachitico, il sangue è melmoso, il corno sulla fronte è un fallo posticcio. (p. 79)

Hence, when it comes to elaborating a way of communicating with each other, Nimbo, Volo, and Raggio create the *alfamuto*, a silent language that has nothing to do with words and letters, made of gestures and bodily poses, which Nimbo and his comrades take from media and pop culture. With the *alfamuto*, the three kids refuse words, and aim to deconstruct and re-signify the vacuity of their time:

> Potremo fare a meno di dire le parole con la voce perché le diremo con le posture. …. Le posture le prendiamo da qui, dico. Dai cantanti. Dalle pubblicità. Anche dagli attori. E dalla televisione e dal cinema. E lo facciamo per vendetta: … trasformiamo la miseria in utilità. (p. 125)

For Nimbo, Volo, and Raggio, indeed, their refusal of irony and immersion in ideology constitute a rite of passage and an assumption of responsibility: 'essere colpevoli è una responsabilità. Le Brigate Rosse si stanno assumendo questa responsabilità' (p. 74); 'la violenza è coraggiosa perché riconosce e ammette l'esistenza del dolore e della colpa. … Le Brigate Rosse hanno il coraggio della colpa e la coscienza del dolore' (p. 91). Thus, after a number of small-scale violent actions, Nimbo, Volo, and Raggio target their first victim, a schoolmate known as Morana, whose name recalls that of the President of the Christian Democracy Aldo Moro.

8.1.1.2 Morana's Endurance Against Ideology

In *Il tempo materiale,* the encounter with the victim is central to the evolution of the character of Nimbo, who plays the role of the perpetrator: this makes *Il tempo materiale* an unparalleled work in the corpus of this thesis, where the literary character of the victim does not play any significant role in the evolution of the characters. Moreover, from the beginning,

Vasta does not rely on a moralistic rhetoric of victimhood, in which the victim is described as either morally 'good' or 'bad'. Morana is an insignificant and uninteresting figure: a disturbed and repugnant child, he barely speaks – the dichotomy of silent victimhood and the language of ideology being central to this novel – and only appears through his dull physical appearance.

Morana embodies the archetype of the scapegoat: 'Morana – il focolaio, l'untore infetto – … sembrava destinato a diventare la vittima orribile e il capro espiatorio, … sul quale si concentra tutto il male compiuto senza cattiveria, senza malizia … ' (Vasta 2008, pp. 69–70). His innocence is not a moral condition, but rather a tragic one: his suffering has nothing to do with his actions, and he is innocent inasmuch as he did nothing to deserve the violence that he will suffer:

> Uno come lui è trasversale nelle epoche. C'è e ci sarà sempre. La vulnerabilità, ma nella sua manifestazione più ripugnante. Qualcuno che dovresti difendere ma sai che difendendolo ti sporcherai le dita. Quindi esiti, fai finta di non sentirlo. Morana è così. La sua distruzione è infinita. Nella sua vita non ci sarà mai niente. Mai un ragionamento, mai un'intuizione. Niente di niente. Eppure è qui, continua a esserci. … Vorrei dirgli qualcosa perché ho bisogno di cavargli dal corpo una reazione, di capire in che modo può esistere in questo continuo martirio, vittima senza vittimismo. (p. 142)

On more than one occasion, Vasta suggests the sacrificial and sacred dimension of archetypal victimhood. In one passage, while watching the news of Moro's kidnapping, Nimbo imagines finding the corpse of the statesman in his dinner soup. The representation of victimhood in the form of food here suggests the ritual dimension of sacrificial scapegoating, a central aspect in the reading of Moro's killing in contemporary Italian culture (Antonello 2009):

> prendo il cucchiaio e lo faccio scivolare dal bordo del piatto verso il basso, … cercando un ostacolo, un contatto, Aldo Moro intirizzito, le braccia piegate strette contro i fianchi, la testa chiusa tra le spalle, le ginocchia contro il petto, l'onorevole esibito, ostentato, innalzato nella sua culla di acciaio inox e offerto a nutrimento sacrificale, a ostia da prendere in bocca e ingoiare senza pensiero, tutta l'Italia e tutti gli italiani, mangiare il presidente della Democrazia Cristiana, fare la comunione, non masticare, deglutire, sentire dentro il sapore di quaresima e di grano, di medicina, e poi guardarsi negli occhi

e trovarli luminosi e senza angosce, gli sguardi pieni compatti e onorevoli degli italiani. (Vasta 2008, p. 67)

This anthropological reading of victimhood also permeates the depiction of Morana, a repugnant *pharmakos* that Nimbo and his comrades choose in their radical ambition to rebuild their relationship with reality. The violence they inflict on Morana is described as a 'liturgia della distruzione' (p. 250) and the act of tailing him as a prayer:

pedinare è una preghiera muta che al posto delle parole mette i movimenti, una preghiera tramite la quale il nostro corpo si rivolge a un altro corpo, non divino ma terreno … . (p. 183).

Morana's bodily existence– his only form of existence, in fact – is precisely what makes him a physical limit, an 'obstacle' to the actuation of violence. Here, the author explicitly suggests how this physical and mental recognition of the victim as an 'alterity' within conflict leads the three kids to turn the victim into a cult object: 'a noi piace l'ostacolo, gli eleviamo un culto: siamo attratti dall'impedimento e dal compito farraginoso. Ci serve a *sentire* il nemico, a perfezionarlo' (p. 211). The bodily existence of the victim is an important aspect of Vasta's novel, one that plays a central role in Nimbo's disengagement and comprehension of the constructed and 'verbal' nature of terrorist ideology, overturning the dichotomy between the abstractness of language and the reality of action. A silent, slightly disabled child, Morana only exists in his passive physicality:

Morana non dice e non dirà niente. Morana aspetta. Non aspetta neppure. Morana è, Morana sta. È un organismo, è composto da cellule. È come se in lui tutto volesse ricordarci questo: io non esisto se non come piccolo corpo. Nessuna percezione del presente, nessuna immaginazione del futuro. (pp. 246–247)

Morana's agency, we could say, simply lies in the very fact of existing as a body exposed to brutality, as a creaturely alterity in the exercise of violence. This creaturely passivity challenges the ideological apparatus of Nimbo and his comrades:

> proprio per il fatto di essere *sempre* vulnerabile, Morana ci mette in crisi: la sua fragilità ha un'espressione illimitata. È una provocazione, interviene Volo. Non lo è in sé ma noi dobbiamo considerarla tale. …. Morana ci provoca con la sua fragilità. (p. 232)

In fact, Morana's silent passivity unmasks the 'constructed' nature of ideology:

> Il nemico è una nostra invenzione. Se non c'è dobbiamo essere noi a generarlo …. Il nemico perfetto non esiste. Il nemico reale è sempre imperfetto: non è mai perfettamente maligno, mai perfettamente invincibile. Ha tratti mansueti, persino teneri. È vulnerabile. L'unico nemico perfetto è quello che generi tu stesso. … Combattere contro un nemico inferiore, che può anche sbriciolarsi, che ci affronta scivolando sulle bucce di banana, ci mortificherebbe. … La soluzione è che quello che il nemico non ha glielo diamo noi. (pp. 196–197)

In this light, Nimbo starts to realize that, contrary to what he believed, their ideological architecture is, in fact, immersed in language: 'nessuna azione fuori dalla prassi, nessuna parola reale fuori dall'alfamuto' (p. 245). Nimbo's interior evolution takes on a more concrete narrative dimension within the description of Morana's captivity and consequent killing. In the second half of the novel, the three protagonists kidnap Morana and lock him inside a prison built for the occasion: in an imitation of the actions of the Red Brigades, Nimbo and his comrades even take a picture of Morana holding the daily newspaper in his hands (p. 256). A long, detailed description of the cruelties that Volo inflicts upon Morana follows these actions: through an 'itinerario preciso, tappe collaudate, posture minerali: una via crucis solidificata' (ibid.), Volo slowly and meticulously injures Morana. Either attempting to suffocate him, or crushing his head on the ground, or even folding his body into painful positions, Volo experiences the feeling of perpetrating violence:

> la liturgia della distruzione alla quale ho assistito non è fatta di calci e pugni ma di pressione e densità. È una colonna nera che spinge in basso, piega e comprime. La violenza morbida. La violenza gentile. La concentrazione come distruzione. Il corpo di Morana, la tenerezza del suo dolore incosciente. La nostra capacità di compiere il male. (p. 250)

Faced with Morana's silent endurance – '[p]er la pressione la fronte si deforma. Morana non si ribella' (p. 248); 'Morana si risolleva, prende l'aria, senza esibizionismi, senza

melodrammi' (p. 249); 'non oppone resistenza: ogni volta ci guarda e il suo sguardo non ha nessun significato' (p. 250) – Nimbo realizes that their violence is purposeless and unreasonable. In particular, when Morana – the 'grado zero' (p. 247) of victimhood – dies, his death is a revelation about the constructed, language-related nature of fundamental ideology: 'nella lotta non c'è lotta. Noi colpiamo al cuore ma il cuore non c'è. Il corpo non oppone resistenza; colpire al cuore è una frase' (p. 257).

Vasta's depiction of Morana as a victim offers a first point of reflection on the question of realism. If a form of realism can be found in Vasta's novel, this is entrenched in the depiction he offers of the victim's passivity and bodily dimension. Yet, Vasta's realism has little to do with a mimetic or lifelike depiction of reality: as previously stated, his characters and the events represented are highly unrealistic. Vasta's realist concern rather coexists with, and inhabits, his fantastic portrayal of event, and could be addressed through the notion of 'creatural realism', which Eric Auerbach introduced in the 10th chapter of *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature,* published in 1946 (2003, pp. 232-260).

Auerbach introduced this notion to comment on the late medieval writer Antoine De La Sale's dramatic representation of the execution of the 13-year-old son of the commander of the fortress of Brest at the hands of the English in the context of the Hundreds' Year War, in his piece *Réconfort de Madame du Fresne.* Auerbach describes the barbarous execution of the boy as a 'tragic occurrence of the highest dignity' (p. 244) in this piece, a remarkable example, in medieval literature, of 'a genuinely tragic and genuinely real scene' (p. 245), which lifts the representation of this death out of 'traditional motifs of courtly literature' (p. 244) and builds on a total lack of separation between the tragic and everyday realism. All this, Auerbach argues, brings out 'in visual clarity the contrast between the innocence of the boy and the gruesome execution' (p. 237), which constitutes what he calls a form of 'creatural realism' (p. 246). Namely, a form of realism concerned with the bodily dimension, its transitoriness and inevitable decadence, which also constitutes 'a radical theory of the

equality of all men' (p. 239). Creatural realism, Auerbach writes, stems from Christian figuralism and takes almost all its intellectual and artistic motifs from the Christian tradition' (p. 247), from the Passion of Christ in particular.

In his novel, Vasta anchors his signification of terrorist violence to the bodily dimension of Morana as a victim, whose physical sufferance he describes in detail, until presenting the very moment of his decease as a sort of reality principle for Nimbo, which forces him to realize the purposelessness of terrorist ideology. Morana's victimization is an irreversible sign on Nimbo's path of growth – 'so che qualunque cosa accada la morte di Morana è ciò che nutrirà tutta la mia vita' (p. 258) – and so does the violated and mutilated body of Morana: 'Sono importanti, i corpi? I corpi incarnano, rappresentano. I corpi sono corpi, dice. Sono simboli. Il corpo di Morana di cosa è simbolo? Di una scoperta' (p. 261). Here, the author gives an important narrative function to the victim's endurance of violence, that of unmasking fundamentalist ideology as a pure language construction, overturning the initial dichotomy, set out by Nimbo, between abstract language and terrorist action. With 'endurance', I am here drawing on Bernard Williams (1993, pp. 38–41): in endurance – i.e., 'the capacity to sustain suffering that comes from an inner cause, though it is inflicted from outside' (pp. 38–39) – Williams highlights a form of agency typical of ancient culture that modern morality, centred on the primacy of the will, is often unable to conceptualize. In Vasta's novel, the conceptualization of suffering as a form of agency takes shape in the tragic, amoral innocence of Morana as a turning point of the novel, one that marks a point of evolution in the architecture of the story. This, in my view, makes Vasta's novel a successful symbolization of conflict, to which the depiction of victimhood as a vulnerable and embodied alterity is central.

8.1.1.3 The 'Creole Girl'

In *Il tempo materiale,* the parabola of Nimbo's radicalization and disengagement ends through an encounter with a second character, a girl called Wimbow, whom Nimbo loves, and that Volo and Raggio choose as their second victim. Nimbo is in charge of inviting her to his place for a birthday party to ambush and kidnap her. Like Morana, Wimbow does not speak. She is dumb, and through her character the author reinforces the dichotomy between the silence of victimhood and the language of fundamentalist ideology. Wimbow is mainly referred to as 'the creole girl', suggesting her foreign and mixed origins. This character, indeed, quintessentially represents an unknown otherness: her name is Central American, she comes from the other side of the world and was adopted by an Italian family. Until Nimbo discovers about her foreign origins, however, he knows nothing about her:

> Della bambina creola ignoro tutto. … Non conosco il suo nome, non so quanti anni abbia. … So che ha i capelli neri, a volte blu, con dentro i demoni. Non so, prima, in quale scuola andasse, dove vivesse. Non so se è italiana, non so in che lingua parla, non l'ho mai sentita parlare, non conosco la sua voce. (p. 50)

The creole girl magnetically attracts Nimbo's radical desire for signification. In particular, the figure of Wimbow challenges Nimbo's dichotomic opposition between reality and language, embodying the point at which reality and language converge into signification:

> Sento le parole *bella, Bellissima* percorrere una traiettoria curvilinea, trafiggerle dolcemente la carne e scomparire nel suo buio … e sento branchi, sciami, stormi di parole muoversi dal mondo verso di lei, vocabolari interi scomparire nel suo corpo, tutto il linguaggio concepibile farsi materia microscopica e trovare posto dentro la sua carne. (pp. 52–54)

Throughout the story, Nimbo seeks to keep her in an uncontaminated space separate from language in his imagination: '[v]oglio che lei, per me, resti solo un fenomeno, una creatura' (p. 51). When his comrades nominate her as the target for the second attack, however, Nimbo is forced to acknowledge her physical, real existence:

> Le parole di Scarmiglia [comrade Volo] che fanno esistere la bambina creola, che la trasformano in realtà dandole un nome e un'origine. … Dalla voce di Scarmiglia è arrivato il contagio: sapere che *bambina creola* era un nome insufficiente, che pensare a una creatura separata da tutto era irreale, che Wimbow esiste, agisce, è presente. (pp. 149–150)

At the very moment that language touches her, and with it the tangible possibility of annihilating her, Wimbow turns from a 'puro fenomeno' into a '[f]orza invisibile', a '[l]egame' (pp. 270–271) that triggers an evolution of Nimbo's character. As with Morana, the bodily existence of the victim unmasks the abstract and unreasonable nature of terrorist ideology. In a suggestive passage towards the end of the novel, the author describes this mechanism as follows:

> Pensare che lei sia materia. Ossa, carne, tessuti, organi interni. Spina dorsale. … La riduzione del proprio amore a organismo. O forse il contrario. L'elevazione. Amare un corpo … che esiste prima che la mia immaginazione se ne impossessi. … Poi tutto converge verso un punto di fuga. Il piano del compagno Volo per sequestrare Wimbow è così lucidamente irreale che io e Raggio lo ascoltiamo senza ribattere …: sedotti dall'inverosimile, accettiamo tutto. (pp. 278–279)

Nimbo realizes that his initial opposition between ideology and language – in which he saw the former as a form of 'action' opposed to the abstractness of words – is illusory and groundless: 'penso che non siamo realistici. Siamo iperrealistici. Cerchiamo di stare nel reale esasperandone i connotati. … eccessivi. … Melodrammatici, estenuati' (p. 284). In this light, Nimbo decides to report his comrades to the police and save Wimbow's life. As with Morana, the figure of Wimbow is central to the evolution of the protagonist: two silent and apparently weak figures, Morana and Wimbow question with their very bodily existence any fundamentalist claim to pragmatism. In both cases, victimhood incarnates an embodied and relational alterity within conflict, and this provides Vasta's novel with the basis to symbolize the complexities of conflict and its degeneration into violence.

8.1.2 Restoring the Blank: Giacomo Colnaghi in Giorgio Fontana's *Morte di un uomo felice*

Giorgio Fontana's novel *Morte di un uomo felice,* the last work in focus in the present analysis, differs significantly from Vasta's *Il tempo materiale*: whilst Vasta constructs an unrealistic fictional world, Fontana's novel is realistic, and his characters lifelike. Their approaches to the theme of political terrorism is also different, Fontana adopting a more historical and less metaphorical approach. Fontana's novel, however, shares with Vasta's *Il tempo materiale* a great narrative relevance for the literary character of the victim, as well as the centrality of this relevance to the author's problematization of terrorism in the 1970s.

Along with *Per legge superiore* (2011), *Morte di un uomo felice* constitutes a diptych on the theme of justice, both novels exploring its ethical implications through the figure of a judge. *Morte di un uomo felice* tells the story of Giacomo Colnaghi, a judge living in Milan in 1981 who is investigating the killing of Mr Vissani, a surgeon and a representative member of Christian Democracy, at the hands of a splinter cell of the Red Brigades. The author interweaves the story of Colnaghi with that of his father Ernesto, a partisan of the Resistance, setting up a parallel between the fight against leftist terrorism and the fight against Fascism. The story ends with Colnaghi being killed by a group of leftist terrorists, following the conclusions of his investigation into Vissani's murder.

With regards to the main trends in the depiction of terrorism in the works addressed in this analysis, Fontana's novel is original in more than one respect. Despite the kind of plot driving us to think of *Morte di un uomo felice* as crime fiction, it is not. In fact, the unveiling of the truth about the surgeon's murder is not the core of this novel, which rather consists of a broader reflection on the theme of justice and violence. While investigating the truth about Vissani's killing, Colnaghi enters into a range of dialogues with colleagues, the relatives of the victim, the terrorist during the interrogation, and a theology professor. Moreover, his story dovetails with the story of the Resistance and his father Ernesto. The figure of the

judge, in sum, allows Fontana to explore the legitimacy of violence, the problem of rage and hate, and the notions of punishment and forgiveness. This makes *Morte di un uomo felice* not only a judiciary, but also an interior, civic, and ethic investigation.

Moreover, like Vasta's novel, *Morte di un uomo felice* exceeds the rigid ideological categorization of victims that I illustrated in the first part of this thesis, through Greimas's semiotic square. Giacomo Colnaghi is, yes, a progressive judge, but he does not die at the hands of right-wing terrorists, like all the other judges in this corpus (see Chapter 1): as Fontana himself writes in the afterword of his novel (2014, p. 259), the literary character of Colnaghi was inspired by the really-existing figures of Emilio Alessandrini and Guido Galli, both killed by the leftist terrorist group Prima Linea in 1979 and 1980. Moreover, as we shall see shortly, Colnaghi is the only victim of leftist terrorism in this corpus for which the Resistance plays a role in his characterization.

8.1.2.1   Memory, Imagination, and Compassion

Morte di un uomo felice begins with a conversation between Colnaghi and the son of Vissani, a fifteen-year-old boy called Luigi who asks for revenge for the murder of his father. Faced with Luigi's rage, Colnaghi wonders: '[p]erché alla fine tutto si riduceva alla solita, banalissima domanda: come spieghi a un bambino la morte del suo papà?' (Fontana 2014, p. 16). A few pages after, the very same question opens the first chapter of the novel dedicated to Ernesto Colnaghi, the father of Giacomo and a partisan killed during the Resistance: '[c]ome spieghi a un bambino che il suo papa è stato ammazzato?' (p. 36).

From the start, Fontana addresses victimhood as the unfillable gap that violence leaves behind: how to react to loss and grief? How to do justice? How to make meaning of the blank that someone leaves behind her/himself, when no practical action can compensate for it? In the face of these questions, Fontana highlights the inadequacy of the pre-established and sensationalistic rhetoric that usually permeates the public image of victims:

Vissani, 'quel tipo volgare, odioso e incolpevole' (p. 14) was killed, and the 'verbose considerazioni sulla pretesa bontà di quell'uomo e sui tempi che stavano attraversando' (p. 15) appear useless and out of place. By the same token, when describing Colnaghi's childhood and the premature loss of his father, Fontana writes:

> quella perdita … non smetterà di essere irreparabile: sfugge alla catena di cause ed effetti, rimane come sospesa in un vuoto. … era come se le cose, con il tempo, si fossero … ridotte … a frammenti che sua madre metteva insieme di volta in volta, ripetendo i fatti in maniera sempre più risicata, con il solo scopo di ridurli a una morale …. I vecchi compagni, invece, erano sempre contenti di usare altre parole. Volevano scolpire una figura diversa …: un uomo che non si era arreso, una vittima da onorare. Per tutta la vita, Giacomo cercò di ricucire quei due lembi per ottenere un'immagine del padre il meno sfocata, il più coerente possibile …. E dove non sarebbero arrivati i ricordi altrui, sarebbe arrivata la sua fantasia. Avrebbe inventato suo padre come sentiva giusto, l'avrebbe afferrato per mano e strappato all'oblio in cui era caduto …. (pp. 36–37)

There are no pre-established images, Fontana suggests, that are capable of restoring the blank of an absence. In this light, he presents the work of memory as closely tied to the work of writing and literary imagination, whereby it is only by means of an imaginative tension with the absence that a coherent image of the victim can be reconstructed. In this light, the author presents the very acts of remembering and writing as filled with ethical and political significance: for Colnaghi, imagining and 'inventing' his father's history is 'qualcosa che poteva salvarlo dalla rabbia' (p. 37).

By approaching victimhood in this fashion, Fontana explicitly refers to Benedetta Tobagi's *Come mi batte forte il tuo cuore* (2009), which he lists among the key references for his novel (Fontana 2014, pp. 259–260). The daughter of Walter Tobagi, Benedetta devotes *Come mi batte forte il tuo cuore* to her father. In this book, Tobagi writes about her lifelong discomfort with the celebratory and sensational rhetoric surrounding the public figure of her father, as well as with the 'miti privati' (Tobagi 2009, p. 27) through which her family used to remember him after his death. Victims, she claims, share a common destiny: after their death, their subjectivity and identity are overshadowed by a number of 'immagini incomplete, sbilanciate, falsate, riduttive' (p. 23). Tobagi writes:

> Vi è un fenomeno caratteristico che interferisce con la memoria delle vittime del terrorismo …: una vita intera viene risucchiata, come in un buco nero, dalla potenza di una fine tanto drammatica. L'identità della vittima è schiacciata. Quel che resta è solo il simulacro scintillante, ma vuoto, dell'eroe …. Tutto ciò rende assai più difficile capire chi fosse realmente il defunto e tracciare un bilancio oggettivo della sua attività. (p. 14)

'Il dolore' – Tobagi writes – 'è una sostanza pericolosa, difficile da gestire, come un esplosivo molto instabile' (p. 26). To the rhetorical simplifications surrounding the memory of her father, Tobagi opposes a meticulous reconstruction of his activity as a journalist, constructed from archival research, interviews, and her personal and familial memory. In Fontana's novel, where the literary character of Giacomo Colnaghi is modelled on real-life victims of leftist terrorism, this meticulous reconstruction is purely imagined and fictional, and yet still very credible and lifelike.

Colnaghi, indeed, is a realistic and multifaceted literary character, which Fontana describes in his working activity as well as in his daily routine and familial relationships. As readers, we follow his evolution throughout the story, delving into his thoughts and reflections until the very moment of his death, observing his conflicts with the surrounding environment, and discovering new facets of his personality throughout his reactions to and dialogues with his colleagues and his family. In some cases, the author characterizes the mild and ironic personality of Colnaghi through apparently insignificant little discussions he has with his wife; in other cases, Colnaghi's ordinary insecurities, such as his fear of growing old, appear in meaningless gestures, like poking out his tongue in front of the mirror to smooth out his wrinkles (p. 31). Not all of these details nor a number of dialogues within the story are immediately related to Colnaghi's investigation, or to his imminent victimization. Yet, they are successful in rendering the density and credibility of this literary character. Drawing on Roland Barthes's notion of the 'reality effect', we could describe Fontana's novel in terms of literary realism inasmuch as it builds on a number of fictional details that do not simply denote reality but also signify it in its less visible and yet meaningful aspects.

In this light, whilst the expressive strength of Vasta's novel lies in its metaphorical and imaginative potential, that of Fontana's *Morte di un uomo felice* lies precisely in the realistic portrayal of the protagonist, in the possibility for readers to identify with him. This possibility of identification is what differentiates Colnaghi from several other 'good' victims in my corpus, whose representation was often de-personalized and built on sensationalistic and pre-established images of victimhood, aimed to spark the readers' pity. Drawing on a distinction that Hannah Arendt makes between pity and compassion in his essay *On Revolution* (1963), we could say that Fontana's 'reality effects' spark a form of compassion towards the character of Colnaghi. Arendt argues that pity differs from compassion in relation to the ability to generalize and depersonalize the experience of suffering. Unlike pity, for Arendt, compassion can only be directed towards the suffering of a single individual, a suffering incarnated in flesh and bone that we can relate to:

> For compassion, to be stricken with the suffering of someone else as though it were contagious, and pity, to be sorry without being touched in the flesh, are not only not the same, they may not even be related. … Compassion, by its very nature, … cannot reach out farther than what is suffered by one person …. Its strength hinges on the strength of passion itself, which, in contrast to reason, can comprehend only the particular, but has no notion of the general and no capacity for generalization. (Arendt 1990, p. 85)

The power of literary imagination precisely enables the possibility to create, and inhabit, another being, with all his feelings and emotions. As René Wellek and Austin Warren argue in *Theory of Literature* (1949), '[t]he principle of characterization in literature has always been that of combining the 'type' with the 'individual' – showing the type in the individual or the individual in the type' (Wellek & Warren 1963, p. 32). Fontana's literary depiction of Colnaghi follows this principle and exemplifies the attempt to restore the blank of victimhood that, at the very beginning of the novel, both Vissani's son and Colnaghi himself feel towards their respective fathers.

8.1.2.2 Victimhood and Political Agency

When constructing the literary character of Giacomo Colnaghi, Fontana draws on a number of features to give this character a narrative depth and a psychological complexity. On the one hand, there is the Catholic faith, which constantly leads Colnaghi to wonder about the ethical complexities of his activity as a judge. On the other hand, Fontana interweaves the story of Colnaghi with that of his father Ernesto, a partisan during the Resistance. In an interview with Goffredo Fofi, Fontana explains that, through the character of Colnaghi, he aimed to address the controversial appropriation of the memory of the Resistance by leftist terrorists during the Years of Lead: 'E infine la domanda più terribile: quando avrebbe pesato nell'affrontare persone che si richiamavano, a loro detta, a una "Resistenza tradita"?' (Fofi 2015, p. 134).

The characterization of Colnaghi in relation to the Liberation war is another way in which *Morte di un uomo felice* exceeds the rigid ideological categorization of victims that I illustrated through Greimas's semiotic square. As we have seen, the link between the Resistance and leftist terrorism is pronounced in this corpus, and authors tend to link the Resistance to the victims of right-wing terrorism. By linking the Resistance to a victim of leftist terrorism, Fontana addresses the Resistance beyond the boundaries of a rigid ideological division, problematizing its political exploitation by leftist terrorists in the 1970s and, by virtue of this, addressing the issue of the legitimacy of violence in the struggle against injustice: 'il problema della rabbia e dell'odio; … il conflitto sociale, la critica a uno stato di cose ingiusto, il limite di liceità da porre in caso di lotta per un mondo migliore' (Fofi 2015, p. 135). Once more, this reflection occurs through the eyes of Colnaghi. Initially, the author combines the judge's perspective on political violence as an unjustifiable crime with

his comprehension of its political reasons, therefore establishing a parallel between a fight against injustice during the 1970s and the Resistance:

> I fascisti avevano tagliato la mensa per i poveri al dopolavoro, e una mattina si erano presentati a casa di sua madre per chiedere tutto il rame che c'era in casa .... Fu allora, forse, che all'Ernesto vennero le idee. (Fontana 2014, p. 38)

And, in relation to the radicalization of the extra-parliamentary left:

> Non era cieco. Vedeva la pressione esercitata in tanti anni dall'alto: l'ossessione per il potere, la tentazione autoritaria dell'esercito, la retorica dell'emergenza continua, le leggi repressive… Anche per questo dall'altra parte era germinato un odio tanto grande, una violenza così feroce. (p. 71)

At the same time, Fontana suggests the difference between the two contexts. In fact, he portrays the figure of the partisan and that of the terrorist in two radically different ways: whilst the militancy of Ernesto and his comrades is sparked by genuine and future-oriented ideals of freedom and social justice, the terrorists appear to be uniquely moved by a blind hate. Whilst Ernesto is a young and joyful man – 'La vita gli scoppiava tra le mani, nonostante le preoccupazioni' (p. 157) –, the young terrorist only embodies hate: 'Lo sguardo era carico del solito disprezzo' (p. 186). The parallel between the Resistance and the terrorism of the Years of Lead runs through the whole story, until it flows into the final dialogue between Colnaghi and the young terrorist Meraviglia:

> "Volete fare la rivoluzione, ma tutto quello che avete ottenuto è ammazzare delle persone".
> "Gliel'ho detto, è una guerra: e in guerra ci sono sempre dei morti. Cosa crede, che i partigiani…".
> "Voi non siete i partigiani!", gridò Colnaghi alzandosi di scatto, e Meraviglia si chinò d'istinto piegando la testa.
> "Ha capito? Mi ha *capito*? Non siete i partigiani!" (p. 199)

Through Colnaghi, Fontana deconstructs the narrative of the 'betrayed Resistance' by relating the Resistance to the figure of a victim and making an unprecedented parallel, in this corpus, between leftist terrorism and Fascism. Most importantly, the passage above

shows how the author characterizes Colnaghi as an authoritative figure, who towers above the young terrorist Meraviglia. Although in a more transparent and less metaphorical manner, like Vasta, Fontana challenges the interpretation of terrorism in terms of adulthood and maturity, further stressing this point in a diary page written by Colnaghi during his investigations:

> *Il problema del terrorismo rosso è che rivela uno stato di adolescenza all'interno del vecchio corpo italiano. … chi sceglie di sparare è accecato dal desiderio di avere tutto e subito, a qualsiasi costo: una perversione.* (p. 113)

In this case too, Fontana's perspective on the Years of Lead is similar to that of Tobagi's: in her book, she addresses the frequent 'idealizzazione romantica attorno alle gesta dei terroristi' (Tobagi 2009, p. 293), opposing the political agency of those like her father – based on a non-violent, daily commitment to the improvement of existing reality – to the terrorists' unrealistic delirium of omnipotence:

> *Perché vedere una grandezza tragica nei fantasmi deliranti dei terroristi e non nella maturità di chi sceglie di fare i conti con la realtà e impegnarsi nel mondo nonostante le molte frustrazioni e contraddizioni, scontrandosi con gli ostacoli del «pratico inerte»? Come si può non cogliere l'idealità intensa, la tragicità persino, di un simile sforzo quotidiano?* (pp. 294–295)

Together with Giovanni Fasanella and Antonella Grippo's *I silenzi degli innocenti* (2006), Fontana includes Tobagi's memoir on her father Walter among the key references in the drafting of *Morte di un uomo felice.* Part of what Ruth Glynn defines as the 'turn to the victim' in Italian culture (2013), these works emerged in the early-2000s, giving a public voice to victims for the first time since the end of the Years of Lead, or precisely to their relatives or to those who survived. The emergence of victims in the public sphere was not immediately well received and was criticized by some as sensationalistic and useless to the comprehension of history. Christian Raimo's essay entitled 'La vittima, la memoria, l'oblio' – which I mentioned in Chapter 2 to introduce the 'critique of the victim' informing his narratives

– was part of this context: '[w]itnesses, victims, survivors in place of the heroes, or those militants, winners who until recently used to make history and politics.' (2008).

Yet, as Alessandra Montalbano writes in response to Raimo's essay, as well as to other critiques of the victim by Giovanni De Luna (2011) and Daniele Giglioli (2014), the emergence of victims in the public sphere put contemporary Italian culture in contact with a new way of conceiving historical and political agency that has emerged in the last two decades. In 'La memoria privata degli anni di piombo' (2018), Montalbano discusses Tobagi's *Come mi batte forte il tuo cuore* and Mario Calabresi's *Spingendo la notte un po' più in là* (2007) through the theory of vulnerability and relationality elaborated by the feminist thinkers Judith Butler (2004) and Adriana Cavarero (2007).

The words of victims, Montalbano argues, are usually seen as sensationalist, sentimental, and empty of historical and political relevance, but this approach relies on a modern, outdated philosophical model of conceiving subjectivity, which contemporary political philosophy challenges through a new perspective on the question of vulnerability. Hence, Montalbano approaches Tobagi's and Calabresi's memoirs through the theories of Butler and Cavarero, who participate in the cultural landscape that I outlined at the beginning of this chapter by challenging the modern understanding of the subject as individualist and autonomous with a more relational view of subjectivity, based on a common exposure to others' violence.

In my view, the way in which Fontana fleshes out the literary character of the victim through the figure of Giacomo Colnaghi makes *Morte di un uomo felice* an interesting literary work in the light of this contemporary concern with alterity as vulnerable and relational. As is the case for Vasta, the narrative depth given to the literary character of the victim enables Fontana to symbolize conflict and problematize its degeneration into violence. In this novel, the imaginative effort to fill the 'blank' of victimhood, giving substance to a void, triggers a process of signification that is filled with ethical implications.

8.2 The Paradigm of Reality and the Symbolic

What is the relationship between Giorgio Vasta's *Il tempo materiale,* Giorgio Fontana's *Morte di un uomo felice* and the so-called 'return to reality'? How do Vasta's and Fontana's works cast light on the issues at the core of this critical debate? How do they contribute to the critical discussion on literary realism? In conclusion, let us consider this point. In this chapter, I highlighted the political dimensions of both *Il tempo materiale* and *Morte di un uomo felice*, whereby in both cases the authors deconstruct a stereotyped representation of victimhood and flesh out the figure of the victim as an ethical subject, challenging the mythologization of revolutionary violence that permeates many of the works in the corpus of this thesis.

Both the ethical tension of these two works and their subject matter, namely Italian political terrorism in the Years of Lead, place them within the context of the 'return to reality', namely, as Italian literary critics describe it, of a new ethical tension in contemporary Italian literature, arising from a new interest in subjects of a social, political, and historical interest, of which 1970s terrorism is just one example. In what ways, however, can these two works help us to define the 'realism' that critics see at the core of this trend? In fact, I have shown how Vasta and Fontana draw on two radically different modes of representation. Moreover, when I introduced Part I, I mentioned how literary critics involved in the debate on the 'return to reality' did not offer a definition of realism, but rather identified it with a literary expression of political commitment.

With regards to Fontana's *Morte di un uomo felice,* the relationship with literary realism is clearer than it is with regards to Vasta's novel. We have seen how Fontana approaches the subject of his novel, and consequently depicts the literary character of Giacomo Colnaghi by means of a realistic mode of representation. The 'realism' informing Fontana's writing differs significantly from the pragmatic and factual understanding of literary writing that

characterizes many works in this corpus. Fontana's 'realism' rather lies in the narrative techniques he uses, which are anchored to verisimilitude and the approximation of truth.

The question of realism, after all, closely interests Fontana, who graduated with a thesis on Hilary Putnam's notion of 'internal realism' (Putnam 1981, 1987, and 1988). A relevant twentieth century philosopher and the author of *Realism with a Human Face* (1990), Putnam devoted much thought to the theme of realism. With 'internal realism', Putnam identified a 'third way … between classical realism and antirealism' (1988, p. 107) and a point of encounter between objectivism and relativism: '[i]nternal realism is, at bottom, just the insistence that realism is *not* incompatible with conceptual relativity' (Putnam 1987, p. 17). Putnam's notion of 'internal realism' built on the idea that reality is not self-evident, but rather stems from a ceaseless interaction between objective reality and our subjective conceptual frameworks. In a newspaper article written on the occasion of Putnam's death, Fontana highlights how Putnam's idea of realism was the inspiration for the 'ethical and social preoccupations'[21] that always permeated his thought. Putnam, moreover, also contributed to the debate on philosophical 'new realism' with an essay collected in *Bentornata realtà. Il nuovo realismo in discussione* by Maurizio Ferraris (2012, pp. 5–20).

Unlike with Fontana, it is difficult to define Giorgio Vasta's novel in terms of literary realism. *Il tempo materiale* tells the story of three eleven-year-old boys who speak, think, and act like adults, turning into three little terrorists. Moreover, this novel is interspersed with dialogues between Nimbo, the protagonist, and some fantastic creatures that guide him in his disengagement, such as a prehistoric pigeon (Vasta 2008, pp. 170–173), a speaking puddle (pp. 192–193), a mosquito (pp. 220–224), and a crippled cat (pp. 242–245). Throughout the novel, these creatures speak with Nimbo and question his radicalization through serious and profound dialogues concerning the problem of guilt and evil, as well as

---

[21] Fontana, Giorgio. (2016). Chi era Hilary Putnam, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 14 March. [Online]. Available from: https://24ilmagazine.ilsole24ore.com/2016/03/chi-era-hilary-putnam/?refresh_ce=1 [Accessed on 19 October 2020], para. 8.

the relationship between imagination and reality. Finally, *Il tempo materiale* contains a *topos* from the tradition of science fiction, namely the observation of the Earth from space: towards the end of the novel, in a chapter entitled 'Lander' (pp. 292–294), the author depicts a spacecraft landing on Venus, from which the prehistoric pigeon, the speaking puddle, the mosquito, the crippled cat and other figures in the novel look down at Nimbo, light-years from Palermo. Needless to say, all these elements are unrealistic and purely imaginative: as readers, we trust and accept them through a willing suspension of disbelief.

As Ermanno Conti argues (2013, p. 174), the metaphorical and symbolic dimension of Vasta's *Il tempo materiale* finds an antecedent in *Alonso e i visionari,* a novel about Italian political terrorism written by Anna Maria Ortese published in 1996. In his essay, Conti highlights how the ethical and political dimension of Ortese's novel found expression precisely in a combination of realistic and fantastic modes of representation (Conti 2013, p. 137). Some Italian literary critics involved in the debate on realism in the 'return to reality', however, see things differently. As I mentioned on more than one occasion, these literary critics see in literary realism the only possible expression of a politically relevant literary work.

In this light, in his essay on contemporary Italian literature on the Years of Lead, Raffaele Donnarumma describes Ortese's work as a 'failed' novel (Donnarumma 2010, p. 453), whereby the antirealistic and oneiric mode of representation 'cancelled the reality' of the Years of Lead (ibid.). In the same vein, Donnarumma criticizes Vasta's novel because of its 'renounciation to a naturalistic output' (ibid.). By the same token, Gabriele Vitello argues that *Il tempo materiale* aligns with other novels in its inability to tell us about terrorism 'for what it really was' (Vitello 2013, p. 187), rather setting it 'in an oneiric and surreal atmosphere' (ibid.).

Yet, at the same time, these critics acknowledge the originality and political dimension of Vasta's depiction of terrorism in the 1970s, yet struggle to conceptualize this ethical and

political dimension without appealing to the question of realism. In some cases, this leads to a critical endeavour to define *Il tempo materiale* in terms of literary realism, which contributes to the lack of a clear definition of 'realism' in this debate. In an essay he writes on Vasta, Vitello maintains that, since 'the realist tradition is characterized by the confidence in the possibility of literary language of perfectly adhering to the real as a second skin' (2013, p. 326), Vasta's novel testifies to a new and different form of realism, which he describes as follows:

> [Vasta's] realism warns of the limits of language and brings to the fore the deep biological and material foundation in which a tragic, authentic element can be recovered. In this light, Vasta proposes a form of creatural realism that can confront the society of the spectacle and its processes of de-realization. (Vitello 2013, p. 326)

Here, Vitello refers to Auerbach's notion of 'creatural realism', which I discussed above. Yet, Vitello seeks to combine Auerbach's complex and articulated discussion of realism to a strictly mimetic conception of realism, which, as he states, 'perfectly' adheres 'to the real as a second skin' (ibid.). In my view, such definition elicits the risk of being contradictory and not helpful in defining how *Il tempo materiale* can be considered a realistic piece of literature, or, at least, the ways in which a realist concern could permeate a novel where the main representative modality is rather the fantastic. On the other hand, in his contribution to Hanna Serkowska's *Finzione cronaca realtà* (2011), Alberto Casadei discusses Vasta's *Il tempo materiale* in terms of 'allegorical realism' (Casadei 2011, pp. 17–19). This notion is part of a wider reflection on literary realism that Casadei has developed not only in this essay (pp. 3–10), but also in a study entitled *Letteratura e controvalori. Critica e scritture nell'era del web* (2014). Generally speaking, Casadei opts for a re-establishment of the very notion of 'realism' in the light of the radical modifications in our relationship with the real that have arisen with new technologies in the digital revolution, which, in his view, have made a univocal or strictly mimetic definition of literary realism inappropriate. A new and timely definition of realism, Casadei maintains, should face the

times in which the relationship between man and outside world has increasingly become mediated by omnipresent filters … that generate conditions that are neither true nor false, but «realistic» in more than one respect. (Casadei 2014, p. 151).

Hence, Casadei offers an extremely flexible definition of realism, one that articulates two poles, which he calls '*realismo ristretto*' and '*realismo allargato*':

> [i]t is better … to consider at least two concepts of literary realism as feasible: a *narrow* one («the writer aims at getting as close as possible to a historically-defined reality, with no implausible or fantastic elements») and a *broad* one («the work represents a reality comparable to the one we perceive as normal, but introduces inconsistent, implausible or even fantastic elements, so that to force readers towards an interpretation»). (Casadei 2014, p. 66)

In this manner, Casadei looks at Vasta's *Il tempo materiale* as an example of what he calls 'allegorical realism', namely a form of literary realism that is closer to the *polo allargato* than to the *polo ristretto*, and in which literary realism is strengthened by the encounter with allegory. In this case too, I contend that this definition does not help us to define the relationship between *Il tempo materiale* and literary realism: in fact, Casadei's definition of realism is extremely wide and almost overlapping with the very idea of literature itself.

In my view, the critical attempts to locate Vasta's novel within the boundaries of literary realism are a powerful lens through which to observe the problematic nature of the debate on realism in the 'return to reality': in fact, a critical tendency to see in realism the only possible expression of a politically engaged work leads to the disregard of other modes of representation as 'failed' explorations of reality, or to the forceful inclusion of non-realistic works within the boundaries of a (consequently unclear) definition of 'realism'.

This thesis does not offer a new definition of literary realism. Yet, I believe that, however complex the experience of reality might have become in our times, 'realism' continues to identify a set of techniques and strategies anchored to verisimilitude and the approximation of truth. In this light, I believe that, although this might not give full description to what 'realism' entails, a definition of 'realism' is inseparable from the category of the

'realistic', namely a depiction of events in which no supernatural or physically unexplainable phenomena occur in the story.

In the words of a theorist of the fantastic, Lucio Lugnani, we could define realism as a mode of representation that acts within the limits of our 'paradigm of reality': in an essay on Todorov (1983), Lugnani identifies in the 'paradigm of reality' the yardstick to assess the difference between a realistic and a fantastic representation of reality. A paradigm of reality, Lugnani maintains, is the combination of our scientific knowledge of reality and an axiology of values through which we interpret the interaction between individuals (Lugnani 1983, p. 54). According to our paradigm of reality, we consider something to be real or plausible. Hence, whilst a realistic representation is a 'narration of the real within the limits of the paradigm of reality' (p. 55), a fantastic, strange, or marvellous representation – categories taken from Tzvetan Todorov's theorization of the fantastic – refers to everything that constitutes the gap between the 'paradigm of reality' and its representation. And, Lugnani maintains,

> reality contains an infinity of tensions and rifts that are worthy of narration and … there are more things in heaven and earth than can be contemplated in the philosophy of Horatio or anybody else. (Lugnani 1983, p. 55)

According to Lugnani's Todorovian categories, we can describe a literary work like Vasta's *Il tempo materiale* as belonging to the 'marvellous' (Lugnani 1983, pp. 47–50; Lazzarin 2000, pp. 11–12), namely when the presence of supernatural and physically unexplained phenomena, such as speaking objects or animals, are fully accepted as normal in the story. In any case, however, it would be wrong to define this literary work in terms of realism and, most importantly, in no way does the non-realistic dimension of Vasta's novel affects its ethical and political relevance[22]. In this light, Vasta's novel also helps us to understand how

---

[22] For a more detailed study on the ethic and political potential of the fantastic, see Jackson, Rosemary. (2015) *Fantasy, The Literature of Subversion.* London & New York, Routledge.

the choice between a realistic mode of representation and one that is not is unrelated to the choice between writing a politically engaged work or one that is not.

To conclude, I contend that, precisely by virtue of their radically different modes of representation, Vasta's *Il tempo materiale* and Fontana's *Morte di un uomo felice* help us to understand how the close connection that some Italian literary critics make between realism and political commitment fails to capture the variety of ways through which literature can narrate reality. In this light, Vasta's and Fontana's works cast light on the necessity for contemporary Italian literary criticism to abandon the dichotomy between realism and antirealism and rather to consider the degree of signification of reality, whatever the modes employed, that a literary work is capable of offering. In this respect, drawing again on the categories offered by Lacanian psychoanalysis, I find that the Symbolic – namely, the realm of signification and language, the universe of culture in which the subject finds itself and which influences and determines its unconscious – is particularly useful to comment on literary texts. In particular, I find it useful to consider the relationship between the Lacanian Symbolic and conflict, this latter seen not only in political terms, but as a wider relationship with reality, as a collision with the existent that fosters our imaginative tension towards what is not given.

The case study of the victim is particularly apt to illuminate this point: compared to their coevals, Vasta and Fontana recover the dimension of conflict through the depiction of victims as literary characters. In their works, this results from an effort of signification, which these two authors express in two radically different forms. In my view, it is precisely this effort of signification that endows *Il tempo materiale* and *Morte di un uomo felice* with their ethical and political dimensions. This latter does not result from the authors' urgency of performing their political commitment, but rather builds from their careful exploration of the question of violence through literary imagination and language. In my view, this effort of signification is also what makes these two novels the most accomplished in this corpus, and

what differentiates them from the other works considered. As the literary critic Shoshana Felman writes by quoting and commenting on Henry James's New York Preface to *The Turn of the Screw* (1898),

> *the vulgar is the literal,* insofar as it is unambiguous …: because it blocks and interrupts the endless process of metaphorical substitution. The vulgar, therefore, is anything that misses, or falls short of, the dimension of the symbolic, anything that rules out, or excludes, meaning as a loss and as a flight – anything that strives, in other words, to eliminate from language its inherent silence …. (Felman 2007, p. 26)

A literary critic who has worked on and been influenced by the work of Jacques Lacan, in these lines Felman spotlights the importance of the Lacanian register of the Symbolic in relation to literature and literary criticism. Most importantly, Felman encourages us to analyze a literary work not on the basis of a realistic or non-realistic mode of representation but, rather, by looking at how that literary work fulfils the task that is peculiar to literature and constitutes its very cognitive function: namely, to signify the existent by means of representation. This task, this thesis has sought to demonstrate, cannot be seen as a perceptible or tangible action.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study explored the representation of victimhood and its relationship to realism in a corpus of novels and short stories on the strategy of tension and terrorism during the so-called Years of Lead. The authors of this corpus belong to the first generation who did not have direct experience of those events. Within this framework, I looked at victimhood both in the construction of literary characters and as a cultural paradigm for this generation of authors, exploring the link between these two aspects and how this link illuminates the question of political commitment in literature. I argued that a fundamental narrative of impotence permeates this generation of authors' expression of commitment, and I discussed this narrative of impotence as a distinctive trait of Italian writers and intellectuals belonging to the so-called 'transition generation', a generation who grew up between the decline of the nation-state system and the rise of globalization at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Finally, I discussed how this narrative of impotence finds literary expression in the so-called 'return to reality', as some Italian literary critics described the increasing interest of contemporary Italian literature in themes and subjects inspired by the socio-political context of our time. Critics identify in literary realism the pivotal tension of this new trend, which they welcome as the sign of a renewed trust in the authority and public importance of writers and intellectuals. The analysis undertaken in this study allowed me to argue that, in my corpus, the expression of political commitment is unrelated to literary realism. Instead, the 'return to reality' expresses the desire of the authors to be politically engaged, emphasizing the relevance of literature to the social and political reality of their time. I argued that a concern for action and direct intervention permeates the works of this generation of authors, and that this concern for action is at odds with the symbolization of conflict through the depiction of victims as vulnerable and embodied alterities. Against this backdrop, the generational

imagery of 1970s terrorism explored in this thesis offered new insights on the question of ethics and intellectual engagement in contemporary Italian culture.

In Part I, I developed a close textual analysis of the representation of victims as literary characters in my corpus, casting light on the strong ideological polarization between 'good' and 'bad' victims and on the robust presence of the authorial voice within this polarization. Chapter 1, in particular, explored the rhetoric of martyrdom and the spectacular depiction of innocence in the representation of 'good' victims, while Chapter 2 looked at the deprecation and neglect of 'bad' victims. In both cases, I showed how these authors devised the literary characters of victims through a range of different styles and modes of representation, often spectacular and unrealistic. I also showed how the representation of victims has strong and often explicit points of contact with the social and political background of Italy during the 2000s, when these works were conceived and written. In this light, both chapters addressed the 'return to reality' as an attempt by authors to foster a moral reaction in their readers, performing their political commitment so as to make their writing appear more compelling and relevant.

In Part II, I explored the relationship between political commitment and victimhood in more detail. I argued that a fundamental narrative of impotence – of lacking 'potency', as intellectuals, to have an impact on reality – permeates the display of political commitment by this generation of authors. I argued that this impotence can be treated as generational inasmuch as it unveils a common, generational problem. With examples from my primary sources and theoretical support, I identified three main patterns through which victimhood emerges as a cultural paradigm for this generation of authors. Chapter 3 looked at the iconic status of Pier Paolo Pasolini in the performance of authorial political commitment and at the role played by Pasolini-as-icon in assessing this commitment to be unsuccessful. Chapter 4 explored the events of the 2001 G8 summit in Genoa as a 'social framework of memory' for the interpretation of the Years of Lead, illustrating how police brutality towards protesters is

used to develop a systematic narrative of generational victimization in contemporary Italian history. In contrast, Chapter 5 looked at the idealization of leftist terrorists of the Years of Lead as a generation that 'made' history, which is intertwined with the depiction of present-day generations as passive and lacking historical agency.

I defined the cultural paradigm of victimhood as 'hypermodern', as it originates from an unsuccessful application to the globalized present of some paradigms of interpretation for politics and history that are typical of modern political culture. In Chapter 6, I discussed how this condition of hypermodern impotence, expressed in the cultural paradigm of victimhood, leads readers to see the present as a time of inaction, with no conflicts in which to engage. I discussed how, in fact, the authors of my corpus rely on a patriarchal reading of conflict, which found its culmination in the Years of Lead; they are blind to the conflicts of the present, a time of unprecedented interdependence, in which conflict takes shape in different and more horizontal terms. Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis and on its applications to the Italian Years of Lead, I discussed the relationship between conflict and the signification of reality, addressing the 'return to reality' as a literary expression of this generational feeling of impotence.

In Part III, I discussed how the question of victimhood in my corpus contributes to an understanding of the so-called 'return to reality', particularly in its relationship with realism. In Chapter 7, I used Lacan's theory of the Symbolic – through some Lacanian discussions of realism by Roland Barthes (1968), Eric Downing (2000), and Walter Siti (2013) – to discuss the 'return to reality' as a traumatic repetition of the non-symbolized Real in literature. I also engaged with the Lacanian notion of 'repetition', namely the expression of what resists symbolization, to interpret the depiction of victims in the 'return to reality' as the reiteration, in language, of the reality of violence. By either monumentalizing the victims or reducing them to targets, our authors do not symbolize conflict, which rests on the

recognition of alterity, but reiterate in language the non-recognition of alterity that characterizes violence.

I devoted the final chapter to two works that depict victims in original and unconventional ways. I showed how these depictions differ from others in the corpus in their symbolization of conflict and its degeneration into violence through the literary character of the victim, and I evidenced the political dimensions of these two novels. These two authors abandon a nostalgically patriarchal reading of conflict, anchoring conflict to the encounter with a horizontal, embodied, and vulnerable alterity. I also showed how this political dimension finds expression in two radically different modes of representation unrelated to literary realism. Thus, I concluded that, whatever the modes employed, the political dimension of a literary work dovetails with its capacity to access the symbolic order, the universe of meaning and signification.

The analysis carried out in this thesis provided an original framework for reflection on a generation of Italian writers who experienced a critical moment of the country's recent history. The generational imagery of 1970s terrorism explored in this thesis illustrates the complexities of this historical period and of the great and deep transformations that twenty-first century globalization introduced into the national culture. My analysis showed how, as part of the 'transition' generation, these authors inherited some paradigms of interpretation for politics and history that took shape within a national *epos* and are no longer useful to interpret the present. Political agency and conflict are conceived from a vertical, intergenerational perspective, in which a revolutionary and ritual parricide is seen as the only way of accessing History. Caught up in a nostalgic fascination with this kind of narrative and for a generation that 'made history' by killing their political fathers, most of the authors here considered seem blind to the new and diverse forms that conflict takes in the unprecedented interconnection of the present, a time that poses the question of agency in more relational and horizontal terms. More than ever before, conflict builds today on our

relationship with alterity, on the problem of creating forms of sustainable coexistence between radically different and increasingly interdependent cultures, on the still unresolved dilemma of balancing universalism and relativism, and in finding shared values in global societies. In this light, the saga of revolutionary generations who 'make history' by killing their fathers appears as a model of political conflict that belongs to the past.

The acknowledgement of a form of agency in the suffering of others raises the question of what some have discussed as a modern *hubris* – namely 'the refusal to accept limits, the insistence on continually reaching out … beyond morality, beyond tragedy, beyond culture', as Daniel Bell defined it (1978, pp. 49–50). In this respect, my analysis aligns with other reflections on suffering and victimhood in contemporary Italian criticism, such as Cristina Savettieri's analysis of innocence in the modern novel (2017) or Alessandra Montalbano's essay on how the emergence of victims in the public sphere put Italian culture in contact with a new, more relational way of conceiving political subjectivity in contemporary philosophical thought (2018). To address these issues, I found it particularly useful to draw on Lacan's theory of the Law, as a 'virtuous experience of limit' (2011, p. 5), namely as the encounter of a boundary, of what cannot be possessed and attained, which carries ethical and epistemological significance and is the source of an imaginative tension.

Through a contextual reading of the representation of victims in a corpus of novels and short stories by the first generation who did not experience 1970s terrorism, the present study casts new light on the Years of Lead as a 'national trauma' in the collective Italian memory, as some scholars have discussed (Lombardi 2000; Tota 2003; Glynn 2006). In particular, building on theorizations by Judith Lewis Herman (1992) and Cathy Caruth (1995 and 1996), Ruth Glynn looked at the Years of Lead as an unhealed wound in the Italian memory, which haunts us with the memory of that violence and against which Italian society has developed a number of defence mechanisms. In this thesis, I suggested reading the literary works from the so-called 'return to reality' as the literary expression of this trauma,

while arguing that the violence that produced this trauma is glorified and glamorized as part of the myth of the Years of Lead.

Overall, I also suggested that generational belonging should not be seen as deterministic. As I pointed out in the Introduction, the imagery of a specific social group of contemporary Italian authors who wrote fiction about the Years of Lead, as well as my analysis, cannot be illustrative of the imagery of all of the Italians who belong to that generation. Moreover, within the specific group of my interest, I evidenced some central tendencies in the generational imagery of the Years of Lead. I also drew attention to the work of two authors that overcome the mythologization of the Years of Lead, highlighting how the construction of the literary character of the victim is central to this process. These two authors reworked the memory of the Years of Lead in original and unconventional ways, demonstrating the possibility of alternative modes for the emplotment of their generational belonging. As Luisa Passerini writes in her preface to the Italian edition of Halbwachs's *La mémoire collective*,

> individuals are not bearers of structures that repeat, over and over, the archetypal drama. Rather, they are characterized by a symbolic activity during which each of them plays a unique and unrepeatable role. … The specific nature of each individual psyche appears … in its complex structures and configurations. … Hence, individual contributions are to be found not so much in memory, but rather, in the way in which memory reinvents its position in history and the relationship between one individual and the others. (Halbwachs 2001, pp. 194–195)

This thesis took literature as a testing ground to explore the 'symbolic activity' that forges a relationship with collective memory. The analysis of the corpus suggests that the so-called 'return to reality' provides a literary expression to a political and historical trauma of a generation of writers. By discussing how conflict informs and structures the literary signification of the Real, I also cast light on the possibilities of literature to describe a different 'paradigm of reality' (Lugnani 1983). In fact, various modes of representations and stylistic

choices that are not necessarily realistic can access signification and language as the result

of the conflictual relationship between the subject and reality.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Italian are by Marella Feltrin-Morris.

Primary Sources

Babette Factory. (2005) *2005 dopo Cristo*. Torino, Einaudi.

Babsi Jones. (2007) *Sappiano le mie parole di sangue.* Milano, Rizzoli.

Balestrini, Nanni. (2006) *L'editore* (first edn. 1989). Roma, Derive Approdi.

Balicco, Daniele. (2011) 'Da Edipo a Telemaco: figli in cerca di padri. Intervista a Massimo Recalcati', *Allegoria,* 63. [Online] Available from http://www.leparoleelecose.it/?p=4919 [Accessed on 5 June 2020].

Ballestra, Silvia. (2009) *I giorni della Rotonda.* Milano, Rizzoli.

Braghetti, Anna Laura, Tavella, Paola. (1998) *Il prigioniero.* Milano, Mondadori.

Calabresi, Mario. (2007) *Spingendo la notte un po' più in là.* Milano, Mondadori.

Calvino, Italo. (1947) *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno,* in Calvino, Italo. (1991) *Romanzi e racconti.* Milano, Mondadori, pp. 3-147.

Cenciarelli, Gaja. (2011) *Sangue del suo sangue.* Roma, Nottetempo.

Fasanella, Giovanni, Antonella, Grippo. (2006) *I silenzi degli innocenti.* Milano, Rizzoli.

Flaubert, Gustave. (1961) *Three tales* (first edn. 1877), trans. by Baldick, Robert, Harmondsworth, Penguin Classics.

Fogli, Patrick. (2010) *Il tempo infranto* (first edn. 2008). Segrate, Piemme.

Fontana, Giorgio. (2011) *La velocità del buio*. Lavagna, Editrice Zona.

——. (2014) *Morte di un uomo felice.* Palermo, Sellerio.

——. (2016) 'Chi era Hilary Putnam', *Il Sole 24 Ore,* 14 March. [Online]. Available from: https://24ilmagazine.ilsole24ore.com/2016/03/chi-era-hilary-putnam/?refresh_ce=1 [Accessed on 19 October 2020].

Garlini, Alberto. (2004) *Fùtbol bailado.* Milano, Sironi.

——. (2012) *La legge dell'odio.* Torino, Einaudi.

Genna, Giuseppe. (1999) *Catrame.* Milano, Mondadori.

——. (2001) *Nel nome di Ishmael.* Milano, Mondadori.

——. (2006) *Dies Irae,* 2014 edition. Milano, Rizzoli.

——. (2010) *Assalto a un tempo devastato e vile. Versione 3.0.* Roma, Minimum Fax.

——. (2013) *Fine impero.* Roma, Minimum Fax.

Iovane, Antonio. (2019) *Il brigatista.* Roma, Minimum Fax.

James, Henry. (1998) *The Turn of the Screw and Other Stories* (first edn. 1898). Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Lucarelli, Valerio. (2006) *Buio Rivoluzione.* Ancona, Pequod.

——. (2010) *Vorrei che il futuro fosse oggi*. Napoli, L'Ancora del Mediterraneo.

Moretti, Mario. (1994) *Brigate Rosse: una storia italiana. Intervista di Carla Mosca e Rossana Rossanda,* 2019 edition. Milano, Mondadori.

Moretti, Luca, Bruno, Toni. (2010) *Non mi uccise la morte.* Roma, Castelvecchi Editore.

Moretti, Luca. (2011) *Il senso del piombo.* Roma, Castelvecchi Editore.

Moretti, Luca, Montana, Duke. (2011) *Roma violenta.* Roma, Castelvecchi Editore.

Morgante, Dario. (2007) *La compagna P38. Il romanzo delle Brigate Rosse.* Roma, Newton Compton.

Murray, Les. (1969) *The Weatherboard Cathedral.* Sidney, Angus & Robertson.

Ortese, Anna Maria. (1996) *Alonso e i visionari.* Milano, Adelphi.

Paolin, Demetrio. (2009) *Il mio nome è Legione.* Massa, Transeuropa.

——. (2018) 'Piombo (un'autobiografia)', in *Spiegelungen | Vite allo specchio. Zehn neue literarische Stimmen aus Italien | Dieci nuovi protagonisti della scena letteraria italiana.* Freiburg, Non Solo Verlag, pp. 55-64.

Pasolini, Pier Paolo. (1948-1949) 'La crocifissione', in Pasolini, Pier Paolo. (2009) *Tutte le poesie*, I. Milano, Mondadori, pp. 467-468.

——. (1968). 'Il PCI ai giovani!!', *Nuovi Argomenti,* 10, in Pasolini, Pier Paolo. (2008) *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte*, I. Milano, Mondadori, pp. 1440-1450.

——. (1973). 'Il 'discorso' dei capelli', in Pasolini, Pier Paolo. (2009), *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*. Milano, Mondadori, pp. 271-277.

——. (1976) *Scritti corsari.* Milano, Garzanti.

——. (1974) 'Che cos'è questo golpe?', *Il corriere della sera,* 14 November, in Pasolini, Pier Paolo. (1999) *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*. Milano, Mondadori, pp. 362-367

——. (1974) 'Genocidio', in Pasolini, Pier Paolo. (2009) *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*. Milano, Mondadori, pp. 511-517.

——. (1992) *Petrolio.* Torino, Einaudi.

——. (1976) 'Fascista', in Pasolini, Pier Paolo. (1999) *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*. Milano, Mondadori, pp. 518-522.

——. (1976) 'La realtà', in Pasolini, Pier Paolo. (2009) *Tutte le poesie*. Milano, Mondadori, II, pp.1109-1123.

——. (1979) *Descrizioni di descrizioni*, in Pasolini, Pier Paolo. (2008) *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte*. Milano, Mondadori, pp. 1685-2224.

——. (1980) 'Poeta delle ceneri', in Pasolini, Pier Paolo. (2009) *Tutte le poesie.* Milano, Mondadori, II, pp. 1261-1288.

——. (1983) *Il sogno del centauro,* in Pasolini, Pier Paolo. (1999) *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*. Milano, Mondadori, pp. 1401-1550.

Raimo, Christian. (2001) *Latte.* Roma, Minimum Fax.

——. (2004) *Dov'eri tu quando le stelle del mattino gioivano in coro?.* Roma, Minimum Fax.

——. (2008) 'La vittima, la memoria, l'oblio', *Nazione Indiana,* 28 November. [Online] Available from https://www.nazioneindiana.com/2008/11/28/la-vittima-la-memoria-loblio/ [Accessed on 27 December 2020].

——. (2010) 'La performatività vuota di Berlusconi – idee per un nuovo discorso di sinistra', *Nazione Indiana,* 13 August. [Online]. Available from https://www.nazioneindiana.com/2010/08/13/la-performativita-vuota-di-berlusconi-idee-per-un-nuovo-discorso-di-sinistra/ [Accessed on 22 April 2019].

——. (2014) 'La ripetitività della tragedia', *Il Post*, 14 July. [Online] Available from https://www.ilpost.it/christianraimo/2014/07/12/israele-gaza/ [Accessed on 27 December 2020].

——. (2015) 'È possibile capire i terroristi?', *Internazionale,* 18 November. [Online]. Available from https://www.internazionale.it/opinione/christian-raimo/2015/11/18/capire-terroristi-terrorismo [Accessed on 27 December 2020].

——. (2015) 'Genova per lui', *Internazionale,* 10 April. [Online]. Available from https://www.internazionale.it/opinione/christian-raimo/2015/04/10/renzi-genova-g8 [Accessed on 27 December 2020].

——. (2016) 'Capire Genova ci aiuta a pensare al futuro della nostra politica', *Internazionale*, 21 July. [Online]. Available from https://www.internazionale.it/opinione/christian-raimo/2016/07/21/g8-genova-politica-futura [Accessed on 27 December 2020].

——. (2017a) 'La mia generazione', *minima&moralia,* 27 July. [Online]. Available from http://www.minimaetmoralia.it/wp/la-mia-generazione/ [Accessed on 27 December 2020].

——. (2017b) 'Come raccontare il terrorismo e ciò che viene dopo: su *I Soldati delle Parole* di Frank Wasterman', *minima&moralia*, 19 November. [Online]. Available from https://www.minimaetmoralia.it/wp/altro/raccontare-terrorismo-cio-viene-soldati-delle-parole-frank-wasterman/ [Accessed on 27 December 2020].

Ravera Rafele, Nicola. (2017) *Il senso della lotta.* Roma, Fandango.

Sarasso, Simone. (2012) *Confine di stato* (firs edn. 2007). Venezia, Marsilio.

——. (2009) *Settanta*. Venezia, Marsilio.

——. (2009) 'Il giallo, *Confine di Stato,* la storia dei colpevoli', in Milanesi, Claudio (ed.). *Il romanzo poliziesco. La storia, la memoria. Italia.* Bologna, Astraea Editrice, pp. 567-579.

——. (2010) 'Solve et coagula: *il futuro della letteratura italiana per come lo vedo io'*. [Lecture] Wellesley College (USA), 10 November. Courtesy of Professor David Ward (Wellesley College).

——. (2013) *Il paese che amo.* Venezia, Marsilio.

Tobagi, Benedetta. (2009) *Come mi batte forte il tuo cuore.* Torino, Einaudi.

Tondelli, Pier Vittorio. (1985) Gli scarti, *Linus*, June, 243.

Tondelli, Leonardo. (2011) 'Passa la Storia, fai ciao con la manina*,* blog post, 9 July.' [Online] Available from https://leonardo.blogspot.com/2007/07/passa-la-storia-fai-ciao-con-la-manina.html [Accessed on 11 November 2019].

Vasta, Giorgio. (2008) *Il tempo materiale.* Roma, Minimum Fax.

Vv. Aa. (2011) *Manifesto TQ.* [Online] Available from http://download.repubblica.it/pdf/2011/Manifesto-TQ.pdf [Accessed on 9 November 2020].

Wu Ming. (2011) 'Pensando alle rivolte del 2011. Tamburi a Genova (nell'anno del decennale)', blog post, 3 January. [Online]. Available from https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/2011/01/pensando-alle-rivolte-del-2011-tamburi-a-genova-nellanno-del-decennale/ [Accessed on 11 November 2019].

Secundary Sources

Agamben, Giorgio. (2006) *Che cos'è un dispositivo?* Milano, Nottetempo, trans. by Kishik, David, Pedatella, Stefan. (2009) *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays.* Stanford, Stanford University Press.

Agnoletto, Vittorio, Guadagnucci, Lorenzo. (2011) *L'eclisse della democrazia. Le verità nascoste sul G8 2001 a Genova.* Milano, Feltrinelli.

Albrow, Martin. (2012) 'Universalism', in Alheiner, Helmut K., Juergensmeyer, Mark (eds.). *Encyclopedia of Global Studies,* 1, 1712-1713. [Online] Available from http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/10.4135/9781452218557.n539 [Accessed on 30 May 2020].

Alfandary, Isabelle. (2019) 'Identity between sex and gender in Freud and Lacan', *Journal of the CIPH,* 95(1), 22-43, available from https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_RDES_095_0022--identity-between-sex-and-gender-in-freud.htm [Accessed on 29 May 2020].

Annovi, Gian Maria. (2017) *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Performing Authorship.* New York, Columbia University Press.

Anonymous. (2015). 'Diaz, il poliziotto del G8: "non capisco le critiche, non ho commesso reati*",* *La Repubblica.* [Online]. Available from https://video.repubblica.it/cronaca/diaz-il-poliziotto-del-g8-non-capisco-le-critiche-non-ho-commesso-reati/197730/196759 [Accessed on 6 September 2020].

Antonelli, Giuseppe et al. (2011) 'Andare oltre la linea d'ombra'*,* *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 18 April. [Online]. Available from https://st.ilsole24ore.com/art/cultura/2011-04-18/andare-oltre-linea-ombra-131304.shtml?uuid=Aav6QyPD [Accessed on 9 November 2020].

Antonello, Pierpaolo. (2009) 'Narratives of sacrifice: Pasolini and Moro', in Antonello, Pierpaolo, O' Leary, Alan (eds.) *Imagining Terrorism: The Rhetoric and Representation of Political Violence in Italy 1969-2009.* Oxford, Legenda, pp. 30-47.

Antonello, Pierpaolo, O'Leary, Alan (eds.). (2009) *Imagining Terrorism: The Rhetoric and Representation of Political Violence in Italy 1969-2009.* Oxford, Legenda.

Antonello, Pierpaolo, Mussgnug, Florian (eds.). (2009) *Postmodern Impegno. Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture.* Oxford, Peter Lang.

Antonello, Pierpaolo. (2012) *Dimenticare Pasolini. Intellettuali e impegno nell'Italia contemporanea.* Milano, Mimesis.

Arendt, Hannah. (1990) *On Revolution.* London, Penguin Books.

Associazione Antigone. (2007) *Relazione della commissione ministeriale per la riforma del codice penale.* [Online]. Available from http://www.antigone.it/english/76-archivio/1696-relazione-della-commissione-ministeriale-per-la-riforma-del-codice-penale [Accessed on 16 February 2019].

Aubert, Nicole (ed.). (2006) *L'individu hypermoderne.* Paris, Eres Edition.

——. (2011) *La société hypermoderne. Ruptures et contradictions*. Paris, L'Harmattan.

Auerbach, Erich. (1938) 'Figura', *Archivum Romanicum*, 22, 436–489.

——. (1946) *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur.* Tübingen, A. Francke Verlag, trans. By Trask, Willard R. (2003) *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature.* Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Balibar, Étienne. (2004) 'Racism, Sexism, Universalism(s)', in Gordon, Neve (ed.). *From the Margins of Globalization: Critical Perspectives on Human Rights*. Lanham, Lexington Books, pp. 43-59.

Banti, Alberto Mario. (2011) *Sublime madre nostra. La nazione italiana dal Risorgimento al fascismo.* Bari, Laterza.

Barański, Zygmunt G. (1999) 'Introduction: the importance of being Pasolini', in Barański, Zygmunt G. (ed.), *Pasolini Old and New.* Dublin, Foster Court Press, pp. 13-40.

Barthes, Roland. (1968) 'L'Effet de réel', *Communications,* 11, 84-89, in Barthes, Roland. (1989) *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Howard, Richard. Berkeley, University of California Press, pp. 141-148.

——. (1973) *Le Plaisir du texte.* Paris, Seuil, trans. by Miller, Richard. (1976) *The Pleasure of the Text.* London, Jonathan Cape.

——. (1975) *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes.* Paris, Seuil, trans. by Howard, Richard. (1977) *Roland Barthes on Roland Barthes*. New York, Hill & Wang.

Baudrillard, Jean. (1995) *Le Crime parfait.* Paris, Galilée, trans. by Turner, Chris. (1996) *The Perfect Crime.* London, New York, Verso.

——. (1997) *Le Paroxyste indifférent: Entretiens avec Philippe Petit.* Paris, Grasset, trans. by Turner, Chris. (1998) *Paroxysm: Interviews with Philippe Petit.* London, New York, Verso.

Bazzocchi, Marco Antonio. (2017) *Esposizioni. Pasolini, Foucault e l'esercizio della verità.* Bologna, Il Mulino.

Bell, Daniel. (1960) *The End of Ideologies: On the exhaustion of political ideas in the Fifties*. New York, Free Press.

——. (1972) 'The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 6, 1/2, Special Double Issue: Capitalism, Culture, and Education, 11-38.

——. (1978) *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism.* New York, Basic Books.

Bellassai, Sandro. (2012) *L'invenzione della virilità. Politica e immaginario maschile nell'Italia contemporanea* (first edn. 2012). Roma, Carocci.

Belpoliti, Marco. (2009) *Il corpo del capo.* Modena, Guanda.

Berardi, Franco 'Bifo'. (2017) *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility.* New York, Verso.

Berardinelli, Alfonso. (2013) 'Ferraris e il New Realism come forma estrema di populismo culturale', *Il Foglio,* 8 June. [Online]. Available from https://demo.carocci.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ilfoglio08.06.13.pdf [Accessed on 31 December 2020].

Bolis, Tommaso, Xerri, Mario. (2014) *Archivi memoria di tutti. Le fonti per la storia delle stragi e del terrorismo.* Roma, Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo.

Bolognesi, Paolo. (1998) '2 Agosto 1998'. [Online] Available from: https://www.stragi.it/vittime/discorso-1998 [Accessed on 10 May 2019].

Boni, Federico. (2008) *Il superleader. Fenomenologia mediatica di Silvio Berlusconi.* Roma, Meltemi.

Boscolo, Claudia, Jossa, Stefano. (2014) *Scritture di resistenza. Sguardi politici dalla narrativa italiana contemporanea*. Roma, Carocci.

Bouris, Erica. (2007) *Complex Political Victims.* Bloomfield, Kumarian Press.

Braidotti, Rosi. (2013) *The Posthuman.* Cambridge, Polity Press.

Bryant, Levi, R, Srnicek, Nick, and Harman, Graham. (2011) *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism.* Melbourne, re.press.

Buchignani, Paolo. (2017) *Ribelli d'Italia. Il sogno della rivoluzione da Mazzini alle Brigate Rosse.* Venezia, Marsilio.

Burns, Jennifer. (2001) *Fragments of Impegno: Interpretation and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Literature (1980-2000).* Leeds, Northern Universities Press.

Butler, Judith. (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of "Sex".* New York, Routledge.

——. (2004) *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence.* London & New York, Verso.

Calvi, Fabrizio. (1982) *Camarade P.38.* Paris, Grasset.

Calvino, Italo. (1976) 'Usi politici giusti e sbagliati della letteratura', in Calvino, Italo. (1986) *The Uses of Literature, Essays,* trans. by Creagh, Patrick, San Diego, New York, London, Harcourt Brace & Company, pp. 89-100.

Caruth, Cathy. (1995) *Trauma: Explorations in Memory.* Baltimora, John Hopkins University Press.

Casadei, Alberto. (2007) *Stile e tradizione del romanzo italiano contemporaneo,* 2009 edition. Bologna, Il Mulino.

——. (2011) 'Realismo e allegoria nella narrativa italiana contemporanea', in Serkowska, Hanna. (2011) *Finzione, cronaca, realtà. Scambi, intrecci e prospettive nella narrativa italiana contemporanea.* Massa, Transeuropa, pp. 5-8.

——. (2014) *Letteratura e controvalori. Critica e scritture nell'era del web.* Roma, Donzelli Editore.

Cavarero, Adriana. (2007) *Orrorismo.* Milano, Feltrinelli.

Charles, Sébastien. (2007) *L'hypermoderne expliqué aux enfants*. Montréal, Liber.

Ceci, Giovanni Mario. (2013) *Il terrorismo italiano. Storia di un dibattito.* Roma, Carocci.

——. (2016) 'A "Historical Turn" in Terrorism Studies?', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 51(4), 888-896.

——, Zinni, Maurizio. (2017) 'I duellanti: una guerra civile di celluloide? I terrorismi e lo Stato nel cinema italiano (1995-2012)', in Dogliani, Patrizia, Matard-Bonucci, Marie-Anne. *Democrazia insicura. Violenze, repressioni e stato di diritto nella storia della Repubblica (1945-1995)*, Roma, Donzelli Editore, pp. 251-265.

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

Cento Bull, Anna, Cooke, Philip. (2013) *Ending Terrorism in Italy.* London, Routledge.

Ceserani, Remo. (2012) 'La maledizione degli "ismi"'. *Allegoria*, 65-66, 191-213.

Christie, Nils. (1986) 'The ideal victim', in Fattah, Ezzat, A. (eds.), *From Crime Policy to Victim Policy: Reorienting the Justice System*. Hampshire, Macmillan, pp. 17–30.

Conti, Ermanno. (2013) *Gli "anni di piombo" nella letteratura italiana.* Ravenna, Longo Editore.

Cooke, Philip. (2011) *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance.* New York, Palgrave Macmillan.

Crainz, Guido. (2009) *Autobiografia di una Repubblica.* Milano, Feltrinelli.

D'Agostini, Franca. (2013) *Realismo? Una questione non controversa.* Torino, Bollati Boringhieri.

Dalkey Archive Press. (1993) 'A Conversation with David Foster Wallace By Larry McCaffery'*. The Review of Contemporary Fiction,* 13.2. [Online] Available from https://www.dalkeyarchive.com/a-conversation-with-david-foster-wallace-by-larry-mccaffery/ [Accessed on 25 October 2020].

Davies, Todd, Womack, Kenneth (eds.). (2001) *Mapping the Ethical Turn.* Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press.

De Luna, Giovanni. (2009) *Le Ragioni di un decennio. 1969-1979, Militanza, violenza, sconfitta, memoria.* Milano, Feltrinelli.

——. (2011) *La Repubblica del dolore. Le memorie di un'Italia divisa.* Milano, Feltrinelli.

Della Porta, Donatella, Rossi, Maurizio. (1984) *Cifre crudeli. Bilancio dei terrorismi italiani.* Bologna, Istituto di Studi e Ricerche «Carlo Cattaneo».

Della Porta, Donatella. (2003) *I new global. Chi sono e cosa vogliono i critici della globalizzazione.* Bologna, Il Mulino.

——, Reiter, Herbert. (2004) *Polizia e protesta. L'ordine pubblico dalla Liberazione ai «no global».* Bologna, Il Mulino.

Della Porta, Donatella, Andretta, Massimiliano, Mosca, Lorenzo, Reiter, Herbert. (2006) *Globalization from Below: Transnational Activists and Protest Networks.* Minneapolis & London, University of Minnesota Press.

Di Blasi, Luca, Gragnolati, Manuele, Holzey, Christoph F.E. (eds.). (2016) *The Scandal of Self-Contradiction: Pasolini's Multistable Subjectivities, Traditions, Geographies.* Vienna, Turia+Kant.

Di Cesare, Antonella. (2013) 'Fantasticherie di un pensiero reazionario', in Di Cesare, Antonella, Ocone, Corraso, Regazzoni, Simone (eds.). *Il nuovo realismo è un populismo*, Genova, Il Melangolo, pp. 9-24.

Di Martino, Loredana, Verdicchio, Pasquale (eds.). (2017) *Encounters with The Real in Contemporary Italian Literature and Cinema*. Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Donnarumma, Raffaele, Policastro, Gilda. (2008) 'Ritorno alla realtà? Otto interviste a narratori italiani', *Allegoria*, 57, 9-25.

Donnarumma, Raffaele. (2008) 'Nuovi realismi e persistenze postmoderne', *Allegoria,* 57, 26-54.

——. (2010) 'Storia, immaginario, letteratura: il terrorismo nella narrativa italiana (1969-2010)', in Cataldi, Pietro (ed.) *Per Romano Luperini.* Palermo, Palumbo, pp. 438-465.

——. (2011) 'Ipermodernità: ipotesi per un congedo dal postmoderno', *Allegoria,* 64, 2, 15-50.

——. (2014) *Ipermodernità. Dove va la narrativa contemporanea*. Bologna, Il Mulino.

Downing, Eric. (2000) *Double Exposures: Repetition and Realism in Nineteenth-Century German Fiction.* Stanford, Stanford University Press.

Drake, Richard. (2003) *Apostles and Agitators: Italy's Marxist Revolutionary Tradition.* Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

Enzensberger, Hans Magnus. (1974) *Politics and Crime.* New York, The Seabury Press.

——. (2008) *Hammerstein oder der Eigensinn: eine deutsche Geschichte*. Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, trans. by Chalmers, Martin. (2010) *The Silences of Hammerstein.* London, Seagull.

Ercolino, Stefano. (2015) *Il romanzo massimalista.* Milano, Bompiani.

Fedeli, Franco. (1981) *Da sbirro a tutore della legge: l'emarginazione, i problemi della famiglia, la tensione, i pericoli di un mestiere difficile nelle lettere dei poliziotti.* Roma, Napoleone.

Felman, Shoshana. (2007) 'Writing and madness. From "Henry James: Madness and The Risks of Practice (Turning the Screw of Interpretation)"', in Sun, Emily, Peretz, Eyal, Baer, Ulrich (eds.). *The Claims of Literature: a Shoshana Felman Reader*. New York, Fordham University Press, pp. 15-50.

Ferragu, Gilles (2014) *Histoire du terrorisme.* Paris, Perrin.

Ferraris, Maurizio. (2012) *Manifesto del nuovo realismo*. Roma, Laterza.

Flood, Christopher. (2001) *Political Myth*. London, Routledge.

Fofi, Goffredo. (2015) *Il racconto onesto. 60 scrittori, 60 risposte*. Roma, Contrasto.

Foot, John. (2009) *Italy's Divided Memory*. London, Palgrave Macmillan.

Fulginiti, Valentina. (2016) 'Resisting Leviathan: Depictions of Silvio Berlusconi in Italian fiction 2003-2011', *The Italianist,* 36, 1, 106-27.

Garber, Marjorie, Hanssen, Beatrice, Walkowitz, Rebecca L. (eds.). (2000) *The Turn to Ethics.* London and New York, Routledge.

Gentile, Emilio. (2005) 'The Fascist Antropological Revolution', in Bonsaver, Guido, Gordon, Robert S.C. (eds.). *Culture, Censorship and the State in Twentieth-Century Italy.* Oxford, Legenda, pp. 22-33.

Ghidotti, Cecilia. (2015) '«Gli anni settanta non sono il fine» Tra rimosso e iper-esposizione: scrittori italiani contemporanei e racconto degli anni Settanta', *Studi Culturali,* 2, 217-234.

Gibelli, Antonio. (2005) *Il popolo bambino. Infanzia e nazione dalla Grande Guerra a Salò*. Torino, Einaudi.

Giglioli, Daniele. (2007) *All'ordine del giorno è il terrore.* Milano, Bompiani.

——. (2011) *Senza trauma. Scrittura dell'estremo e narrativa del nuovo millennio.* Roma, Quodlibet.

——. (2014) *Critica della vittima.* Milano, Nottetempo.

——. (2015) 'La città senza nome. Eclissi del conflitto e dispositivi di impotenza', *Between*, V, 10, 1-15.

——. (2016) 'Risentimenti antipostmoderni', *CoSMo – Comparative Studies in Modernism,* 9, Fall, 203-218.

Girard, René. (1972) *Violence et le Sacré.* Paris, Grasset, trans. by Gregory, Patrick. (1977) *Violence and the Sacred.* Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press.

——. (1978) *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde.* Paris, Grasset, trans. by Bann, Stephen, Metteer, Michael. (1987) *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World: Research Undertaken in Collaboration with J.-M. Oughourlian and G. Lefort.* Stanford, Stanford University Press.

Glynn, Ruth. (2006) 'Trauma on the line: terrorism and testimony in the *anni di piombo*', *Italianistica Ultraiectina,* 1, 317-335.

——, Lombardi, Giancarlo, O'Leary, Alan. (2012) *Terrorism Italian Style: Representations of Political Violence in Contemporary Italian Cinema.* London, IGRS Books.

Glynn, Ruth, Lombardi, Giancarlo (eds.). (2012) *Remembering Aldo Moro. The Cultural Legacy of the 1978 Kidnapping and Murder*. Oxford, Legenda.

Glynn, Ruth. (2013) 'The turn to the victim in Italian culture: victim-centred narratives of the *anni di piombo*', *Modern Italy,* 8(4), 373-390.

Golino, Enzo. (1995) *Tra lucciole e palazzo. Il mito Pasolini dentro la realtà.* Palermo, Sellerio.

Greimas, Algirdas Julien. (1970) *Du sense.* Paris, Seuil, trans. by Perron, Paul J. and Collins, Frank H. (1987) *On Meaning.* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

Guzzo, Domenico. (2009) 'Gli anni '60 e '70 in nero: Simone Sarasso', in Milanesi, Claudio (ed.). *Il romanzo poliziesco: la storia, la memoria. Italia.* Bologna, Astraea Editrice, pp. 233-246.

Hajek, Andrea. (2009) 'Brigatisti di carta: realtà e finzione nella *P38,* "il romanzo delle Brigate Rosse"', in *Littérature et "temps des révoltes" (Italie, 1967-1980)*, Lyon, 27-29 November 2009. [Online]. Available from http://colloque-temps-revoltes.ens-lsh.fr/spip.php?article150 [Accessed on 28 December 2020].

——. (2013) *Negotiating Memories of Protest in Western Europe: The Case of Italy.* London, Palgrave Macmillan.

Halbwachs, Maurice. (1925) *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire.* Paris, Félix Alcan, trans. by Lewis A. Coser. (1992) *On Collective Memory*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

——. (1950) *La mémoire collective.* Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, trans. by Ditter, Francis J., Ditter, Vida Yazdi. (1980) *The Collective Memory.* New York, Harper & Row.

Hardt, Michael. (1997) 'Exposure: Pasolini and the flesh', in Massumi, Brian (ed.). *A Shock to Thought: Expressionism after Deleuze and Guattari.* London, Routledge, pp. 581-87.

Herman, Lewis, Judith. (1992) *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence.* New York, Basic Books.

Hirsch, Marianne. (1992-1993) 'Family pictures: Maus, mourning, and post-memory', *Discourse*, 15(2), Special Issue: The Emotions, Gender, and The Politics of Subjectivity, 3-29.

——. (2008) 'The generation of postmemory', *Poetics Today,* 29(1), 103-128.

Innocenti, Orsetta. (2005) 'Anna Magnani simbolo della Resistenza', *Patria Indipendente,* 31 March, 59-60.

Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum de l'autre femme.* Paris, Éditions de Minuit, trans. by *Porter, Catherine* (1985) *Speculum of the Other Woman.* Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

——. (1977) *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un.* Paris, Éditions de Minuit, trans. by Gill, Gillian. (1985) *This Sex Which Is Not One.* Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

Istat. (2016) *Le trasformazioni demografiche e sociali: una lettura per generazioni.* [Online]. Available from https://www.istat.it/it/files//2016/04/Cap_2_Ra2016.pdf [Accessed on 10 November 2020].

Iversen, Margharet. (2007) *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes.* University Park, Pannsylvania University Press.

Jackson, Rosemary. (2015) *Fantasy, The Literature of Subversion*. London & New York, Routledge.

Jameson, Fredric. (1987) 'Foreword to Greimas, Algirdas Julien'. (1970) *Du sense.* Paris, Seuil, trans. by Perron, Paul J. and Collins, Frank H. (1987) *On Meaning.* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, pp. vi-xxii.

Jansen, Monica. (2010). 'Narrare le forze dell'ordine dopo Genova 2001'. *Italian Studies,* 65(3), 415-424.

——. (2020) 'Transnational subjectivities and victimhood in Italy after the 2001 Genoa G8 summit', in Burdett, Charles, Polezzi, Loredana (eds.). *Transnational Italian Studies.* Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, pp. 343-359.

Jedlowski, Paolo. (2012) 'Un costruzionismo ben temperato', in Rigotti, Francesca (ed.). *New Realism. Molto rumore per nulla, Paradoxa*, VI, 3, 69-80.

Johnston, Adrian (2018) 'Jacques Lacan', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. [Online]. Available from https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lacan/ [Accessed on 28 May 2020].

Jossa, Stefano. (2013) *Un paese senza eroi. L'Italia da Jacopo Ortis e Montalbano.* Bari, Laterza.

Keller, Ernst. (1977) 'George Lukács' concept of literary realism', *Journal of the Australasian Universities Modern Languages Association*, May 1, 0 (47), 30-38.

Koselleck, Reinhart. (2004) *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (first edn. 1985), trans. by Keith Tribe. Cambridge Mass., MIT Press.

Lacan, Jacques. (1938) 'La famille'*,* in De Monzie, A (eds.). *Encyclopédie Francaise,* 8, now *Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l'individu,* in Lacan, Jacques. (2001) *Autres Écrits.* Paris, Seuil, pp. 23-84, trans. by Kahn, Andrea. (1981) 'The Oedipus Complexes', *Semiotext(e)*, 4, 1, pp. 190-200. [Online] Available from https://monoskop.org/images/8/8f/Semiotexte_10_Polysexuality_1981.pdf [Accessed on 31 December 2020].

——. (1966) *Écrits.* Paris, Seuil, trans. by Fink, Bruce. (2006) *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English.* New York, W.W. Norton & Company.

——. (1969) 'Note sur le pére et l'universalisme', in Lacan, Jacques. (1970) *Lettres de l'école freudienne,* 7, p. 84. [Online] Available from http://ecole-lacanienne.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Lettres-EFP-N7-Mars-1970-part2.pdf [Accessed on 31 December 2020], trans. by Grigg, Russell. (2017) Note on the father and universalism, *The Lacanian Review*, 3, Spring, p. 11, available from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d52d51fc078720001362276/t/5e8f1ecdbf0ebf3e05a8829d/1586437839308/19681012+Lacan+Note+on+the+Father+and+Universalism+Intervention+to+the+Strasbourg+Congress+The+Lacanian+Review+Number+3+Spring+2017+p11+.PDF [Accessed on 26 December 2020].

——. (1973) *Le Seminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XI, Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse 1964.* Paris, Seuil, trans. by Sheridan, Alan. (1998) *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis.* New York, W.W. Norton & Company.

——. (1991). *Le Seminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVII, l'Envers de la Psychanalyse 1969-1970.* Paris, Seuil, trans. by Grigg, Russell. (2007) *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII, The Other Side of the Psychoanalysis.* New York, W.W. Norton & Company.

——. (2001) *Autres écrit.* Paris, Seuil.

Lasch, Christopher. (1979) *The Culture of Narcissism.* Norton, New York.

Lazar, Marc, Matard-Bonucci, Marie-Anne. (2010) *Il libro degli anni di piombo. Storia e memoria del terrorismo italiano.* Milano, Rizzoli.

Lazzarin, Stefano. (2000) *Il modo fantastico.* Bari, Laterza.

Lettieri, Camilla. (2009) 'I cicli della storia e la frammentazione dello spazio in Girolamo De Michele, *Scirocco*', in Milanesi, Claudio (ed.). *Il romanzo poliziesco: la storia, la memoria. Italia.* Bologna, Astraea Editrice, pp. 247-258.

Lipovetsky, Gilles, Charles, Sébastien. (2004) *Les temps hypermodernes.* Paris, Grasset. Trans. by Brown, Andrew. (2005) *Hypermodern Times.* Cambridge, Polity.

Lipovetsky, Gilles. (2015) 'Time against time, or the hypermodern society', in Rudrum, David, Stavris, Nicholas, *Supplanting Postmodernism: An Anthology of Writings on the Arts and Culture of the Early 21st Century.* London, Bloomsbury, pp. 156-171.

Lombardi, Giancarlo. (2000) 'Unforgiven: Resiviting Political Terrorism in *La Seconda Volta*', *Italica,* 77, 2, Film and Theatre (Summer), 199-213.

Lopez, Jose, Potter, Garry. (2001) *After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism.* London, Athlone.

Lukács, György. (1964) *Studies in European Realism, Universal Library.* New York: Grosset & Dunlap.

Lugnani, Lucio. (1983) 'Per una delimitazione del «genere»', in Ceserani, Remo, Lugnani, Lucio, Goggi, Gianluigi, Benedetti, Carla, Scarano, Emanuela. *La narrazione fantastica.* Pisa, Nistri-Lischi, pp. 37-73.

Luperini, Romano. (2005) *La fine del postmoderno.* Napoli, Guida.

Luzi, Mario. (1998) *L'opera poetica*. Milano, Mondadori.

Luzzatto, Sergio. (1998) *Il corpo del duce.* Torino, Einaudi.

Mannheim, Karl. (1952) 'The problem of generations', in Kecskemeti, Paul (ed.). *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge,* London, Routledge, pp. 276-322.

Mannoni, Francesco. (2008) 'Un uomo contro il Führer', *La Gazzetta di Parma.* [Online]. Available from https://www.gazzettadiparma.it/archivio/2008/09/28/news/un_uomo_contro_il_fu_hrer-858615/ [Accessed on 16 September 2020].

Marini-Maio, Nicoletta. (2006) Specters are haunting Italy: Left -wing terrorism and the tragic plot of the Moro Affair in Italian culture, theater, and film. Dissertations available from ProQuest. AAI3246198. https://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI3246198

Mieli, Paolo. (2008) Speech during the official commemorative ceremony for the first Italian Remembrance Day of Terrorism Victims on May 9th, 2008 at the Palazzo del Quirinale. Rome, RAI Archives of via Teulada 66 [Accessed on 4 September 2017].

Miller, Martin A. (2013) *The Foundations of Modern Terrorism: State, Society and the Dynamics of Political Violence.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Montalbano, Alessandra. (2018) 'La memoria privata degli anni di piombo', in Gastaldi, Sciltian, Ward, David (eds.). *Era Mio Padre: Italian Terrorism of the* Anni di Piombo *in the Postmemorials of Victims' Relatives,* Oxford, Peter Lang, pp. 207-258.

Moro, Giovanni. (2007) *Settanta.* Torino, Einaudi.

Naqvi, Fatima. (2007) *The Literary and Cultural Rhetoric of Victimhood: Western Europe 1970-2005.* New York, Palgrave.

Nora, Pierre. (1992) *Les lieux de mémoire.* Paris, Gallimard, trans. by Golhammer, Arthur. (1996) *Realms of Memory.* New York, Columbia University Press.

——. (1996) 'Generation', in Nora, Pierre, *Realms of Memory*, trans. by Golhammer, Arthur, New York, Columbia University Press, pp. 499-612.

O'Leary, Alan. (2007) *Tragedia all'Italiana. Cinema e Terrorismo tra Moro e Memoria.* Tissi, Angelica.

Palumbo Mosca, Raffaello. (2014) *L'invenzione del vero. Romanzi ibridi e discorso etico nell'Italia contemporanea.* Roma, Gaffi Editore.

Paolin, Demetrio. (2008) *Una Tragedia Negata. Il Racconto Degli Anni di Piombo nella Narrativa Italiana.* Nuoro, Il Maestrale.

Parotto, Giuliana. (2007) *Sacra officina. La simbolica religiosa di Silvio Berlusconi.* Milano, FrancoAngeli.

Passerini, Luisa. (1987) 'Postfazione', in Halbwachs, Maurice. (1987) *La memoria collettiva.* Milano, Unicopli, pp. 189-195.

——. (1999) 'Memories of Resistance, Resistances of Memory', in Peitsch, Helmut, Burdett, Charles, Gorrara, Claire. *European Memories of the Second World War*. New York, Berghan Books, pp. 288-296.

Pellegrini De Luca, Alessandra. (2015) 'Il caso Moro: la controcronaca letteraria di Leonardo Sciascia'. Master thesis, University of Bologna.

——. (2020). 'Appropriation and Displacement: Postmemorial Articulations of the Italian Antifascist Resistance', *Status Quaestionis*. 18, 99-116. Available from https://doi.org/10.13133/2239-1983/16836 [Accessed on 28 December 2020].

Per non dimenticare. (2012) *Sotto il cielo di aprile. Per non dimenticare Claudio Varalli e Giannino Zibecchi 1975-2012.* [Online]. Available from http://www.pernondimenticare.net/images/stories/libri/sotto_il_cielo_di_aprile.pdf [Accessed on 20 October 2019].

Pezzotti, Barbara. (2016) *Investigating Italy's Past through Historical Crime Fiction, Films, and TV Series Murder in the Age of Chaos.* New York, Palgrave Macmillan.

Piga Bruni, Emanuela. (2018) *La lotta e il negativo. Sul romanzo storico contemporaneo.* Milano, Mimesis.

Pivato, Stefano. (2007) *Vuoti di memoria: usi e abusi della storia nella vita pubblica italiana.* Bari, Laterza.

Portelli, Alessandro. (2006) 'So much depends on a red bus, or, innocent victims of the liberating gun', *Oral History,* 34, 2, 29–43.

Putnam, Hilary. (1981) *Reason, Truth and History.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

——. (1987) *The Many Faces of Realism.* Chicago, Open Court Publishing.

——. (1988) *Representation and Reality.* Cambridge, MIT Press.

——. (1990) *Realism with a Human Face.* Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press.

Raio, Marco. (2017) 'Il fading dell'oggetto. Presenza e assenza in Roland Barthes'*, Laboratorio dell'ISPF*. [Online]. Available from: http://www.ispf-lab.cnr.it/2017_RAM.pdf [Accessed on 29 September 2020], p. 2.

Recalcati, Massimo. (2010) *L'uomo senza inconscio. Figure della nuova clinica psicanalitica.* Milano, Raffaello Cortina.

——. (2011) *Cosa resta del padre? La paternità nell'epoca ipermoderna,* 2017 edition. Milano, Raffaello Cortina.

——. (2013) *Patria senza padri. Psicopatologia della politica italiana.* Roma, Minimum Fax.

Ricciardi, Stefania. (2011) *Gli artifici della* non-fiction. Massa, Transeuropa.

Ricoeur, Paul. (2003) *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli.* Paris, Seuil. Trans. by Blamey, Kathleen, Pellauer, David. (2004) *Memory, History, Forgetting.* Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Rovatti, Pier Aldo. (2011) *Inattualità del pensiero debole.* Udine, Forum.

Sachs, Jeffrey D. (2020) *The Ages of Globalization.* New York, Columbia University Press.

Savettieri, Cristina. (2017) 'Il disagio dell'innocenza: tragedia, teoria e romanzo moderno', *Between,* 7, 14, 1-24.

Shields, David. (2010) *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto.* London, Penguin Books.

Sciascia, Leonardo. (1978) *L'affaire Moro.* Palermo, Sellerio.

Scolari, Baldassarre. (2019) *State Martyr: Representation and Performativity of Political Violence*. München, Nomos.

Scurati, Antonio. (2006) *La letteratura dell'inesperienza. Scrivere romanzi al tempo della televisione.* Milano, Bompiani.

Sennett, Richard. (1980) *Authority.* New York, Knopf.

Serkowska, Hanna. (2011) *Finzione, cronaca, realtà. Scambi, intrecci e prospettive nella narrativa italiana contemporanea.* Massa, Transeuropa.

Serra, Francesca. (2011) *Le brave ragazze non leggono romanzi.* Torino, Bollati Boringhieri.

Simonetti, Gianluigi. (2011) 'Nostalgia dell'azione. La fortuna della lotta armata nella narrativa italiana degli anni Zero', *Allegoria*, 64, 97-124.

——. (2012) 'Il realismo dell'irrealtà. Attraversare il postmoderno', *CoSMo: Comparative Studies in Modernism*, 1, 113-120.

Siti, Walter. (2013) *Il realismo è l'impossibile.* Milano, Nottetempo.

Somigli, Luca. (2013) *Negli archivi e per le strade. Il ritorno alla realtà nella narrativa di inizio millennio.* Roma, Aracne Editrice.

Sontag, Susan. (2019) *Regarding the Pain of the Others* (first edn. 2003). London. Penguin.

Spinazzola, Vittorio (ed.). (2010) *Tirature 2010. Il New Italian Realism.* Milano, Il Saggiatore.

Staccioli, Paola (eds.). (2005) *In ordine pubblico. 10 scrittori per 10 storie.* Roma, Fahrenheit 451.

——. (2005) *Piazza bella piazza.* Associazione Walter Rossi.

——. (2011) *Per sempre ragazzo.* Roma, DeriveApprodi.

Tabacco, Giuliano. (2010) *Libri di Piombo. Memorialistica e Narrativa della Lotta Armata in Italia.* Milano, Edizioni Bietti.

Tota, Anna Lisa. (2001) *La memoria contesa. Studi sulla comunicazione sociale del passato.* Milano, Franco Angeli.

——. (2003) *La città ferita. Memoria e comunicazione pubblica della strage di Bologna, 2 agosto 1980.* Bologna, Il Mulino.

Treccani. (n.d.) *Generazione.* [Online]. Available from https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/generazione/ [Accessed on November 9th, 2020].

Uva, Christian. (2007) *Schermi di Piombo. Il Terrorismo nel Cinema Italiano.* Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino.

Valesio, Paolo. (1992) 'Pasolini as symptom', in Valesio, Paolo. *Gabriele D'Annunzio: the Dark Flame.* New Haven and London, Yale University Press, pp. 154-171.

Vattimo, Gianni. (1991) *The End of Modernity.* Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press.

——. (2012) *Della realtà. Fini della filosofia.* Milano, Garzanti.

Ventrone, Angelo. (2006) *L'ossessione del nemico. Memorie divise nella storia della Repubblica.* Roma, Donzelli.

Vitello, Gabriele. (2011) 'Terrorismo e conflitto generazionale nel romanzo italiano'. PhD thesis, University of Trento, Italy. [Online] Available from http://eprints-phd.biblio.unitn.it/707/1/TESI_DI_DOTTORATO_SUL_TERRORISMO.pdf [Accessed on 24 May 2019].

——. (2013a) *L'album di famiglia. Gli anni di piombo nella narrativa italiana.* Massa, Transeuropa.

——. (2013b) '"Gli "anni di piombo" nella narrativa italiana del nuovo millennio. *Il tempo materiale* di Giorgio Vasta."', in Somigli, Luca (ed.). *Negli archivi e per le strade: il ritorno alla realtà nella narrativa di inizio millennio.* Roma, Aracne Editrice, pp. 317-329.

Wagner-Pacifici, Robin. (1986) *The Moro Morality Play: Terrorism as Social Drama.* Chicago, Chicago University Press.

Ward, David. (2017) *Contemporary Italian Narrative and 1970s Terrorism: Stranger than Fact.* London & New York, Italian and Italian American Studies.

Wellek, René. (1961) 'The concept of realism in literary scholarship', *Neophilologus,* 45(1), 1-20.

——, Warren, Austin. (1963) *Theory of Literature* (first edn. 1963)*.* Victoria, Peregrine Books.

White, Hayden. (1973) *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe.* Baltimora, John Hopkins University Press.

Williams, Raymond, 1961. *The Long Revolution.* London, Chatto & Windus.

Williams, Bernard. (1993) *Shame and Necessity.* Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press.

Woolf, Virginia. (1938) *Three Guineas,* 1952 edition*.* London, Hogarth Press.

Wu Ming. (2009) *New Italian Epic. Letteratura, sguardo obliquo, ritorno al futuro.* Torino, Einaudi.

Zavoli, Sergio. (1995) *La notte della Repubblica.* Milano, Rai-Eri.

Zinato, Emanuele. (2015) 'György Lukács inattuale? Una teoria politica del romanzo', *Between*, V, 10, 1-14.

Filmography

Buongiorno, notte. (2003) Directed by Marco Bellocchio. Italy, Film Albatros/Rai Cinema.

Carlo Giuliani, ragazzo. (2002) Directed by Francesca Comencini. Italy, Cinema nel Presente/Luna Rossa Cinematografica.

Die Bleierne Zeit. (1981) Directed by Margarethe Von Trotta. West Germany, Bioskop Film.

Il piccolo garibaldino. (1909) Directed by Filoteo Alberini. Italy, Cines.

On my skin. (2018) Directed by Alessio Cremonini. Italy, Lucky Red/Netflix.

Mamma Roma (1962) Directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini. Italy, Arco Film.

Rome, Open City. (1945) Directed by Roberto Rossellini. Italy, Excelsa Film.

Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma. (1975) Directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini. Italy, Produzioni Europee Associati.

Legal Sources

Consiglio Superiore della Magistratura. (2015) *Nel loro segno. In memoria dei magistrati uccisi dal terrorismo e dalle mafie.* [Online]. Available from https://www.csm.it/documents/21768/0/Nel+loro+segno/068e3eb2-ad54-4d98-92f5-ccf02aaf743d [Accessed on 25 July 2020].

Corte di Appello di Genova (2009). *Sentenza n. 678/10.* [Online]. Available from https://www.penalecontemporaneo.it/upload/Corte_di_App._di_Genova,_Sez._II,_05.3.10_(dep._15.4.11),_n._678.pdf [Accessed on 6 September 2020].

Corte di Cassazione (2005) *Udienza pubblica del 3/05/2005. Sentenza n° 470.* [Online] Available from https://www.csm.it/documents/21768/146316/Corte+di+cassazione+3+maggio+2005/2c5ce5c2-04c4-470e-b0c4-a00bf62de65b [Accessed on 24 July 2020].

Italian Chamber of Deputies. (2001) *Interpellanza urgente 2/00118 presentata da Zani Mauro (Democratici di sinistra – L'Ulivo) in data 25/10/2001.* [Online]. Available from http://dati.camera.it/ocd/aic.rdf/aic2_00118_14 [Accessed on 28 November 2018].

Italian Chamber of Deputies. (2006). *XV Legislatura – Discussioni – Seduta del 26 Luglio 2006 – N. 32.* [Online]. Available from http://leg15.camera.it/_dati/leg15/lavori/stenografici/sed032/pdfs003.pdf [Accessed on 16 February 2019], p. 40 and after.

Italian Senate. (2008) *Disegno di legge d'iniziativa dei senatori Berselli e Balboni.* [Online]. Available from https://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/DF/202534.pdf [Accessed on 16 February 2019], p. 3.

Songs

De Andrè, Fabrizio. (1972) *Sogno numero due.* Distributed by Produttori Associati.

Guccini, Francesco. (2004) *Piazza Alimonda.* Distributed by Capitol/EMI music.

Mannarino, Alessandro. (2014) *Scendi giù.* Distributed by Universal Music.