

ITALIAN NEO-FASCISM IN STROESSNER'S PARAGUAY*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to analyze the phenomenon of Italian neo-fascist migration in Paraguay since 1977. After outlining the Paraguayan context during the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner, attention will be devoted to some elements that characterized the Italian presence in Paraguay. In particular, the granting of political asylum, the creation of an international economic investment center in the lands of Chaco; the elimination of the criminal past of immigrant terrorists. The sources used come from the Archives of Terror in Asunción, Paraguay, and the House of Memory in Brescia, Italy.

* This is an automatic translation made for the sole purpose of facilitating circulation. I apologize for any errors or unclear phrases.

Introduction

The Seventies represented a singular conjuncture in the history of Latin America, particularly during the second half of the decade. The Argentine *coup in 1976* politically homogenized the subcontinent, governed by military dictatorships inspired by the *Doctrina de Seguridad Nacional* (NSD). The picture that emerged was that of a "continental stronghold", characterized by a very strict control of internal contingencies and the meticulous monitoring of borders.

A military bloc that nevertheless opened its doors wide to common criminals, terrorists and anti-communist militants fleeing their countries of origin.

Many pages have been dedicated, especially in journalism, to the neo-fascist migrations to Latin America since the second half of the 1970s.¹ In the historiographical field, the issue of the links between radical European right-wing movements and military dictatorships has been analysed through the Cold War lens. According to scientific literature, many terrorists fleeing their countries of origin lived in hiding under the protection of local *intelligence*, participating in some cases in the repressive activities carried out by regimes.²

However, in the historiographic production on the subject, there is one case that has enjoyed little attention: Stroessner's Paraguay, the longest-running military dictatorship in Latin America, which lasted from 1954 to 1989. An experience that, in the time frame on which this work focuses, was already well established. Apart from becoming the refuge of "excellent" personalities, such as the Nicaraguan dictator, Anastasio Somoza,³ Paraguay was the destination of common criminals and, above all, militants of terrorist organizations belonging to the galaxy of the most violent anti-communism, on which, in most cases, international arrest warrants were pending. Among these, there were also former members of the Italian neo-fascist organization called *Ordine Nuovo* (ON), one of the main responsible for the so-called tension strategy. Born from a rib of the Italian Social Movement, ON began its militant and terrorist activity in 1969. In 1973 he was disbanded by the judicial authorities, but continued in hiding until the mid-seventies.⁴

1 See Patricia Mayorga, *Il Condor Nero* (Milano: Sperling&Kupfewr, 2003); John Dinges, *The Condor Years. How Pinochet and His Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents* (New York-Londra: The New Press, 2004); Magnus Linklater et al, *The Fourth Reich: Klaus Barbie and the Neo-Fascist Connection* (Londra: Coronet, 1985).

2 Eduardo Gonzalez Calleja, *Unorthodox Wars. The 'strategy of tension' and the networks of neo-fascist terrorism in Southern Europe and Latin America* (Madrid: Catarata, 2018).

3 Frank O. Mora e Jerry W. Cooney, *Paraguay and the United States. Distant Allies* (Athens-Londra: University of Georgia Press, 2007), p. 205.

4 About the strategy of tension and the attacks perpetrated by Ordine Nuovo, Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy. The radical Right in Italy after the war* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 84-147. With regard to the investigations into the movements of Italian terrorists in Paraguay, see Civil and Criminal Court of Milan, Ufficio

During the judicial investigations into the black subversion and the investigations of the Parliamentary Commission into the massacres, it emerged that some of those responsible for the massacres, wanted by the Italian authorities and Interpol, took refuge in Paraguay from 1977, where they obtained official protection from the Stroessner government. A condition that lasted even after the end of the regime.⁵ The transfer to Paraguay coincided with the end of a period of hiding in Spain, which began in 1974, the last period of the Franco's regime.⁶

The neo-fascist flight to Paraguay and the reception received by the dictatorial government raises a number of questions, the first of which concerns the ideological fabric on which this alliance was founded. The ideology married by ON derived in fact from the thought of the philosopher Julius Evola, who, in extreme synthesis, advocated an evolution of society in a hierarchical, spiritual and aristocratic sense. The main objective was the overthrow of the democratic system, with the consequent construction of a Europe-nation that was free from both US and Soviet colonialism, free from all bourgeois and materialistic influences. It was also proposed that capitalism be abolished and foreign companies nationalised. All this in the name of an anti-communist, elitist and heroic conception of life.⁷ A vision that presents several points of contrast with the NSD, the most obvious of which is represented by the economic and political side of the doctrine, which embraced capitalism, embraced the *American way of life* and recognized the leadership of the United States in the battle against communism.⁸

Another question concerns the origin of the relationships. Given the international links of ON already addressed by historiography,⁹ did they have any role in the development of the phenomenon?

The terrorism charges pending on the heads of the neo-fascists and the way in which the Paraguayan government dealt with this circumstance represent another important element of investigation. Not only in terms of international relations, but also in terms of relations with its

Istruzione 20a, Judge Guido Salvini's order in the proceedings against Rognoni Giancarlo and others, 03/02/1998, freely available at <http://www.fontitaliarepubblica.it/documents/681-sentenza-istruttoria-milano-salvini.html>. Last visit 04/08/2019.

5 See Parliamentary Inquiry Committee on the Lodge P2, Volume XI, vol. III, series II, p. 488. Available at <http://www.fontitaliarepubblica.it/documents/270-09-leg-doc-xxiii-n-2-4quater-3-tomo-11-ocr.html>. Last visit 4/08/2019.

6 On the links between the formations of the Italian and Spanish radical right, Matteo Albanese and Pablo Del Hierro. *Transnational Fascism in the Twentieth Century: Spain, Italy and the Global Neo-Fascist Network* (London - Oxford - New York - New Delhi - Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2016).

7 Questura di Roma, *Rapporto sulle attività di Ordine Nuovo*, cit. in F. Ferraresi, *La Destra Radicale*, p. 64. On the ideological references of the Italian radical right, Richard Drake, "Julius Evola and the Ideological Origins of the Radical Right in Contemporary Italy", in *Political Violence and Terror: Motifs and Motivations*, a c. by Peter Merkl (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 61-89

8 Sulla DSN, David Pion-Berlin, *The National Security Doctrine, military threat perception, and the "Dirty War" in Argentina*, in «Comparative Political Studies», Vol. 21 N.3, ottobre 1988.

9 On the international connections of radical right-wing organizations, Jeffrey Bale, *The Darkest Sides of Politics. Postwar Fascism, Covert Operations, and Terrorism I* (London: Routledge, 2017).

citizens: how can we justify the presence on the territory of people accused of heinous crimes without tarnishing the image of defender of the order that Stroessner had built up over the years? What were the terrorists' relations with the Paraguayan social fabric? Finally, from an operational point of view, other questions arise. Once in Paraguay, how was their presence in the country characterised? Did they play any role in the repressive activities of the regime or were they simply political refugees?

To try to answer these questions we will use sources coming mainly from two *corpus*. The first is represented by the so-called *Archivos of Terror*. Discovered on 22 December 1992 by Martin Almada and Judge José Agustín Fernández in a police station in Lambaré, a suburb of Asunción, they are currently housed in the Museo de la Justicia - Centro de Documentación y Archivo para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, which is housed in the Palacio de Justicia de Asunción. The second archive is the Casa della Memoria in Brescia, where all the documents produced during the investigation of the black massacres that took place in Italy between 1969 and 1980 are kept. Through the judicial investigations, an impressive amount of documents concerning the activities of neo-fascist groups, inside and outside the national territory, has been collected. Considering the richness of the archival fonds and the certainty that some of the protagonists of that season had taken refuge in Latin America, the chances of meeting useful elements for this research were decidedly high. This particular circumstance therefore creates an important agglomeration of documents that can "dialogue" with Paraguayan ones, thus providing an additional research tool. After outlining the general context in which the phenomenon developed, we will try to reconstruct the dynamics of the migration of the Ordovists to Paraguay, and then focus attention on the activities carried out in the Latin American country and their relationship with the social fabric. Many of the documents that will be mentioned in the following pages contain a large number of Spanish spelling and grammar errors, as well as numerous Italianisms. To maintain maximum rigour, the extracts have been transcribed as in the original.

The context: the "kingdom" of Stroessner

Since its independence, declared in 1811, Paraguay's history has been characterised by political instability, armed conflicts and military dictatorships. As stated by Maria Rosaria Stabili, three events in particular left wounds difficult to heal in the history of this country. First, the "Triple Alliance" war, which Paraguay had to fight against Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay from 1865 to 1870 and which caused the total devastation of the country. The population was decimated from one million three hundred thousand to just two hundred thousand. In addition to the human losses,

Paraguay had to surrender part of its territories to the winners, thus also generating a severe economic depression.¹⁰

Second, the dispute with Bolivia over the Chaco region, which began in 1912, because of the oil deposits in its territory. Tensions led to a new armed conflict in 1928, after the invasion of Chaco by the Bolivian army. The hostilities ended with the 1935 armistice, after which Paraguay received about two thirds of the region. This allocation, however, did not achieve appreciable economic growth.¹¹

Finally, in 1947, it was the turn of the Civil War, which broke out during the dictatorship of General Higinio Morínigo. A conflict that cost Paraguay another 30,000 dead.¹² It was during this last period that the figure of Alfredo Stroessner began to emerge.¹³ After the fall of Morínigo in 1948, it reached the top of the Armed Forces during the governments of Molas López first and then Chaves. It was the latter who appointed him Head of the First Military Region. From this extremely important position, General Stroessner led the *coup* in 1954, inaugurating thirty-five long years of dictatorship. It¹⁴ was not a progressive or communist government that was overthrown, but a *de facto* president who was a member of the *Partido Colorado*, the same government to which Stroessner belonged. Membership of this party, now completely subjugated to the dictator, was compulsory for the entire military corps and for all private citizens who wanted to hold public office.¹⁵ Through a systematic use of the *estado de sitio* eliminated all opposition, from Catholics to Communists, considered a threat to democracy and the free world.¹⁶ About a decade after the *coup*, the dictator married the SNB because of both his strong anti-communist positions and his continued political support of the United States.¹⁷

It is worth noting that the internal opposition, both democratic and guerrilla, had already been completely annihilated several years earlier. At the beginning of the 1960s, in fact, some members of the *Partido Febrerista* and the *Partido Liberal*, after taking refuge in Argentina, set up two guerrilla organizations, the *Movimiento 14 de Mayo* and the *Frente Unido de Liberación Nacional*. Both subjects were weak and logistically inefficient. Stroessner's armed forces defeated them without particular effort, thanks also to the support of a paramilitary group within the *Partido*

10 Maria Rosaria Stabili, *Opareí, La justicia de transición en Paraguay*, in "América Latina Hoy", No. 61, (2012): pp.139-140.

11 *Ibidem*.

12 *Ibidem*.

13 Oscar Cabello Sarubbi, *Storia del Paraguay* (Manziana: Vecchierelli Editore, 1999), p. 141.

14 *Ibidem*, p. 142.

15 *Ibidem*, p. 139.

16 Alfredo Boccia Paz, *et al.*, *En los sótanos de los generales: Los documentos ocultos del Operativo Cóndor*, (Asunción: Expolibro/Servilibro, 2002), p. 17.

17 Mora e Cooney, *Paraguay and the United States*. p. 129.

Colorado called *Guionistas*, whose task was to prevent the Communist advance in the country. In the same years, the then Minister of the Interior, Edgar Ynsfran, had also set up a network of informers called *pyragües*. This network, which worked in conjunction with the regime's secret police, covered both national territory and Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil through the infiltration of agents into Paraguayan exiled communities.¹⁸ Starting in the 1970s, Stroessner placed Pastor Milciade Coronel at the head of the *Departamento de Investigaciones* Pastor Milciade Coronel, which coordinated the search, capture and torture of political prisoners. Within the *Department* was created the *Dirección de Política y Afines*, in which there was the political section, which had the task of neutralizing people even suspected of being communist and subversive; the workers' section, which controlled trade union activities; the control section, which had the task of monitoring ports, airports and all road lines. The efficiency of its repressive apparatus made Paraguay one of the nerve centres of the infamous Condor System.¹⁹

The constant violation of human rights put him on a collision course with the US administration led by Jimmy Carter who, as will be seen later, drastically cut economic and military aid.

From an ideological point of view, Stroessner's Paraguay was one of the strongest bastions of anti-communism in the world. Over the years, a small country with no particular relevance within the world chessboard thus became a point of reference for the international radical right.

The origin of relations and political asylum

As previously stated, emigration to Paraguay began in 1977. The first issue that we want to question in these pages is the origin of the relations between Stroessner's government and the former activists of ON. Help to answer the question comes from the *leader* of the organization, the main protagonist of the events that will be analyzed in the following pages: Elio Massagrande. The transcript of a hearing before the Paraguayan authorities states the following:

[Massagrande] He arrived in Paraguay recommended by Dr. Rodney Elpidio Acevedo, Paraguay's Ambassador to Spain, contacted Dr. Bestard who was then a senior official at the

18 Comisión de Verdad y Justicia (C. D. V. Y.J.), *Informe Final: las responsabilidades en las violaciones de derechos humanos* (Asunción: Editorial J.C. Medina, 2008), Vol. 2, p. 170, Vol 6, pp. 33-34. See also Paul H. Lewis, *Paraguay under Stroessner* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), p. 167; Paul H. Lewis, *Socialism, Liberalism, and Dictatorship in Paraguay* (New York: Praeger, 1982), chapters 1-3.

19 Stabili, *Opareí*, pp. 139-140.

Ministry of the Interior and Dr. Campos Alum at the Ministry of the Interior, where a statement was taken, where he was also booked and soon after was released.²⁰

A statement that would indicate in Ambassador Acevedo the link between the neo-fascists and the Paraguayan government.

On his arrival on August 16, 1977 with a flight from Madrid,²¹ Massagrande was registered and released shortly afterwards. The inclusion in the national archives and the release after a short period sanctioned the beginning of the procedure for the request for protection, which Massagrande will carry out together with Gaetano Orlando, an Italian fugitive coming not from ON but from the Revolutionary Action Movement, another organization of radical Italian anti-communism that allied itself with the neo-fascist formation during the years of the massacre.²²

Together with the request for asylum, Massagrande handed over to the authorities a biographical note that told, strictly from his own point of view, his personal and political history, together with the reasons that had led him to emigrate to Paraguay. The first significant element present in the note concerns its membership in the Italian Army Lightning Brigade:

He reaches the rank of Artillery Lieutenant and is assigned to the Parachute Artillery group (Folgore Brigade).

He has to leave the army under the decree of the socialist minister Tremelloni, as he is classified as a sympathizer of an anti-communist political group. He obtains the certificate of military instructor of parachuting in free fall.²³

The last lines of the extract just reported raise some doubts. The so-called Tremelloni Decree, in fact, concerned only the military *intelligence* sector, whose body changed the name of SIFAR to SID.²⁴ There was no mention of forbidden political sympathies within the military corps. There is not even a trace of such measures in the main texts concerning the history of the Italian Armed Forces.²⁵ Finally, considering the general political context and the conservative tendencies of military circles in those years, the possibility that someone might have been kicked out of the

20 Archives of Terror, from now on AdT, *Declaración Información de Elio Massagrande*, 21/03/1989, roller 97, frame 2262.

21 *Ibidem*.

22 On the Revolutionary Action Movement, see Civil and Criminal Court of Milan, Education Office section 20a, Judge Guido Salvini's order in the proceedings against Azzi Nico and others, 18/03/1995 "*The testimony of Gaetano Orlando on the relations between the M.A.R. and the state structures*", p. 150 et seq.

23 AdT, *Elio Massagrande, Biographical Note*, 19/11/77, roller 108, frame 0624.

24 See Carlo Mosca et al., *I servizi d'informazione e il segreto di stato* (Milan: Giuffrè Editore, 2008), p. 20.

25 See by way of example Virgilio Ilari, *Storia militare della Prima Repubblica 1943-93*, Ancona, Nuove Ricerche, 1994.

Lightning Brigade as anti-communist would be unlikely. In this first step, the main element that the whole document in question will take shape and that will characterise the relations of the former Ordovists with the Paraguayan Government is beginning to take shape: anti-communism.

After the general information, the document continues describing the political activities that characterized Massagrande's past. In 1962 he joined the Centro Studi Ordine Nuovo, collaborating with MSI member of parliament Pino Rauti as head of the province of Verona. After refusing the appointment as a member of the Missino Central Committee, he decided to continue the political struggle with the Movimento Politico Ordine Nuovo together with Clemente Graziani, engaging in violent clashes with communist parliamentary and extra-parliamentary organizations.²⁶

Following the dissolution of ON, Massagrande fled to Greece, where the colonels' regime was in force. Here he would collaborate with local anti-communist movements while directing the community of Italians who had fled to the Hellenic Peninsula to escape capture orders. After the fall of the Colonels' regime, the newborn Greek democracy extradited him to Italy on charges of terrorism. He would have been in jail for about 10 months, until the errors of the indictment would have been "recognized".²⁷ In 1976 he moved to Spain, where the following year he would be joined by another international arrest warrant. The note then goes on to identify the main causes of his flight from Europe. The first is found in the last crime of which he was accused:

The accusation is this time of having participated in the organization of the massacre of the judge who had joined the communist will to destroy the Ordine Nuovo movement. To face a new extradition trial and in the general context, driven by the need to leave Europe for another country that is surely anti-communist, Massagrande arrived in Paraguay in August with his family.²⁸

The second, instead, coincides with the general political situation in which Italy was navigating:

Italy is a country dominated by communist political force. The Christian Democratic government governs with the consent of the Communist Party and the Communist trade union and student organizations. It is such a serious problem for the whole of the West that it massacres our weak underground forces.²⁹

26 AdT, *Elio Massagrande, Biographical Note*, 19/11/77, roller 108, frame 0624.

27 *Ibidem*, frame 0625. Translation from Spanish for a.

28 *Ibidem*.

29 *Ibidem*.

In exchange for political asylum, Massagrande offered the Paraguayan Government its aviation and parachuting powers:

He also intends to make available (if necessary) his knowledge of military matters, especially the knowledge of the technique of free fall which is necessary today for the formation of civil and military agonistic parachuting (command formation).³⁰

The document closes with an attempt at a political analysis of the global situation, which includes the need to create a bridge between Latin American and European anti-communist organizations to make the fight against the common Marxist enemy more effective:

Our ideology [...] is mortally opposed to materialism and communist internationalism, [...] We are still aware of the need for a broader collaboration between the analogous forces which in the world are opposed to the victory of subversion. We anticommunists must also have a global and total vision of the struggle and become aware that the place where we fight for our ideas is our country.

The revolutionary wars being fought in the world are coordinated.

Especially for us Europeans, according to our *terzaforzista* vision, the collaboration with movements and governments in Latin America is useful. This is for a reason of evident submission in the spirit and in the interests that unite and will always unite these two parts of the world.

We consider especially useful the cost of an organism that coordinates, also within the existing organisms, the activities of groups from Latin Europe (Spain, France, Italy, and can be Greece and Belgium) and from Latin America.³¹

These lines represent a sort of business card of Massagrande and, indirectly, of all the other former ordinovists who went to Paraguay afterwards. The tone of the narrative is decidedly apologetic, and the perception of being victims of the world communist conspiracy clearly emerges. The note takes up many of the themes dear to the ideological universe of ON and the radical right in general, the result of the reflections that characterized the debate within the movements since the 1950s. In particular, the submission of the Italian government to the Communists, considered as puppets of the USSR, which had already represented a *leitmotif in the* discussions and propaganda made by the Ordovists since 1963,³² reappears in the political analyses of the members of the dissolved

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Ibidem*, frame 0626.

³² See in this regard Clemente Graziani, *La guerra rivoluzionaria*, "Quaderni di Ordine Nuovo", 1, 2 April 1963.

organization, fourteen years later, in a document attached to a request for political asylum made on the other side of the globe.

Marked by a different tone are instead the last lines of the document, within which Massagrande, speaking in the plural and therefore probably also reporting the positions of his comrades, reveals their desire to continue their service to the cause of anti-communism, proposing the establishment of an unspecified subject that, starting from Paraguay, would also involve European militants.

The countries listed by Massagrande are not random. The close links that existed between No 1 and various organisations of the European radical right in the 1960s are well known. Stable relations existed in France with *Ordre Nouveau* and the *Fédération des Étudiants Nationalistes*,³³ with *Kinema tes 4 Augoustou* in Greece, *Jeun Europe* and related organisations in Belgium, *Fuerza Nueva* and the *Circulo Español de Amigos de Europa* (CEDADE) in Spain.³⁴ A rather ambitious project is therefore outlined, whose objective was the creation of an undefined intercontinental body that would coordinate itself in the anti-communist battle that was raging. A purpose which, however, is vaguely presented and which will never materialise.

Despite the fact that the documents consulted do not include any document attesting to the granting of political asylum to Elio Massagrande by the Paraguayan State, the presence of a criminal record, requested by the Italian in September 1990, which shows the number of his identity document issued by the local authorities, indicates that this circumstance has indeed occurred, confirming what emerged during the judicial investigations. As for³⁵ Gaetano Orlando, according to his personal file found in the archives, he was officially granted asylum on January 3, 1978.³⁶

Another excellent name coming from the line of ON who chose Paraguay as a refuge was that of the group's ideologist, Clemente Graziani, who arrived in Asunción in 1978:

Citizen Clemente Graziani, of Italian nationality, industrial profession, 53 years of age,
From Bolivia in Londres - Great Britain - and safe conduct of the Consulate of our Country in the City of Santa Cruz - Bolivia -, arrived at our Country in date 10 of May of the current year, coming from the referred Bolivian city by Lloyd Aereo Boliviano, being detained to its arrival, by weight on its person capture recommended by the "Interpol" and released the following day, by being exiled politician; according to report provided by the Dr. Antonio Campos Alum, Director of Technical Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior, the aforementioned Graziani is an anti-communist, of the intellectual line of his country, who is currently preparing a work on the

33 To deepen the transnational relations between Italian and French neo-fascism, Andrea Mammone, *Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

34 Bale, *The Darkest Side of Politics*, p. 142.

35 AdT, Policia de la Capital, *Certificado de antecedentes*, 07/09/1990, roller 108, Photogram 0619.

36 AdT, Departamento de investigaciones, *Datos personales, ficha n. 4228 de Gaetano Orlando*, rullo 17, frame 2005.

"Study of the situation, tactics and techniques used by the Italian Communist Party" for the anti-communist congress of the CAL (Latin American Anti-communist Committee), to be held in our country next year.³⁷

Once again, anti-communism is the *pass* to legally entering Paraguay and evading the justice of the country of origin. It should be pointed out that both Massagrande and Graziani were acquitted for lack of evidence for the murder of Judge Occorsio. But this event will have to wait until 1987.³⁸ Meanwhile, the seriousness of the charges didn't matter. Whatever crime they had hypothetically committed, as long as it was in the name of anti-communism, was not considered a crime by the Paraguayan authorities, but a legitimate action. Moreover, given the brutal violence perpetrated by the regime and the *reasoning* behind this inhumanity, it would have been rather surprising if the Paraguayan authorities had instead granted extradition. Condemning those who fought Communism with violence would have meant, in essence, denying the actions of the regime itself.

Such an attitude towards terrorists cannot be properly understood without considering the importance of the antimarxist theoretical elaboration in the Stroessner regime.

The fear of communist infiltration into every crevice of society was one of the most frequent *topoi* within the press controlled by the stonist government. On the other hand, the anti-Marxist propaganda carried out by members of the *Partido Colorado* and public officials was considered one of the safest ways to maintain one's position within the Paraguayan bureaucratic apparatus. Militant anti-communism did not stop at the political sphere, but could count on strong links with civil society and associationism, woven and maintained by Antonio Campos Alum, director of the *Dirección Nacional de Asuntos Técnicos*, the person who, as we have just seen, was the first point of reference on the *spot* for Italian neo-fascists and who took charge of their filing and application for political asylum. The work done by Campus Alum in the anti-communist cause led him to be one of the most influential figures of the regime, in constant contact with the organizations and *intelligence* services of other countries.³⁹

Given this deep-rooted perception, it is not surprising that the Paraguayan authorities considered the information included by the neo-fascists in their biographical notes to be reliable, considering them to be victims of the international communist conspiracy.

The names of Italians linked to the radical right-wing circles who, according to documents, have spent part or all of their time in this country, in addition to those already mentioned, are those of

37 AdT, Policia de la Capital, Dpto. De Investigaciones. *Elevar formless*, 08/07/1978, Roller 172, Photogram 1637. Graziani was also among the people wanted by Interpol for the murder of Judge Vittorio Occorsio, as well as for the crime of reconstitution of the Fascist Party.

38 S. Bertuccelli, *Ergastolo confermato per Paolo Signorelli*, in "La Repubblica", 17/10/1987.

39 Alfredo Boccia Paz et. Al, *This is my report. Stroessner's secret police files* (Asunción: Abc, 1994), p. 195.

Romano Coltellacci,⁴⁰ Alessandra Crocco,⁴¹ Saverio Sparapani,⁴² Roberto Besutti,⁴³ Piercelso Mezzadri and Alberto Frigerio, to which are added a series of characters simply identified as *Italianos* without adding other general information.⁴⁴

It is well founded to believe that the migration took place with a sort of "chain", whose first link between the former ordinovists and the Paraguayan dictatorship was Elio Massagrande. The latter, once "accredited" with the authorities, began to prepare the ground for the arrival of his comrades.

As we have seen, the facts in the documents attached to the asylum application do not always correspond to reality. The narrative is self-absorption and the image that emerges is that of political militants persecuted solely and exclusively because of their ideas. It is plausible to believe that behind such a narrative there was a precise strategy. In the absence of a previous relationship of cooperation with the regime, the militants had the burden of winning the trust of the local authorities to open the doors of the country. In order to do so, they focused not only on institutional recommendations, but also on a sort of "anti-communist empathy", describing themselves as persecuted soldiers of the anti-Marxist struggle and using the conspiracist rhetoric that characterized both the thought of Italian neo-fascism and the SNB. Moreover, the Paraguayan dictator's sympathy for the movements of the international radical right was by no means a mystery.⁴⁵

On the other hand, it is considered necessary, however, to consider the "state of necessity" in which the terrorists were in that precise period. 1974 saw the fall of authoritarian regimes in Portugal and Greece. The following year was the time Spanish regime. This event, which gave a point to the dictatorial experiences in Mediterranean Europe, meant on the one hand the end of any "logistical" support in the Old Continent that could give refuge to fleeing terrorists. On the other hand, it erased from the horizon any possibility of an authoritarian turning point in Italy too. According to Judge Guido Salvini, in fact, it is no coincidence that the action of radical right-wing groups has been "rarefied since the mid-seventies when, [...] with the fall of right-wing regimes in Spain, Portugal and Greece, an openly authoritarian reaction had become anachronistic and impractical for Italy".⁴⁶

40 AdT, *Ministerio del Interior - Dirección Nacional de Asuntos Tecnicos, Note*, roller 108, frame 0620.

41 AdT, *Elio Massagrande, Biographical Note*, 19/11/77, roller 108, frame 0624.

42 AdT, *Information Declaración de Elio Massagrande*, 21/03/1989, roller 97, frame 2263.

43 Casa della Memoria di Brescia, ROS, *Subject: Criminal proceedings against Rognoni Giancarlo and others - GUNNELLA Pietro*, in the "Brescia Massacre" file, "Atti ROS" folder.

44 AdT, *Informe AdT, Informe. Stefano Delle Chialle (sic)- "Cacola"*, date unknown, roller 108, frame 0617.

45 Casa della Memoria di Brescia, CESIS, information sent to SISMI, *Subject: Eversione di destra*, 02/08/1982, file "Italicus bis", folder "Delle Chiaie, vol. 2".

46 Judgment Order 03/02/1998, p. 295.

Reasons considered by the fugitives more than valid to blunt their third-force positions, choosing what, in their eyes, appeared to be the lesser evil.

Repopulating Paraguayan Chaco

One of the deepest imprints left by the Italian neo-fascist presence in Paraguay is undoubtedly traceable in the creation of a series of settlements in the Chaco area. A letter, sent to the national authorities in July 1979, asked the government for authorisation to set up a series of *fincas* in the area, which was poorly exploited and almost uninhabited:

We are a group of immigrants of European and South African origin who, for political, sentimental and economic reasons, chose this hospitable Paraguay to start a new life. [...] all without distinction anti-communist since ever and forever.

[...] it is our intention to start a colony in the Paraguayan Chaco and to devote ourselves to agricultural and livestock activities, possibly in the form of a cooperative and each settler will have guardianship of property relating to his stay. To this end we need a considerable amount of land (minimum 100,000 ha) which could be acquired from the Government of Paraguay through the I.B.R. (Instituto del Bienestar Rural, *ndr*) at the lowest possible price [...] In effect the immigrants would have the great opportunity to rebuild their lives and progress in their work in a country which they themselves chose, hospitable, peaceful, and wisely led by a President and an anti-communist Government.

[...] At last we wish to mention that these new settlers, although they are peaceful people, if the case is offered and the country calls them, will not hesitate to defend this land that will be the homeland of their children and this government that shook a friendly hand.⁴⁷

The letter in question bears the signature of Massagrande and a South African citizen named Luis Mainardis. At a first reading, considering the tones used, the redundant use of the word "anti-communist" and the lock in which it is veiledly declared the willingness to take up guns if the new homeland should call, the intention of the postulants appears to create a sort of refuge for all exiles fleeing communism, where they can work the land and make a new life. The question of settlements in Chaco was, however, much more complex. Having obtained the *placet* of the government and started the activity thanks to the initial investments, in a short time the Chaco companies became a

⁴⁷ Adt, *Memorandum for a colonization project in the Paraguayan Chaco*, 02/07/1979, Rullo 108, photogrammi 0615-0616.

reference point for that part of the neo-fascist militants in the past more or less closely linked to ON.

Once the bureaucratic issues relating to political asylum had been resolved and production had begun, Massagrande resumed contact with the old comrades, telling them about the beauty, prosperity and political stability of this land and communicating the possibility of investing capital in the new businesses that were emerging.

During a search carried out by the DIGOS of Verona at the home of Pietro Gunnella, former ordinovista of the Veneto cell,⁴⁸ a series of letters from Paraguay were found whose sender was Massagrande.

The letters were written on letterhead marked "Ma.Be. Srl", indicating, probably, the initials of Massagrande and Besutti. One letter in particular, dated September 4, 1981, provides some information on the project that the neo-fascist and other comrades were carrying out:

[...] Many foreigners are coming to Paraguay to invest mainly in agriculture and livestock. It is certain that there are also public and private willingness to install industrial plants. This country, when the turbines of the Itaipu dam⁴⁹ (the largest in the world) will work, will have energy at a very low price. It is difficult for me to explain this country in a few lines, which we can compare to Switzerland (of the south cone). The political stability, the free exchange rate, the low number of inhabitants, its position between two great powers (Brazil and Argentina), make this country an ideal place to invest with confidence. The law favours both immigration and foreign capital (tax exemptions etc., even if these are very low or non-existent). The lack of a working class and the homogeneity of the breed (cryolla) are still positive factors.⁵⁰

This first extract from the letter provides some interesting data. If we exclude the references to the lack of a working class and ethnic homogeneity, in this first part the political element is completely missing. The sender of the letter does not appear to be a former member of a terrorist organization characterized by a profound ideological dimension, but rather an entrepreneur who moved to Paraguay in search of a new and fertile market.

In the conclusion of the letter, Massagrande describes the role he would play as an intermediary with the government:

48 See judgment 03/02/1998, p. 277.

49 The "Itaipú" dams constitute an impressive hydroelectric production plant located on the Paraná River, on the border between Paraguay and Brazil.

50 Casa della Memoria di Brescia, ROS, *Subject: Criminal proceedings against Rognoni Giancarlo and others - GUNNELLA Pietro*, Acts acquired at DIGOS in Verona, in the "Brescia Massacre" file, "ROS Acts".

I think it is important to mention that I work with a group of people from the government and members of the local section of the World Anti-Communist League (WACL, *ed.*) for the sale and development of land in the Paraguayan chaco (state property) to foreigners and especially French, German and French people. I'm supposed to look after the dirty Italians. I can, if necessary, get a plane ticket from Frankfurt or Madrid (LAP)⁵¹ for someone to come and see and talk. I have a plan for this country to become an economic and financial base as well. Security for those who need it and insurance for tomorrow (if things get worse). In any case I can tell everyone from now on that I am able to have the ticket discounted by 25% and payable here on arrival or in installments. I believe that we must put to good use the work done here and my presence.⁵²

This last step highlights another set of elements that give back the scope of the project. First of all, it emerges from the text that the Paraguayan government did not limit itself to granting the abandoned lands of Chaco to the immigrants mentioned earlier, but saw the possibility of creating a centre to encourage investment from abroad, using the contacts that the neo-fascists to whom it had given asylum had maintained at home. The economic policy of the stronist regime, moreover, was always inclined to open its borders to foreign investment, mainly from the United States and Brazil.⁵³ But Massagrande's words, addressed to his compatriots, lead us to believe that, through the development of the Chaco lands, the government wanted to use the contacts of the new settlers in their home countries to try to attract investment from Europe as well.

The Veronese ordinovista, therefore, once he obtained the concession of the land, worked actively in the project for the development of state land and in the management of investments from abroad in close contact with the local authorities. Evidence of this is the possibility for Massagrande to provide air tickets at discounted prices, as well as installments, of the national flag carrier, public and therefore in the hands of the state. A difficult facility to propose if not with the government's *placet*.

In one of his answers, Gunella suggested the arrival of such a surveyor Zonin, a character sympathetic to the neo-fascist circles in Verona, as a possible investor, especially in the marble sector.⁵⁴ According to a report by the Carabinieri, Zonin arrived in Asunción in January 1982, and

51 The acronym LAP stands for Líneas Aéreas Paraguayas, the Paraguayan national airline, which was public until 1994.

52 Casa della Memoria di Brescia, ROS, *Subject: Criminal proceedings against Rognoni Giancarlo and others - GUNNELLA Pietro*, Acts acquired at DIGOS in Verona, in the "Brescia Massacre" file, "ROS Acts".

53 Oscar Cabello Sarubbi, *History of Paraguay*, pp. 95-102.

54 Casa della Memoria di Brescia, ROS, *Subject: Criminal proceedings against Rognoni Giancarlo and others - GUNNELLA Pietro* - Acts acquired at DIGOS in Verona, in the "Brescia Massacre" file, "ROS Acts".

Massagrande was in charge of organising his entire stay.⁵⁵ Further confirmation of the work carried out by the former Ordovista *leader* comes from an account of his activities handed over to the new Paraguayan authorities in 1990. According to the document, in that year Massagrande was a director of two companies that dealt with the raising of foreign capital to invest in state land, boasting over the years the raising of various funds from Italy, France and Spain.⁵⁶

The news of the existence of an anti-communist oasis in Latin America and the possibility of participating economically in its development also crossed the borders of Italy. Starting in 1981, advertisements began to appear in the German monthly magazine *Nation und Europa* inviting people to invest money in the new companies that were emerging in Paraguay.⁵⁷ If we consider the caliber of the magazine in question, this element takes on a not inconsiderable importance. The magazine *Nation und Europa* was in fact one of the main reference points of the European radical right. It was founded in 1951 by the former German SS officer Arthur Ehrhardt and the writer Herbert Böhme, also closely linked to National Socialism. The magazine recalled its name to the concept of Europe as one nation, inspired by the speeches of the English neo-fascist Oswald Mosley. From a political point of view, the newspaper advocated the creation of a Europe of peoples capable of representing a third way to North American capitalism and Soviet communism. Ideas that also characterized, as seen above, the movements of the Italian radical right, in particular the New Order. Many of the journal's contributions came from ideologists of the European national neo-fascist movements, such as Julius Evola, Oswald Mosley, Jean-Marie Le Pen.⁵⁸

Nation und Europa was one of the main links of the so-called "Black International" and one of the most widely used tools for the dissemination of ideas and the exchange of information. As previous studies have shown, ON was an integral part of this network of organisations operating at continental level, together with several other groups active in other countries of the Old Continent.⁵⁹ In the biographical note mentioned above, Massagrande launched the proposal to build a Euro-Latin American anti-communist network between military regimes and neo-fascist organisations in Europe, presumably on the basis of contacts made in past years during the ON activities in Europe. It is plausible to believe that these contacts, rather than for the establishment of the aforementioned network, have been used to convey another type of message within the galaxy of the European radical right, concerning, precisely, the question of the nascent settlements in Chaco.

55 Casa della Memoria di Brescia, ROS, *Subject: Criminal proceedings against Rognoni Giancarlo and others - GUNNELLA Pietro*, p. 5.

56 AdT, *Emprendimientos de Elio Massagrande en el Paraguay desde 1979 a 1990*, undated, roller 108, frame 0634.

57 Unknown author, *Paradise in Paraguay*, in "Patterns of Prejudice", vol. 16, issue 1 (1982): pp. 45-46.

58 Per approfondire, Siegfried Jäger, "Legal pressure. Die Presse der Neuen Rechten", in *Wanderer im Nebelfeld - the "Third Way" of the New Age*, a c. di Siegfried Jäger (Berlino - Bonn: Dietz Taschenbuch 24, 1988), pp. 119-145.

59 Bale, *The Darkest Side of Politics*; Albanese e Del Hierro, *Transnational Neofascism in the Twentieth Century*, Andrea Mammone, *Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy*.

Given the political tendencies of potential investors, the visceral anti-communism of the Paraguayan government was a considerable incentive. Those who decided to capitalize their savings in a land ruled by a dictator considered one of the cornerstones of world anti-Marxism would have indirectly contributed to the development and consolidation of that experience. The friction with the Carter administration due to the constant violation of human rights also contributed to attracting the sympathies of those fringes of the most extremist third-forceism, which did not welcome the historical proximity between the Latin American governments and the United States.

The contacts of the former ordinovists did not only touch Italy and Europe, but stretched their links to Africa. It was said that the second signatory of the letter was a South African citizen named Luis Mainardis. To explain this, it is necessary to take a step back. Already during the 1960s, a group of Italians linked to the galaxy of the radical right, some of them wanted, moved to South Africa.⁶⁰ Here they began to collaborate with a paramilitary group called "Wit Kommando" (White Commando), a white supremacist formation with strongly anti-Semitic positions. In 1981, several Italian militants were arrested by the South African authorities, along with indigenous comrades, for taking part in sabotage actions against the organization.⁶¹ There was therefore a close connection between Italian militant groups and South African white supremacists. One of the main points of connection between the two communities was the already mentioned Saverio Sparapani, who would also move to the Chaco shortly afterwards.⁶²

Considering the strong ties existing between Italian and South African militants, it is plausible to believe that both the investment proposals and those of relocation to Paraguay for those who had "problems" began to circulate widely among the South African militant community. A fact confirmed by the *American Year Jewish Book of 1983*, according to which some of the *leaders of the supremacist organizations* "left South Africa to establish a settlement of like-minded people on land allocated to them by the government of Paraguay".⁶³

A very specific phenomenon is observed in this case. To the traditional uses of the international network of the radical right, such as the sharing of counter-insurgent techniques and theories on Marxist conspiracy, requests for foraging for anti-communist campaigns or exchanges of favours of

60 Casa della Memoria di Brescia, SISMI, *Far Right Terrorism in South Africa*, 18/03/1981, in dossier "Italicus Bis", folder "Atti SISMI 2.8.80-vol. 3".

61 *Ibidem*, p. 76. On the membership of Italian neo-fascists to the *Wit Kommando*, House of Memory in Brescia, SISMI, *Extreme Right Terrorism in South Africa*, 18/03/1981, in dossier "Italicus Bis", folder "Acts SISMI 2.8.80-vol. 3".

62 Casa della Memoria di Brescia, Questura di Bologna - DIGOS, *Elio Massagrande and others*, 26/07/1982, in the file "Italicus Bis", folder "Acts acquired by P.P.n. 344.A.80 Delle Chiaie + 3 (vol.17)".

63AAVV, *The American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 83, The Haddon Craftsmen, Scranton (Pa), 1983, p.266.

various kinds, another one is added. Neo-fascist links are now also becoming a means of conveying messages of a mainly financial nature.

From the point of view of Paraguayan economic policy, the creation of these new channels could be considered as one of the countermeasures dictated by the collapse of foreign investment due to the deterioration of relations with the US. Between 1954 and 1977 the successive US administrations had excellent relations with Stroessner, characterised by a conciliatory attitude towards the needs of the regime to which constant economic and military aid was given. Starting in 1977, with Carter's pressure for democratic openness and respect for human rights, the US went from being an unconditional ally to an enemy to fight. Ever since his election, Carter has attacked the stonist regime hard, denouncing it in front of the entire international community as a bloody one-man dictatorship and drastically cutting economic and military aid by 50 and 70 % respectively, creating various internal budgetary problems.⁶⁴ The decline in economic trade between Paraguay and the United States peaked in 1981. Paraguayan exports to North America rose from 21,5 % in the second half of the 1960s to 2,6 %. The same fate befell imports, which fell to 7,5 %. Investments fell sharply, falling by up to 7 %.⁶⁵ It is therefore plausible to believe that the bridge built with the movements of the European and South African radical right, using as it did the Italian neo-fascists, was one of the manoeuvres carried out by the stonist dictatorship to seek alternative financing channels and thus reduce economic dependence on the United States.

The rooting in the social fabric and the removal of the criminal past

The end of the neo-fascists' clandestinity and the development of economic activities in the Chaco allowed them to integrate perfectly into Paraguayan society, going far beyond the level of politics and militancy.

How can we explain the strong integration into the social fabric and the undisturbed stay in Paraguay even after the fall of the stonist regime and the beginning of the democratic transition?

With regard to the first point, the answer must be sought on several fronts. First of all, the end of clandestinity, which had as a corollary the possibility of using their real names and having social interactions without fear of being recognized or discovered, may have played an important role. As far as Massagrande in particular was concerned, the activity to which he devoted the most time, together with the management activities of the companies in Chaco, was skydiving. The former

64 Mora e Cooney, *Paraguay and United States. Distant Allies*, pp. 198 – 204.

65 Ricardo Rodríguez Silvero, "Empresas transnacionales en el Paraguay: Tipos, formas de acción y origen", in *Las transnacionales en el Paraguay*, a c. di Ricardo Rodríguez Silvero (Asunción, Editorial Histórica, 1985), pp. 22 - 26.

Veronese ordovista decided to share his knowledge of aviation and free fall learned during his service with the Brigata Folgore by founding, in 1979, the *Asociación Paraguaya de Paracaidismo Deportivo*, of which he became the first president.⁶⁶ The sports association was not only involved in recreational-sports activities, but also carried out training for military personnel. Over the years, about six hundred paratroopers were trained, for a total of about twelve thousand jumps. The association also took part in various national and international sports competitions.⁶⁷ As the association's website shows, Massagrande remained in office as president from 1979 until 1998. On the same page, in the *Historia* section, you can read the following:

It was the decade of the 70's and the first courses of parachuting began to be carried out in our country by Mr. Elio Massagrande, an Italian immigrant who settled in Paraguay, together with active fans and military of the time decided to found the Paraguayan Association of Parachuting in April 6, 1979.⁶⁸

From these lines, Massagrande appears as a simple immigrant of Italian origin who one day decided to leave Italy to move to Paraguay. There is no mention of the reasons that drove him to abandon Italy or his past in the terrorist organization. A line held also by the numerous newspaper articles, with parachuting as a theme, in which Massagrande is mentioned.⁶⁹ In particular, from one of these tracks you can learn that near the town of Tobatú there is a runway named after *Don Elio Massagrande*, as a founding member of the association.⁷⁰

The elements just mentioned lead us to believe that the new lifestyle adopted by the neo-fascist, therefore the abandonment of violent militancy, the work done as a business administrator in the Chaco and the activities related to parachuting have allowed an almost total removal of the criminal past of Elio Massagrande, who in fact became a respected member of the community.

With regard to the second issue, it is necessary to focus on the democratic transition process that began after the fall of Stroessner. In February 1989, a coup organized by General Andrés Rodríguez deposed the dictator. After the fall of the regime, just as in other countries that had lived under a

66 AdT, *Lista actualizada de socios de la Asociación Paraguaya de Paracaidismo Deportivo*, 23/01/1980, roller 108, frame 631.

67 AdT, *Emprendimientos de Elio Massagrande en el Paraguay desde 1979 a 1990*, undated, roller 108, frame 0634.

68 Official website of the *Asociación Paraguaya de Paracaidismo Depoortivo*, section "Historia", available at <https://www.appd.org.py/historia/>. Last visit 02/08/2019.

69 "El día de Hispanoamérica", *abc*, online edition, 08/10/2006, available at <http://www.abc.com.py/edicion-impresa/suplementos/abc-revista/el-dia-de-hispanoamerica-935253.html>. Last visit 08/08/2019; APPD advertising page, "Caidos en el aire", *Clip*, no. 12 (2013): p.77. Available online at https://issuu.com/sole.ferres/docs/clip_juniojulio2013_borrador_final. Last visit 08/10/2018.

70 "Dreamers celebrate 30 years", *Última hora*, edizione online, 09/04/2009. Consult us at <https://www.ultimahora.com/sonadores-celebran-30-anos-n211645.html>. Last visit 08/10/2018.

military dictatorship, the transition to democracy began. However, this process was not comparable to those faced by countries such as Chile, Argentina or Brazil, to name a few. In particular, the transition was characterized by the permanence in the administrative apparatus of the same people who had managed public affairs during the stronist era. The administrative structures, the leadership of the police corps and the organisation of the judiciary remained identical. The stronist imprint remained clearly visible.⁷¹

According to the documents that have been seen, it is not possible to establish whether Massagrande and the other exiles were subjected to restrictive measures after the fall of the regime. However, in the Archives of Terror there is a transcript of a sort of interrogation to which Massagrande himself was subjected at the end of March 1989, after Stroessner's dismissal. General Obdulio Arguello Britez, in his capacity as the head of the *Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Investigation of the Capitol Police*, was in charge of the interrogation⁷². In the light of the above, it is not surprising that the interrogation officer had been an active participant in the repressive campaigns carried out by Pastor Coronel during the years of the stronist regime.⁷³ The interrogation in question appears to be a mere formality. It consists of nine general questions concerning how to enter the country, the activities carried out and any contacts with other fugitives during the years spent in Paraguay.

Considering the permanence of the high administrative levels at their posts even after the fall of Stroessner, it is possible to believe that the close relations built by the Italian neo-fascists, and in particular Massagrande, with the military leadership over the years have meant that the protection granted by the stronist regime to the fugitives has continued even beyond the end of the dictatorship, allowing them to evade Italian justice even in this circumstance. Some of the neo-fascists returned home once the statute of limitations had passed. Others, like Clemente Graziani and Elio Massagrande, remained in their new homeland until the day they died.⁷⁴

Conclusions

The picture that emerges at the end of this work appears rather complex. The meeting between veterans of the neo-fascist organization and the Paraguayan regime seems to have been born *ex novo*, through a process in which radical anti-communism and the legitimization of violence as a

71 Stable, *Opaí*, p. 148.

72 AdT, *Declaración información de Elio Massagrande*, 21/03/1989, roller 97, frame 2262.

73 Boccia Paz et al., *Es mi Informe*, p. 252.

74 Roberto Zuccolini, "Fasci e saluti romani al requiem per il camerata Lello", in *Corriere della Sera*, 24/01/1996, p. 37.

political instrument represent the common denominator between two very distant worlds. In their aversion to Marxism, the Paraguayan regime and the Italian neo-fascists identified a common language that both actors were able to understand and translate practically. In this way, ideological bridges were created, which did not exist before and which were the basis of an "anti-communist solidarity" that took the form of the granting of political asylum and the new life that followed for the former terrorists.

Nevertheless, very little remained of the "legionary spirit" that characterized the ordinovists during the Paraguayan season. In a context completely subjugated to the regime and in the absence of any progressive opposition, the neo-fascists turned away from violent militants, who manufactured weapons and organized attacks, to wear those of respected businessmen with a normal job. A change that culminated with the development of the investment centre in Chaco and the creation of what could be called the "Economic Black International". A network that maintained the same characteristics as the *network* through which it was built, namely informality, weak links and the lack of an organizational or command structure, but which, unlike the "original" black International, had a strong institutional reference point. The latter can be considered as the driving force behind the "legal" evolution of the transatlantic links addressed by historiography so far.

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