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Criticism of “fascist nostalgia” in the political thought of the New Right

The seizure of power by the National Liberation Committee on 25th April, 1945 and the establishment of the republic on 2nd June, 1946 constituted the symbolic end to Mussolini’s dictatorship that had lasted for more than 20 years. However, it emerged relatively early that fascism was not a definitively closed chapter in the political and social life of Italy. As early as June of 1946, after the announcement of a presidential decree granting amnesty for crimes committed during the time of the Nazi-Fascist occupation between 1943 and 1945, the country saw a withdrawal from policies repressive towards fascists.¹ Likewise, the national reconciliation policy gradually implemented in the second half of the 1940s by the government of Alcide De Gasperi, aiming at pacifying the nation and fostering the urgent rebuilding of the institution of the state, contributed to the emergence of ambivalent approaches towards Mussolini’s regime. On the one hand, Italy consequently tried to build its institutional and political order in clear opposition towards fascism, as exemplified, among others, by a clause in the Constitution of 1947 that forbade the establishment of any form of fascist party, as well as the law passed on 20th June,

¹ Conducted directly after the end of WW II, the *epurazione* action (purification) that aimed at uprooting fascism, was discontinued on 22nd June 1946, when a decree of president Enrico De Nicola granting amnesty for crimes committed during the Nazi-Fascist occupation of Italy between 1943–1945 was implemented. The legislation was a project of the then minister of justice in the Christian-Democratic government of Alcide De Gasperi, the secretary of the Italian Communist Party, Palmiro Togliatti (hence the name “Togliatti’s amnesty”). More on this subject: H. Woller, *I conti con il fascismo, L’epurazione in Italia 1943–1948*, Bologna 1997, R. Palmer Domenico, *Processo ai fascisti*, Milano 1961; F. Focardi, “Die Unsitte des Vergleichs. Die Rezeption von Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus in Italien und die Schwierigkeiten, sich der eigenen Vergangenheit zu stellen”, [in:] *Parallele Geschichte? Italien und Deutschland 1945–2000*, eds. G.E. Rusconi, H. Woller, Berlin 2006, p. 114 and subsequent.

1952, introducing the crime of a “fascist apology” (the co-called *legge Scelba*).² On the other hand, however, a tendency forced through by antifascist circles to portray fascism as a “closed chapter of history” led to the anchoring of a vision of a mild dictatorship deprived of totalitarian features and essentially different from Hitler’s and Stalin’s regimes, mostly in conservative environments. An Italian historian, Giovanna Belardelli, defined this phenomenon as a sign of the emerging “indulgent memory” (“*memoria indulgente*”).³ Furthermore, an important stance on the matter was made by the then leader of the Italian Communist Party, Palmiro Togliatti, who stated that: “fascism could not corrupt the spirit of Italian society, because Mussolini’s dictatorship was contrary to firmly rooted civic tradition of Italy”. Other significant members of the antifascist opposition made similar remarks, for example the liberal senator, philosopher and culture historian, Benedetto Croce, who described Mussolini’s dictatorship as an “accident in history”, or the renowned philosopher of politics connected with the Action Party (Partito d’Azione), Norberto Bobbio, who emphasised that fascism did not develop any political culture and offered only “ideology of negation”.⁴ As noted by Italian historian Emilio Gentile, because of this policy, undermining the thesis of “historical nothingness of fascism” was considered a sign of apology of Mussolini’s regime as late as the 1970’s. In consequence, the political scene of Italy saw the quite quick and efficient emergence of parties referring in more or less an open manner to fascist tradition and ideology, with Fronte dell’Uomo Qualunque existing between 1945–1948, and with the Italian Social Movement (Movimento sociale italiano) established in 1946 on the initiative of former Italian Social Republic members, i.e., Giorgio Almirante, Pino Romualdi, Arturo Michelini and Augusto De Marsanich.⁵ The symbol of the latter party was

² Article 12 of the final provisions of the Constitution of the Italian Republic adopted by the Constitutional Assembly on 22nd December 1947 and valid until 1st January 1948 says that it is strictly forbidden to recreate in any form the fascist party and guarantees the deprivation of active and passive voting rights to former fascist gerarchi.

³ The questioning of the totalitarian character of fascism after WWII was induced mostly by former *gerarchi* and fascist intellectuals who starting in the second half of the 1940s published their memoirs, autobiographies and journals, trying to present a gentler face of Mussolini’s regime. Such interpretation can be seen in a book by a journalist and one of the most prominent representatives of fascist culture, Indro Montanelli, entitled: *Buonuomo Mussolini* published in 1947, which stated a.o. that “the police state was limited to ‘relocating a few hundred antifascists’”. This thesis was later grounded by Hannah Arendt in a study *Roots of Totalitarianism* in 1951. See: I. Montanelli, *Il buonuomo Mussolini*, Milano 1947, p. 98; and H. Arendt, *Le origini del totalitarismo*, Torino 2009, p. 68. More on the topic, see: A. Mattioli, <*Viva Mussolini*> *La guerra della memoria nell’Italia di Berlusconi, Bossi, Fini*, Milano 2011, pp. 46–47.

⁴ Quote after: E. Gentile, *La via italiana al totalitarismo, Il partito e Lo Stato nel regime fascista*, Roma 2008, p. 347.

⁵ There is a vast amount of literature devoted to the subject of the Italian Social Movement’s activity in post-war Italy, a.o. P. Ignazi, *Il polo escluso. Profilo storico del Movimento Sociale Italiano*, Bologna 1989; idem, *Postfascisti. Dal Movimento sociale italiano ad Alleanza Nazionale*, Bologna 1994; G. Parlato, *Fascisti senza Mussolini. Le origini del neofascismo in Italia, 1943–1948*, Bologna 2006; S. Setta, *La Destra nell’Italia del dopoguerra*, Roma-Bari 2001; A. Baldoni,

a tri-colour Italian flag shaped as a flame over a catafalque, personifying a phoenix rising from Mussolini's ashes. External symptoms of outright allusions to fascist tradition were the rallies organised on 28th October to commemorate the March on Rome, the usage of a typical fascist form of addressing “camerata”, the Roman greeting, and singing of fascist songs. On the ideological level, the Italian Social Movement distinguished itself by its extremely anticommunist attitude, referring to the programme of the Fascist Republican Party that was endorsed at the Congress in Verona in November of 1943 and tried to bring fascism back in its original form as a republican, revolutionary and socially left-oriented movement. The MSI displayed slogans of corporatism and nationalism, glorifying the Italian nation and rejecting parliamentary democracy, as well as postulating the establishment of a national state of work in Italy leaning on syndicalist-corporative patterns as an alternative to communism and capitalism.⁶ At the same time, the party still criticised the totalitarian, military, imperialistic and racist model in an attempt to reconcile the slogans displayed with a system of personal, civil and political rights. The MSI remained in absolute political isolation until the late 1970s, even though starting from the 1950s its subsequent secretaries, Augusto De Mersanich and Arturo Michelini, made attempts to legitimise it, to “include it in the system”, primarily promoting the strategy of communication with other right-wing political groups, in particular with the Christian Democrats with an aim of opposing the influences of communists and preventing them from coming to power in Italy (which was prominently demonstrated by the so-called *operation Sturzo* in 1952). As rightly noted by the Italian political scientist Marco Tarchi — the main ideologist of the New Right and active member of the MSI in the 1970s — in republican Italy based on a tripolar system in which the strongest political force between 1948 and 1993 belonged to the Christian Democrats centrist party which efficiently blocked the competition both from the right (through antifascist slogans) and from the left (through anti-communist slogans), there was no environment for the emergence of a truly integrated non-anti-regime right wing party. Although the aforementioned policy of Mersanich and Michelini transformed the Italian Social Movement in the 1950s from an openly fascist movement into a neo-fascist party endeavouring to present itself as a regular right-wing, nationalist and anti-communist formation, the fascist sentiments it cultivated doomed it to political marginalisation. As Tarchi pointed out, “a contamination of the MSI with the memory of fascism and its well-deserved opinion of the “nostalgists” worked as a drag chain, success-

La destra in Italia 1945–1969, Roma 2000; P. Rosenbaum, *Il nuovo fascismo. Da Salò a Almirante*, Milano 1975; and in Poland: M. Bankowicz, “Faszyzm po faszyzmie. Włoski Ruch Społeczny (MSI) na scenie politycznej powojennych Włoch”, *Politeja* 5, 2006, pp. 52–65; and the same article in its extended version [in:] idem, *Niedemokratyzmy*, Kraków 2011, pp. 163–186.

⁶ M. Tarchi, *Esuli in patria. I fascisti nell'Italia repubblicana*, Parma 1995, p. 9.

fully blocking any potentially stable coalitions”.⁷ We should agree with Roberto Chiarini’s statement that the declared and accentuated support for Mussolini’s regime, which on the one hand constituted a source of identity for that party and an internally integrative element, was at the same time the reason for its isolation in the political arena. This historian described the phenomenon as an “identity paradox” (*paradosso dell’identità*).⁸ Tarchi noted also that

because of this *damnatio memorie*, which touched all of that referred to the fascist tradition [...] the neo-fascist right became a subject of political demonisation as a party which, through its declared ideological connection with the fascist regime, embodied the enemy of democracy.⁹

The breakthrough moment in the MSI’s history was a time of student protests in 1968. In the 1970s, as a result of the aforementioned student contestation and workers’ protests, as well as the neo-fascist terrorism of “the Years of Lead”, the party’s identity showed its weakness and went through a collision between its two antithetical fractions: 1) the radical, revolutionary, anti-capitalist, hostile towards the West, supporting the attempts to conduct a military coup d’état at the end of the 1960s, as well as radically right-wing terrorism, and 2) the fraction grouped around the new secretary (from 1969) Giorgio Almirante, i.e., the moderate, nationally-conservative, presenting itself as a conservative group attached to traditional values and simultaneously a “movement of power and order” condemning organised crime and mafia in particular. In addition, the student protests of the late 1960s led to an internal divide between the old generation of neo-fascists (“the nostalgic and traditionalist”) and the young generation of “the revolutionary and subversive”. As Michele Angela claimed, the lack of response from the MSI leadership to youths’ postulates, combined with a violent campaign against the demonstrations, perpetuated mostly by the secretary Arturo Michelini who pictured the protests as subversive activities piloted by the far left, caused deep frustration among the young generation and led to a conflict between the youth sector and the top of the party. The young generation of “Missinos” became aware of the party’s incapacity to answer the questions about the social transformations and cultural and lifestyle changes taking place in Italy during the economic boom and realised its essential isolation. That new generation describing itself as “national youth” (*gioventù nazionale*) did not agree with the perspective of prolonged stagnation in the peripheral areas of political and social life. As a consequence, the events of 1968 contributed to political emancipation of the far-right youth and their criticism of the to date ideological models and patterns of the neo-fascist party. Particularly strong criticism of the conservative programme of the National Right, promoted

⁷ M. Tarchi, “L’eredità del fascismo e la demolizione dell’avversario”, [in:] *L’ossessione del nemico. Memorie divise nella storia della Repubblica*, Roma 2006, p. 119.

⁸ R. Chiarini, *Destra italiana dall’Unità d’Italia ad Alleanza Nazionale*, Venezia 1995, p. 10.

⁹ M. Tarchi, *Esuli in Patria...*, p. 52.

by the secretary Giorgio Almirante and of fascist tradition cultivated by the MSI, flowed from a wave of the New Right that was shaped in the mid 1970s among the youth of the MSI.

Although there is no doubt that the New Right was one of the most interesting phenomena which stimulated the Italian neo-fascist environment and became a sign of progressive political autonomy of the far right youth striving for the revision of the ideological programme and modernisation of political culture of MSI at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, this subject remains virtually unknown in Poland.¹⁰ Thus, this article aims to fill the existing gap in the scientific literature on the subject.

The New Right as a metapolitical project

The New Right's agenda started to take shape in the mid 1970s in the environment of a neo-fascist youth organisation Fronte della gioventù, in Florence. The organisation was close to the MSI¹¹ faction concentrated around Pino Rauti, who was critical of the political line represented by the secretary, Giorgio Almirante. As stated by one of the main ideologists of this current, Stelio Solinas, the New Right was a child of all "heretics disappointed with contemporary politics and the ideological agenda of right-wing circles". The emergence of the New Right's environment was a result of not only the cultural and social ferment of 1968, but also an outcome of the relations with the French Nouvelle Droite, i.e., Alain de Benoist's GRECE group (*Groupe de Recherches et Etudes pour la Civilisation Européenne*), and a progeny of youth happenings organised in 1977–1980 (the so-called "campi Hobbit") which encompassed concerts, theatrical performances, literary manifestations and discussions.¹² On a tide of relations with the French ND, a first underground periodical under the title of "La voce della fogna" was established, with the first publication in December 1974, drawing inspirations from the satirical "Alternative" by Jack Marchal. Other periodicals established during

¹⁰ Research on Italian fascism has a long tradition in Poland. After the first opinions formulated by lawyers and economists (amongst others Konstanty Grzybowski, Władysław Jabłonowski, Roman Rybarski, Antoni Peretiakowicz, Leopold Caro, Stanisław Kutrzeba, Maciej Starzewski and Jan Zdzitowiecki) on the totalitarian state of Benito Mussolini in the interwar period, research on fascism developed most notably at the beginning of the 1970's and continues to grow today. Amongst the most important researchers in this field are: Jerzy Wojciech Borejsza, Stanisław Sierpowski, Wiesław Kozub-Ciembroniewicz, Maria Zmierzak, Marek Bankowicz, as well as Małgorzata Kiwior-Filo, Adam Wielomski, Piotr Podemski and the author of this work. The issue of the Italian New Right had not been tackled in the Polish literature on the subject until now.

¹¹ In 1969 a radical group Ordine nuovo Pino Rauti merged with MSI and created within the party its own stream related with the political laboratory of Centro studi ordine nuovo and the journals *Corrispondenza Europea*, *Presenza*, *Civiltà* and the publishing house Libreria editrice Europa. See: G. Tassani, "La nuova destra", *Democrazie e Diritto* 24, 1994, no. 1, p. 121.

¹² Historian Giovanni Tassani connects the establishment of the New Right with the organisation of the first campo Hobbit at the turn of 1977 and 1978. See: G. Tassani, op. cit., p. 123.

that time were “Diorema letterario” launched in 1976 and “Elementi”, published for the first time in 1978. The aforementioned titles set out to modernise the MSI’s political culture and to thoroughly renew it ideologically by breaking with the nostalgia for fascism. Marco Tarchi himself, at that time the main leader of the party, and now a professor of political science at the University of Florence, ties the beginnings of the New Right with the emergence of the titles mentioned above, as well as with the organisation of the first debates and intellectual discussions between 1976 and 1979.¹³ This circle put under critique the ideas of traditionalism which were immensely popular in the 1960s among the Italian neo-fascists who cultivated Julius Evola’s philosophy and conformism. The young generation also postulated opening up to more up-to-date ideas, programmes and agendas that were picked up as a result of student protests of 1968. The aforementioned press undertook the most relevant social topics that were both of interest for the young generation and very far from the political dialectic of traditional neo-fascist circles, e.g., the issue of a woman’s place and role in modern society, problems of a multicultural society, and environmental issues. The New Right was meant to be mostly of an intellectual character, focusing on the publication of periodicals and books and organisation of conferences and debates. Much importance was attached also to the issues of contemporary culture. The abovementioned publications encompassed film and theatrical performance reviews, reports on rock concerts, and even articles devoted to Tolkien’s *fantasy* literature, alternative tourism and remote cultures, e.g., Native Americans. As Michele Angella rightly noted, the New Right was characterised by a fresh “metapolitical” approach, striving to find an “opening to the civic society” and preparing the ground for the development of a right-wing political culture. Influenced by the ideas coming from France, the New Right’s theoreticians intended to have a direct impact on society, its mentality and habits, in accordance with Alain de Benoist’s concept of “right-wing Gramscism” (*gramscismo di destra*) which postulated a definite approach, assuming an agenda aimed at extending the traditional electorate through the means of culture and highlighting the primacy of the civic society over the world of politics.¹⁴

¹³ As Marco Tarchi mentions, the first meeting of the young activists, “anticonformists” of the Florence MSI with the representatives of French Nouvelle Droite took place in the summer of 1974. It should be noted that the French ND, whose ideas had been known from Pino Romualdi’s “L’Italiano” was tremendously active in the sphere of culture, broadening its horizons with new disciplines such as ethnology, social biology and psychiatry, as well as new subjects (abortion, racial integration, feminism, etc.), read Gramsci, Simone Weil, as well as German revolutionary conservatives — Moeller van der Bruck, Spengler, Junger, Ernst von Salomon, Grimm. See: M. Tarchi, *Cinquant’anni di nostalgia. La destra italiana dopo il fascismo*, Milano 1995, pp. 135–136.

¹⁴ It is not by accident that the first seminar organised by Grece in Lyon on 11th–12th November 1968 was entitled *Che cos’è la metapolitica?* and Alain de Benoist himself defined this phenomenon as “right-wing Gramscism”. The concept of “right-wing Gramscism” was then presented in his book: *Vu de droite. Anthologie critique des idées contemporaines* published in France in 1977 and translated into Italian in 1981.

The New Right showed interest in relations between science and ideology, technology and media, observing in particular the dangers arising from mass media manipulations. This concern about the phenomena of contemporary society was tied to anti-Americanism and a strong criticism of the American society model, which was yet another feature common for the New Right and Nouvelle Droite. It should be pointed out that the New Right founders did not look upon themselves as strictly right-wing in the category of the right-left political dichotomy, however their right-side "placement" demonstrated itself through their agenda postulates such as the fight against egalitarianism, Marxism and liberalism. In this respect, it should also be underlined that the New Right was critical of individualism and defined all contemporary political systems as "real liberalism". Among the key elements of the New Right's policy we can specify: 1) rejection of liberalism, market society, capitalist logic, consumerism, utilitarianism and mercantilism in social relations; 2) hostility towards imposing Western cultural patterns, seen as attempts to "americanise Europe"; 3) reluctance to egalitarianism portrayed as the last nexus in the process of merging liberal individualism and mass society; 4) opening up to the so-called "culture of differences". It should be mentioned here that the New Right emphasised the meaning of minority rights, accentuated the need to protect other cultures, and rejected all attempts at creating a uniformed model of society. As specified by Tarchi: "admitting differences between people means resignation from all projects that aim at uniformity of humanity in accordance with one taken approach".¹⁵ Thus, the measure that was to be taken first and foremost was a rejection of the Americanisation of social habits (the so-called *American way of life*) and its full homologation in the manner of American society, looked upon by the New Right as ultimately the creation of the liberal and egalitarian model. The New Right pointed out that European civilisation, constituting a common cultural heritage and granting respect for ethnic and cultural identities should be a starting point for the future development of society. It is worth noting that the Italian New Right differed from the Nouvelle Droite in their approach to Christianity. For the *Grece* group, Christianity, like all the other monotheist religions, was an enemy — the "evil which brought European thought to its knees" — and it was paganism that was seen as the essence of social community and an expression of hierarchy, respect for natural order, and the Indo-European genius. The New Right in Italy, however, underlined the value of the Christian tradition.¹⁶

¹⁵ M. Tarchi, "Ipotesi e strategia di una nuova destra", [in:] Aa.Vv., *Proviamola nuova: atti del seminario. Ipotesi e strategia di una nuova destra*, Roma 1980, p. 118.

¹⁶ According to Michele Angela, the fact that the Italian New Right did not mimic Nouvelle Droite's patterns when approaching the question of Christianity was a result of the concept of the role of sacrum in the society developed by the medievalist Franco Cardini. See: M. Angela, *La Nuova Destra. Oltre il neofascismo fino alle "nuove sintesi"*, Firenze 2000, pp. 16–17.

“Leave the Ghetto of Nostalgia” — the criticism of the Italian Social Movement programme in the New Right’s agenda

Underpinning the considerations of all of the young New Right’s theoreticians was the criticism of “fascist nostalgia”, i.e., of the Italian Social Movement’s cultivation of fascist traditions. As mentioned by one of the New Right’s leaders, the editor-in-chief of the “Diorama” journal, Stenio Solinas, the MSI at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s was a closed environment isolated from the outside world:

It was a ‘museum of horror and miracles’ [...] of Roman greetings, martyrology, hymns to praise Rome and Badoglio’s death, fascist militia and bannerets. In terms of culture, it was a desert [...] with no single university professor, writer, or essayist who would agree for any contamination.¹⁷

Similarly, Marco Tarchi described the party as “the most marginalised, anachronistic and barricaded on the Italian political scene of the First Republic”.¹⁸ Tarchi especially condemned the tendency to refer to the period of the Social Italian Republic, to the revolutionary and anti-bourgeois ideas of the “first fascism” and to create the so-called “expatriates in their homeland” (“*esuli in patria*”). Apart from the strong criticism of referring to fascist traditions, Tarchi expressed a critique towards repeating rituals of the nostalgists and the glorification of the RSI veterans’ memory. As he pointed out,

the MSI leadership was convinced about their mission to defend the historical heritage of a rather sentimental, not political meaning, concentrating on this agenda to limit the influence of communists in the political life of Italy.¹⁹

In addition to criticising the tendencies to cultivate the past, the constantly repeated rituals of the “nostalgists”, Tarchi also slated the lack of definite benchmarks in the thought of the far right, both political and cultural, which he called an ‘ideological gap’.²⁰ He stressed that the MSI political leadership treated the issue of culture as “optional”.²¹ The party’s lack of ideological patterns in good standing had been noticed already by a young intellectual, who died prematurely

¹⁷ S. Solinas, *Per farla finita con la destra*, Milano 1997, pp. 12–14.

¹⁸ M. Tarchi, “Breve storia di un’ambizione”, *Diorama*, October 1976–February 1978, p. 3. Cit. after M. Angela, op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁹ M. Tarchi, *Cinquant’anni di nostalgia...*, p. 153.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

²¹ As Marco Tarchi recalled, when Adriano Romualdi was asked why the events of 1968 in Italy had a mostly left-wing character, he answered: “because there was nothing on the other side”. Cit. after M. Tarchi, “Il problema di una <nuova destra> italiana”, [in:] A. De Benoist, *Visto da destra. Antologia critica delle idee contemporanee*, Napoli 1981, p. 8. Similarly, Marcello Veneziani noted that not much could be said about the right-wing culture until the early 1970s. See: M. Veneziani, *Sinistra e destra. Risposta a Norberto Bobbio*, Firenze 1995.

in 1973, Adriano Romualdi. On the pages of the "Italiano" journal, he condemned "intellectual dilettantism of the party's leadership".²² According to Marco Tarchi, the main benchmarks for the neo-fascist environment were Giovanni Gentile's philosophy (most of all the idea of an ethical state) and Julius Evola's thought, particularly his concepts present in the studies: *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*, *Gli uomini e le rovine*, and *Calvacare la tigre*. However, Pino Rauti's faction had a slightly broader cultural base, which referred not only to Evola's traditionalism, but also to the thought of German revolutionary conservatives and the tradition of fascist movements from Eastern Europe. The most popular authors were: Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, Ernst Junger, Ezra Pound, Robert Brasillach, Oswald Spengler, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, Joseph de Maistre, and Knut Hamsum. The New Right additionally expanded its ideological sources, referring also to the concepts of Friedrich Nietzsche, Richard Wagner, Oswald Spengler, Ernst von Salomon, Carl Schmitt, and Lorenzo von Stein. Theoreticians of this so-called "new culture" drew attention not only to the lack of contemporary intellectual patterns for neo-fascist circles, but also criticised the constant addresses to Julius Evola's thought.²³ It must be remembered that the New Right, unlike traditional right-wing circles, also rejected the myth of imperial fascism, Gaullism, and contemporary authoritarian regimes, both European and Southern-American (Francisco Franco, the Greek colonels' junta and Caudillism, Augusto Pinochet's and Juan Peron's governing model). Using Renzo De Felice's distinction between fascism the movement and fascism the regime, the New Right identified itself with what was called by Finnish historian Tarmo Kunnas a "pagan side of fascist movements", as an expression of authentic social revolution not suppressed by a monopolistic and totalising party and regime. Not by chance, the New Right's theoreticians completely disregarded any references to Alfredo Rocco's doctrine about the fascist state, as well as key theoreticians of the regime, namely: Giovanni Gentile, Giuseppe Bottai, Gioacchino Volpe, instead preferring a concept from a less known lawyer, Carlo Costamagna. Likewise, the political and economic concepts of Alberto De Stefani and Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata were contrasted with those of Werner Sombard and Ernst Wagemann. The New Right also rediscovered the elitism of Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, as well as ideas of German sociologists Ferdinand Tönnies, Georg Simmel and Max Weber, completely overlooked in neo-fascist circles, and the social agrarianism of Pitirim Sorokin. The party also appealed to the contemporary concepts of Jacques Le Goff, Pierre Chaunu and Philippe Aries. As Italian historian Roberto Chierini noted, the New Right's striving to expand

²² Adriano Romualdi was the author of studies greatly appreciated in the MSI environment, namely: *L'Europa e la crisi del nazionalismo. Idee per una cultura di destra* and the unfinished *Il fascismo come fenomeno europeo*. See: M. Tarchi, *Cinquant'anni di nostalgia...*, pp. 97–98.

²³ Stenio Solinas put forward an idea to change the name of the New Right to that of a "new culture" "was that New Right a right-wing party indeed? [...] To me it was so little right-wing that I tried to give it a new name, though with no success, of "New Culture". See: S. Solinas, op. cit., p. 30.

their cultural horizons, until then reserved for the left, did not exclude *a priori* references to neo- and post Marxist culture in a search of a “new synthesis” and tried to establish a new model of culture, which Marco Tarchi defines as “cultura di et-et”. In the place of ideological selection and filters (the so-called “cultura di aut-aut”) Tarchi proposed the evolution of a “cultural heritage” of the right.²⁴

Criticism of Julius Evola’s radical traditionalism

At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s the New Right expressed criticism of the far right’s dominating cultural models, particularly the radical traditionalism of Julius Evola. The thought of the aforementioned “heretic of fascism”, inspired by the Eastern tradition, rejecting historical linearity and advocating the theory of historical cycles, in which one small elite can survive the stages of collapse and decadence connected with the heroic-aristocratic concept of existence, was regarded as the source of loneliness and isolation, which was very popular among the far right. The “missinos” approved of the historical metaphysics presented by Evola, the aristocratic vision of the world, criticism of progress, the idea of traditionalism, and the theory of historical cycles. At the first congress of the New Right in 1980, Marco Tarchi termed the traditionalist concepts of Evola as an “unfit myth” (“mito incapacitante”) using the expression coined by Alain de Benoist.²⁵ The New Right’s leader emphasised that due to the references made constantly to traditionalism, the culture of the far right remained deadlocked. Traditionalism did not facilitate an understanding of current issues and, as a consequence, did not enable efficient reactions to contemporary challenges. Tarchi also refuted the concept of historical cycles, especially the idea that neo-fascists were fated to live in a “dark age”. The conviction that humanity entered a phase of civilisational crisis after the French Revolution, together with the concept of fascism as a phenomenon serving to stop the temporary civilisational fall through values such as: hierarchy, primacy of the spirit over matter and rejection of idolatry, was absolutely wrong in Tarchi’s view. In his opinion, it led to perceiving modernity as a final stage of decline and thus to pessimism and passivity. Hence the opposition between traditionalism and modernity. As the philosopher Marcello Veneziani noted, Evola’s theories were often criticised for instigating extremist means. In reality, these were to lead to being “locked in an ivory tower”, a total lack of interest in any form of political activism, in accordance with the concept of *apolitia*, i.e., remoteness from

²⁴ M. Tarchi, “Dalla politica al politico: Il problema di una nuova antropologia”, [in:] Aa.Vv., *Al di là della destra e della sinistra: atti del Convegno Costanti ed evoluzioni di un patrimonio culturale*, Roma 1982, p. 21.

²⁵ M. Tarchi, “Ipotesi e strategie di una nuova destra”, [in:] *Proviemola nuova. Atti del seminario <Ipotesi e strategie di una nuova destra>*, Roma 1980, p. 108.

politics and non-participation in public life.²⁶ The New Right's theoreticians did not have in mind a rejection of modernity, but a critical assessment of problems of topicality. Integral traditionalism led to a regressive concept of history and humanity, refuting the surrounding reality and contemporary anthropological model. As Marco Tarchi stated,

the rebellion against the modern world, striving for the creation of the integral human, refutation of 'historical sense' were all meant to award compensation for marginalisation, the toils of political combat, ghetto; to justify our situation of the 'alienated'.²⁷

The original character of the New Right's agenda was a matter of the emphasis placed on modernity, an attempt at facing the problems of the reality around it. As Monica Zucchini rightfully noted, through the criticism of Evola's thought, the New Right tried to cut off the cultural sources from which it sprang.²⁸ By this rejection of integral traditionalism, the whole ideological basis on which the far right's thought had hitherto been founded was called into question. According to Marco Tarchi:

throughout the whole post-war period, the Italian right and also a part of the European right in forms less narrow and more attentive to cultural phenomena claimed that traditionalism (whose main representative is still Julius Evola) constituted the only possible answer to the shortcomings of the political right. This led, however, to taking from the traditionalistic ideology only schematic, folk, and bizarre aspects.²⁹

A critical approach towards the problems of modern society and active participation in the ongoing social and political processes was preferred over the refutation of the modern world.

Gramscismo di destra in Marco Tarchi's concept

When it comes to the New Right's approach towards the MSI, two phases should be distinguished: 1) from the mid to the late 1970s, when the New Right began to shape itself as a new cultural stream within the neo-fascist party, aiming at its radical renewal, mostly by breaking with fascist nostalgia and 2) the period of 1980–1981, when after leaving the MSI³⁰ the New Right started to function as

²⁶ M. Veneziani, "Evola il mostro colpisce ancora", *Il Giornale* 24.02.1994.

²⁷ M. Tarchi, "Evola e noi", *Diorama Letterario* Jun. 1984, issue 72, pp. 2–6. See also idem, *La Torre, o il tentativo superfascista*, cit. in: J. Evola, *La Torre. Foglio di espressioni varie e di tradizione una*, Milano 1977, p. 10.

²⁸ M. Zucchini, *A destra in Italia oggi*, Milano 1986, p. 113.

²⁹ M. Tarchi, "Ipotesi e strategie di una nuova destra", p. 110.

³⁰ The definitive division between MSI and the New Right took place between 1979–1981. One of the reasons was a public lack of support of the New Right for the project proposed by the new secretary of the MSI, Giorgio Almirante, that the assumed introduction of capital punishment. According to Marco Tarchi, that initiative kept the party's collocation at the extreme pole of the right

an autonomous entity, establishing its ideological programme, critical towards the traditions and agenda of the Italian Social Movement. During the first two congresses, the New Right's theoreticians highlighted the necessity of modernising the far right's agenda, pointing out new ways for action. They commenced with the revision of the fascist heritage and the criticism of the "ideological and political confinement" of the traditional right, rejecting Evola's traditionalist concepts as causing "MSI political paralysis". As Marco Tarchi stated in his paper entitled "Dalla politica al 'politico' — Il problema di una nuova antropologia", which opened the Second Congress of the New Right on 12th March 1981, constant references to "ideal fascism", which never existed as a matter of fact, forced neo-fascists to function in psychological circumstances typical for the post-war period. The New Right's leader spoke of the need for definite closure of this cycle and the beginning of the new "post-postwar" cycle, as well as "freeing from the lost father complex".³¹ Representatives of the New Right also felt the need to cut themselves off from the folk aspects of neo-fascism: Roman greetings, the "camerata" mode of personal address, yet without the refutation of the whole fascist tradition, such as references to "communion" or social justice. As stated by Monica Zucchinali, the rejection of the fascist tradition by the New Right's theoreticians was connected to their criticism of the totalitarian and authoritarian state model and the organic state postulate.³² The New Right stressed the meaning of "communion" as the essence of social life, showing however — contrary to the traditional right — the role of folk cultures and ethnic and regional autonomies (cultural pluralism). On the economic level, they thought the organic model to be the ultimate pattern, as a contrast to both mercantile neo-capitalism and socialism.³³ At the second congress under the banner *Costanti e evoluzioni di un patrimonio culturale* in 1981, the "definite end of the post-war period" and abandoning traditional right-left dichotomy were highlighted. The main theoreticians of the party emphasised the metapolitical character of the project and the conviction about a crisis of "the old paradigms, benchmarks and identities". As one of the main theoreticians, Stenio Solinas, noted: "only abandoning categories that seemed to be dead allows us to see the Italian situation in full light."³⁴ The major goal of the new cultural policy was the creation of a "new anthropology" in accordance with the emergence of the

wing. Similarly, the criticism of the New Right for the references made constantly to the tradition of fascist regime of "vital authoritarian, chauvinist and pro-war features" that doomed the party to function on the margins of the country's political life, as unacceptable for the older generation of the MSI. The First Congress organised in Cison di Valmarino between 12th–14th March 1981 is seen as a moment when the New Right was established — *Ipotesi e strategie di una nuova destra*. See: *ibid.*, p. 108.

³¹ M. Tarchi, "Dalla politica al politico...", p. 28.

³² M. Tarchi, *Partito unico e dinamica autoritaria*, Roma 1981.

³³ M. Tarchi, "Ipotesi e strategie di una nuova destra", p. 123.

³⁴ S. Solinas, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

new man of the right wing and addressing the "civic society", not the "political society". The New Right's agenda thus aimed at creating a new cultural paradigm, free from fascist nostalgia and capable of facing the challenges brought by modernity.³⁵

* * *

The New Right was the first in the environment of the Italian far right to reject all nostalgic behaviour and to announce the necessity to "leave the tunnel of fascism". There is no doubt that it was a generational phenomenon. The vast majority of its representatives belonged to the new generation of MSI activists, born in the 1950s who reached the age of majority at the time of the student protests in the late 1960s and, as a result, their political and social agenda was fundamentally different from that of the older generation of the far right.³⁶ The young activists criticised the governing group of the MSI, which refuted the proposal of the political and organisational renewal of the party put forward by both the youth circles and Pino Rauti's faction, thus closing itself in the environment of "authentic gerontocracy."³⁷ The New Right, claiming the sources of neo-fascism to be depleted, announced the need to broaden the cultural horizons of the far right, as well as opening themselves up to the needs of modernity. Its agenda, based on the refutation of the traditional right-left and fascism-antifascism dichotomies, assumed the creation of the new metapolitical project with the aim of directly influencing civic society.

It is undeniable that the end of the 1970s and all of the 1980s were a breakthrough period in MSI history. Although criticism of the political line of the secretary, Giorgio Almirante, was expressed by the New Right, it was not given much of an audience among the party leadership and finally led to Marco Tarchi's group abandoning the MSI in the early 1980's, resulting in an internal shock which undoubtedly influenced the later changes of the character and ideological agenda of the party. The process of "defascisation" and their gradual legitimisation launched in the 1980s and facilitated by Bettino Craxi's policy,³⁸ resulted in the full ideological transformation of the MSI-DN into the National Alliance (AN) in 1994,

³⁵ R. Chiarini, "La Destra italiana. Il paradosso di un'identità illegittima", *Italia Contemporanea* 185, 1991, p. 596.

³⁶ As Enzo Rasi noted, the generational question was not of little importance in ideological choices. See: E. Rasi, *Storia ed idee della Nuova Destra italiana*, Roma 1990, p. 54.

³⁷ Cit. after M. Tarchi, *Esuli in Patria...*, p. 62.

³⁸ As Aram Mattioli noted, there was a gradual approximation in the 1980's between socialists and MSI. In 1983, when Bettino Craxi was creating his government as the first prime minister in the postwar history of Italy, he consulted its formation with representatives of the neo-fascist party and condemned isolating this group in the Italian political arena. Likewise, in May 1985, president Sandro Pertini had a meeting with the MSI's leader, Giorgio Almirante, to discuss the political issues of modern Italy. A. Mattioli, op. cit., pp. 46–47.

and propelled the party into the centre-right coalition of Silvio Berlusconi — Polo delle libertà e del buon governo. In Marco Tarchi's view, 1994 was the symbolic end of the New Right in Italy.³⁹

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³⁹ M. Tarchi, *Cinquant'anni di nostalgia...*, p. 165.

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CRITICISM OF "FASCIST NOSTALGIA" IN THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF THE NEW RIGHT

Summary

The article analyses the way in which the Italian New Right perceived fascist traditions as cultivated by the Italian Social Movement (Movimento Sociale Italiano). The New Right that was shaped in the period of student protests and marches in the 1960s and 1970s among the youth environment of the MSI strived for the ideological renewal of this party, in particular seeking to discard the so-called "Fascist Nostalgia" that had been dooming it to political exclusion. The party principally rejected Julius Evola's integral traditionalism, which had been a point of reference for neo-fascist circles, and castigated the absence of contemporary cultural and ideological patterns of the Italian far right. Under the influence of the French idea of "Nouvelle Droit", the Italian New Right was meant to be a metapolitical programme that assumed expanding of the traditional electorate with a simultaneous and direct impact on the civil society through taking up contemporary social and cultural topics, as well as fighting traditional dichotomy of the right and the left.

Keywords: New Right, Fascist Nostalgia, Italian Social Movement.

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