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The legacy of fascism in the present: ‘third millennium fascists’ in Italy

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ABSTRACT

New political groups directly or indirectly related to the European fascist past are gaining strength and significance in the political arena of the new millennium. Starting from an analysis of CasaPound in Italy, a movement and party whose activists define themselves as ‘third millennium fascists’, this article explores the legacy of fascism in current Italian politics. Analysing CasaPound’s history, political programme and some of the main features of its organization as a community, the article examines the prominent role the fascist legacy plays in structuring this movement, for which history constitutes a source of legitimization and identity formation. Fascism is not traced as something isolated in history, but instead its history is presented as a legitimate legacy with a significant place in Italy’s political landscape.

KEYWORDS Fascism; neo-fascism; integralism; Italy; CasaPound

The rise of political parties and movements inspired by the European fascist past is a phenomenon evident in a number of contemporary political arenas, although generally these movements are described as xenophobic, populist or far-right; it is only rarely that the *f*-word appears in public debates. Douglas Holmes has recently argued that it is necessary to bring the word *fascism* back to the centre of the analysis of the political extremism we are currently facing, suggesting that we view this phenomenon ‘as a Fascism of and in our time’ (2016, 1), with its own features that diverge in some respects from its earlier historical forms. Fifteen years before making this statement, Holmes sketched the profile of what he calls ‘integralist’ political culture, meaning a whole spectrum of movements promoting political activity as a style that can – but need not – result in fascism (Holmes 2000, 14). Integralist movements, as Holmes defines them, are political formations that seek to respond to the insecurity and fears engendered by social and economic crisis by promoting essentialized forms of belonging (Holmes 2000; Gingrich and Banks 2006).

The global anthropology perspective developed by Kajsa Ekholm Friedman and Jonathan Friedman (2008) offers a model according to which the economic

displacement inherent in capital and markets gives rise to multiple social consequences, including both cultural fragmentation and modernist homogenization as two 'constitutive trends of global reality' (Friedman 1990, 311). According to Friedman, history comes to play an important role in processes of identity formation by offering people a source of security through the construction of cultural identity (Friedman 1994, 118). Investigating the relationship between 'making history and constructing identity', Friedman argues that history comes to play a key role in that it is a 'representation of the past linked to the establishment of an identity in the present' (Friedman 1992, 195). In the integralist agenda as well, as suggested by Holmes, the use of the past is central to people's efforts to find a source of identity-based security (Holmes 2000, 3).

This article focuses on a contemporary neo-fascist movement and party active in Italy: CasaPound, a group of self-defined 'third millennium fascists'. This movement has received some attention from political scientists (Albanese et al. 2014; Castelli Gattinara, Froio, and Albanese 2013; Froio and Castelli Gattinara 2015) interested in measuring the impact of the economic crisis on the diffusion and electoral success of CasaPound. From a different disciplinary perspective, the sociologists Di Nunzio and Toscano (2011) offer an insightful view of the movement through a study written with the participation of the activists themselves (something that is only made clear to readers at the end of the book, however), although this publication seems to represent more an effort to grant the movement political respectability than a scientific analysis as such (see Cammelli n.d.).

My own approach differs from the existing literature in two respects. First, it is based on anthropological methodology and insights; secondly, unlike the other publications, I do not discuss the emergence and spread of the CasaPound movement in general or document the perspectives of the activists (Cammelli 2014, 2015, 2017a, 2017b). On the contrary, in what follows I seek to draw a line showing the direct – and indirect – connections between third millennium fascists and Italian fascism of the last century, during Mussolini's time in power. Beginning from an analysis of the movement's political programme and actions, as well as ethnographic insights drawn from fieldwork,¹ I seek to identify the specific place that historical narrations and representations of the past occupy in forging a fascist identity in the third millennium. I investigate the presence and role of fascist history in the contemporary CasaPound movement and party, showing how it comes to represent a concrete source of political ideas and initiatives for the CasaPound party and, therefore, a wellspring for constructing identity. Finally, this analysis sets the stage for questioning the place the fascist legacy occupies in current political agendas and suggesting that we consider the role that fascism is playing in contemporary Europe.

The history of CasaPound Italia

CasaPound was born in 2003 in Rome during the occupation of a building in the Esquilino district, a multi-ethnic neighbourhood populated mostly by Chinese and Bengali people. The site was a seven-storey building near Piazza Vittorio and not far from the Termini railway station that belongs to the Italian state. In this building, which is still occupied by activists today, there are three apartments per floor that host the activists and their families. The police did not intervene at the time of the occupation, nor did they take action in the following months or years. The two mayors of Rome to hold office in the years 2003–2013 treated the fascist occupation with a degree of tolerance: first, Walter Veltroni (Partito Democratico) promised that the city would ensure accommodation for the families living there should an eviction take place (Resolution 206 of 2007); then, Gianni Alemanno (Partito della Libertà) tried to buy the property from the central government using City of Rome funds, an operation that ultimately failed in December 2012.

In the 13 years of its history, CasaPound has changed quite significantly. It emerged as a movement linked to the occupation of this building and an integral part of the Fiamma Tricolore, a political party founded in 1995 by Pino Rauti. Fiamma Tricolore was originally established in protest against the ‘Fiuggi turn’ when, at a congress held in the city of Fiuggi, Gianfranco Fini, then secretary of the post-war neo-fascist party Movimento sociale italiano (MSI), proposed that the party’s name be changed to Alleanza Nazionale (AN), marking an important step in the evolution of the party positioned as the heir of Mussolini’s regime. Until that time the MSI had maintained explicit links to the fascist legacy, and its entire history was marked by internal conflicts in which adherents debated the best way to keep the party’s fascist identity alive while ensuring it was up to date with the contemporary democratic context. From the outset, this peculiar characteristic had largely relegated the MSI to the margins of the parliamentary stage (Ignazi 1989, 1994; Conti 2013; Ferraresi 1984), hence the 1994 MSI congress proved particularly significant in view of these declarations by its secretary. Fini not only suggested changing its name, he also called for a new phase in the life of the party that entailed moving beyond direct links with the fascist regime and its heritage. Following this shift, the MSI-AN embarked on a new chapter of activity, participating in parliamentary alliances and becoming part of the ruling majority together with Silvio Berlusconi (Forza Italia) that same year. This ‘turn’ therefore represents an important point in the evolution of right-wing political parties in contemporary Italy and especially the contemporary forms these parties take, including CasaPound. In fact, the 1994 congress paved the way for the emergence of a whole group of new parties and political initiatives that revolved around a clear allegiance to fascist history and Mussolini’s legacy, exactly what the MSI-AN party appeared to repudiate. It was in this context of crisis among extreme right actors and the consequent reshaping of

their political organizations that the Fiamma Tricolore party was born under the leadership of Pino Rauti. In order to understand what inspired the creation of CasaPound, therefore, we need to take a closer look at the history of post-war Italian neo-fascism.

Pino Rauti already enjoyed a reputation in the history of fascist-linked right-wing organizations as a militant with intransigent respect for fascist history. He was among the original members of the MSI in 1946. He was also one of the founders of the Centro Studi Ordine Nuovo in 1956, a group formed in opposition to the MSI secretary of the time (Ferraresi 1984, 62). Ordine Nuovo played a key role in the alliance between representatives of the Italian state, neo-fascist groups and international organizations actively working to prevent the Communist Party from garnering support in the Italian parliament (Conti 2013, 54), and thus participated as a 'co-belligerent' in the 'strategy of tension' (Cento Bull 2009, 597).

The MSI represented an important element in the history of Italian neo-fascist political organizations of the second half of the twentieth century, but from its inception, and even more so with the creation of Ordine Nuovo in 1956, it was unable to embody all the different perspectives making up the highly diverse galaxy of neo-fascism (Ignazi 1989, 109). Pino Rauti decided to return to the MSI when the party's secretary changed in 1969, thus ushering in a new epoch in which neo-fascist activism was characterized by 'dual activity' both inside the MSI and, at the same time, in other groups such as Ordine Nuovo (Conti 2013, 153).

Even though many elements made the 'Fiuggi turn' a critical juncture, the whole history of neo-fascist legacies in the Italian political landscape was characterized by a multitude of different groups and parties alternating between dialogue and conflict with the MSI. The founding of the Fiamma Tricolore party in 1995 in opposition to this shift in the MSI was a moment of dissidence, but it was anything but isolated.

In a broader perspective, the MSI's evolution at the Congress of Fiuggi echoes the more generalized crisis of Italy's institutional and political system following the collapse of the Berlin Wall. 'The period from 1992 to 1994 is rightly referred to as the "earthquake years"' (Forlenza and Thomassen 2016, 249). In fact, not only did the collapse of the Berlin Wall overturn the Italian Communist Party, but 'Operation Clean Hands' (*Mani Pulite*) revealed a vast network of political corruption and ultimately led to the disintegration of the entire party system. The Christian Democracy party fell apart, and Bettino Craxi, the leader of the Socialist Party, escaped to avoid serving time in prison (Forlenza and Thomassen 2016, 249). It was in this context of structural change that Silvio Berlusconi and his Forza Italia party emerged, and at the 1994 elections they gained power together with a coalition including the new MSI-AN party. This was the first time since the end of the Second World War that a post-fascist movement had participated in Italy's government (Forlenza and Thomassen 2016, 249). Following

these changes and the far-reaching political 'earthquake' of these years, right-wing actors in general needed to find a new equilibrium and not only in terms of political configuration within the party system. The result was a wide-ranging reconfiguration of political identity and connections with the country's fascist legacy. While on one hand the heir of the Fascist Party, namely the MSI-AN, was confronting the issue of how closely to adhere to its fascist legacy and chose in some ways to repudiate this heritage, on the other hand multiple different movements characterized by a hard-line respect for the fascist memory and faithful adherence to it made their appearance.

With the shift represented by the Fiuggi turn, the fascist legacy made its way inside the Italian parliament for the first time; at the same time, it underwent a new process of transformation and reconfiguration which, in the new millennium, gave rise to a movement and party that explicitly claimed to be the heir to that tradition, with the self-selected label 'third millennium fascists'.

CasaPound was founded in 2003 as a branch of the Fiamma Tricolore party, making specific reference to the history of the MSI and Mussolini's legacy. While the MSI was founded on 26 December 1946 in Rome, CasaPound made its appearance in the streets of Rome with the occupation of the building in the Esquilino on 26 December 2003. This was not accidental, since it furnished an explicit initial link between the CasaPound movement and the fascist era and its legacy.

The CasaPound movement was born as a youth organization associated with the Fiamma Tricolore party and remained such until 2008, at which point it broke off from the party to become an officially registered association with offices in all major Italian cities under the name CasaPound Italia (CPI). As a legally recognized association, CasaPound was eligible to receive the voluntary pre-tax donation of 0.5% of an individual's income as established by the Italian tax system, as well as many benefits in terms of funding and public recognition.

In 2013, CasaPound Italia developed a new strategy when it became an independent political party and participated in local elections in February. It won 0.69% of votes in Lazio, comprising 8734 votes in the city of Rome. In 2014 it struck up informal relations with the Lega Nord, and in 2015 a new political formation called Sovranità established an alliance between the two parties supporting the Lega Nord's leader Matteo Salvini. In 2016, CasaPound participated in the elections as an independent party, winning 1.14% of the vote in Rome, equivalent to around 14,000 votes, slightly less than double the number of votes from three years before.

In what follows, I focus mainly on how the legacy of fascism takes shape in CasaPound as illustrated by activists' own name for themselves – 'third millennium fascists', a label they claim as their own. I then examine this legacy in the party/movement's political programme and, subsequently, in several statements and physical spaces associated with the movement.

The CasaPound political programme

CasaPound Italia presented a political programme in 2009 that was almost the same as the one it presented at the administrative elections in 2013 and 2016. The aim of this section is to identify connections between this programme and the historical legacy of the fascist era. Traces of the fascist legacy in the contemporary political programme of CasaPound are revealed through an examination of some of its main points, and it is worth noting that CasaPound's programme lays the foundations for its vision of the Italian nation beginning from the very first lines: the word 'nation' is used a number of times and is given the meaning of an 'organism' and a 'moral, political and economic unity' that finds realization in the state. For its part, the state is supposed to be 'ethical, organic and inclusive', 'something spiritual and moral' aimed at ensuring that the nation remains independent of private and international interests. From the beginning, therefore, CasaPound displayed its connections with the fascist conception of society and the state. In the fascist era, society was seen as an 'organism' in which the lives of individuals were merely tools for pursuing the interests of society as a whole (see Cammelli 2017b and Rocco [1938] 2001, 237–239), and humankind and the state were considered a single entity (Gentile [1927] 2001, 267). CasaPound retains this perspective characteristic of the fascist era in terms of its idea of an organic state and Italian nation that takes priority over any individual or personal interests or desires.

The housing issue

The name CasaPound is composed of two words: *Casa*, house in Italian, and *Pound*, a reference to the American poet Ezra Pound. Both terms stand for important statements in the programme. The housing issue has been a priority since 2003. The very symbol of the movement is a turtle, chosen for its physical characteristic of carrying its own house on its back wherever it goes,² while since 2005 the movement has repeatedly proposed a bill called *Mutuo Sociale* that would involve creating regional boards responsible for building new neighbourhoods and selling new housing units at cost. The idea behind the *Mutuo Sociale* is to enable Italian citizens who have resided in the city for at least five years to become homeowners as opposed to paying rent, a system CasaPound defines as 'usury', and without taking out a mortgage from the bank.

The connection between the fascist era and this draft legislation proposed by CasaPound has many facets. Rome's Garbatella neighbourhood, which was built during the fascist era, is held up as an example for this housing bill, and a perusal of Mussolini's writings reveals several statements that are very similar to the draft legislation. For instance, the Verona Manifesto written by Mussolini in 1943, at the dawn of the Repubblica Sociale Italiana (RSI, known in English as the Republic of Salò), addresses the same issues concerning home ownership

and the need to build new housing and sell it directly to citizens without the mediation of bank loans:

15. The [right] of home ownership is not just a property right, it is a right to property. The party includes in its programme the creation of a national agency for public housing which, absorbing the existing Institute and widening its range of action to a maximum extent, provides home ownership to the families of workers in every category through the direct construction of new homes or gradual repurchasing of existing ones. In this respect, the general principle is that rent, once it has repaid the capital and earned the appropriate profit, constitutes proof of purchase. (De Felice 2001, 474–475)

What CasaPound Italia does is to translate this proposal from 1943 into a form more in keeping with the new millennium, thus making it contemporary.

Autarchy

The second part of the name CasaPound is a reference to the well-known American poet Ezra Pound, among whose numerous poems there is one explicitly declaring the poet's opposition to usury ('Cantos XLV'). CasaPound has taken on this name in order to position itself in opposition to the international financial system and privatization of banking.

Among the 18 points of CasaPound's political programme, the first calls for the 'public control of banks' (Una nazione n.d., 2). Statements from the fascist era stated the same aversion to the international financial system that was blamed for causing the economic crisis of the time. Indeed, the so-called 'anti-capitalism' of the fascist era was framed within a discourse of opposition to 'international plutocracy' (Guerin 2001, 238–243). Along the same lines, CasaPound has called for the nationalization of the institutions comprising the core of society's economic structure, namely banks. This nationalization of a specific institution is proposed as a way of solving problematic structural dynamics in that the movement's discourse identifies the individual, physical owners of financial institutions as the source of the economic crisis. This discursive chain follows the same logical sequence that functioned during the darkest period in German history to transfer the 'enthusiasm of the masses from social and economic claims to anti-Semitism' (Mosse 1968, 433). In the same way, CasaPound's nationalism and autarchy is characterized by an aversion to all multinational corporations and European institutions.

The primary interest of CasaPound as expressed in its political programme is 'the unity of the only important thing: the Italian people', while the building in the Esquilino neighbourhood in Rome is referred to as the 'Italian Embassy'. Similarly, the CasaPound squat in Rome called Area 19 contained a huge reproduction of a fascist monument. The reference to the Roman Empire is as a concrete symbol linking the mythological past evoked by CasaPound and the one deployed during the fascist era. History and its symbolic narrations, such as Roman monuments, play a concrete role in the contemporary cosmology of this

movement. Involving the creation of an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983), this use of symbols of the past shows the 'relation between making history and constructing identity' (Friedman 1992, 195). CasaPound evokes the fascist past and, within it, claims for the identification of an 'Italian people'. The name 'Italian Embassy' can be seen as an example of this position in that the Esquilino is a multi-ethnic neighbourhood and CasaPound claims to represent and stand as the defender of this 'national identity'.

Racism and migration policy

The 'manifesto della razza' published in Italy in 1938 affirms the existence of hierarchically positioned races and the importance of preserving the 'Italian race' before all others; perceived threats included not only the Jewish race but also the French, German and so on. As Castelli Gattinara and Froio (Castelli Gattinara, Froio and Albanese 2013, 250; Froio and Gattinara 2015, 100) have noted, CasaPound has edited its programme to eliminate any explicit references to the racist policies of the fascist epoch as expressed in the Verona Manifesto; nevertheless, many CasaPound statements reveal an 'updated' version of this tendency to consider human beings different from one another. CasaPound does not claim biological differences, as was the case in the 'manifesto della razza'. However, in both its political programme and the everyday actions organized by CasaPound, cultural diversity is presented as an insurmountable problem that prevents people from communicating and sharing daily life. CasaPound claims to fight to protect such differences, including for instance language, culture and religion. There may no longer be a racial hierarchy for human beings, but there is still a hierarchy distinguishing people, and cultures, who enjoy the right to claim rights and citizenship and others who are not entitled to this basic right.

In the political programme of CasaPound, migration constitutes the third priority and the movement states its clear opposition to the 'migration mechanism' in which 'migrants come happily to Italy to accept low salaries, thus promoting unjust competition to Italian workers' (Una nazione n.d., 4). The programme proposes 'blocking all migration inflows, sending back all irregular migrants, and sustaining any identity-based movement active in other countries capable of promoting the re-settlement of people in their own countries' (Una nazione n.d., 4). In relation to migration, CasaPound declares a desire for 'a world where the differences are protected and promoted, ... in order to prevent the confusion and spoliation of each identity' (<http://Casapounditalia.org/p/le-faq-di-cpi.html>). Succinctly, in the programme and in the demonstrations of Sovranità it is stated, 'Stop invasion; Italians first'.

These statements provide an example of what in the social sciences is known as 'differential racism' (Wieviorka 1998). CasaPound does not grant any value to race as a genetic attribute, but identity is promoted as a feature deriving from the person's culture and linked to a specific national territory. In this discourse,

such identities are naturally linked to national borders and history, elements which determine the specific 'culture' of the area in question. This specific 'culture' in turn produces the identity of individuals, and CasaPound has declared itself ready to defend these specific cultures and traditions against the supposed risk of contamination entailed in encountering and living with different 'cultures'. According to this logic, migrants should be sent back to their own countries because different cultures cannot live together. This example of cultural fundamentalism (Stolcke 1995) claims different access to citizenship and civil rights depending on the origins of the individual in question.

CasaPound's actions often target centres hosting migrants and asylum seekers through outright attacks (Tor Sapienza; Casale San Nicola, 2014) (Selmini 2016) or symbolic demonstrations (see Cammelli 2015, 123–126). CasaPound also seeks to mobilize people in certain neighbourhoods to hold protests against asylum seekers or force migrants to leave the country. This occurred, for instance, in Goro Gorino in the autumn of 2016, when CasaPound and Lega Nord activists coordinated with local inhabitants to put together a committee to prevent asylum seekers from settling in the town, erecting a barricade across the street at night time. Eventually, CasaPound militants went on to actually kill migrants. The first incident took place in Florence in 2011, where a CasaPound militant with a gun shot and killed two workers from Senegal; another occurred in Fermo in the summer of 2016, when a CasaPound sympathizer beat an asylum seeker to death (see below). CasaPound's rhetoric of opposition to migrants and all different cultures opens the way for violent actions and shows how the fascist past can find space for its mythological narration and thereby legitimize a specific identity in the present.

Women and motherhood

Concerned by the demographic crisis affecting Italy, CasaPound has expressed a number of ideas similar to those circulated in the fascist era. At that time, the fascist state was concerned with demography and encouraging the growth of the country through the birth of future citizens and soldiers. In the 1920s, the demographic crisis was blamed on urbanization and the fascist state celebrated the traditional rural way of life (Bellassai 2011, 74). Today, CasaPound does not talk about a traditional way of life or urbanization; responsibility for demographic problems is assigned instead to the agents of 'multinational corporations and big finance' (Una nazione n.d., 9). CasaPound has proposed a law that would promote 'the right to motherhood and to life. Against the disappearance of Italy' (Una nazione n.d., 9). This draft legislation ('Time for Being a Mother') would reduce working hours for one of the two parents from eight to six hours per day, while guaranteeing the same salary.

The continuity between CasaPound's position and the fascist valuation of motherhood is revealed not by the proposed bill itself, but by the statement

in the second part of the programme where the party claims to promote the right to motherhood and life 'against the disappearance of Italy'. Today, as in the fascist era, the role of women is to procreate for the wealth and prosperity of the Italian nation. Women have the right and duty to ensure that the history of Italy is kept alive into the future. By stressing the enactment of this peculiar right, CasaPound perpetuates a normative vision of female gendered identity.

These legislative proposals display not only the movement's focus, inherited from the fascist era, on demographic wealth as the heart of the country's greatness, but also reveal a traditional vision of women as actors whose primary responsibility is to procreate, to satisfy not a personal desire of their own, but the state's hunger for power.

Il manifesto di Verona

Finally, comparing the political programme that CasaPound Italia presented at the administrative elections in 2013 and 2016 with the 1943 Verona Manifesto Mussolini wrote at the beginning of the Republic of Salò, we find that they contain some very similar passages. Not only does the Verona Manifesto contain many ideas that are found in an updated form in the CasaPound programme, as in the case of the housing issue, but it also contains some passages that use the very same wording. For example, the programme of CasaPound Italia states (point 4):

For Work as a social duty: Work, manual, technical, or intellectual, in all its manifestations, must be the base of the state and its primary object. Private property, the fruit of labour and individual savings, integration of human personality must always be guaranteed by the state. Private property, however, must not lead to the disintegration of the physical and moral personality of men, through the exploitation of their work. In the national economy everything which due to either its size or function goes beyond the single individual to enter the collective interest, belongs to the sphere of action which is the domain of the state.

In the paragraph dedicated to social matters, the Manifesto of Verona affirmed:

9. Work, manual, technical, or intellectual, in all its manifestations, is the base of the Italian Social Republic and its primary object. 10. Private property, the fruit of labour and individual savings, integration of the human personality, is guaranteed by the state. Private property must not lead to the disintegration of the physical and moral personality of men, through the exploitation of labour. 11. In the national economy everything which due to either its size or function goes beyond the single individual to enter the collective interest, belongs to the sphere of action which is the domain of the state. (De Felice 2001, 474–475)

The same wording is used in both texts. Rather than introducing innovative elements to the panorama of Italian neo-fascism, CasaPound Italia has succeeded in modernizing many of the proposals that already existed in that movement. Sometimes CPI uses original and novel language; at other times it maintains the very same words. In both cases, the more traditional issues

that historically characterized fascism are also found in the CasaPound party, synthesized in the name they claim for themselves: third millennium fascists.

Nevertheless, the legacy of the fascist era is not limited to the statements found in the CPI's political programme. Indeed, the entire organization of the community and party is informed by that tradition.

The new political style of fascism

George Mosse coined the term 'new politics' to describe the style that emerged when the masses entered politics after the end of the nineteenth century. From that time onwards, Mosse argued, sovereignty became 'popular' (Mosse 1975, 7), that is to say, it was no longer a question of venerating a king, but rather of venerating the 'general will' described by Rousseau. In this context, the 'new political style' of the Third Reich 'transformed the political action in a dramatic representation, where the main actor was supposed to be the people itself' (Mosse 1975, 8). This is the main reason why celebrations, happenings and rituals constituted a central component of the political doctrine of fascism (Mosse 1975, 15).

CasaPound Italia has adapted this 'new political style' to the third millennium. Instead of parades, memorial rituals or celebrations, they organize rock concerts where people can meet up and 'community' can take shape and, through chorus and dance, celebrate itself.³ This is possible thanks to an important characteristic of CasaPound, namely the fact that its main leader, Gianluca Iannone, is also the front man of the rock band Zeta Zero Alfa, the band at the origins of the entire movement.

Iannone is not simply a charismatic leader capable of competing with the well-known images of charismatic leaders in contemporary Europe. He is an actor capable of updating the new political style to adapt it to the new millennium, making people, and hence the CasaPound community, feel a desire to take part in the power of the leader. When Iannone sings and stands at the centre of the stage, everyone flocks to be near him. On the evening of a concert I attended, people were scattered around the room while several groups took the stage one after another. When Zeta Zero Alfa came on, however, no one remained outside to smoke or stood at the bar talking. All of them rushed to the stage, and everyone knew all the lyrics of the songs sung by the leader, even though his new album had only been released seven days earlier.

As one activist stated, Zeta Zero Alfa is not a single artist; rather, 'if you listen to Zeta Zero Alfa, you understand that they are like the tip of the iceberg, that there is a whole community behind [them]'. One of their most well-known songs is called 'Cinghiamattanza', and while it is performed the activists take off their belts and begin to beat each other with them, as the lyrics themselves encourage them to do:

Cinghiamattanza! First, I take off my belt; / two, the dance begins / Three, I aim well; / four, cinghiamattanza / First, I take off my belt; / two, the dance begins / Three, I aim well; / four, cinghiamattanza.

In this case, proximity is material and immersion in the community takes the form of a physical experience. Indeed, it appears to resemble one of the ceremonies of self-celebration comprising the fascist rituals described by George Mosse.

CasaPound Italia has proved capable of updating this aspect of the fascist era: participants feel that they are part of a community. CasaPound activists describe this movement and party mainly as a community, an 'existential experience' linked to the specific 'community of struggle and destiny' to which they feel they belong (Cammelli 2015, 2017a, 2017b).

In the fascist era, the state was the entity at the centre with the capacity to create a community of citizens, Italians, the nation, and mould it out around the leader's will. Today, CasaPound shows that a political movement can combine these same characteristics and political style without needing to hold institutional power in the same way that Mussolini's Fascist Party did.

Violence and squadristism

On 7 April 2006, CasaPound held a demonstration along the streets of Rome involving a truck and, for the first time, defined this protest as characterized by a 'squadrist style', as reported by one of the main Italian newspapers (*Repubblica*, 7 April 2006). In the same article, the president of CasaPound declared: 'this is a way of declaring our Fascist identity clearly'. According to the historian Mimmo Franzinelli, we cannot understand fascism without a clear and defined reference to the actions of the *squadristi* (Franzinelli 2009, 108) that characterized the first years in which Mussolini and his followers made their violent appearance on the scene (1919–1922). Squadristism in Italy expresses the image and memory of fascist violence, a specific kind of political violence committed in particular against political opponents with the purpose of gaining power. Needless to say, squadristism is illegal and in Italy the term is evoked by politicians anytime an action defies the democratic order and its non-violent codes.

However, CasaPound Italia positions itself as a direct descendant of the fascist tradition, and this includes references to squadristism. In the years since 2006, CasaPound has continued to claim the 'squadrist style' as a tool and form of political action, but has described it more as a style and way of approaching actions and discourses. After this first appearance, activists continued to speak about the 'squadrist style' and also proposed a new concept, that of 'mediatic squadristism'. Through this definition, CasaPound militants make explicit reference to the history of fascism and its squadrist violence, thus illustrating the mythological function history can play and, moreover, how 'the representation of the past [is] linked to the establishment of an identity in the present' (Friedman 1992, 195).

To demonstrate this point, let us consider some of the actions that have been defined as 'mediatic squadristism': a 2012 demonstration inside a high school in Rome that involved setting off smoke bombs and shouting for the 'Duce' (Mussolini) to return; an incursion into the public television studio (Rai Tre) in 2009 to express disapproval of a programme (*Chi l'ha visto*), in which militants ran into the studio and warned the Italian public and politicians 'not to play with their lives' while publicizing this action as a 'demonstrative run'. They had several t-shirts printed bearing the text 'perfect squadrist style: dress up as a rockstar'.

CasaPound has been involved in numerous violent actions (see Cammelli 2015, 93–102; Cammelli 2017a, 116–128) and violence plays an important role in evoking the history of the movement and marking its evolution. This is evident in the rise of the youth branch of CasaPound for high school and university students, the Blocco Studentesco, which grew between 2006 and 2009. Many episodes of violence characterized the growth and public presence of this movement, such as the violent disturbance of elections and assemblies in Roman schools that allowed Blocco Studentesco to win the student elections in 2007 (Cammelli 2014, 62–66).

As Castelli Gattinara and Froio have suggested, violence in CasaPound is linked to the history and rhetoric of fascism 'justifying the use of any kind of violence against its opponents' (Castelli Gattinara and Froio 2014, 163). As the squadrist period represents a core element for understanding the fascist era, its mythological narration in the present thus represents a founding step in the identity-building process associated with CasaPound and its political practices (Cammelli 2017b). As such, it represents yet another element revealing the connection between the fascist era and contemporary CasaPound activists.

Finally, in December 2011, as mentioned earlier, Gianluca Casseri, a CasaPound militant, killed two African workers in Florence, while in the summer of 2016 an African asylum seeker was killed by a CasaPound sympathizer in Fermo (Cammelli 2016, 2017a, 150–154). These murders suggest that a mythological narration of the past does not prevent it from being reproduced in the present. Furthermore, they indicate that these practices and the fascist legacy hold a significant place in contemporary Italian political life.

The fascist legacy and CasaPound

This article highlights traces of the fascist legacy in contemporary Italian politics. Focusing on CasaPound, analysing its history, political programme and certain elements of its activities, it is clear that the fascist legacy is present in the contemporary CasaPound movement and party, in both its identity-building processes and concrete organization and actions. The 'third millennium fascism' of CasaPound updates many aspects of the political programme developed by Mussolini, especially the Verona Manifesto of 1943. Issues promoted in the 1920s and 1930s are given a new shape, but the values remain the same. The

emphasis on nationalism, private property and gender roles, among other elements, attests to the legacy of fascist political thought and its place in the third millennium. The date on which the movement was established, echoing the birth of the MSI, is another element in this same process. Like other integral movements, the CasaPound movement and party is an expression of the tendency in contemporary Europe to play on fears and social crisis in order to promote political identity, finding a source of security and legitimization in a specific narrative of history.

The CasaPound party draws on the fascist past and its representation not only to come up with ideas for its political programme, but also to inscribe this new movement in a lengthy history and thus grant it an extended temporal dimension. While it is true, as Holmes has argued, that today's fascism is not wholly congruent with its historical form, this article shows how the legacy of fascism plays a key role in building the political programme, collective imagination and everyday practices of this new movement of third millennium fascists. It demonstrates, too, the prominent place that the *f*-word holds in contemporary Italy. In light of this, the fascist era seems more than an episode confined to the past, occasionally evoked by political exponents but essentially excluded from contemporary reality; on the contrary, fascism is revealed as a still powerful mythology with the capacity to renew its principle values and keep abreast of developments in today's political arena.

Notes

1. The fieldwork for my PhD dissertation took place in Rome in 2010. For insight about the methodological issues concerning this ethnographic experience, see Cammelli 2014, 14–33; 2015, 17–23; 2017a, 20–28; and n.d.
2. www.casapounditalia.org.
3. For more ethnographic insight about CasaPound as a community, see Cammelli 2015, 56–84; 2017a, 71–99; 2017b.

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