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IL CASO MORO 1978-2004: WITCHCRAFT, ORACLES AND MAGIC

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Preamble

It is a paradox of the Moro case – the 54-day kidnapping and eventual murder of one of Italy's Christian Democrat leaders by the Red Brigades (BR) in 1978 – that investigations lasting more than twenty-five years have produced greater knowledge of the events but less consensus about their interpretation. The lack of consensus is regularly conveyed by public skirmishes between the members of two camps: the supporters of the 'official version' and the 'conspiracy theorists' (Drake 2001). The first camp contains those who believe that the responsibilities and reasons for Moro's fate have been fully identified, apart from a few puzzling details which, however they might be resolved, would not change the attribution of exclusive responsibility to the Red Brigades. Their opponents argue that precisely in those unexplained details lie the undeniable signs of so far hidden conspiratorial responsibilities, involving a range of national and international players who had good political and strategic reasons to want Moro out of the way permanently. In elementary, elaborate or exotic form this dispute has been audible virtually from the day of the kidnapping itself. Yet, whereas by the late 1980s the official version, endorsed in the successive verdicts of 5 sets of trials, appeared to have been broadly accepted, the balance has now swung back towards conspiracy theories, reaching at least the more moderate position that too many features still remain unexplained to allow the case to be closed.

One striking index of the continuing controversy is the recent surge in accounts of what is alleged to have really happened in the period 16 March – 9 May 1978. No fewer than 10 books on the kidnapping (roughly 20% of the total 50-odd books since 1978 and more than appeared in the three years after the event itself) have appeared since 2002. Even before the most recent contributions, a participant with every reason to see the controversy settled, Moro's son Giovanni, had declared in 1999 that less was really known about the event than ten years earlier.¹ The persistence, indeed the increasing intensity, of the disputes today is puzzling. The retirement from active politics or deaths of the politicians directly involved, the dissolution of the parties which had managed the responses to the kidnapers, and the ignorance or indifference of new generations of voters might have been expected to remove the event from public controversy, relegating dissent from the court verdicts to the private arena. The persistence is even more puzzling insofar as the issues had indeed seemed

¹Intervention on 23 April 1999 in conference on "Le ragioni delle vittime e all'accertamento della verita' del Caso Moro" at Torrita Tiberina. To the books should be added the films of Bellocchio (*Buongiorno Notte*) and Martinelli (*Piazza delle Cinque Lune*) released in 2003 and taking the standpoints, respectively, of the official and conspiracy versions.

largely settled, as Giovanni Moro implied, by the end of the 1980s.² This paper therefore addresses these puzzles. In spite of the apparent promise in its title, it does not add yet another far-fetched solution of the difficulties in accounting for some features of the kidnapping. What it does try to do, instead, is to explain, on one hand, the curious combination of greater knowledge and less certainty and, on the other, the variations over time in the intensity of the interpretive disputes.

Explanations of the persistence of the controversies

Recently two historians, Sabbatucci (1999; 2003) and Drake (2001), have sketched some reasons for the persistence of controversy despite what both regard as flagrant logical contradictions and a fatal lack of evidence in the conspiracy interpretations.³ Sabbatucci suggests that the collapse after 1978 of the National Solidarity project to bring the DC and the PCI together was so traumatic for its supporters that its end can only be attributed to the murder of its major architect Moro: it is then a brief step to the conclusion that the murder itself was designed to have that effect and must therefore have been organised by national and international forces determined to destroy the project. Moreover, the increasing willingness on different sides of politics to accept that the attack was decided by forces beyond the Red Brigades is a way of settling the past conflicts between supporters and opponents of negotiations with the kidnappers, since even if accepted, negotiations with the BR – the unwitting instruments of more powerful forces – could never have led to a Moro's release (1999: 221). Drake claims to see broadly psychological factors at work. Contemporary commentators who once belonged to the PCI or extraparliamentary Left are in denial, unable to accept that they shared a Communist heritage with Moro's murderers and determined to show that the BR were always pawns in the larger conspiratorial games played by the extreme Right and security services. Court verdicts which pin responsibility on the BR members alone – the 'official version' – must therefore be mistaken or, at least, incomplete. The equal scepticism of the Centre-Right towards the judicial accounts is attributed by Drake to its general concern to undermine the judiciary intent on prosecuting Berlusconi for dubious financial dealings (2001: 370).

² A report by the second Parliamentary committee of inquiry in 1994 describes the sense of closure and reopening of the disputes: 'Dopo anni di stasi, in cui l'inchiesta sul caso Moro sembrava sul punto di esaurirsi per l'impossibilità di acquisire nuovi elementi utili a colmare i troppi "buchi neri" presenti nella vicenda del sequestro dell'assassinio dello statista democristiano e del massacro della sua scorta, dal 1989 - e in particolare nell'ultimo anno ..sono emersi fatti nuoviNel volgere di pochi mesi si sono succedute rivelazioni riguardo alcuni degli aspetti che, a sedici anni di distanza, ancora si frappongono ad un accertamento pieno e persuasivo della verità sul caso Moro' (CPS 1994: 30).

³ Both accept that some details of the case remain to be explained: the claim of identification of a BR base in Rome through a spiritual séance (in which the current President of the European Commission participated); the false communiqué in mid-kidnapping alleging that Moro's body had been dumped in a lake; and the location of the original version of the political testament (memoriale) that Moro wrote during the kidnapping.

The reliance by both authors on claims about traumas and denial afflicting political collectivities and the relief or support which might derive from a particular explanation of Moro's murder make such arguments hardly less speculative than the conspiracy theories they are intended to dispose of. But there are also more specific objections to this kind of account. First, whatever the validity of explanation-by-denial for some leftwing controversialists, the disputes have been fuelled by too many different kinds of participant to allow single political motivations much explanatory power. In any case, given the political transformations of the 1990s, it is hardly likely that any single political motivation can do explanatory service for the entire period after 1978. The most severe controversies in fact occur after 1993: by then most of their contributors from the political élite would know little and care less about the political conflicts of two decades earlier. Second, such broad explanations cannot account for the changes in the balance of consensus and dissensus since the murder – why disputes should die down but then revive, perhaps in a different form and from a different set of sources. Third, neither author pays attention to the particular contexts in which the interpretations of the kidnapping are actually produced nor indeed to the most mundane feature of all - the appearance of new evidence and the volunteering of unexpected testimonies. I conclude that the explanations why argument should continue over the real meaning of the kidnapping which have so far been offered are pitched at too remote a level from the details of the disputes to be convincing. A fresh way of characterising the explanandum and some new analytical resources is therefore needed, permitting suspension of the exclusive attention to political content and allowing for the workings of non-political mechanisms why the interpretive disputes have taken the form that they have.

One way of characterising the Moro case is to take it as a sacrificial tragedy followed by a prolonged struggle to fix or evade the responsibilities for it. Given the complexity of the events themselves and the reverberations predicted by the victim himself, the attribution or evasion of responsibilities has covered a wide range of involvements; different procedures have been used to assess degrees of culpability; and individuals and groups have equally been the targets of blame. To an anthropologist, a description of the case in those terms immediately calls to mind the domain of witchcraft, traditionally analysed as a means by which in premodern societies misfortunes are explained, individual or social conflicts brought to the surface and resolved, and power relations of various kinds challenged or reinforced.⁴ Moreover, anthropology's characteristic focus on the ways in which the conduct and beliefs of individuals are shaped by the social context in which they act

⁴ For a survey of anthropological approaches to witchcraft and the wide variations in its beliefs and practices in different societies, see Marwick (1982). A recent African case is described by Zeitlyn (1990).

seems an especially appropriate analytical framework to try to explain how the meanings progressively attributed to the murder of a political leader have been shaped by the social and political relationships of the meaning-givers to the victim and to one another. In what follows, therefore, I shall borrow some techniques of analysis used in the study of witchcraft to make sense of some features of the Moro case – a term in which I include the events of the kidnapping itself and its not-yet-concluded interpretive sequel. In the following section I shall provide some justifications for comparing the apparently very different phenomena of witchcraft and terrorism, the field to which the Moro case belongs. That juxtaposition will pave the way for comparison at a much more detailed level in terms of the mechanisms used to trace responsibility in both cases. I then examine the evolution of those mechanisms over the past twenty-five years and the relations between them, identifying the factors responsible for ensuring that the responsibilities remain in key respects contested. Finally, I suggest briefly that this approach might be pursued to analyse the mechanisms used in post-Unification Italy to identify and confront social and political danger.

Witchcraft and terrorism: the class of ‘insidious causes of damage’

Modern anthropological analysis of witchcraft starts with the classic account of witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande of the Southern Sudan by Evans-Pritchard (1937). For the Azande, witchcraft is a system of beliefs and practices which serves to explain individual misfortune and manage social relations. Evans-Pritchard’s particular concern was to show the logic of a system of apparently irrational beliefs and to identify the ways it was underpinned and rendered coherent by the practices used to identify and repress witchcraft. Of the two sides to Evans-Pritchard’s analysis – the logic of witchcraft ideas and the nature of the practices which supported them – the first has been much more influential, especially outside anthropology, partly because it was of greater interest to Evans-Pritchard himself.⁵ His analysis of the structure of cognitive systems has inspired work, *inter alia*, in philosophy (Polanyi 1957), science studies (Barnes 1974) and the cultures of medical knowledges (Lock, Young and Cambrosio 2000). In each case the Azande materials have been used to illustrate features of intellectual systems in modern as well as pre-modern societies. The other dimension of Evans-Pritchard’s analysis – the examination of the social mechanisms which supported the witch cosmology – has been hardly exploited outside the study of African societies. Its potential has in any case been suffocated by the loss of interest in the topic of witchcraft among anthropologists in recent years: the intellectual initiative has largely passed to

⁵ McLeod (1972) points out that while Evans-Pritchard had ready access to witch beliefs, the practices which supported those beliefs had been outlawed some twenty years before his fieldwork by the colonial authorities and were therefore necessarily less amenable to fieldwork reporting.

historians.⁶ Only the anthropologist Mary Douglas, once one of Evans-Pritchard's students, has sought to explore and apply elsewhere the lessons from his material on the institutional dimensions of Azande witchcraft.

Douglas' strategy for exploiting the potential of Evans-Pritchard's approach is to name a higher-level class of misfortunes to which witchcraft belongs: the class of 'insidious causes of damage' (1991: 724). 'Insidious' here refers to the fact that the damage in question is caused by invisible agents, impossible to identify prior to the breach of defences and only subsequently diagnosed with the help of elaborate procedures. Diagnosis is frequently accompanied by widespread determination to root out the individuals or groups responsible for the damage. Alongside witchcraft in this category Douglas has placed potentially fatal infectious diseases – notably leprosy and HIV/AIDS – which, to various degrees in different times and places, stimulate strong social and political pressures to defend the community. A contemporary addition to this category is, I suggest, terrorism which, if we accept it as a *bona fide* member, will enable us to subject the Moro case to analysis of the kind that anthropologists use in studying cases of witchcraft.⁷

Some *prima facie* similarities appear in the ways in which the damage is delivered and the consequences which follow. As in the case of witchcraft, acts of terror are committed by agents usually indistinguishable from those around them; the intentions behind their acts initially appear unclear and require specialised mechanisms of detection to reveal their often hidden meaning; the period between the moment of attack and the appreciation of its full potential for damage is usually lengthy; and the damage the attacks cause prompts widespread demands to purge the community of anyone suspected of sympathy or connivance with those responsible and to protect more securely its external boundaries. Witches and terrorists are both commonly represented as depraved inversions of everything proper citizens should be.

Two objections can be raised to the claim of any straightforward comparability between terrorism of the Red Brigades kind and witchcraft of the Azande kind. First, human rather than supernatural agents cause the damage. Second, terrorism does not offer witchcraft's characteristic explanatory idiom or institutional apparatus to handle everyday conflicts between neighbours: aggressors and victims in terrorist attacks are typically unknown to each other. Rejoinders to these objections,

⁶ 'The last twenty-five years have been a golden period for the historical study of witchcraft ... At the same time the social anthropologists ... appear to have largely abandoned witchcraft studies' (Briggs 1998: 49).

⁷ Both witchcraft and terrorism come in many different forms, with different motivations, techniques, patterns of accusation. Here I shall make exclusive use of Azande materials.

softening or eliminating their force, are, however, available. On one hand, although witchcraft beliefs do assert the use of a supernatural causal mechanism for damage, the activator, deliberate or unwitting, of this mechanism is always a human being. On the other hand, although Azande witchcraft is characteristically a technique to solve local conflicts between individuals who know each other well and have reason to distrust each other, it has an equally significant function in demarcating social and political boundaries. In Zandeland it serves to reinforce the distinctions between rulers and subjects (rulers do not practice witchcraft and are never accused by commoners), men and women (the capacity for witchcraft is inherited only from same-sex ascendants), lineages (some are infected, others not), and children and others (children do not practice witchcraft).⁸ Terrorism has an analogous collective dimension. Use of violence puts pressure on the boundary between legitimate and illegitimate politics; it sharpens the distinctions between the groups (political, ethnic, religious) from which the terrorists appear to emerge and those from whom their victims are chosen; and invocation and use of the powers needed to combat terrorism is likely to alter not only relations between rulers and subjects but also among groups of subjects. Curtailment of civil rights, loss of confidence in the rule of law, increases in the powers of largely unaccountable anti-terrorist agencies, engendering of suspicion of people from outside the community and potential traitors within it – all are ways in which the conduct of the battle against terrorism can serve more or less rapidly to recast social and political relations.⁹ In the same way the need for protection against witchcraft encourages a pervasive sense of distrust and the surrender of powers to political authorities. From this standpoint, the consequences of the widespread conviction of the powers of terrorists and witches, however persuaded we are of the reality of one and the unreality of the other, look rather less different than they might at first appear.¹⁰

We can pursue the comparison further by examining the institutional dimensions: the extent to which the mechanisms for clarifying responsibilities and controlling the operations of witchcraft in Zandeland have parallels in the investigative aftermath of the Moro tragedy. The mechanisms confirm the existence and powers of witches, clarify key social and political boundaries, sketch the nature of the supernatural world of witches and suggest how it is connected to the ordinary social world of the Azande. Evans-Pritchard calls these mechanisms ‘oracles’, described as ‘techniques which are supposed to reveal what cannot be discovered at all, or cannot be discovered for certain,

⁸ The collective dimensions – the ways in which witchcraft becomes the locus of institutional power struggles or gender conflicts – has been stressed in recent historical work on European witchcraft (see Briggs, *op.cit*)

⁹ For a recent forecast of the impact of terrorism, see Rorty (2004).

¹⁰ Furthermore recourse to witchcraft is usually interpreted as the final step in a dispute which may have been rumbling away for several years – rather as terrorism is frequently claimed to be the response of last resort when non-violent strategies have been tried.

by experiment and logical inferences therefrom' (1937: 10). The oracles are an essential component of the entire witchcraft complex: '...belief in witchcraft is dependent on witch-doctors and oracles and magic' (1937: 257).¹¹ However, while in the case of the Azande the operations of the oracles serve to end, at least temporarily, disputes by restoring social relations or punishing the guilty, in the Italian case they may also be the means by which meanings remain contested. The nature, relations and dynamics of the oracles assigned or created to understand the real nature of the Moro kidnapping – the full range of participants, the reasons for choosing him as the specific victim, the motives which led to his murder rather than release, and the goal or goals that the attack was intended to achieve – that we can find a major reason for the continuing controversies which surround it.

Moro's sacrifice and the need to consult oracles

Although aggressors and victims described Moro's murder in wholly contrasting ways, they agreed that it was essentially a sacrifice. For the political élite, the refusal to negotiate his release was an agonising but necessary price to pay to maintain democracy and the rule of law. For the Red Brigades, it was an essential step towards the demolition of the DC régime and an advance towards a communist society. The very idea of 'sacrifice' has, however, become foreign to post-war Western democracies and can at best be applied analogically. Borneman (2002), for example, finds a parallel in features of contemporary elections: the excesses of money and time they demand, their potential to remove the current political leaders, and the essential support they offer for the transcendent value of democracy. In such cases, the calculus of equivalence is conventional and – at least in Western societies – loss of life is rarely a consideration. In the case of Moro, however, there was no simple or uncontested way in which the choice between saving or losing his own life could be weighed against the future of Italian democracy. Perhaps the most direct response was that by Andreotti who argued that the equivalence issue should be settled in different terms: the state could not negotiate for the life of Moro with people who had murdered his five bodyguards. But of course this did not end the inevitable dispute about the necessity or otherwise of adding Moro to the list of the dead. The loss of sacrificial discourse is no doubt one reason why they have come to be perplexing events for us.¹² In any case, as Mauss (1969 [1899]: 305) noted, sacrifices are inherently

¹¹ Witchdoctors play a gatekeeper role, commanding some of the powers of their witch opponents and thus regarded with considerable suspicion – not unlike the Italian security services, assigned to protect the community against violence but often regarded as far too tolerant towards its rightwing exponents in the name of a common political ideology (see below, pp.)

¹² And why the actions of contemporary suicide bombers have been hard to understand.

ambiguous insofar as they necessarily embody a series of contradictory motivations and ambitions, a mix of egoism and altruism, individual advantage and collective benefit.

The sacrifice of Moro, however, added a series of further complexities to the inherent difficulty of coming to a consensual conclusion about the value of sacrifice. The major puzzles can be listed briefly: why Moro, rather than any other senior DC politician, was chosen as the sacrificial victim and by whom the choice had actually been made; how the Red Brigades were able to carry out the kidnapping successfully, evade detection for two months and leave his corpse in one of the most heavily-policed areas of central Rome; how far the contents of the letters to his family and political colleagues released over Moro's signature during the kidnapping were genuine products of his own free will and, for example, represented a real conviction that the needs of his family ranked above those of Italian state in determining what the government should do; and whether his captors had had any serious intention of negotiating his release or had decided on his murder from the outset. These features were deeply perplexing at the time and remained so. They were accentuated in 1990 by the casual discovery of a further set of letters written by Moro, especially to his family, and a copy of a near-complete handwritten political memoir.¹³ The circumstances of the discovery – in a BR base which had already been searched in 1978 and then left empty – and the identity of the questioner to whom Moro was apparently responding added a further set of puzzles. The attempts to resolve the specific responsibilities, direct and indirect, witting and unwitting, for these many issues has been the has so far occupied more than a quarter of a century.

When tragedy strikes and explanations are sought, the Azande consult their oracles. Four types of oracle are available to them, depending on the nature of the misfortune and the status of the victim. Azande oracles are ranked in a roughly hierarchical order of credibility, under the control of different social groups. Access to the most reliable, indeed definitive, oracle – the poison oracle – is available only to the political élite and wealthy commoners. Its use is under the control of technical experts or of people known for their skills in operating it and interpreting the results. However, some discretionary scope for interpretation exists. Verdicts which were unwelcome or ambiguous could be appealed to a more authoritative oracle or brushed off as the result of the incompetence or the temporary ritual impurity of the operator. The verdicts provide clarification of the reasons for the misfortune and identify the person responsible. Among the Azande, the issue of knowing how

¹³ A typescript of about half the memoriale had been found in a BR base in Milan in October 1978. The discovery in 1990 of the virtually complete *memoriale* in the very same base, allegedly fully searched in 1978, and whether the few apparently missing pages of the memoriale had been removed at the order of senior DC politicians, constitute one of the puzzling features of the case.

far damage by witches was intentional is an important issue for clarification. Witches were held to be able to employ their powers involuntarily, thus deflecting accusations of deliberate intention to harm and averting potentially disastrous confrontations between victims and their aggressors. The mechanism of oracle consultation, therefore, helps to preserve the political order, clarify the relations between the individuals or social groups in conflict, determine how far the person responsible was knowingly responsible for the scale of the attack and desire for particular consequences, and sustains the content of the beliefs in invisible malevolent powers. In the Moro case, too, we can identify a similar process – the creation and operation of a set of oracles – through which the answers to the puzzles set by the kidnapping have been sought. As among the Azande, the oracles are required to identify the full range of people and organisations involved, the nature of their agency (that is, the extent to which they were aware of the aims of the damage they were causing) and the measures to be taken to protect Italian society against future attacks of that kind.

The five oracles for the identification of responsibilities

I define an oracle as a distinctive group of socially accredited figures held to have access to clarificatory evidence interpreted through the manipulation of a particular set of procedures and techniques. The oracles which provide significant answers to these questions are essentially five. Of course the huge volume of variegated commentary on the Moro case also derives from other sources; but to an overwhelming extent these other sources provide second-order interpretations of documents or pronouncements originally uttered through one of the following five oracles. In key respects, however, each of those oracles displays, for different reasons, the traditional oracular characteristics of ambiguity or obscurity which mark the contributions it can provide.

i. Moro himself

The information that Moro himself could offer to elucidate his kidnapping is contained in two sets of documents produced during the kidnapping itself: first, in the twenty-six letters written to his political colleagues and family which were made public at the time; second, the further fifty-four letters and virtually complete photocopy of his handwritten 400-page *memoriale* that were discovered in 1990. The initial reluctance to accept that the contents of either the letters or his political testament could be a faithful account of what Moro really believed gave way to ever-closer scrutiny to decipher the messages that they might contain about the practical aspects of the kidnapping or about his own understanding of the reasons for his abduction and eventual murder.

The chances that the missing pages of his memoriale might turn up and their content and place of discovery force a further revision of the current interpretations cannot be discounted.

ii. Moro's family

Moro's family – his wife (Eleanora Chiavarelli) and four children (Maria Fida, Anna Maria, Agnese and Giovanni) – made every effort, unsuccessfully, to persuade the Christian Democrat government to consider negotiating his release with the BR. Their status as potentially authoritative sources of information available to no one else derived from two features: first, what Moro might have told them privately before the kidnapping about threats made to him, dangers he sensed, and the direction from which he felt threatened; second, because several letters he wrote from his 'people's prison' suggested the possible existence of a two-way communication channel with his family during the kidnapping itself. The family's repeated denial that any such channel existed has never proved wholly convincing, however. Even in 2000, the President of the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into the case could describe the suggestion that contact had taken place as 'ever more likely', a view endorsed by the least credulous analyst of the mysteries of the case (Fasanella, Sestieri e Pellegrino 2000: 171; Satta 2003: 405). Around the immediate core of Moro's family lies a group of further interpreters who are regularly regarded as having almost as close a knowledge of Moro as his wife and children: his brother, Alfredo Carlo Moro (A.C.Moro 1998) and his immediate political entourage who in various ways served as intermediaries between the family and the outside world during the kidnapping: Manzari, Rana, Guerzoni, Tritto, and Don Mennini. The refusal of Don Mennini, the priest through whom contact between Moro and his family is alleged to have taken place, to give evidence to the second parliamentary committee of inquiry was thought to give strength to the suspicion.

iii. The Rome judiciary

A small set of magistrates from the anti-terrorist pool in Rome were responsible for directing the investigations of the kidnapping and murder of Moro and his five bodyguards and sentencing those responsible. The police evidence and judicial argument by which they reached their conclusions were then assessed under the direction of a restricted set of experienced judges. The eventual court decisions were set out in the sequence of 23 sentences issued in the 5 sets of trials which took place

more or less continuously over the period 1982 – 1998.¹⁴ The major trials were in fact concluded in 1993: the subsequent minor trials were concerned solely with the conviction of four BR members, including one of Moro's 'gaolers', who had hitherto escaped detection. From the standpoint of their contributions to the understanding of the Moro case, the limitations of the judicial pronouncements lay in the constraints of the legal procedures and rules of evidence. Sometimes, too, complaints were made that the accumulated experience in this small-scale interpretive community of magistrates and judges constituted a serious source of bias against defendants: on at least one occasion, an attempt was made by defence lawyers to get one of the senior judges, Severino Santiapichi, to stand aside on these grounds.

iv. *Members of the Red Brigades.*

The BR members specifically responsible for the planning and execution of Moro's capture and murder were obviously privileged sources of information on all aspects of the case. This group – a tiny proportion of the affiliates of the BR at that time - consisted of 15 people, who included those who organised and carried out the kidnapping itself, the four 'gaolers' who kept him captive for 54 days, the members of the BR 'Executive Committee' responsible for taking the key decisions, and two members with the task of distributing Moro's letters to their destinees during the kidnapping. Other BR activists might have learned something by hearsay or guesswork or may have offered a view on whether Moro should be released or murdered, but only these 15 had direct, even if variable in extent, knowledge of what had actually happened during the 54 days. By 1983, when most of these 15 participants had been arrested, three 'speaking positions' were available to them: the roles of *pentito* (full collaboration with all state authorities), *dissociato* (acceptance of interrogation and confession of own responsibilities but refusal to provide names or inculpatory details of others) and *irriducibile* (refusal to cooperate in any form with magistrates and politicians but progressive willingness to talk to journalists and, sometimes, the kin of their victims). Determination to preserve the distinctions between these three different kinds of relationships with the state ensured that, no matter how convincing their renunciation of violence and remorse for their damage, the BR members were likely to be regarded as providers of at best unreliable or incomplete. .

¹⁴ A sixth trial (processo 'Metropoli') in 1986-7 dealt with the relations between some members of the Red Brigades and two leaders of the extraparliamentary Left in Rome. It dealt only with a single aspect of the Moro kidnapping.

v. *The Parliamentary committees of enquiry*

In November 1979, eighteen months after the murder, Parliament established a bicameral Committee of Inquiry (*Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sulla strage di Via Fani, sul sequestro e l'assassinio di Aldo Moro e sul terrorismo in Italia* (CPM)) to report on the political aims of the attack, the reasons why the state had been unable to protect or retrieve Moro and more broadly the nature and evolution of both leftwing and rightwing terrorism. Such committees of inquiry, whose forty members are drawn from all parties represented in Parliament, have served as the major political instrument to identify dangers of various kinds faced by Italian society and formulate better forms of protection – a task obviously filled to varying degrees by the 49 committees established since 1948.¹⁵ They have judicially equivalent powers to gather evidence and interrogate witnesses and, in addition, supra-judicial access to confidential state documents. They are not however bound by legal rules of procedure which means that, without the presence of lawyers interrogations can be wider-ranging and less formal than in court. Parliament is obliged to receive, but not to debate or take action on, the formally-approved Committee reports. The CPM, which described itself as the ‘overall institutional interpreter for the national community’ (CPM 1983: 1), delivered its majority and five minority reports in June 1983. The examination of the Moro case had proved so time-consuming – the investigations had required three prorogations of the original deadlines - that no effort was made to draw up a broader analysis of terrorism as a whole. In the light of the CPM’s acknowledgement that puzzles remained and the continuing judicial investigations, however, a successor Committee of Inquiry (*Commissione Parlamentare d'inchiesta sul terrorismo in Italia e sulle cause della mancata individuazione dei responsabili delle stragi* (CPS)) was established in 1988 with a much broader frame of reference.¹⁶ It was required not only to evaluate further progress on the Moro case but also to examine why a series of massacres, in some cases dating back to 1945, had gone wholly or partly unpunished. As in the case of the CPM, unrealistic deadlines were envisaged for the CPS. It had to be extended three times, then reconstituted after the 1992 elections and prorogued on a yet another three occasions before being finally wound up in early 2001. Altogether, therefore, the political élite spent a total of about eighteen years attempting to resolve the puzzles of the Moro case, embodying their deliberations in 13 reports, excluding the routine 6-monthly reports to Parliament on their activities. The principal sources of ambiguity surrounding the impartiality of its conclusions stem partly having to sit in

¹⁵ For a summary of the legal basis and powers of Parliamentary committees, see Caravita di Torino (2001). A list of the postwar committees is in Violante (2001).

¹⁶ In 1986 the Chamber of Deputies had established its own committee of inquiry. However, it had barely begun work, and produced nothing substantial, before Parliament was dissolved for the 1987 elections.

judgement of the political élite's own performance in managing the kidnapping, partly from the personal relationships of at least some members with Moro himself.

Relationships between the oracles

Among the Azande, as we have seen, order between the potentially contrasting interpretations offered the various oracles is preserved in various ways. The oracles make use of different types of evidence: sticks, termite behaviour, rubbing-boards and the administration of poison to chickens and, in the past, to humans. Partly because of the different complexity of these techniques, they are agreed to possess different levels of credibility and are consulted by members of different social groups for different kinds of misfortune. In cases of clarification about the past rather than divination of the future, they are used by the victim or his kin which restricts the number of people with an interest in the outcome. In most cases the way in which the question put to the oracle is framed helps to ensure the desired outcome: since consultations are conducted in secret by a single operator, there is little possibility of dispute arising in relation to the procedures actually used. In really serious or intractable disputes, the verdicts delivered by the princely oracles are regarded as definitive. Anyone contesting them risks death (Evans-Pritchard 1937). Thus interpretive order is maintained, blatant contradictions are avoided and the risk of potentially interminable conflict over the causes of a particular misfortune is minimised.

The Moro case is altogether less straightforward. [since there are few resistant social fences between the five oracles to ward off the possibility of interpretive babel]. First, the murder of Moro damaged not only his kin but also the range of political groupings in which he played a central role: his own political faction, his party, the PCI which might have benefited from his support, and, at the broadest, Italian society as a whole. The interests potentially involved in seeking a favourable verdict from the oracles are therefore multiple and likely to be opposed. Second, although the CPM as the self-described 'summarising institutional interpreter of the national community' (CPM 1983: 1), there is no clear or formal hierarchy of authority between the oracles themselves: the standpoints from which they provide their specialist knowledge are very different and all are in principle open to challenge. Indeed, precisely because there is no conventional hierarchy and each oracle expresses a different perspective, an obvious temptation is to undermine rather than endorse the kinds of pronouncements voiced by a competitor. Third, the operations of the oracles are also much less well protected by secrecy than during Azande consultations and are thus more exposed to scrutiny and

contestation at every point. Fourth, unlike the reliance of the Azande oracles on different types of evidence, the five Moro oracles often use the same evidence, or evidence from the same human or documentary source, in arriving at their pronouncements. This overlap provides plenty of opportunity for disagreement about the value of the source, its more and less important features, and so on. In the case of the Parliamentary committees of inquiry, for example, there was a particularly substantial overlap with the judicial investigations, in terms of the powers to gather and use evidence. Fifth, while the Azande consultations consist principally of the scrutiny of staged animal behaviour by a single human operator, each of the oracles in the Moro case are operated by at least several people who, again, may not agree with one another's conclusions and may forcibly voice their dissent.¹⁷ That is, the mechanisms through which the meaning of the Moro case is explored and responsibilities assigned are all vulnerable not only to challenges originating elsewhere but also to disputes among the operators of the same oracle. Since at least some oracles are operated by coalitions of at least potentially different interests, the interpretive outcome is likely to change as those interests emerge or the composition or balance of power in the coalition changes. Under these circumstances, the achievement of any consensus at all seems remarkable.

The containment of interpretive conflict: 1978-1993

For several reasons the aftermath of the kidnapping seemed extremely unpromising ground for any interpretive agreements. In protest against the government's refusal to try to negotiate with the BR and in fulfilment of Moro's express request, his family refused to attend, or permit the presence of his body at, a state funeral. Within the political élite, the outcome seemed destined to lead to recriminations between the DC, PSI and PCI and the loss of momentum towards the achievement of any form of 'Historic Compromise'. The BR themselves were now in possession of documents left by Moro which contained severe criticism of his party and senior colleagues as well as obscure references to the possibly illegal structure (Gladio) established to prevent Italy going Communist. These documents might easily be used to exacerbate conflicts within and between the political parties. Moreover, on a more formal side, the terms of reference of the CPM enabled it to scrutinise the direction of investigations by the magistrature in the kidnapping, leading to potential conflict between the interpretations of the judiciary and the legislature. In the late 1970s, indeed, magistrates were being increasingly forced into highly controversial, quasi-political reconstructions of the history of 'armed struggle' for the purposes of establishing the criminal responsibilities of different

¹⁷ In the only application known to me of the application of Evans-Pritchard's analysis of oracles to a European society, Peters (1972) also treats a group – in this case rural Welsh youth groups – as playing the part of an oracle. Evans-Pritchard notes that the Azande themselves regard witchdoctors as oracles (1937:149)

groups: the so-called 'Calogero theorem' is the obvious example. Yet, despite this decidedly unpromising context, the disputes were muted, certainly by comparison with what was to come later.

The potential for conflict among these overtly hostile interests was contained in various ways. In the first place, the public pronouncements of Moro's family (Maria Fida Moro 1982; 1985) were directed primarily towards presenting a picture of Moro as a dedicated family head with whose role the contents of his private letters from the 'people's prison' would be more easily consistent. Since discussion of family relations is largely excluded from Italian politics, the clear priority of family interests which Moro had expressed in his letters caused considerable embarrassment. Repair work was needed to establish that the quality of family life was indeed such as to justify the importance that Moro had, unexpectedly in that context, placed on it. Moreover, a public dispute over how to manage the newly-established Moro Foundation came to divide his family and weaken its force as representatives of a single public interest.¹⁸ In 1985, too, Maria Fida Moro entered Parliament under the DC banner so that any too-forceful criticism of the party strategy, as opposed to strictures on the conduct of single individual members, was curbed. Under these circumstances, any concern to dispute the verdicts, in any case still under construction, of the CPM or the judiciary or to offer an alternative explanation of the event was of clearly secondary interest.

As far as the Red Brigades were concerned, their position after 1980 did not leave them well placed to exploit the textual resources at their disposal. Their major task was to cope not only with the arrest of the members in possession of Moro's texts but also with the impact of defection and confession by several former members. The practical opportunities for those who remained at large to make use of the documents, aggravated by the difficulty of grasping Moro's mode of expression, were strictly limited. Once arrested, moreover, the majority of the 15 BR participants refused to participate in court proceedings or provide testimony to the CPM and its successor and therefore throughout the 1980s offered no contributions to the clarification of the event.¹⁹

The potentially severe conflicts between the simultaneous investigations by the judiciary and the Parliamentary committees of inquiry were handled, to a large extent, by preserving an explanatory division of labour. The questions of criminal responsibility - how the event happened and who was

¹⁸ Maria Fida Moro would later say that the wording of Moro's epitaph on his tomb would be the last thing to be agreed by all members of the family.

¹⁹ The exceptions were the *dissociati* Morucci and Faranda who progressively offered further details of the event during the 1980s. Morucci was the only participant in the kidnapping to agree to interrogation by the CPM, and he, Faranda and Maccari (one of Moro's four captors) also provided testimony to the CPS.

responsible for it - directed the judiciary while the questions of political responsibility - why Moro had been chosen as the victim, what the event was intended to achieve and how the police and security services had performed – remained the focus of the politicians’ examination. These distinctions were also preserved in two further ways. First, explicit collaboration and exchange of information took place between the court and the parliamentarians. The court attended a CPM session to interview politicians in September 1982; and, although the CPM made no use of expert consultants, 21 of the 25 employed by the CPS between 1988 and 1994 were magistrates and police who had worked on political violence (D’Agnelli 2003: 2). Second, any possible incompatibility between the conclusions reached in the courtroom and in the Parliamentary committees of enquiry was restrained by the timing of their reports. The first trial verdict was handed down in 1983 before the CPM compiled its report, and the debate on the that report took place some considerable time before the court outcome was re-examined on appeal and was subsequently confirmed by the Court of Cassation. The timing of the appearance of the political and judicial interpretations avoided any sense of direct public confrontation: if it could not guarantee complete convergence, it ensured against at least the possibility of strident contradiction.

Finally, within the two Parliamentary committees of inquiry, the impact of the relationships between interpreters and the principal victim must be regarded as important. Despite the election of 1979, the overwhelming majority of members of the CPM had been Moro’s parliamentary colleagues and three had served with him in government. No doubt these personal connections helped to keep the focus firmly on the Moro they had known, keeping the emphasis firmly on the letters that conveyed his personality and restraining interpretive flights of fancy. The interpretive disputes were very largely confined to the question, debated in a confused but relatively muted way during the kidnapping itself, whether negotiations with the BR could have or should have been more pursued and, if they had been, whether they might have been successful. Disagreement here and elsewhere within the CPM resulted in the release of 6 separate reports in 1983 while the task of assessing the development of both leftwing and rightwing violence – certain to lead to much deeper conflicts – was quietly shelved.

Despite the renewal of the Parliamentary investigations, largely at the insistence of the PCI, in the establishment of the CPS in 1988, the interpretive conflicts initially diminished further. Two reports on the results of further investigations of the Moro case were produced, an interim one in 1992 and a more substantial summary in 1994. Although the CPS had an almost wholly different membership to its predecessor, the CPM, and contained fewer members who had known Moro personally, the

drafting of the 1994 report was entrusted to a three-person group headed by the DC senator Luigi Granelli, a longstanding political ally of Moro, member of the party leadership at the time of the kidnapping and one of the few people to whom Moro had directly appealed by name to demand negotiations for his release.²⁰ Granelli's account of the kidnapping can almost be treated as a valedictory assessment on the part of Moro's remaining political peers – an analysis which remained largely within the terms in which the debates had been conducted at the time and in the CPM. The report did not ignore the problematic details requiring explanation, endorsing the views of the Rome judiciary, first, that they warranted further investigation and, second, that the Red Brigades should be regarded as solely responsible for the event. It examined but did not accept the suggestion of a wider conspiracy still to be uncovered. The report was approved by all members of the committee with the exception of the representative of the Northern Leagues who abstained.²¹ At this point, with agreement between the interpretations emanating from the judicial and political oracles all but complete and in the absence of the production of any credible alternative attribution of responsibilities by either the family or the Red Brigades themselves, the Moro case might have seemed as closed as it would ever be.

The interpretive outcome of this first phase of the scrutiny of responsibilities was largely shaped by the relationships between victim, aggressors and operators of the oracles. Attention was directed to Moro as an individual - his letters from captivity treated as the central piece of evidence he could offer, his fate clarified by those who had known him personally, and his aggressors assigned their individual responsibilities through the judicial process. In the next interpretive phase, however, the relationships among and within the oracles were to change, offering the opportunity to reopen the allocation of responsibilities.

The widening of controversy: 1994-2004

Apart from the completion of the Granelli report, the years 1993-4 represents a turning point in the controversies for at least three further reasons. First, in mid-1993 the Court of Cassation confirmed definitively the verdicts of the last major BR trial of the 1980s, thus sealing the official version against revision. Only a handful of individual responsibilities remained to be identified. Second, in late 1993 the Red Brigades members directly involved in the kidnapping began to offer their own

²⁰ The other members of the sub-group, both in Parliament at the time of the kidnapping, were Macis (PCI), who had served on the CPM, and Ciccio Messere (Radical Party). Granelli denied that he had been in favour of trying to open negotiations and indicated that if the National Council of the DC had been convened, he would have argued strongly against any move to weaken the party line.

²¹ The 1992 report had been accepted by the entire committee except for the two MSI members.

versions of events for the first time in and beyond the courtroom. The key figure in the kidnapping, Moretti, gave an extended interview containing what he claimed was the definitive BR version of all aspects of the event (Moretti 1994). Third, following the national elections of 1994 the presidency and composition of the CPS changed, bringing to centre stage not just new operators of the oracle but also what its new president described as a revolutionary change in methodology for deciphering the kidnapping, relying on the interpretative work of one of the Committee's consultants (Fasanella, Sestieri and Pellegrino 2000: 166, 209; Biscione 1994). These elements – the closure of the official version simultaneously with the possibility to exploit new evidence provided by both Moro and his captors – provided the background for the new interpretive openness.

A common element in this phase was the dissolution of the unity of interpretation in each of the oracles. First, the importance given to Moro's recently discovered *memoriale* added a new dimension to the identity of the hostage. The CPS president, Pellegrino, introduced the novel idea of a 'double hostage' (*doppio ostaggio*), the term indicating that, in addition to Moro himself, the documents containing the secrets he appeared to be confessing had to be regarded as independently valuable items to be negotiated for, with or without their author (Fasanella, Sestieri and Pellegrino 2000: 167). This interpretive move allowed space to propose any number of non-BR interests anxious to stop Moro talking and to retrieve the original version of his 'confessions'. Second, the public interventions of the members of Moro's family became progressively more diverse, having initially been largely under the control of his widow (M.F.Moro 1982: 120-5; A.C.Moro 1998: xiv). Giovanni Moro stuck to his conviction that key details required explanation and maintained a fierce hostility towards the DC leaders, especially Andreotti, who, in his view, had refused to do enough to prevent the tragedy. His sister, Maria Fida Moro, abandoned the DC in the early 1990s, beginning a political trajectory which would take her to *Rifondazione comunista*, then the *Rete* and finally to the former Prime Minister Dini's *Rinnovamento* grouping by the end of the decade. This no doubt gave her much greater interpretive freedom; her views tended increasingly towards the idea that, even without most of their leaders being aware of it, the actions of the BR in the Moro case had been directed by other agencies with an interest in Moro's removal from politics (M.F.Moro 2004). The oracle controlled by the family therefore turned away from revealing information available only to its members towards commentary on the interpretations proposed by others. Its role in this area was reinforced by the publication of the first extended contribution by Moro's brother, a survey of the puzzling features of the kidnapping accompanied by a reading of Moro the person through the now complete set of his letters and *memoriale* (A.C.Moro 1998: xii-

xv).²² The sense of distance between family and state perhaps received additional support from the conflicts sparked by the 1991 law allowing magistrates to freeze family assets to prevent payment of ransoms to the kidnappers of a family members.

Third, the abandonment of silence offered the core Red Brigades participants the opportunity to clarify, authoritatively, the goals and details of the kidnapping. Their contributions were very diverse, partly because of the barriers to the circulation of knowledge within the Red Brigades, partly because of the changes in their personal lives. In the course of the 1990s they were gradually able to leave prison, escape the collective pressures to match their interpretations to the roles they had chosen, and recapture their individuality by producing their own narratives (Faranda 1994; Moretti 1994; Braghetti 1998; Morucci 1999). Not only did any residual solidarity with the BR and those who used the signature for a continuing sequence of murders fall away: so too did some of the social relations underpinning their former solidarity. Two of Moro's captors, Braghetti and Gallinari, who had married in 1981, separated; and the longstanding relationship between the two members responsible for distributing Moro's letters, Morucci and Faranda, also ended. These changes made it easier for them to adopt new identities, accepting or soliciting exchanges with people formerly regarded as enemies – magistrates, politicians and the families of their victims – on the basis of disclosure and rejection of their pasts. They therefore entered, or were drawn into, public debates, essentially to reinforce their new identities and to confirm the accuracy of the official version enshrined in the court sentences. However, the collective force of their contributions was undermined by the refusal of the leading BR participant in the kidnapping, Moretti, to enter these exchanges. His continuing silence identified him, for those who wished to cast doubt on the official version, as the agent of external organisations, deceiving his fellow-BR members and piloting the Moro kidnapping towards outcomes desired above all by his political opponents (Franceschini 2004; Flamigni 2004). Just as the Azande believe that witchcraft can be set off inadvertently by a witch, so the possibility that at least the most dramatic of the Red Brigades' attacks had been carried out by activists unaware of what they were really doing.

Support for the intervention of 'occult powers': the CPS 1994-2003

Until 1993 the judicial arena occupied the most authoritative position in the organisation of the five oracles. The effective end of its enquiries meant that space was now available for occupation by the CPS. The space was occupied with alacrity, in particular by its new President (Pellegrino) who

²² A hitherto reserved daughter, Agnese, published a memoir of her father's family life in 2003 (Agnese Moro 2003)

missed few opportunities over the following seven years to announce the imminence of new discoveries and to proclaim the solution of all outstanding problems. In fact, the solutions did not appear, at least not to the satisfaction of his fellow committee members or to the wider community. While the preceding committees had produced at least a majority report based on consensus among members, the CPS after 1994 was not able to imitate them. Pellegrino produced draft reports on progress in 1995 and 2000 but neither was accepted by his committee and each was withdrawn. After attracting substantial public criticism for its inconclusiveness, the CPS was eventually wound up in 2001, approving a total of 19 separate reports along party lines by its members, 3 of which dealt specifically with the Moro case. A clearer sign of interpretive dissensus could hardly be given: how did it happen that as more and more documentation was amassed – by the end the CPS had at its disposal some 1.6 million documents (Satta 2003: xix) – the broad consensus of a decade earlier had vanished?

One explanation lies in the kind of factors held to influence the decisions of the Azande oracles: the question put to the oracle, the social relations between victim and the operators, and the identity of the operators themselves. As far as the questions put to the CPS were concerned, a notable change can be observed with clear consequences for the kinds of answer that might be given. The CPM was required to address eight specific questions on the kidnapping and then to examine the very large topic of the origins, organisation, funding, recruitment and international connections of both leftwing and rightwing terrorism in Italy, including the adequacy of the resources and responses of the state. As noted above, the Committee was able to provide answers only to the questions in relation to Moro. The CPS was in a different position. On one hand, it was required to address a series of massacres in a variety of historical contexts going back to 1945: the Moro case was simply one of these, with no special interpretive priority. On the other, it was required to explain why in each case investigative goals were not met or adequate prevention was not achieved – in principle and in fact a much harder task than trying to explain why things did happen and certainly unlikely to elicit consensus. To a considerable degree, therefore, the Committee was encouraged to seek to relate the episodes that it had to investigate to one another, rather than to return each to its different local context. The task itself put pressure to produce a form of ‘unitary’ argument, seeking a common pattern behind apparently very different events. Broadening the context in this way to explain the Moro kidnapping meant that the likely involvement of a whole series of national and international forces would be invoked and that sole responsibility could never be assigned solely to the Red Brigades. Great interpretive space therefore opened up for the construction of ‘conspiracy theories’, invoking the responsibilities of occult powers and forces but without being able to specify

the actual evidence or organisational details in any case. Such theories resemble the explanations that Kaplan (1964: 330) calls 'runic'.²³ The Azande too, have a set of beliefs about the relations between witches but it is not generally one that they invoke to explain any particular event (Evan-Pritchard 1937: 38-9, 119-20, 129-31). However we can assume that it is always there to be invoked when for some reason standard explanations fail or are considered inadequate. What the '*doppio stato*' of conspiracy theory shares with the realm which the Azande imagine as the independent domain of witches is that it is simply a reproduction of the kinds of relationships that exist in the visible world.²⁴

This interpretive reorientation was based on the scrutiny of new types of evidence, in particular the redirection of attention from Moro's letters to his recently discovered *memoriale*. The letters contained no information of any political value; but the *memoriale* offered scope for scrutiny whether Moro was revealing damaging inside information, based on his long career as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, which those same national or international forces might be stimulated to try to stop: the few pages missing from the text encouraged this conclusion. The CPS also called on sources of oral testimony: it summoned 32 witnesses (magistrates, police, BR members and others) specifically on the Moro case, only 7 of whom had given evidence to the CPM. So new sources of data, written and oral, and the perspectives of new witnesses provided the foundations for new types of interpretation. But such data can only be converted into effective use with the help of the operators of the oracle.

When its mandate was renewed in 1994 and 1996, the CPS was subject to the same drastic changes in its composition that the political élite as a whole was undergoing in that period. Complete renewal of the 1992 membership, with the single exception of the former President, Gualtieri, took place as a result of the turnover in the 1994 and 1996 elections. From 1996 onwards, the CPS consisted of members with very little Parliamentary experience and no direct knowledge of Moro as a person or politician. Only 6 of the 41 members had been in Parliament before 1996 and none had been a member of the political parties involved in handling the kidnapping. Unlike the CPM, therefore, no convergence on interpretation could be encouraged by relationships among members deriving from long parliamentary experience and committee expertise. The post-1996 CPS could not be described, as the CPM could, as an interpretive community with some basic agreements on

²³ 'They provide a certain intellectual satisfaction, but it is one unwarranted by the actual state of affairs. Those who accept them only see an explanation, but do not have one.' (Kaplan, *ibid*)

²⁴ The concept '*doppio stato*' appears to have been introduced by the historian F. De Felice in 1989. While by no means monopolised by the CPS, some of its most extensive formulations appeared in the publications by its members.

the value of different types of data or the criteria to interpret them. Moreover turnover on the committee was high: more than 30% of the original members were lost during the period 1996-2001.²⁵ None of these features was particularly propitious for the achievement of consensus on the allocation of responsibilities for the events under investigation.

The inexperience of most members, exacerbated by the high turnover in membership, gave unprecedented interpretive space to the category of expert consultants employed by the CPS. Not used by the CPM and largely restricted to magistrates and police in the CPS between 1988 and 1994, the post-1994 CPS made lavish use of academic and professional consultants. By 2001 academics, intellectuals and journalists, largely chosen to mirror the political composition of the Committee, accounted for 19 of the 24 consultants. Academics and intellectuals, we can speculate, are likely to adopt broader interpretative schemes than the magistrates or policemen they largely replaced as consultants. Moreover, as professionals anxious to exploit their access to otherwise hard-to-obtain documents, they were much more likely to seek permission to publish versions of the reports that they prepared for the committee. Indeed, led by the President himself who organised publication of his own two draft reports that his colleagues had refused to endorse, the consultants were responsible for a large proportion of the texts on the kidnapping that have appeared in recent years. Given that Parliament was not obliged to debate the reports submitted by its committees of inquiry – in fact the CPS President between 1988 and 1994, Gualtieri, complained that none of the reports of his Committee had been discussed – the determination among academic and journalist consultants to adopt their normal mode of producing documents for the wide public circulation and taking issue with opposing views must have been strong. Given that their political sympathies mirrored the spectrum of views in the CPS itself, the circulation of their documents exacerbated different positions within and outside the Committee, making its work simply a reflection of the different views on the responsibilities for the kidnapping rather than a neutral location for adjudication between them. The approval invariably granted to the consultants to publish their findings, backed with the authority of access to 1.6 million documents and 65 oral testimonies, perhaps served to provide a surrogate for the achievement of the Committee's formal task. But it also ensured that no consensual interpretive outcome was possible. The final act of the thirteen-year investigative life of the CPS was therefore simply to authorise the release – but not the transmission to Parliament – of 18 separate reports, based on contrasting interpretations of responsibilities for the various tragedies, by different sets of members.

²⁵ The Committee workings were additionally handicapped, as its President acknowledged, by the fact that most sessions had taken place at night and been inquorate.

The five oracles through which the attempt to identify conclusive, widely-accepted interpretation of the responsibilities for the Moro tragedy have therefore been dismantled, either formally terminated or no longer sufficiently coherent to offer plausible accounts. Although a formal request to reopen the judicial proceedings was made by Maria Fida Moro in March 2004, it seems unlikely that the request will be successful or, if successful, produce information capable of unsettling the clear judicial consensus.²⁶ Whether this means the gradual extinction of the public controversies remains to be seen. The recent wave of publications suggests that the seam of interpretive possibilities opened up in the 1990s is not going to be exhausted very soon.

Conclusion

In this paper I have suggested that in certain respects the phenomena of terrorism and witchcraft resemble each other, especially insofar as they constitute, in the different kinds of societies in which they are found, public dangers to which responses need to be made. A central element in those responses is the localisation of the source of the danger and the clarification of responsibilities which are invariably ambiguous or concealed. To that extent, analysis of the efforts to explain an especially dramatic and politically significant example of a terrorist attack extends the range of cases in the comparative study of social accountability that Mary Douglas (1980) has encouraged. Analysis of the prolonged interpretive sequel of the Moro case has also offered the chance to make use of some of the specific categories through which the responsibilities for attacks by witchcraft are attributed. The study of the institutional means through which responsibilities are fixed involves in particular the consultation of oracles – the combination of types of evidence, interpretive procedures and socially accredited operators. I have suggested that identification of the nature and relations of the five oracles through which the various interpretations of the Moro case have been produced helps us to understand their overall convergence and divergence at different times. As the relations between the victim and the operators of the oracles change, so too do the interpretations that the oracles deliver.

A further, specifically Italian, direction in which this kind of analysis might be pushed is towards the exploration of the role of Parliamentary committees of inquiry in interpreting social and political danger. Since 1863 such committees have reported on banditry, financial scandals, mafia, threats to democracy and responses to natural disasters. In varying depth and skill, they have explored social, political and economic patterns of accountability, identifying individual or collective responsibility

²⁶ The opening of an additional investigation in 1997 to try again to resolve some of the well-known puzzles was abandoned in 1999 without results.

and publicising particular dangers and prophylactic measures. Committees of inquiry are also becoming more common: 49 have been established since 1948, roughly half in the past decade alone; and from an average of two per legislature in the early years of the First Republic, the number has now increased to six. Although the data in their reports have often been used by historians and social scientists, the details of the ways that the Commissions have gathered their data and the consequences for the content of their conclusions have scarcely been examined.

In this regard, a final comparison with the Azande may be worth drawing. From Evans-Pritchard's account it is clear that the establishment of the system of oracles was a relatively recent phenomenon in Zandeland, coeval with the creation of a unified polity under the ruling Avongara clan and designed to provide the clan princes with a vital system of information and control over their new territory. Upholding the oracle system helped to keep Zande society distrustful towards groups known to be bearers of witchcraft as well as towards neighbours as potential witches. The system of detection of witch responsibilities entrenched that general distrust at the same time as it defused the threat from a particular individual. Perhaps we should treat the system of Parliamentary committees of inquiry as an similar dimension of political authority, a set of techniques for identifying the nature of the dangers the newly unified Italy faced and proposing measures to avert them. The representations of bandits, mafiosi and terrorists, and the organisation of their evildoing, suggest that making further use of the anthropological approach to witchcraft may repay dividends.

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