

Fascism as a style of life

Community life and violence in a neofascist movement in Italy

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Abstract: In the European context, where the rise of right-wing movements and parties indicates the emergence of an integral Europe, Italy represents a country where the fascist past grants these political formations significant identitarian security. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted with a contemporary neofascist movement called CasaPound active in Italy, this article proposes to take seriously the activists' definition of themselves as "third-millennium fascists." This article examines the network that CasaPound has built around its movement to analyze the presence fascist political culture currently maintains. Following militants' interpretations of fascist ideology and practice, which oscillates between violence and death on one side and emotions and community on the other, third-millennium fascism appears to be a style of life deeply rooted in violent acts and death.

Keywords: community, fascism, integralism, nationalism, neofascism, violence

"Neofascism" generally defines the political and ideological groups and parties that have been active in Europe after 1945, inspired by the history of Italy and Germany between the two World Wars (Cento Bull 2009: 586). While there is no consensus on one single definition of fascism, scholars do largely agree that this legacy did not end in April 1945. Roger Griffin suggests that "fascism continues to inspire" present-day movements (1991: xii) and, moreover, that fascism is presently characterized by "groupuscularity" and what he calls a "rizhomic" political structure (Griffin et al. 2006: 55), creating a "cellular, capillary network" capable of transforming this ideology into a "faceless force" (59). Douglas Holmes has stated that "contemporary

fascism is dynamic and mercurial" (2016: 2) and that the extremism we are facing nowadays "should be understood as a *fascism* of and in our time" (1; emphasis in original), not necessarily a replication of historical forms.

In the contemporary European context characterized by the resurgence of right-wing movements and parties, I seek to move beyond this definition in order to bring fascism back to the center of analysis. In Italy, the political movement CasaPound defines itself as "third-millennium fascist," thus giving shape to and performing the fascist legacy in contemporary society. This article focuses on the political project of CasaPound and aims to provide ethnographic evidence of the meaning of this form of contemporary fascism.



A vast debate has erupted around the political and historical phenomenon of fascism in an effort to grasp its inner logic. Besides its relationship with the capitalist system, as stressed by Marxist analyses, fascism has been explained as a “political religion” (E. Gentile 2005: 35), a “revolutionary form of nationalism” (Griffin 1991: xi), a “new political style” (Mosse 1975: 8) and a “cultural phenomenon” (Sternhell et al. 1989: 444) in which violence is “a means to achieve the transformation of the society” (Griffin 2005: 21). Scholarship about nationalism defines it as a “social phenomenon” (Gingrich and Banks 2006: 2) and a cultural and dynamic process involving a shared imagination (Anderson 1983). However, since “not all nationalisms are the same” (Kapferer 2012: xiv), Holmes delves into the new shapes European nationalism takes on as they “are being recast by those forces encompassed by advanced European integration” (2006: 385). He proposes the term “integralism” to refer to those political and cultural phenomena that draw directly on the Counter-Enlightenment as a specific European tradition in four registers: “as a framework of meaning, as a practice of everyday life, as an idiom of solidarity, and, above all, as a consciousness of belonging linked to a specific cultural milieu” (2000: 3). The term “integralism” enables Holmes to investigate a broader phenomenon that “can, but need not, follow a trajectory toward fascism.” Nevertheless, he states that “fascism is a form of integralism” (14).

According to Holmes, the project of European integration has a direct effect on processes of meaning making and signifying social reality. Holmes calls “fast-capitalism” not “a system of production or exchange” but a cultural phenomenon that “degrades moral claims, subverts social consensus, and challenges various forms of political authority” (10). In this context, he analyzes the spread of integralist political formations and discourses. In a similar manner, Jonathan Friedman’s (1994) global anthropology perspective suggests that periods of hegemonic decline and shifts in processes of accumulating and distributing forms of capital

engender social formations that are caught up with cultural identities and processes of identity radicalization, where history and territoriality come to play a primary role in the search for significance (see also Friedman and Chase-Dunn 2005; Friedman and Friedman 2008).

This article opens with a description of the CasaPound neofascist movement in contemporary Italy. Linking this movement to the history to which militants themselves claim to belong, I am able to shed light on the current flourishing of fascism as a political culture and religion of death. Drawing on an ethnography conducted within this movement in Rome in 2010,¹ I examine its activists’ self-representation as a community and the prominent role played by certain sites in Rome as well as the importance of the group’s leader and the music he plays. I then show how, considering fascist history and neofascist Italian networks, CasaPound is neither an isolated nor a groupuscular phenomenon; rather, these factors reveal it as a political formation compatible with the democratic arena. Based on activists’ statements about the meaning they grant to fascism, this article seeks to grasp the inner logic and sense of this movement, an analysis that reveals “third-millennium fascism” to be mainly a lifestyle. As such, it is not a program that leads participants to engage with the community but rather a prerational experience: a lifestyle best represented by violence and the ability to face death.

CasaPound in Rome and community

Near the Termini train station in Rome, we find the Esquilino neighborhood, a multiethnic area populated mainly by Chinese and Bengali people. On the columns of Vittorio Square, there are several posters celebrating the Chinese New Year and some holy Hindu saints written in several languages. The only Italian-language posters are from CasaPound: flyers celebrating the day dedicated to a special fascist figure or inviting passersby to attend conferences at CasaPound or, as militants love to call it, the Italian Embassy. In

fact, present-day CasaPound began life as seven-story apartment building in this multiethnic area that hosted several militants from the movement and their families. The building is still easily recognizable today, as it bears marble letters on the facade over the main door spelling out CASAPOVND.

The political movement CasaPound was born in 2003 following the occupation of this building in Esquilino. At first it was a movement associated with the right-wing Fiamma Tricolore party and active mainly in Rome.² In 2008, it cut ties with the party to become an independent, legally recognized association with a presence in multiple Italian cities. In 2013, it shifted again, this time to become an independent political party, participating in local elections. In Rome, it earned 0.69 percent of the overall vote. In 2014, it initiated a collaboration with the Lega Nord party led by Matteo Salvini, helping it first to gain support among voters in the district of Rome within the European parliament elections and second, in 2015, establishing a new political subject called *Sovranità*, thus defining the alliance with the Lega Nord and supporting Matteo Salvini's leadership. In 2016, finally, CasaPound participated in elections as an independent party, earning a surprising 8.6 percent in the local elections in Bolzano, a city in northern Italy near the Austrian border, and 1.14 percent, the equivalent of 14,711 votes, in the local elections in Rome.

Squatted on 26 December 2003, the CasaPound building is still being illegally occupied since the intervention by police forces the day after the occupation was not followed by an eviction (Di Tullio 2006: 148), despite the usual appeals to "legality" touted by Italian political institutions. In 2007, the former mayor of Rome, Walter Veltroni (socialist coalition, Partito Democratico), passed resolution no. 206/2007 guaranteeing that the families living at CasaPound would be provided with other accommodations should an eviction take place between 2007 and 2011.³ Gianni Alemanno (right-wing coalition, Partito Delle Libertà), mayor of Rome from 2008 to 2013, then tried to acquire ownership

of the building from the state using funds belonging to the City of Rome (11.8 million euros), an operation that ultimately failed because of the opposition posed by leftist members of parliament.

The Italian Embassy is the main site in Rome's topography related to CasaPound, but it is not the only one. Since the 2000s, Esquilino has also hosted Cutty Sark, "Italy's most hated pub," where militants often meet up to drink beer and hold discussions. The door is always closed; you need to ring the bell and show a registered card to gain access. In the same area, near the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, there is the bookstore Testa di Ferro. This site, also requiring visitors to ring the bell to get inside, contains a large collection of the main publications related to fascist ideology and history, as well as the magazine issued by CasaPound, T-shirts, and music CDs.

The CasaPound building itself is always closed, with a large, solid wooden door at the front and a 24-hour guard on the first floor. In order to go inside, somebody called out my name from a window on the first floor to verify my identity and then came down to let me in. At Area 19 enemy emplacement,⁴ the other space central to CasaPound's topography in the capital, there were security guards at every corner, a force of more than 30 individuals, on the night of a big concert. Recently, a restaurant called Da Angelino was also opened to foster the life of the community in Rome.

CasaPound is mainly experienced by its militants as a community, as it is not a question of political program or formal decisions but rather a phenomenon centered on lived experience: "the community is something that everybody feels in CasaPound. This is also the sense of being in CasaPound and not in a party. We are not a party."⁵ Another militant I spoke with, the first woman to have the turtle—the symbol of the movement—tattooed on her arm and who also wears a necklace with the same turtle symbol, told me that CasaPound is not only a political movement: it is "a very strong existential experience." This community was born inside the

building in Esquilino. Here, each of the floors hosts a family living in one of the apartments while the top floor, clearly representing the hierarchy characterizing the movement, holds the office of Gianluca Iannone, the leader of the movement and community as a whole: it was Iannone who opened the Cutty Sark pub at the end of the 1990s; now he manages both the restaurant Da Angelino and a record company, and he is the singer and front man of Zeta Zero Alfa, the rock band at the core of the community. He is also the person capable of setting the scene in concerts, acting as the officiant of a new form of ritual: when he takes the stage singing, everybody rushes to the stage and begins singing, like a chorus, following the word of the leader. Iannone thus enacts a process of power sharing similar to those of the fascist era in Italy and Germany, where rituals and ceremonies became central events through which the “new politics” established its “popular” sovereignty (Mosse 1975: 7–15). As in other European right-wing movements (Fangen 1998: 207; Loow 1998; Shaffer 2013: 467), CasaPound has granted music a preeminent position in structuring its identity. Music is the means that spreads the message and allows it to reach new people. “I knew it was a group from the area, but I didn’t know who Gianluca was, who they were ... but, since the first time, I understood that somewhere in the world there were people that I would meet one day, sooner or later.” Iannone plays a fundamental role in creating what participants experience as a community, as he is the ideal image of a charismatic personality, similar to other such figures in historical fascist political formations (Dumont 1991; Gingrich 2006; Wolf 1999).

As in hierarchical societies as defined by Louis Dumont, in CasaPound, value is attributed to the community as a whole as if it were a “collective man” (1991: 23): “for all of us the community is a priority as compared to us ... it’s a priority to preserve a community of destiny.” CasaPound is experienced as a community; it is essentialized and its hierarchy naturalized while its scent permeates every aspect of militants’

lives. In remembering the rise of Nazism, Sebastian Haffner describes how it was not simply a “political” phenomenon; rather, it was interwoven with the private lives of all people (2002: 327). The symbol of CasaPound is tattooed on militants’ bodies, the music of Zeta Zero Alfa plays at high volume in their cars as they weave through the traffic of Rome, and they buy homes in the Esquilino neighborhood so they can be near the Italian Embassy.

Bruce Kapferer (2012) argues that nationalism as a political phenomenon is characterized by a “totalitarian tendency”; on the other hand, Francesco Alberoni (1981) highlights some similarities between the logics militants experience as part of a movement in the condition of “*statu nascente*” and the experience of falling in love. I would argue that CasaPound expresses a contemporary form of fascist political style that is well described by some of its main ideologists in the 1920s. These authors theorized society as an “organism” in which the lives of individuals were merely tools for pursuing the interests of society (Rocco [1938] 2001: 237–239), and humankind and the state were considered a single entity (G. Gentile [1927] 2001: 267). In militants’ perceptions of their belonging to the movement, neither CasaPound’s political program nor its public statements hold any real significance. Rather, music, rituals, and community appear to hold a more important place in structuring the reasons people become involved in the movement. This form of involvement is more emotional, they say, making them feel that they are part of a bigger entity.

As I have noted, CasaPound is perceived as a community and the existential experience of taking part in this community is interwoven with militants’ lives in multiple ways. For instance, CasaPound is also a professional network that complements existing neofascist networks in Rome. As militants themselves noted, CasaPound merchandise and Zeta Zero Alfa T-shirts, CDs, and concerts represent an important source of income for the movement. The image of CasaPound appears to be that of a closed and isolated movement, with security guards,

large closed doors, and a community structured around the personality of the leader. Exploring the relationships that militants have established either politically or personally with former neofascist politicians, the movement might appear more open. Some militants have been able to find work thanks to historical neofascist networks in Rome, for instance at *Il Secolo d'Italia*, the newspaper founded by Pino Rauti in 1952 that is the official publication of the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) party. Others have been employed at the Adnkronos agency press, an important Italian agency press directed by a former executive of the Fronte Universitario di Azione Nazionale (FUAN), the MSI's university group. CasaPound's network in Rome includes direct relationships with former neofascist militants. Gabriele Adinolfi, the leader of the neofascist group Terza Posizione in the 1970s who was involved in the violent events of the period, came back to Italy after spending 20 years in England just before the emergence of CasaPound in 2002. He is the well-known "spiritual leader" of the movement, and his son manages the bookstore Testa di Ferro. Gianni Alemanno, mayor of the City of Rome (2008–2013), is the husband of Isabella Rauti, daughter of Pino Rauti, who co-founded the MSI party in 1946 and then Ordine Nuovo, a neofascist radical group that was active in the 1950s and 1960s outside the MSI party and played a significant role in the strategy of tension. Their son, Manfredi Alemanno, ran for student representative in the student elections in Rome in 2011 under the banner of Blocco Studentesco, the student group associated with CasaPound. In other words, there is a direct line uniting the CasaPound movement to neofascist and former fascist militants.

Italian history, and the fascist tradition in particular, plays a foundational role in the CasaPound movement. At the Italian Embassy, the entrance is painted with the names of the people CasaPound claims as its founding members: Ernst Jünger, Ezra Pound, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Benito Mussolini, among others. In Area 19 enemy emplacement, there is an enormous reproduction of a fascist monument standing

in the middle of the hall. A militant explicitly told me about the importance of a "mythical past" that they draw on in order to effectively mobilize participants and create new myths by invoking the eras of imperial Rome and the fascist regime. In the Esquilino building, there is a photo exposition about women's roles during the fascist era displayed in the stairway winding up through all seven floors. History comes to play an important role in CasaPound, just as in other integral movements, becoming a site for producing specific collective identities (Friedman 1994: 118). In the Italian context, the fascist memory represents and satisfies this need by providing a source of founding myths and legitimation. Many of the points in the political program CasaPound presented at the 2013 administrative elections echoed traditional fascist elements: attention to births and women's roles in a state, an aversion to international and financial banking systems, the desire to nationalize many aspects of the political and economic life of the country. In addition, this program included a highly conspicuous passage copied and pasted from the Manifesto of Verona, written in 1943 by Mussolini, featuring the exact same words and sentences.⁶

CasaPound represents an emotional stance for militants; for them, it provides a community and shared identity based on following the will of the leader. This community is structured around music and concerts as well as many community spaces in Rome where militants can gather: it meets specific needs in terms of identity. At the same time, the movement seems to be an integral part of an Italian historical tradition, calling for the fascist legacy to be granted a renewed place in the new millennium. Integral movements such as those described by Holmes are political movements that act as a "framework of meaning," an "idiom of solidarity," a "consciousness of belonging linked to a specific cultural milieu" (2000: 3), and indeed CasaPound seems to meet these kinds of needs in its militants—not programs or political discourses but networks, places where you can go and meet people, a community to be part of, a leader to

follow, an identity to take on. As part of this process, as Friedman notes, history represents a prominent source to draw on in seeking a secure and solid sense of identity.

CasaPound therefore appears to be a political movement capable of meeting certain specific exigencies of young people in Rome and renewing long-standing, traditional networks, thus giving life to the fascist legacy in what appears to be a new shape.

Fascism as a style of life and death

CasaPound militants love to call themselves “third-millennium fascists,” a definition that has come to identify this group in the Italian press and public sphere. It is appropriate to clarify that the Italian Republic was established after the end of World War II, integrating “antifascism” and the memory of the Resistance Movement as primary elements of its Constitution. One of the country’s main public holidays is the celebration of Liberation every 25 April, a day for remembering the end of the fascist period and freedom from the Nazi occupation. A specific article of the Constitution prohibits the “reconstitution of the fascist party,” and this injunction is echoed by the Scelba law⁷ which defines the “apology of fascism” as a crime. Nevertheless, since 1946 there has always been a party claiming to be heir to that legacy, namely the MSI and its multiple factions (Conti 2013; Ignazi 1989, 1994). Nevertheless, for most of its existence the MSI had been mainly concerned with distancing its contemporary image from that historical heritage, a process that finally resulted in its secretary Gianfranco Fini changing the name of the party to Alleanza Nazionale (AN) in 1994, a shift known as the “Fiuggi turn,” thereby officially making the MSI a national party rather than simply a symbol of nostalgia and minority interests. The history of the MSI is far from linear and straightforward, as the history of the 1970s reminds us: this period is known for the strategy of tension, with public bombings and murders involving neofascists factions linked to the MSI

(Cento Bull 2009; Conti 2013; Loperfido 2011). Nonetheless, CasaPound’s public claim to be third-millennium fascists represents an important point of renewal for investigating the place this political culture has acquired in Italy.

I asked militants to explain the reasons for this self-definition and their understanding of the word “fascism.” There was no one consistent answer, but in explaining why they felt this commitment, they did stress the role of CasaPound as a community: “Fascism for me is CasaPound; it’s fascism that goes beyond fascism: what I love is this approach to life, this way of facing life, to live and to be.” Similarly, another militant advised me to take care that my terminology reflected their contemporary character: “Yes, fascists, but of the third-millennium as well,” stressing the necessity to make the myth present in and for the present moment rather than an outdated fetish. Nevertheless, the most expressive position was expressed by a militant who held a “cultural place” in the organization. He explained the meaning fascism has for him and for CasaPound:

Before any theory of the state, before any kind of legislation, there’s a feeling of the world, there’s a style of life, and that is what fascinates us from that historical period. There is a style of life, typical of that revolution, and that we feel to be strictly ours. ... One doesn’t become a fascist for having read a program, one becomes a fascist first because he is attracted by a set of symbols ... it’s something more subtle than simple political stuff, you know, that’s why I use the expression “feeling of the word,” ‘cause it’s an expression that I think explains the idea well ... Because it is something prerational that is rationalized afterward. ...

A beautiful book was recently published, *The Death of the Fascists* by Gian Accame [2010]. Among other things, in this book he describes the relationship fascists have with the death, with their death, and thus the way many fascists face

death. And, you see, there is always this idea of going to die smiling, and it is not a slogan: it is something that most black shirts do: to donate oneself ... But, well, fascism isn't the first doctrine to seek the sacrifice of militants up to death ... Yet, it is the only doctrine to do so while smiling. And this is a really beautiful thing. There are some images of young guys, about to be shot, who are there, standing with a cigarette in their mouth and smiling, facing the firing squad ... and when you see these kinds of images you understand that ... there is something enchanting your heart, something attracting you ... In my opinion, these images, of the young guys going to die smiling, is the best expression of the fascist style of life.

Fascism from this standpoint is perceived first as a feeling of the world, as a style of life, best represented by death and by the capacity to face death with a smile. The sacrifice of the militant's own life for the growth of the community is perceived as a positive value in which death and violence are closely linked. It is something pre-rational, an idea that is rationalized afterward.

On 13 December 2011, 50-year-old Gianluca Casseri, a CasaPound militant and full member of the community who wrote and contributed to the movement's website, left his house in Pistoia and drove to Florence. It was still morning when, in Dalmazia Square, he pulled out a gun and shot several African workers he encountered there. Two of them were killed, the third injured. The bystanders who witnessed the scene and tried to stop him were intimidated into leaving. Casseri got back into his car and disappeared among the streets of Florence. He emerged again in the afternoon, near San Lorenzo market, where he met two more Africans and shot them. They were injured. He ran from the scene, trying to reach his car once again, but this time the police followed him. He decided to shoot himself.

The first reactions to this event by CasaPound militants online celebrated Casseri as a

hero, but shortly afterward Casseri's writings were removed from movement websites and only the leader was authorized to speak. CasaPound repudiated Casseri and its leader, Iannone, distanced the movement from Casseri as a person and from his actions. Along the same lines, politicians and the media were united in describing a "racist act" committed by a "crazy man" who was framed as completely outside of mainstream society. CasaPound's leader, Iannone, declared that Casseri was nothing more than a crazy man, and Matteo Renzi, at the time mayor of Florence, mirrored this idea when he denounced the episode as the actions of a crazy person, a foreign element in relation to Italian civil society. No legal proceedings were initiated following the tragic episode; it was stigmatized as madness and an inexplicable event, the action of one single man, racist and lonely. There was a generalized refusal to engage in a deeper analysis of the event, similar to the reaction in Norway in the aftermath of Anders Breivik's attack in July 2011 (Eriksen 2014).

On the contrary, if we consider the militant's statement presented above about fascism as a style of life best represented by the capacity to face death, then the Casseri episode appears in a totally different light. As I have explained, for militants the community is more important than their individual lives, and fascism as a style of life is well represented by the capacity to face death with a smile. This is because militants do not actually die when they leave this world: they feel that they are part of a community of destiny, which means they live in a timeless present that is not located in the future; rather, they identify with the entire fascist legacy. Every year they gather to celebrate militants' deaths, and the main rituals involve everyone in the community raising their right hands into the air—the "roman greeting" shared by fascists and Nazis—and saying "Present!" after the name of the militant is pronounced. Their T-shirts and songs repeat the slogan "Boia chi molla!" (The hangman who quits!), thus celebrating "resistance until death, the absolute refusal to surrender" (Jesi 2011: 97), an idea embodied in Casseri's actions.

At the core of this tragic event lies the issue of whether or to what extent ideological, political, and cultural movements can give rise to concrete practices through the violence they profess. Considering the relationship between myths and reality, Michel Wieviorka (2004: 224) suggests that violence comes to play a role when militants find themselves face-to-face with the contradictory character of their statements, referencing the position held by Georges Sorel and his revision of Marxism, which was so important in the initial development of fascism. Sorel (1926) argued that class is insufficient to drive people to action and therefore mythological value becomes necessary (Sternhell et al. 1989: 112). Furio Jesi (2011), like Franco Ferraresi (1995), talks explicitly about fascism as a “religion of death” in describing the role death plays in fascist cosmology. Meanwhile, this episode represents another historical example of the totalitarian tendency of political ideologies—such as nationalism and fascism—to shape human actions through the use of violence against other humans as a tool of political realization (Kapferer 2012; Wolf 1999). In light of this insight, fascism appears to be a style of life in which death and violence prevail in their capacity to ensure militants’ support for the cause, given that this support is something prerational.

The Italian word *squadrisimo* refers to the fascist violence committed in the 1920s by Mussolini’s earliest followers. The fascists killed and tortured thousands of people—mainly political opponents—in order to aid fascism in its rise to power (Franzinelli 2009). CasaPound has decided to assert this identitarian legacy through a range of actions they define as “media squadrisim” (*squadrisimo mediatico*). These include making T-shirts referring to this legacy, writing public statements, and carrying out violent actions, including raids on the offices of the national television broadcasting company in Rome in 2008, a radio station in Milan in 2009, and a few high schools in Rome in 2012. Similar ideas are repeated in the lyrics of Zeta Zero Alfa songs, which feature lines about “hitting with an

iron bar,” “beating,” living in a “trench war,” and “waiting to move forward with the attack.”

Despite these images of aggression, CasaPound militants claim that they only use violence for defensive purposes. Militants explain that they need to defend their space against “antifascist prejudice”: “In case somebody tries to deny our political space, we are always ready to defend our position.” At the same time, a militant who was found guilty of having beaten and injured several young people, after having declared himself a “political prisoner” during the trial, was released from jail at the end of his one-year sentence and became a candidate on the CasaPound lists for the 2013 elections.

For CasaPound, conceptualizations of violence seem to oscillate between two different and opposite necessities: on the one hand, the need to protect the credibility of the movement in the eyes of the public; on the other hand, the rhetoric of fascism “justifying the use of any kind of violence against its opponents” (Gattinara and Froio 2014: 163). Violence is thus central in building the identity of the group, especially in cases such as this in which “the destruction of the other is simultaneously the production of the self” (Friedman 2003: 23–24): “As long as there is one antifascist, I will be a fascist,” states Gianluca Iannone (Cosmelli and Matthieu 2009: 138).

We might ask what kind of violence is licit and what kind is not, both within CasaPound as well as in Italian institutions and democratic society. David Graeber reveals the role media played in shaping the image of the “anti-globalisation movement” as violent by describing any large action that took place as a “violent protest” (2002: 66) even though not a single person suffered physical injury in two years of movement actions and political demonstrations. In the Italian context, similar violent descriptions are used to frame all “anticapitalist demonstrations,” from Genoa in 2001 to the No TAV (No to the High-Speed Train) movement in 2013, even though no acts of physical violence against human beings occurred. Conversely, both media and political institutions in Italy reserve

much different treatment for the CasaPound movement notwithstanding the occurrence this specific form of violence explicitly directed against human beings. Demonstrations held by the African community following the Dalma-*zia* episode to demand justice and the closure of CasaPound were silently put down without any concrete consequences. A few months later CasaPound opened a new office in Florence, and one year later it became a political party, taking part in the 2013 administrative elections. The general silence surrounding the violence enacted by the CasaPound militants prompts us to explore how violence becomes an ordinary event and how words sometimes give way to silence in expressing violence (Das 2007), even at an institutional level.

Considering the links CasaPound maintains with Italian society both inside and outside traditional neofascist networks, it would also make sense to interrogate the proximity of fascist values to broader Italian society. Illustrative of this connection is the legal case brought by Mary de Rachewiltz, who took CasaPound to court for misappropriating the name of her father, the well-known American poet Ezra Pound. In June 2016, Judge Bianchini handed down a verdict, ending a trial that started in January 2012, just a few weeks after the tragic events in Florence. The judge found that the name “CasaPound is different from the name ‘Ezra Pound,’ and that the Association operates in a legitimate manner, and it did not legitimate the use of violence under the poet’s name.”⁸ The verdict was sustained by a quote from an appendix supplied by Domenico Di Tullio, the lawyer for CasaPound, signed by the Prefect of Police Mario Papa on 11 April 2015.⁹ The note describes CasaPound’s militants as “characterized by an active and dynamic style, ... a manifest and declared wish to support a reappraisal of fascism’s most innovative aspects, and a social promotion of the fascist period” within a “primary engagement for protecting the poor.” The note ends by stating that a few episodes of violence have occurred over the years, but these were because of “so-called militant antifascism,” which refused to

recognize CasaPound’s “right to have political activity.” In cases where violence is not cloaked in silence, there is an interesting proximity between statements by the minister of the interior and those by CasaPound: both assert that violence is only used for defensive purposes. Even more relevant, however, are the shared values expressed by the CasaPound statements and commemoration of the fascist legacy and the ministry’s position: both appear to view fascism as a legitimate legacy of Italian history with no mention of its being forbidden by the Scelba law or the Italian Constitution.

For CasaPound militants, fascism is mainly a lifestyle in which death and violence are just as present and legitimate as the feeling of being part of a community. Moreover, this contemporary form of fascism does not seem to be a “faceless force” (Griffin et al. 2006: 59): on the contrary, now as in the past it appears to move through networks and relationships that are embedded in Italian institutions and democratic society, shaping events such as those described above and rendering them possible and licit. As Eric Wolf notes, “the processes through which ideologies are constructed take place in historic time and under definable circumstances” (1982: 388).

Fascism’s legacy and present

This article has described how CasaPound is mainly experienced by its militants as a community, “something prerational that is rationalized afterward,” as one militant said. The community is perceived as permeating every aspect of activists’ lives, as an emotional, existential, and collective phenomenon that, as such, meets a specific identitarian need. The CasaPound community is structured around the leader’s will, reproducing collective rituals typical of the “new political style” described by George Mosse (1975), thus stressing the direct link between this movement and the historical fascist era that is perceived as its foundational mythological past.

CasaPound is not an isolated entity in the Italian political and cultural landscape, however. It maintains direct links with neofascist former politicians, institutional figures, and political leaders. These networks help the movement to find employment for its activists, but they also help preserve its legitimate status no matter what violent actions its participants commit. CasaPound is part of a legacy that places it directly within the tradition of Mussolini, granting historical fascism new life as a founding myth across its actions and political program.

Historically, fascism as a political party and political culture was not alone in its quest for power. In mapping the rise of fascism in Italy in the 1920s, Luigi Fabbri finds that Mussolini's squads were relatively few, but it was "the solidarity, the direct and indirect help, the complicity of the other political forces that made them strong" (1975: 14). Along the same lines, Eric Wolf recalls how in 1933 Germany, Hitler was brought to power "through the manipulation of a conservative clique, and it always required the use of force and violence to maintain its grip on society" (1999: 272). In contemporary Italy, a movement claiming to be part of the fascist legacy has succeeded in gaining institutional and democratic legitimation, with direct support from two mayors of the City of Rome, long-standing neofascist politicians and statements by the minister of the interior and a sitting judge, despite what the Constitution and Scelba law decree.

In light of activists' claims that fascism is a style of life, fascism can be seen as a political culture and historical legacy that is capable of comprising the present-day political moment of the new millennium through its ability to grasp people's needs, a political culture in which participants assert the use of violence as a political and identitarian act. Fascism as a style of life in which emotional and prerational elements prevail over any political program, but a style of life best represented by death and the individual's ability to die for his community.

And yet violence is not an isolated phenomenon; rather, it is part of a syndrome (Fromm

2012: 183), and I have outlined the networks, relations, and institutional figures that take part in this violence. In a way, silence can be a tool for making violence "descend into the ordinary" (Das 2007); on the other hand, the similarity between institutional understandings of such violence and CasaPound's position lead us to question fascism's "proximity" to conventional values (Holmes 2016: 1). No matter how it is viewed, fascism does not appear to represent an isolated or groupuscular phenomenon.

CasaPound is an expression of what the fascist legacy can become in the third millennium. Performed and experienced as a community, the political program expressed by this contemporary form of fascism does not explain participants' involvement in such a movement. Rather, the political program as such gives way to what activists feel is more important: lived experience, the emotional stance of a shared identity, community. Third-millennium fascism is lived as a prerational experience, described as a style of life capable of grasping people's inner reason and meeting their need for identity. Violence and death are claimed, performed, and enacted as concrete tools for linking contemporary fascism with its historical manifestations.

Third-millennium fascism illustrates the capacity of an historically rooted political identity to renew itself in order to keep pace with the times, finding a way to overcome historical condemnation through the law and norms. Third-millennium fascism illustrates the intimate relationship between fascist political culture, violence, and death, showing the concrete trajectories of a prerational political lifestyle in which life gives way to death in order to satisfy a need for identity.

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Notes

1. For an in-depth analysis about the methodological issue of the ethnography, see Cammelli (2014: 15–34; 2015: 17–23; 2017: 20–28).
2. For a deeper description of the evolution of CasaPound since 2003 and its connection with the neofascist political parties in Italy since the end of the War World II, see Cammelli (2015: 25–38; 2017: 29–48).
3. Resolution 206, relative to the town council meeting of 16 May 2007.
4. On 27 August 2015, police carried out an eviction of Area 19. Nobody was found inside the space to defend the occupation.
5. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
6. The program of CasaPound Italia states the following under point 4, “For Work as a Social Duty”: “Work, manual, technical, or intellectual, in all its manifestations, must be the basis of the state and its primary object. Private property, the fruit of labor and individual savings, and the integration of human personality must always be guaranteed by the state. Private property, however, must not become a disintegrator

of the physical and moral personality of men through the exploitation of their labor. In the national economy, everything that in terms of either size or function goes beyond the individual to enter the collective interest belongs to the sphere of action, which is the proper domain of the state.” By the same token, the Manifesto of Verona, in the paragraph dedicated to social matters, affirms: “9. Work, manual, technical, or intellectual, in all its manifestations, is the foundation of the Italian Social Republic and its primary object. 10. Private property, the fruit of labor and individual savings, and integration of the human personality is guaranteed by the state. Private property must not become a disintegrator of the physical and moral personality of men through the exploitation of their labor. 11. In the national economy everything that, in terms of either size or function, goes beyond the individual to enter the collective interest belongs to the sphere of action which is the proper domain of the state” (De Felice 2001: 474–475).

7. Law no. 645 of 1952 (Scelba law).
8. *Adnkronos*, 10 June 2016.
9. Ministero dell'Interno, Dipartimento di Pubblica Sicurezza, Direzione Centrale della Polizia di Prevenzione. N.224/SIG.DIV2/Sez.2/4333. Rome, 11 April 2015.

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