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## **Historical Narratives of Lost Causes in Civil Wars: Investigating a Discursive Strategy at Play in the Histories of the Vanquished of Italy and the USA**

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Master Thesis

**Historical Narratives of Lost Causes in Civil Wars:  
Investigating a Discursive Strategy at Play in the Histories of the  
Vanquished of Italy and the USA**

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## Introduction & Research Question

Probably any historian, amateur or professional, has heard at least once, during a heated debate, the often-misquoted phrase, 'history is written by the victors'. Likely shouted when the facts put forward by the historian left the other party cornered and out of arguments. Factually, this phrase used as a last resort, seems to function as the ultimate argument to undermine the validity of any claim, no matter how sound or accurate it might be. Ironically, the originality of this quote remains uncertain, not traceable to a precise source, while being alternatively accredited to Winston Churchill, Herman Goering and, amongst others, to Confederate Senator George Graham Vest and Confederate Major General Patrick Cleburne<sup>1</sup>.

Relevantly, the real implication of this quote serves to cast doubt over the veracity of settled historical narratives, those supposedly written by the victors, in favour of counternarratives proposed by the vanquished. In this framework, those using this argument apparently claim the existence of a conspiracy of historians -all belonging to the victors- elaborating a one-sided interpretation of historical events, serving the power-that-be. Ideally, an accurate depiction would be the one that instead sees history being written by those actively studying it, preferably after a process of methodical investigation, where the only thing left to either victors or vanquished is whatever interpretation to be derived. An interpretation that would likely variate based on what political purpose it may serve. Still, an even more precise depiction would be the one that sees the process of researching and writing history strictly intertwined with the political process of interpreting it, often in a relationship of reciprocal influence, at a given time and context. In this light, it might be realized that if it is indeed true that history could be written by the victors, it can still happen that the vanquished are able to propose their version of that history in such a way that they are able to preserve and propose it to the public with meaningful results, contending the very meaning of historical veracity. In such a case, history becomes a matter of narratives.

This last consideration is fundamental. When historical narratives become of public domain, the public is potentially as important in determining the successful narrative as the history being taught, especially if those narratives become vessels for political or ideological endeavours. Corollary to this concept is the one that understands the importance of proper marketing strategies and parallel processes of political lobbying to ensure that the historical narrative ending up being read and spread the most does not need to be the one more accurately researched, but just the one best sold. Thus, it can happen that the narrative written by the vanquished not only can carve its space in the market of knowledge alongside the one written by the victors, but it can occasionally outsell it. Fundamentally, the history

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<sup>1</sup>Matthew Phelan, "The History of 'History Is Written by The Victors'", *Slate*, November 26, 2019, <https://slate.com/culture/2019/11/history-is-written-by-the-victors-quote-origin.html>; Edward H. Bonekemper III, *The Myth of The Lost Cause: Why The South Fought the Civil War and Why The North Won*, e-book edition, (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing,2015): 1.

written by the vanquished can be as influential in shaping a people's own understanding, interpretation, and eventual internalization of its pivotal historical events as the one written by the 'conspirator' winning side. Certainly, historiography should not be simplistically divided between victors and vanquished. However, this dualistic terminology is used here for its effectiveness and clarity regarding the argument being proposed, for I am specifically analysing how vanquished framed their historical narratives being object of this thesis.

This premised, the only instance when the sentence 'history is written by the victors' -implied in a strictly negative and provocative undertone- can be accepted as a valid argument is when we are dealing with the histories of totalitarian regimes, for which the (re)writing of history is *de facto* just another weapon of states' propaganda. Yet, as noted, two of the historical figures to which the phrase's originality has been accredited -H. Goering and P. Cleburne - shouted comparable arguments in defence of two of the most infamous institutions Contemporary History ever witnessed. Respectively, Nazi-Fascism and Slavery. Arguably, they might have been self-interested when making such claims. In fact, both -in symbolic representation of their ideals, and the institutions they fought for to preserve- in their respective historical contexts have been the ones trying to re-write history, either while in power yet eventually failing, as in the case of Nazism, or as a consequence of losing power yet succeeding in the process of reframing it, as in the case of the Confederacy. A success testified by the level of controversy and yet support that the lost cause mythology still generates in the public sphere, particularly in the United States, where a relevant portion of the population still regards its version of the narrative as factual history, as heritage worthy of preservation.

This does not imply that the official history written by the victors is always complete, unbiased or the more just toward all involved. It can indeed be incomplete, partially biased, and stained with shades of grey. Something of which academics are aware of, for example, when they need to approach the study of western colonialism and imperialism, that for far too long mainly proposed Eurocentric or Western-centric perspectives. However, this is why historians rely on scientific methods, not for their perpetual infallibility, but because they provide the tools to recognise missteps, and properly correct them.

In this research, I focus on two specific instances where the vanquished wrote their version of history to influence how nations should understand their past and their sense of national identity. Specifically, I am proposing a comparative analysis, using Discourse Analysis (DA), of how history can be rewritten by the vanquished, to variant degrees of effectiveness and in very comparable manner, by societies that differs from each other both historically and geographically. I do so by analysing a selected number of works from those authors most relevant for the propagation of the counternarratives that constitute those Lost Cause myths and that in various forms were able to politically endure and even thrive in the post-conflict reality governed by very victors they seemed to despise and distrust.

Specifically, I compare two historical events that are separated from each other in time and space by an ocean, and some 70 years: the American Civil War (1861-1865) and the Italian Civil War (1943-1945). I have made this selection for two main reasons. Firstly, for both cases, historians have long argued that the debates over these countries' civil wars myths are yet to be settled, representing still an unresolved matter in the social and political sphere of these nations. Secondly, the historical and geopolitical contexts that separate these two cases offer an interesting opportunity to properly assess how comparable vanquished narratives are.

Within academic literature, it is this frame of reasoning, arguing vanquished being able to write successful historical counternarratives, that allows authors like the American historian Heather C. Richardson to provocatively investigate how the Confederacy won the Civil War, or the Italian historian Francesco Filippi to wonder how comes that Italians are still Fascists<sup>2</sup>. Necessarily, given the different contextuality of the two cases, these authors provide different and nuanced answers for their respective investigations. However, strikingly similar is the focus placed upon the pivotal role that language and framing possess regarding the formation and presentation of self-absolving narratives aimed at disregarding blames and avoiding accountability. Furthermore, within these processes, both the American and the Italian historians reveal how the recollection of historical memories became necessarily selective, and often militant, in service of the language and framings upholding the narrative. Importantly, both authors recognised how the constant struggle for controlling the narrative was and still is connected to the political goal of either holding onto power or regaining it<sup>3</sup>. Truthfully, selective memories and militant narratives do not constitute a one-side only issue. As many historians have argued for both the Italian and the American Civil War, for a series of reasons concerning reunification, reconciliation, national security, political stability and pragmatism necessities, victors have often been either complicit of the vanquished selective memories, or guilty of their own militant narratives that still resulted in the proposition of partisan historical narratives. Within this framework, Italian historian Claudio Pavone, accredited for being the first to have interpreted the last years of the war in Italy and the Resistance struggle as a proper civil war, explicating the totalizing nature of such conflict on the moral and political consciences of the Italian people, provides a striking example of how a victor militant narrative can look like, in his work *A Civil War*<sup>4</sup>. Specifically, when dealing with the change of narrative regarding the image of the German soldier that took place after the armistice, and that survived long after the war, he shows how, in the collective memory of most Italians, the German soldier became the newfound -yet historically primordial- enemy, and as such a new language was needed for addressing him within the collective imaginary, functional to the goals and prerogatives of the cobelligerent government and the resistance struggle, needing to distance Italy from its wartime

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<sup>2</sup>Heather C. Richardson, *How The South Won The Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Francesco Filippi, *Ma Perché Siamo Ancora Fascisti? Un Conto Rimasto Aperto*, (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2020);

<sup>3</sup>Filippi, *Ma Perché*, 117-119; Richardson, *How The South*, 151;

<sup>4</sup>Claudio Pavone, *Una Guerra Civile: Saggio Storico sulla Moralità della Resistenza*, (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991).

responsibilities as a former German ally, to achieve better bargaining conditions with the Allies. For political figures and historians of the era alike, within this narrative, the Italian people, in changing sides, succeeded where the Germans failed, by taking a stance against the barbarism of Fascism and Nazism and regaining a sense of moral superiority. As such, largely diffused became the conviction that “[...] Germany had to face a harsher punishment than Italy, for greater were its misdeeds and more obstinate its willingness in pursuing them [...]”<sup>5</sup>. As Pavone argues, such stance was intertwined with the largely shared conviction that one of the main goal of the resistance struggle was to soften the future treatment that Allied forces would reserve Italy<sup>6</sup>. Necessarily, the narrative and thus the language had to change alongside and in support of political power being shifted from a fascist Italy to an anti-fascist one, and consequentially a self-absolving and militant narrative capable of boosting the anti-fascist role had to be prioritized over a more complex one meant to own the responsibilities of the fascist regime, but that risked being detrimental for Italy’s post war political stance. However, as both Italian historians Focardi and Filippi have argued, this selective and militant narrative proposed by the victors eventually enabled the vanquished to carve their own counter narratives. For example, Focardi especially has put much focus on the representation of the Italian soldier, compared to his former German ally. For decades after the war, Italians rested assured and cuddled by an image of the Italian soldier characterized by his intrinsic goodwill, kindness and almost total extraneity to evilness and brutality. The post-war narrative created a dichotomy between the evil efficient German soldier and the lazy yet good-spirited Italian, even in the face of the inescapable brutality of total war<sup>7</sup>. Such a simple and benevolent narrative surrounding the Italian soldier, besides being factually incorrect, allowed many fascists, after the war, to propose their edulcorated image of the fascist soldier, where talks of honour, loyalty, and patriotism took central stage. Interestingly, in his work *Ma Perché Siamo Ancora Fascisti?* Filippi reaches comparable conclusions, remarking the role that the public discourse and the political narrative enabled by all subsequent governments since the war created a dual tale of self-absolution and national revitalization, with an unconscious complicity of the Italian people unwilling to know, let alone own, the responsibilities of its past<sup>8</sup>. A dual tale of self-absolution and revitalization, with no accountability in sight, Filippi argues, which coexists with the paradox that Italian historiography regarding fascism is the more complete and complex available<sup>9</sup>.

Relevantly, not different has been the post-war depiction of the confederate soldier, whose honour and patriotism became not less worthy of recognition and respect of a soldier wearing the Union uniform. As Civil War historians David W. Blight and Adam H. Domby uncovered, this narrative was not only allowed by the victors, but was often enabled, where not even supported and endorsed, for the

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<sup>5</sup>Pavone, *Una Guerra Civile*, 210;

<sup>6</sup>*Ibidem*;

<sup>7</sup>Filippo Focardi, *La Guerra Della Memoria: La resistenza nel Dibattito Politico Italiano dal 1945 a Oggi*, (Bari: Laterza & Figli, 2020), 87-92;

<sup>8</sup>Filippi, *Ma Perché*, 238;

<sup>9</sup>Filippi, *Ma Perché*, 239.

sake of reunification, or as some of these historians have partially framed it, for the sake of whites' reunification<sup>10</sup>. Arguably, this happens for such narratives often prioritize the survivability and stability of the post-war peace and newfound status quo over more complex demands for justice, reparation, and accountability. Consequentially, questions concerning responsibilities and blame are never definitively settled, for the political and social cost of similar settlements is eventually deemed too high a price. As a glaring example, one can consider the general amnesty and the individual pardons that have been granted by the post war governments both in Italy and the United States. Precisely, the vacuum created in the absence of a proper process of addressing accountability generates enough room for the vanquished to propose their own narrative, almost unchallenged.

Nevertheless, the main seeds for what would become the narrative of the vanquished are often planted even before the war has officially ended. Factually, virtually all the authors I have studied concerning the American Civil War seem to agree that the very incipit of the Lost Cause narrative must be identified with the famous speech given by the surrendering Confederate General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox, Virginia, on April the 9<sup>th</sup> 1865. Specifically, Lee's final order to his army upon surrendering to the Union forces focused heavily on praising the confederate soldier's "unsurpassed courage and fortitude", whose defeat was made inevitable only by the "overwhelming numbers and resources" that the north could muster<sup>11</sup>. As Edward H. Bonekemper argues borrowing from the work of fellow historian Michael Fellman, "[...] suffering the death of military surrender, the confederacy became immortal [...]"<sup>12</sup> for, as Civil War historian David Blight remarks, by transforming Robert E. Lee into a god-like figure whose struggle could only be crushed by overwhelming odds, Lost Cause proposers could transform a war waged for the preservation of slavery into a noble and righteous revolution for states' rights<sup>13</sup>. Understandably then, most of the works studied in preparation for this research reserve many pages to the careful deconstruction of the main tenets of Lost Cause mythology, of which the 'states' rights' argument represents the most outrageous and yet effective embodiment, expressing the core argument used by Lost Causers to undermine the role slavery and its preservation played prior and throughout the Civil War. Arguably, the most effective work in this regard is Edward H. Bonekemper's *The Myth of the Lost Cause: Why the South Fought the Civil War and Why the North Won*, where every single chapter is dedicated to demystifying all the core tenets, one at a time. Relevantly, Bonekemper demonstrates the centrality of slavery and the absurdity of the 'states' rights' claim, by using the very words of confederates leaders against them, and proposing as ultimate evidence the fact that, not only the Confederate Constitution was for all intents and purposes identical to the original document redacted by the founding fathers, but it also borrowed from it a Supremacy Clause,

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<sup>10</sup>David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 381-391; Adam H. Dombey, *The False Cause: Fraud, Fabrication and White Supremacy in Confederate Memory*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020), 100;

<sup>11</sup>Robert E. Lee (1865), quoted in Edward H. Bonekemper, *The Myth of The Lost Cause*, (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015), 109;

<sup>12</sup>Michael Fellman, *The Making Of Robert E. Lee*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), quoted in Bonekemper, *The Myth of The Lost Cause*, 109-110;

<sup>13</sup>Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 258.

yet for the sole aim of engraving Slavery as the law of the land, regardless of individual confederate states' legislations<sup>14</sup>. Nevertheless, as much as a thorough work of analysis and deconstruction is useful to navigate the debate, even more relevant demonstrated to be those works focused on how those narratives took shape, asking what purpose they served.

Specifically, after reading Adam H. Domby (*The False Cause*), H. C. Richardson (*How the South Won the Civil War*) and David D. Blight (*Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*), individual insights and nuances cast aside momentarily, it seems to emerge a general consensus purporting the Lost Cause narrative as a political tool devised and utilized for the preservation of white supremacy at first and more narrowly, once the struggle for slavery was lost, and as a broader means for political conservatives to control their electoral base after the westward expansion in the late 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the Civil Rights movement of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries had largely shifted the political complexion of the United States. Interestingly, in the conclusive remarks of his work, historian A. H. Domby argues for the presence of a direct and tangible connection between the narrative and language of the Lost Cause, which he refers to as the rhetoric of victimhood, and the current state of conservative politics, accusing conservative politicians of constantly weaponizing the past “[...] to mobilize support through appeals to a shared identity and memory, just as they did in the 1890s [...]”, and even calling out former president Donald J. Trump for having “[...] mobilized heritage and white resentment for political gain.”<sup>15</sup>. Pivotaly, he emphasizes how “[...] controlling the past is not just about remembering one's heroic ancestors but about determining what others can commemorate as well”, and as such, the modern relevance of the Lost Cause relies on its enduring ability of enabling “[...] a form of cultural exclusions that continues to divide Americans”, for such is almost inevitable when Lost Cause narratives are allowed to perdure unchallenged, becoming a reflection of the historical power dynamics within a society<sup>16</sup>. Notably, not in contradiction, but in an even more radical fashion, H. C. Richardson morally equate the political rhetoric of 19<sup>th</sup> century elite slaveholders with that of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century Movement Conservatives and modern Republicans, addressing the unshakable continuity of their relentless attempts to disenfranchise minorities and women to hold onto power against the perceived threat constituted by the so-called liberal consensus, and within this picture the language and imagery of the Lost Cause narrative functioned as the original core script for such a divisive rhetoric<sup>17</sup>.

Finally, connecting this complex literature with the purpose of my research, is the work by German historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning and Recovery*<sup>18</sup>. Schivelbusch proposed an effective comparative analysis of three historical instances<sup>19</sup> where the vanquished developed a national mythology of redemption as a collective psychological

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<sup>14</sup>Bonekemper, *The Myth of The Lost Cause*, 73-74;

<sup>15</sup>Domby, *The False Cause*, 164;

<sup>16</sup>Domby, *The False Cause*, 167;

<sup>17</sup>Richardson, *How The South*, 193;

<sup>18</sup>Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning and Recover*, (New York: Picador, 2001);

<sup>19</sup>The American Civil War, The Franco-Prussian War and World War I.

coping mechanism in response to crushing defeat. Albeit the focus largely rests upon the process of myth creation serving a collective need of vindicating an alleged cultural superiority, unsurpassed honour and military valour, the comparative nature of the work functions as a pivotal precedent, paving the way for what I attempt in my own smaller endeavour. Certainly, while his work is of gargantuan proportions, and largely focused on a psychological interpretation on the origin of such myths, which at times also relies heavily on cultural determinism, it demonstrates that a comparative analysis of Lost Cause narratives is not only feasible, but also potentially effective. Simply, before one can research the why and how of what makes the rhetoric and language of specific Lost Cause narratives effective and resilient in the historical, political, and public spheres, Schivelbusch provides encompassing explanations on the very reason such myths are conceived in the first place.

However, possibly for the nature and the scope of the work itself, notably even Schivelbusch could not be spared from proposing the reader some of those historical inaccuracies that have permeated American Civil War historiography as a direct consequence of the effectiveness of some of the Lost Cause tropes. Such is the case for the largely shared yet incorrect notion that the Civil War represented the first case of modern total war, depicting Union Generals Grant and Sherman as the main culprits for this ‘totality’, and brutality<sup>20</sup>. Specifically, while not referring to Schivelbusch, but simply in the act of attempting a definitive demystification of a largely held historical belief, fellow historian Bonekemper argues that the war waged by the Union in the last years of the conflict should not be labelled as total war, as one would do referring to aerial bombardments over London, Dresden or Tokyo during WWII. Precisely, Bonekemper argues that there cannot be convincingly traced consistent parallels regarding methods, let alone disregard for civilians’ casualties, between the latter and the former cases, and as such it should be referred to, at best, as a ‘hard war’, and those few cases where indiscriminate act of violence against civilians reached a level of unsensed brutality remotely comparable to more modern acts of war, relate to non-regular Confederate units<sup>21</sup>. Pivotaly, Bonekemper negates the equation between the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s historical understanding of ‘total war’ with the war waged by the Union, for this belief constitutes a modern interpretation of the Lost Cause trope depicting the Union victory solely as a consequence of northern industrial might and brutal, unparalleled use of force. As such, it needs to be rejected with the rest of such mythology.

Arguably, the fact that Lost Cause tropes can find their way even within a book centred on the analysis and deconstruction of similar myths can only attest the incredible resilience and the potential vast permeation that such narratives can have on the individual, let alone the public at large. If even the most dedicated scholar can be deceived, albeit mildly, there lies a solid argument for the necessity to

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<sup>20</sup>Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat*, 38-39;

<sup>21</sup>Bonekemper, *The Myth of The Lost Cause*, 249-250.

further the work of deconstructing and analysing these Lost Cause narratives, these national mythologies.

Fundamentally, as the vast literature that precedes this research has already laid out, it emerges that at the core of the issue rests the centrality of effective counter-narratives constructed upon layers of selective and militant memories. As such, it appears that at underscoring the centrality of a constructed narrative it may exist a specific rhetoric and a precise use of language that could determine the ultimate effectiveness and lasting resilience of these Lost Cause myths.

What I ask is then if whether, through a comparative analysis of the language used by the vanquished of two different civil wars, would it be possible to determine the existence of a common denominator within the language of these vanquished that would indeed cast a light, and thus propose a tentative, yet effective explanation for the endurance of such Lost Cause narratives, that academia has long classified as myths, and yet has been so far partially unsuccessful in restraining? Specifically, is it possible to identify a similarity of language in both content and rhetoric, technically defined as a Discursive Strategy (DS), amongst different cases of civil wars where the losing side was the one recognised to be fighting on the wrong side of history following our modern liberal democratic standards, yet kept proposing somewhat successfully its revised version of history after the defeat?

Firstly, to proceed, I must clarify what it is meant by Discursive Strategy, which I argue to be underpinning the narratives of the vanquished. While I use the term with a modicum of liberty to identify basic common elements of comparable content and argumentation at the core of the narratives, characterized by the use of a specific written language adhering to a basic script relying on the constant proposition of fixed arguments, in a consistency of both rhetoric and styles, to the extent that different authors debating the same argument in different works, will adhere to said ‘script’ as if they were writing in concert, the term itself can be better framed. Specifically, Reisigl and Wodak explain Discursive Strategy as “an intentional plan of discursive practices and tactics employed in discourses to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal”<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, according to Igwebuikwe, the purpose of the narrative/discourse being proposed may encompass representing conflicting events and the actors involved in either positive or negative undertones, and consequentially discursive strategies can be actively utilized to frame in-group and out-group belonging<sup>23</sup>.

By relying on Discourse Analysis as the methodological tool, I anticipate that I was able to identify the presence of a Discursive Strategy which adheres to both the understandings of the term presented above. Specifically, in the research I noted how similar the presence of an adhered script

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<sup>22</sup>Martin, Reisigl & Ruth Wodak, “The Discourse-Historical Approach”, *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis* (2009), quoted in Ebuka E. Igwebuikwe, “Discursive Strategies and Ideologies in Selected Newspaper Reports on the Nigerian-Cameroonian Bakassi Peninsula Border Conflict”, *Communication and the Public* Volume 3, Issue 2 (2018), 152;

<sup>23</sup> Igwebuikwe, “Discursive Strategies and Ideologies”, 151-152.

-serving a political discourse seemed to emerge in the two cases concerning this work. Factually, while superficially said script may differ to adapt to its specific contextuality, the style remains consistent to serve a specific aim. Indeed, it is this apparent consistency that allowed me to propose the comparison between the Italian and American cases.

Thus, by focusing on two specific examples of society splitting conflicts as the American Civil War and the Italian Civil War, addressing the narratives of the vanquished of these two cases to analyse the language and rhetoric used as manifestations of how history can be rewritten and/or ambiguously manipulated, at various degrees of effectiveness, through the proposition of revisionist and often negationist counternarratives, a common Discursive Strategy is expected to emerge, serving a specific purpose.

Truthfully, if one were to look at those two cases without comparing them, it would not add much to the respective historiographies of these conflicts. However, it is precisely a comparative analysis of how history has been rewritten by those vanquished that could provide further insight on what makes a vanquished history endure in the socio-political discourse, on what makes a Lost Cause narrative so seemingly resilient. Arguably, historian W. Schivelbusch has already demonstrated the potentiality of a similar approach. Moreover, the recognised role played in both cases by the actual victors of those conflicts, that in higher or lesser levels, allowed for the vanquished' narratives to endure, provides another argument for the soundness of such comparative approach. In both those nations, the vanquished have been eventually allowed to partake in the processes of national reconstruction and reconciliation. This enabled the vanquished to foster their understanding of 'truthful history' to counter the victors' official one. A process that is understood by modern historians as born from the necessity of the vanquished to rationalize the war and their defeat<sup>24</sup>.

Finally, I argue that this investigation would not only be relevant, but it should indeed be done comparatively, as suggested by the resurgence of right-wing Populism in the last decade both in Italy and the US, that it is potentially linked with those leaders' ability and willingness to take advantage of and appeal to those people that either sympathize for or feel to belong to those nation's vanquished and their related counternarratives<sup>25</sup>. In fact, the latest election in Italy that has witnessed the formation of the most far right government since the war, alongside the numerous accidents involving far right movements in connection with the Presidency of Donald Trump in the US, possibly hint toward how an unresolved debate over conflictual narratives on the merits of a nation's identity could constitute the

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<sup>24</sup>Focardi, *La Guerra Della Memoria*; Gary W. Gallagher & Alan T. Nolan, *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); James M. McPherson, *This Mighty Scourge: Perspectives on the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat*;

<sup>25</sup>Giuliano Bobba & Franca Roncarolo, "The Likeability of Populism on Social Media in the 2018 Italian General Election", *Italian Political Science* Volume 13, Issue 1 (2018); Brent Steele, "Juxtapositioned Memory: Lost Cause Myth and Sites of Lynching", *Modern Languages Open* Volume 1, Issue 28 (2020).

historical precedent of what can be the consequences of two conflictual conceptualizations of same historical events coexisting simultaneously, further stressing the current relevance of this research.

Hopefully, this investigation upon the discursive strategies of the vanquished may provide useful insights on the processes that influence how a society interprets its history and either embrace or reject the concepts of national identity and belonging, for as the Italian historians Leone and Sarrica have written, “[...] although apparently convenient, in the long run collective amnesia [...] ends up not only being a threat to social identity, but can also prove to be detrimental to the ownership of the historical memories of their community that young people are supposed to share although being born after the end of that violence [...]”<sup>26</sup>.

This thesis unfolds its argumentation through three main chapters, beginning with the presentation of the methodology and research design upholding the entirety of the work. Discourse Analysis it is used to approach the texts being utilized as the primary sources of this investigation, and identify the Discursive Strategy constructing the narratives of the vanquished.

The second chapter exposes the historical contexts of the American and the Italian Civil War, providing the reader the necessary tools to frame the work being proposed.

The last chapter presents the analysis and its results. It faces the reader with selections from the primary sources being compared between the two cases, to expose the presence of a strongly comparable Discursive Strategy between the Italian and American authors, and eventually discusses the main implications in relations to the issue of addressing accountability.

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<sup>26</sup>Giovanna Leone & Mauro Sarrica, “When Ownership Hurts: Remembering the In-Group Wrongoings After a Long Lasting Collective Amnesia”, *Human Affairs* Volume 22 (2012), 604.

## I. Methodology and Research Design

The basic tool for this comparative analysis is Discourse Analysis (DA). Simply put, this methodology pursues the identification of the relationship existing between textual and social processes, framing discourse as “being productive of subjects authorized to speak and act, legitimate[ing] forms of knowledge and political practices”<sup>27</sup>. Thus, if we consider how the narratives here analysed have contributed to the processes that direct the formation of a nation’s -or part of it- sense of identity and the understanding of its own past history, and if we acknowledge how those narratives are being constructed through a specific kind of discourse, it follows that DA provides the theoretical ground and the practical tools to expose how societies and their history can be understood as framed through discursive interactions<sup>28</sup>. Specifically, the mechanisms and language strategies through which those historical narratives are framed within the text can be argued to represent the empirically observable manifestations of how knowledge production influences, impacts, and potentially even constitutes, social reality<sup>29</sup>.

As such, Discourse Analysis represents the most effective method to identify the consistent and comparable rhetorical and stylistic framing of the discourse that uphold the construction of the narratives of the vanquished, that I have classified under the terminology of Discursive Strategy, borrowing from the work of linguists such as E. Igwebuike, M. Reisigl and R. Wodak. They understand discursive strategies as an “intentional plan of discursive practices and tactics employed in discourses to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal”, or more simply, deliberate strategies to achieve a desired goal, including the representation of conflicts and the actors involved in either positive or negative lights<sup>30</sup>.

The first step consists in the identification of the context within which the language framing those discourses is being proposed, reproduced, and spread. Here, the context is that post-Civil War literary production, both in the United States and in Italy, that has produced the narratives of the vanquished with the main purpose to propose an alternative historical narrative meant to become the historical truth to be juxtaposed to the supposed unjust one told by the victors. This constitutes the unit of analysis. Specifically, I have selected a small but meaningful section of those works of literature, for a total of six authors, three for each country, that depict their version of history of those Civil Wars.

Moving further, two factors have determined the selection criteria for the authors, and their works: the contribution of the authors in developing the narratives of the vanquished object of this research, and the availability of these works using the easiest tool readily available to any non-

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<sup>27</sup>Richard Jackson, “Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Terrorism’ in Political and Academic Discourse”, *Government and Opposition* Volume 42, Issue 3 (2007), 396;

<sup>28</sup>Maarten Hajer & Wytse Versteeg, “A Decade of Discourse Analysis of Environmental Politics: Achievements, Challenges, Perspective”, *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* Volume 7, Issue 3 (2005);

<sup>29</sup>Jason Dittmer, “Textual and Discourse Analysis”, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography* (2018);

<sup>30</sup>Igwebuike, “Discursive Strategies and Ideologies”, 151-152.

professional interested in reading said works: an online research and a subsequent easiness of collecting said works. This second factor might sound odd, but is fundamental for the scope of this research. While we are analysing those narratives, we must be able to put ourselves in the shoes of those non-professionals that delve into this debate without a solid academic background. That is, an audience potentially at risk of being attracted and convinced by convenient revisionist claims, as it may lack the academic tools necessary to navigate the intricacies of contentious historical assertions. Simply put, the criteria consist in a combination of the recognized authority that has produced the source, and the availability and accessibility of the source itself.

With this premise settled, it must be noted that selecting and accessing the American sources has been the easiest task, likely because the terminology driving this entire research, that is the development of Lost Cause narratives in the aftermath of civil wars, originated from the very work of Southern journalist Edward E. Pollard. In fact, he titled his first work on the subject *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates*<sup>31</sup>, coining the term itself, and since its publication has heavily influenced the debate on the topic from the southern perspective, an influence that is still strongly felt to this day, in the media and in the political discourse of modern-day America<sup>32</sup>. The subsequent American author selected is Jubal A. Early, a former confederate officer, who authored the work *The Heritage of The South*<sup>33</sup>, also considered by American historians another prominent contribution to the development of said narrative, and argued to be the main originator of the deification of Robert E. Lee<sup>34</sup>. Finally, the last American author selected is the only one in this research whose work has not been intended as a historical production, but as a novel proper, and yet its historical impact and significance for the Lost Cause myth has been one of the most influential, especially within popular culture. The author in question is Thomas F. Dixon Jr., and the work selected is his *The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*<sup>35</sup> on which the 1915 movie *The Birth of a Nation* is largely based. Factually, historians largely agree that his work and the subsequent movie, both permeated by the proposition of the Lost Cause myth and a completely revisionist take on the era of Reconstruction, contributed to the second rise of the Ku Klux Klan and the resurgence and consolidation of said myths in vast sectors of the society, especially in the South<sup>36</sup>.

Moving further, presenting the Italian sources, it must be noted how, while all the works had been found and purchased on readily accessible e-stores as well, the lesser availability of options in different editions and reprints depicts a stark difference between the Italian and American cases. While the American sources vastly predate the Italian ones, they have been simultaneously easier to find and

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<sup>31</sup>Edward E. Pollard, *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates*, (New York: E. B. Treat & Co. Publishers, 1866);

<sup>32</sup>Domby, *The False Cause*; Richardson, *How The South*;

<sup>33</sup>Jubal A. Early, *The Heritage of The South*, (1867);

<sup>34</sup>Bonekemper, *The Myth of The Lost Cause*;

<sup>35</sup>Thomas F. Dixon Jr., *The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*, (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1905);

<sup>36</sup>Lloyd E. Ambrosius, "Woodrow Wilson and The Birth of a Nation: American Democracy and International Relations", *Diplomacy and Statecraft* Volume 18, Issue 4 (2007); Richardson, *How The South*.

to collect. By the logic of the market, this suggests that there might be an overall higher and more consistent demand concerning the American side of the question, irrespective of the historical influence Italian Fascism has had on the rest of the world since its rise to prominence in the 1920s.

This remarked, I was still able to find on the same e-stores the Italian works I settled upon. For the Italian sources, I have selected three pivotal public figures of the R.S.I.<sup>37</sup> that survived the war (and indictments for war-crimes) to establish almost immediately afterward the political party M.S.I.<sup>38</sup>, fully immersed in fascist ideology and plain far-right revisionism. Relevantly, the three authors selected, Pino Romualdi, Pino Rauti and Giorgio Almirante have all been journalists as Edward Pollard had been, but also served during the war, and two of them as officers, not unlike Jubal Early himself. Furthermore, with the creation of the R.S.I. after the 1943 armistice, Romualdi and Almirante held important political positions within the bureaucracy of the R.S.I., as federal secretary the former and as chief of staff of the Ministry for Popular Culture the latter. Relevantly, Pino Rauti, beside his minor role in the R.S.I., and his activity as a journalist after the war, has also been indicted for his alleged role in the Piazza Fontana bombing, and investigated for his possible involvement in the Piazza Della Loggia bombing, albeit never being convicted in either cases. Moreover, after the war all three have been founding fathers and main leaders of the M.S.I., and two of them have covered either the role of secretary or of president of the party. The following are their works selected for this research: by Giorgio Almirante, his *Autobiografia di un Fucilatore*<sup>39</sup> -that is, Autobiography of a Firing Squad Executioner- a title meant to be polemical against the accusations of having partaken in retaliation shootings and roundups during his militancy in the R.S.I.; by Pino Romualdi, his first collection of memoirs *Fascismo Repubblicano*<sup>40</sup> -that is, Republican Fascism- written in the immediate aftermath of the war, but published in a later period; by Pino Rauti, the first volume of a vast collection dealing with the history of fascism, titled *Storia del Fascismo: Nascita di una Nazione*<sup>41</sup> -that is, History of Fascism: Birth of a Nation. Interestingly, this selection allows us to analyse three post-war works concerning fascism that yet cover the debate from three different perspectives in time. With Almirante we have a work of polemical intent where he revisits his memories with an apologetical/revisionist aim, helped by almost two decades of insights distancing him from the events of the R.S.I.. With Romualdi, we can investigate an almost immediate reaction (albeit published in a later moment) that developed as early as in 1945 in response to the political development of post-war Italy and its new-found antifascist status-quo. Lastly, with Rauti we witness an attempt of rewriting an entire history of fascism starting from the very beginning, since before the war and the eventual collapse. Combined, these works allow us to trace the main

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<sup>37</sup>R.S.I. stands for Repubblica Sociale Italiana (Italian Social Republic): the fascist puppet state supported by Nazi Germany that took control of Northern Italy after the 1943 Armistice and that lasted until 1945 with the final liberation of Italy.

<sup>38</sup>M.S.I. stands for Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement): an Italian far right party founded after the war, yet tied with the historical experience of the R.S.I. during the war, and of which the name is clearly and purposely reminiscent.

<sup>39</sup>Giorgio Almirante, *Autobiografia di un Fucilatore*, (Milano: Le Edizioni del Borghese, 1973);

<sup>40</sup>Pino Romualdi, *Fascismo Repubblicano*, (Varese: SugarCo Edizioni S.r.l., 1992);

<sup>41</sup>Pino Rauti, *Storia del Fascismo: Nascita di una Nazione*, (Napoli: Controcorrente, 1976).

structures of the fascist post-war narrative, through a consistent presence of its main Discursive Strategy.

Preliminarily, I can anticipate that I have indeed identified a comparable Discursive Strategy similar in content and scope in its function toward the construction of the narratives of the vanquished, working as the foundation of a Lost Cause myth following a Civil War. As mentioned, I refer to this form of discourse as the Discursive Strategy (DS) sustaining the narratives analysed, and on the identification and presentation of this DS I focus the analytical comparison, by use of Discourse Analysis.

Still, before presenting the analysis and its results, the next chapter will properly identify the historical context so to provide the reader all the necessary knowledge pivotal for framing this work.

## II. The Rise and Resilience of the Myths: ‘Italiani Brava Gente’ and the Lost Cause of the Confederacy

To begin with, a reflection is required: the studies of contemporary history and of world politics cannot be kept successfully separated from one another, as if they were operating in different and isolated spheres of the human experience. As Domby argues, “teaching and writing history are inherently political”<sup>42</sup>. A world where the subject of contemporary history was to be taught and researched aseptically without invading the political, would be dysfunctional. The study of contemporary history informs the understanding of the modern social and political reality. In turn, the social and political reality in which we live in, can be useful lens to understand how the memories of the recent past, and the historical narratives handed down to us, have influenced the ways in which our history has been studied and transcribed. This is pivotal for the endeavour of this research, since it deals with the existence in those respective countries of two different and largely antithetical propositions of the history of their civil wars.

Albeit not completely new nor ground-breaking, this point is essential: a constructed and polished narrative over a country’s history can become that country’s historical, studied, and published truth. This is often so when on said constructed narratives a nation has engineered its own conceptualizations of national identity and unity. In this framework, the mythological hijacks the historical. Those national myths, that have been more correctly identified with the concept of convenient memories<sup>43</sup>, are meant to work as the foundations of a society that has rebuilt itself, often following a national crisis, and where almost always that crisis consisted in a major armed conflict, or as in our case, civil wars. Inevitably, the situation gets convoluted if parallel to the formation of the national founding myth as conceived by the victors, another myth arises proposed by the vanquished, that is mostly composed of selective, militant memories, serving whitewashed narratives and revisionist interpretations countering the veracity of the official history, inevitably risking undermining the political and institutional legitimacy of the post-conflict (victor) political system. Arguably, this is the situation for the two cases chosen for this research.

Truthfully, the concept of convenient narratives is not new, and it has been used for many European countries in the aftermath of the Second World War, even Allied ones. In some cases, the process of building a convenient narrative meant to inform the historical truth, has been going on well before the war had ended<sup>44</sup>. The convenient narratives, or convenient memories, we are referring to are the ones concerning resistance movements. In fact, those narratives have been labelled as such for a

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<sup>42</sup>Domby, *The False Cause*, 169;

<sup>43</sup>Philippe Buton & Lucia Bonfreschi, “La Memoria Collettiva Francese della Seconda Guerra Mondiale, Crisi d'Identità e Consolidamento Democratico”, *Ventesimo Secolo* Volume 4, Issue 7, (2005);

<sup>44</sup>Wendy Webster, “‘Europe Against The Germans’: The British Resistance Narrative 1940-1950”, *Journal of British Studies* Volume 48, (2009).

multitude of reasons. Mainly, because they were convenient in their depiction of Resistance movements and their role over the formation of the new sense of national identity that was needed for the reconstruction of the national unity, and of the European continent itself. Moreover, the concept of convenient memories virtually overlaps with the concept of selective and militant memories I presented in the introduction, as they serve the same purpose.

However, the intent of this research is not to undermine the role and merit of any resistance movement. What is of interest here is the understanding of how and to what extent those historical truths concerning the liberation of Europe from the Nazi-Fascists' yoke have been hijacked by convenient narratives that were considered of a very practical and strategic necessity for the legitimation of the foundations of a state, and the society within it. This clarification is necessary to introduce the context of the Italian case, for there is an important difference with the American one in the role played by those convenient narratives that were fostered by the victors. Precisely, as argued by Italian historians like Focardi, Filippi and Pavone, in many of those early narratives in the decades after the war, many memories have been underplayed, for the sake of a better reception from the public, to foster a more appealing sense of unity and national identity. Nonetheless, those convenient/selective memories were nowhere near to be charged with revisionism or negationist claims. On the contrary, they were still mostly founded on the undeniable truth of the merits of the Italian Resistance Movement's efforts and sacrifices made during the cobelligerent period of the war<sup>45</sup>.

## II.I Italy

As introduced, in Italy, the founding myth of the resistance, in the sense that upon this struggle the Italian Republic was built, rising from the ashes of Fascism, has its merits based on factual history. However, as some Italian historians argue, this founding myth contributed to a considerable overshadowing of the active military role played by the Italian armed forces, in both negative and positive circumstances for the entirety of the war (pre and post armistice). It is here that selective memories entered the stage. That is, the founding myth of the Resistance has been complicit to a sort of collective amnesia, often functional to the ruling government, where many acts of war, including war crimes, committed prior to the armistice in 1943 have been mostly wiped out from political discourse, official history, and public debates, while the contribution of the Italian Cobelligerent Armed Forces after the armistice has been mostly overshadowed in favour of the actions of the Resistance Movement. Furthermore, this has happened, as Focardi argues<sup>46</sup>, with the complicity of the Allies.

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<sup>45</sup>Focardi, *Guerra della Memoria*; Filippi, *MaPerché*; Pavone, *Una Guerra Civile*;

<sup>46</sup>Focardi, *Guerra della Memoria*, 8, 16-18.

The gravest consequence of this official narration has been the enduring inability or even unwillingness of Italy as a whole, from its ruling class to its population, to come to terms with its responsibilities as a former fascist state, allied to the Nazi regime, culpable of wars of aggression and war crimes for which it has never been put to trial, and that cannot all be framed as a side effect of being allied to the “bad Germans”<sup>47</sup>. For decades historians, politicians, journalist and even cinema proposed the image of the good Italian soldier, juxtaposed to the image of the bad German soldier, and supported by a constructed imagery of a lazy, undertrained, and poorly armed trooper. However, the reality of what the Italian Royal Army committed, for example, in Ethiopia or in the Balkans, depicts a less pleasant, more sordid reality<sup>48</sup>.

From the use of gas and concentration camps in the African colonies, to mass executions of entire villages in Greece and Yugoslavia, numerous army units committed deliberate acts of violence that fall under the definition of War Crimes, for which yet, almost none of the responsible has been indicted, let alone convicted<sup>49</sup>. Arguably, the lack of an Italian Nuremberg or Tokyo trial equivalent rested upon the immanent fragility of the international position of Italy at the dawn of the Cold War. As a former fascist state turned into a cobelligerent actor, Italy found itself in the odd position of being a defeated nation, yet sitting alongside the victors, even if not properly at the same table. Because of this fragility, Italy’s new ruling class, a majority of which took part in the resistance movement, to avoid punitive treatment from the victors and to solidify the newly founded republic, “[...] tended to extol their worth in fighting with the United Nations against Germany and Salò` fascism [...] and to minimize their previous responsibilities in the Axis war fought alongside the Third Reich”<sup>50</sup>.

In this framework, the construction of a master narrative putting the partisan resistance at the core of the founding myth of the Italian Republic set in motion a vicious self-perpetuating cycle. It provided Italian governments a tool to reconstruct a collective sense of national identity unscathed by the vicissitudes and deeds of Italy’s fascist past, and that could instead appeal to the glorious memories of Italy’s Risorgimento<sup>51</sup>. However, it simultaneously fostered a political environment that allowed all the parties involved to never truly engage with Italy’s responsibilities. Undeniably, the international situation dictated by the Cold War, where Communism and not Fascism represented the newfound danger for the Western Hemisphere resting under the aegis of the United States, had imposed on many European countries, including Italy, a new set of political priorities and concerns for national security. Notably, only the Italian Communist Party (PCI), and only initially and half-heartedly, would sustain

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<sup>47</sup>Filippo Focardi & Lutz Klinkhammer, “The Question of Fascist Italy’s War Crimes: The Construction of a Self-Acquitting Myth (1943 – 1948)”, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* Volume 9, Issue 3, (2004), 336;

<sup>48</sup>Focardi & Klinkhammer, “The Question of Fascist Italy”, 333, 338;

<sup>49</sup>Lidia Santarelli, “Muted Violence: Italian War Crimes in Occupied Greece”, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* Volume 9, Issue 3 (2004);

<sup>50</sup>Focardi & Klinkhammer, “The Question of Fascist Italy”, 335;

<sup>51</sup>Focardi, *Guerra della Memoria*, 24,37.

Greek and Yugoslavian demands to hand over former Fascist officers accused of War Crimes, and mostly due to reasons of political allegiances rather than an innate sense of international justice<sup>52</sup>.

However, what matters to this research is another aspect emerged from the fallout of the Resistance narrative and the corollary process of collective amnesia that took hold of Italy and Italians in relation to Italy's war crimes and political responsibilities. Specifically, in constructing a convenient narrative, or a founding myth, prioritizing the positive role partisans, civilians and even cobelligerent army units played after Italy's capitulation and changing of sides, Italy's fascist history was being hidden under the carpet without having had a serious and definitive debate over responsibilities or accountability<sup>53</sup>. If this phenomenon was exemplified from the very start by the presence of the former fascist general Badoglio at the head of the first cobelligerent government, it would later solidify further after the war, with the formation of a neo-fascist political party, the MSI, that embraced numerous former fascist personalities, both politicians and members of the military, pardoned following an official amnesty granted by the government in 1946, through the direct involvement of PCI's secretary Palmiro Togliatti, at the time Minister of Justice.

Internal fragility, necessity of unity and reconciliation and Cold War assets can all be summarized under the terminology of 'Reason of State' or 'National Interest'. However, the fact that the master narrative putting the resistance struggle at the core of the new conceptualization of the Italian sense of unity and identity was not incorrect, yet deliberately incomplete, eventually enabled the emergence of conflictual counternarratives that would end up threatening the very concepts at the base of that sense of unity and identity that the narrative was initially designed to foster. As Focardi and Santarelli have argued<sup>54</sup>, by privileging a narrative depicting Italians as either heroes of the struggles against Nazi-fascism or as victims of it, the historical and political discourses characterizing the entire era of the first republic allowed former fascists to foster their own counternarratives concerning Italy's fascist past and the meanings and implication of the cobelligerent period. Indeed, the fact that unity and reconciliation were conceived without a real political and social endeavour to face and process responsibilities and demand accountability, emboldened former fascists to generate their own myths on the nature of the last years of the war, and in some cases even of the war in its entirety.

Factually, in their distorted narratives, the armistice became a national tragedy or a farce, the liberation was turned into a military occupation under the imperialist allies, and fascist volunteers of the RSI were portrayed as defenders of Italy's honour, stained by the treacherous and coward King and his lackey Badoglio<sup>55</sup>. Moreover, the presentation of this parallel narrative was facilitated by the fact that Italy has never been put to trial for its Fascist crimes in front of the international community, nor

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<sup>52</sup>Focardi & Klinkhammer, "The Question of Fascist Italy", 331-335; Focardi, *Guerra della Memoria*, 18;

<sup>53</sup>Filippi, *Ma Perché*;

<sup>54</sup>Filippi, *Ma Perché*; Santarelli, "Muted Violence";

<sup>55</sup>Focardi, *Guerra della Memoria*.

real efforts have been made internally by subsequent Italian governments<sup>56</sup>. It could be argued that the necessity to heal the country took precedence over the ethical and moral duty of demanding accountability and facing responsibility.

## II.II U.S.A.

Unlike Italy's case, the vanquished Confederates did not need to exploit the loopholes created by the victors' construction of the official history, to propose their own convenient narratives. Precisely, they did not need for the victors to build a founding myth of the nation, since that kind of myth already existed, in the form of the American Revolutionary War, and before the Civil War it had been mostly enough to sustain both North and South's sense of national identity<sup>57</sup>. Yet, once the Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox to the Union General Ulysses S. Grant, the 9<sup>th</sup> of April 1865, ending 4 years of conflict, the seeds of the Lost Cause myth had been planted<sup>58</sup>. The reason is straightforward: as exposed in a well-crafted essay on the origin of the Lost Cause myth by Alan T. Nolan, after 4 years of conflict costing the nation more than 600'000 lives, and ending with the utter destruction of The South both physically and economically, southern leaders responsible for secession had to account for themselves, and justifications were needed<sup>59</sup>.

Precisely, as deftly exposed by Schivelbusch, the Lost Cause myth originated from a collective psychological coping mechanism needed to rationalize the defeat, effectively rewriting southern history in such a way that the cause of the war would not be identified with the one claimed by the North<sup>60</sup>. A rationalization that contemplated a *casus belli* different from the truthful yet dishonourable one of preserving at any cost the institution of slavery, the base of the South's entire system of Plantation Economy. The idea that the South, albeit defeated, had fought valiantly and honourably soundly screeched with the fact that there would have been little honour to be conceded if the preservation of slavery was to be recognised as the core reason behind all that unprecedented death and destruction. Thus, southerners feared that if the writing of history had been left to northerners, theirs would become the Official History, and confederates would have faced an unjust and unlawful judgment, not only by the North, but also by their future southern generations<sup>61</sup>.

To avoid this peril, in 1867 the Lost Cause Myth witnessed its editorial birth, through the writings of Virginian author, journalist, and wartime editor Edward Alfred Pollard, in his book *The Lost Cause: The Standard Southern History of the War of the Confederates*. If he has been the one to first

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<sup>56</sup>Focardi & Klinkhammer, "The Question of Fascist Italy";

<sup>57</sup>Gallagher & Nolan, *Myth of the Lost Cause*;

<sup>58</sup>Bonekemper, *The Myth of The Lost Cause*, 109;

<sup>59</sup>Gallagher & Nolan, *Myth of the Lost Cause*, 12-13;

<sup>60</sup>Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat*, 37-91;

<sup>61</sup>Bonekemper, *The Myth of The Lost Cause*; Gallagher & Nolan, *Myth of the Lost Cause*; McPherson, *This Mighty Scourge*.

write down, within an extensive narration, the construction of the myth (that owes to him its name), subsequent authors, with both historical works and novels, would hastily consolidate it. Its core tenet was the proposition that the cause for secession was not the preservation of slavery per se, but its relationship with the defence of states' rights, and corollary to this was the pretence that secession was lawful, for the Union was based on an agreed compact between sovereign states that could be rescinded at any time. Adding to this essential premise, further arguments would propose ideas, presented as historical facts, that: slavery was not the immoral and unlawful institution that the northerners depicted, and with proper time it would have died out eventually; northern radical abolitionists forced the South's hands with their acts and their influence on the presidency and the government; last but not least, southern forces had been defeated not by any lack of military ability and valour, but only by superior technology, logistical advantages and overwhelming numbers of the northern armies, commanded by unscrupulous and butchery generals the likes of Ulysses S. Grant or William T. Sherman, thus making the confederate's defeat even more glorious and honourable<sup>62</sup>.

However, while the work of Pollard signalled the birth of the myth as it is known today, other aspects factored in and contributed to its resilience over time. In fact, corollary to the narrative that the Civil War had to be understood as an act of northern aggression aimed at restricting individual states' rights that little had to do with the preservation of slavery, is the interpretation that southern authors and historians presented the public concerning the Reconstruction Era. Precisely, it was the depiction of the North, through both its military presence and its policies regarding the treatment of the freedmen, as the unlawful occupier and despotic oppressor of an already devastated South, that moved many Americans, especially white Americans from the South, into embracing the Lost Cause myth in its totality.

Emblematic of what just described is the first rise of the Ku Klux Klan, in 1865. Founded in Tennessee, by former Confederate veterans and led by former Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest, to oppose, by means of violence and intimidation, the Reconstruction policies meant to enforce the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments in all the States of the former CSA<sup>63</sup>. In response to evermore increasing violence on part of the Klan, then President Ulysses S. Grant expanded the federal reach by signing a series of Enforcement Acts, aimed also at combatting that organization and enforcing black vote<sup>64</sup>. However, while the President's intervention helped halting, albeit temporarily, most Klan activities, the expanded authority and reach of the federal government reinforced the narrative of an oppressed South, and white supremacy subsequently regained that little ground lost when policies made in D.C. were actively enforced by a standing Unionist Army. By 1876-1877, once support for

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<sup>62</sup>Ibidem.

<sup>63</sup>AnneMarie Brosnan, "'To Educate Themselves': Southern Black Teachers in North Carolina's Schools for The Freedpeople During The Civil War and Reconstruction Period 1862-1875", *American Nineteenth Century History* Volume 20, Issue 3 (2019); Domy, *The False Cause*; Michael Newell, "Comparing American Perceptions of Post-Civil War Ku Klux Klan and Transnational Violence", *Security Dialogue* Volume 51, Issue 4, (2020); Richardson, *How The South*;

<sup>64</sup>Newell, "Comparing American Perceptions"; Richardson, *How The South*.

Reconstruction had weaned even in the North, the South was again under Democratic Party rule, and segregation and white supremacy became once more the rule of the land, enforced under the Jim Crow laws<sup>65</sup>.

It is precisely under the Jim Crow's South that we witness another factor testifying the resilience of the Lost Cause myth, borrowing from it its main talking points, and founding upon it its *raison d'être*: the founding of many Confederate organizations, all premised on the preservation of Confederate heritage. Namely, a heritage of honour, valour, courage, independence, dignity, and most of all of proud defence of states' rights. A goal of preservation made all the more urgent when at the turn of the century many confederate veterans were starting to perish.

Amongst all those comparable organizations, one stood out as the most successful, both in terms of membership and public influence: the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). In fact, it is partially due to its strong and relentless involvement into the public sphere that the core revisionist narratives of the Lost Cause myth became actual subjects of history in school textbooks throughout the South<sup>66</sup>. Furthermore, it is also mostly due to its activism and lobbying that the entirety of the United States, but especially the South, had been disseminated with grandiose monuments depicting Confederate heroes casting their shadows usually upon cities' townhalls and courthouses. As historians A. Chamberlain and A. B. Yanus have pointed out, these "[...] monuments were clearly about promoting the Lost Cause" as much as it had been their effort to direct what was ought to be depicted in the history books<sup>67</sup>. Relevantly, as both Richardson and Domby argued, this vast effort of preservation, of erecting monuments and celebrating heroes, was actually serving the constant reaffirmation of white supremacy, embodied in Lost Cause mythology, essential for southern political elites to maintain a racial divide and thus keep at bay the dangers of class divide that could have instead brought white and black poor together and threaten the political dominance of the Democratic Party in the South, where Jim Crow rule was nothing more than a new iteration of pre-war Slave Codes under the not so different guise of the Black Codes<sup>68</sup>.

While the influence of the UDC is worth its own research, what matters here is the recognition of the impact that it had in reinforcing and spreading the core narratives of the Lost Cause myth, in a mutual co-dependent relationship. As Chamberlain and Yanus noted, not only these monuments functioned as places of memorialization, literally carving the Lost Cause myth into stone, but also served as organizational maintenance<sup>69</sup>, boasting internal membership, gaining public attention and support, that in turns signified more funding, which translated into intensified activism, from

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<sup>65</sup>Ibidem;

<sup>66</sup>Adam Chamberlain & Alixandra B. Yanus, "Monuments as Mobilization? The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Memorialization of the Lost Cause", *Social Science Quarterly* Volume 102, Issue 1, (2021);

<sup>67</sup>Chamberlain & Yanus, "Monuments as Mobilization?", 127;

<sup>68</sup>Domby, *The False Cause*, 47-61; Richardson, *How The South*, 16-22, 75-82, 128-133;

<sup>69</sup>Chamberlain & Yanus, "Monuments as Mobilization?", 127-128.

influencing even more schools' curricula to building even more Confederate monuments, perpetuating the cycle until a whole section of a nation internalized a revisionist version of its history under the guise of protecting its heritage and its way of life, which in the South meant upholding racial segregation and white supremacy.

The onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century then witnessed the publication of *The Clansman*, by Southern novelist Thomas Dixon Jr. in 1905, which a decade later would be adapted as a major motion picture and distributed nationwide with the title *The Birth of a Nation*, directed by David W. Griffith. The book and the movie were imbued with the core tenets of the Lost Cause narrative, depicting the first iteration of the Ku Klux Klan as an honourable order of white knights in white robes whose only aim was to defend the South from the illnesses brought about the northern oppressor, whose foolish and radical impositions during Reconstruction had almost been fatal to the South.

Arguably, since the Lost Cause myth already had fertile ground in every southern state, with some sympathies in the North, the success of the novel and the movie reinforced and expanded the solidity and reach of the myth itself. Moreover, in 1913 Woodrow Wilson became the first southerner politician to win the presidential elections since the Civil War, and not only was he an accomplished historian by his own right, but also a firm advocate of the Lost Cause<sup>70</sup>. Furthermore, he also happened to be a former fellow student of Thomas Dixon Jr., at Johns Hopkins University. Eventually, the ties between the President's support for the Lost Cause narrative and his friendship with Dixon collided when *The Birth of a Nation* was distributed in 1915, including in its screen-time quotations from the President himself, derived from previous academic work. Furthermore, as an unofficial endorsement, *The Birth of a Nation* became the first motion picture ever to be screened in the White House, an event that further reinforced the embracement of the Lost Cause narrative by an increasingly larger audience, regardless of the President's later attempts to distance himself from the movie<sup>71</sup>.

Relevantly, these events are often regarded as prime motors behind the second rise of the Ku Klux Klan, that took direct inspirations from both the novel and the movie in re-imagining the new Klan's wardrobe, so to embrace in front of the public's eye that vision of southern white brotherhood combined with military discipline and order that those works of fiction so meticulously created for it<sup>72</sup>. In fact, this second breath of life provided by the success of the movie and the novel had been so vital, that at its peak in 1924 the second iteration of the Klan boasted a membership nationwide between 4

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<sup>70</sup>Richardson, *How The South*, 135-136;

<sup>71</sup>Ambrosius, "Woodrow Wilson"; Roland G. Fryer & Steven D. Levitt, "Hatred and Profits: Under The Hood of The Ku Klux Klan", *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* Volume 127, Issue 4, (2012); Richardson, *How The South*;

<sup>72</sup>Fryer & Levitt, "Hatred and Profits"; Katherine Lennard, "Old Purpose, 'New Body': The Birth of A Nation and The Revival of The Ku Klux Klan", *The Journal of The Gilded Age and Progressive Era* Volume 14, Issue 4, (2015).

and 5 million people<sup>73</sup>. Eventually, only the combination of the Great Depression and the outbreak of WWII could lead to a temporary demise of the Ku Klux Klan in its latest iteration.

However, with the rise of the Civil Rights movement in the 50s and 60s, the Lost Cause myth narrative, that had never truly vanished in the Jim Crow's South, re-emerged in force alongside the third iteration of the Klan, as a direct response to the movement's calls for desegregation and equal rights<sup>74</sup>. For once however, the violent and outrageous crimes committed by the Klan in a desperate attempt to silence this movement and any person supporting it were no longer disregarded by either the public or the media, and in 1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson publicly condemned the Klan and its criminal, terrorist activities, asking for official investigation and claiming that the Klan's "[...] loyalty is not to the United States of America but instead to a hooded society of bigots"<sup>75</sup>. Most importantly, the year prior Johnson's administration had passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act, putting an end to segregation in public places and prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, colour, religion, sex or national origin<sup>76</sup>. While ample discussions are possible on the depth and range of its actual success, there is little to argue about its historical importance and the fact that it federally imposed the end of the Jim Crow regime in the South. From the 1970s onward, Klan membership declined as well as Klan related violence. However, as it has happened with the previous iteration of the Klan, its decline was not synonymous with demise, and this remained true with the Lost Cause narrative itself, of which the Ku Klux Klan had only been its most violent internalization and interpretation.

The Lost Cause myth's imagery never ceased to appeal a part of the public, and as witnessed with the latest events in US politics, where right-wing violence and upheaval coalesced with the grievances of working-class whites felt abandoned by an everchanging world economy, there can be found vestiges of the old Lost Cause narratives. The concepts of preserving Confederate heritage whenever there are talks about removals of confederates monuments, favouring individual states' rights against the overreach of the federal government, concerning a variety of topics from voting rights, abortion, same sex marriage and school education, and the preservation of the American way of life, that for half the nation meant racial segregation for generations, are often literally upheld by the physical and esthetical gesture of waving the Confederate Battle flag, during riots and political rallies alike<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup>George Lewis, "An Amorphous Code": The Ku Klux Klan and Un-Americanism 1915-1965", *Journal of American Studies* Volume 47, Issue 4, (2013), 978-979;

<sup>74</sup>Richardson, *How The South*;

<sup>75</sup>Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965, quoted in Lewis, "An Amorphous Code", 986;

<sup>76</sup>Eden B. King, Derek R. Avery & Paul Sackett, "Editorial: Three Perspectives of Employment Discrimination 50 Years After the Civil Rights Act—A Promise Fulfilled?", *The Journal of Business and Psychology* Volume 28, (2013), 375-376;

<sup>77</sup>Domby, *The False Cause*, 146.

### **III. THE ANALYSIS: A Discursive Strategy Sustaining The Vanquished Narrative**

This thesis hypothesises the existence of a commonality of rhetoric and content in the presentation of a vanquished narrative, identified as Discursive Strategy. This section unfolds how this comparable Discursive Strategy presents itself in the authors' own wording, with remarkable levels of consistency, for it is this consistency that would validate the soundness of my argumentation. The presentation of the results begins with what was recognised, through Discourse Analysis, the most evident and recurring trope characteristic of this Discursive Strategy sustaining the narratives of the vanquished. All subsequent corollary aspects contributing to this Discursive Strategy are presented as they unfold through the presentation of the authors' own writings.

Adhering to the academic understanding of Discursive Strategy presented in the methodology, a precise discursive strategy has emerged, used to manipulate the discourse to present under a positive light the actions of the vanquished, serving a precise political and social goal of redirecting responsibilities and blame, resulting in a revised and sanitised history favourable to the vanquished. While 'blaming the other side' appears a simplistic form of discursive strategy, it is pivotal for it generates enough room for manoeuvre in the political discourse, allowing the vanquished to stall, postpone or even avoid the moment of definitive accountability. As previously argued, it appeared that the lack, in both post-war Italy and USA, of a definitive moment of facing accountability contributed to the endurance of the Lost Cause myths here investigated. As such, the relevance of a discursive strategy aimed at shifting blame and responsibility should not be underestimated, no matter how simple it may appear superficially. Blaming the other side, creating a political dichotomy of us vs. them, is functional and corollary to the goal of avoiding accountability and thus enduring in the political system of the post-war period.

Truthfully, this process of shifting blames and responsibilities emerged so readily apparent after preliminary readings of the sources, that it sparked by itself the idea of the possible existence of a consistent Discursive Strategy common to the vanquished narratives, as it would begin to explain the effectiveness of Lost Cause myths and their appeal to right and far right politicians and political activists. It is mostly presented as a twofold process of arguing for the inevitability of the war while casting the blame for this inevitability upon the victors. Corollary to this argument of inevitability is the one presenting the outcome of the war as definitive evidence demonstrating how the blame must indeed be re-directed toward the victors. Specifically, the eventual outcome of the war is not to be interpreted as definitive proof of a moral superiority of the victors, but rather of their expert manipulative skills that allowed them to achieve the very result they were aiming at and for which they put forth so much effort in rendering the war inevitable to begin with. Specifically, in these authors' words, the war did not break out for a failure to compromise on their part. Rather, the compromises were meant to fail all

along, achieving thus the inevitability of the armed struggle. Moreover, I argue that the focus on specific recurring themes on part of these authors reflects the findings of previous and current historical literature dealing with the nature and effects of selective/convenient and militant memories within historical narratives, as discussed by the like of Focardi, Filippi, Richardson and others.

It is clearly useful then to begin by presenting immediately a direct extract from one of the Italian sources, where the author Romualdi, to express his personal stance, uses Mussolini's words:

They accuse me of having wished and prepared for war. Nothing could be more stupid or perfidious. If I had been listened to in London, Paris and Washington, when I warned them that peace was being threatened by their own dusty intransigence, war would have not broken out. It has been foolish to believe that unjust treaties, born from their own ambitious will and their particular interests, would have been eternal: that it would have been logical for the others to resign themselves, for life, to deal with their own political and moral inferiority and with misery [...]<sup>78</sup>

This quote was extracted from the first chapter of Romualdi's book, dedicated to constructing an image of Italy as a continuous victim of external events, always at the mercy of superior powers' will. Within this chapter, Mussolini himself is depicted as not being a man of war, but as someone who unwillingly accepted war as the extreme remedy for Italy's poor standing<sup>79</sup>. Arguably, from the incipit the author's aim is to establish a precise self-absolving narrative, for if the war was not Mussolini's fault, neither could it be the subsequent Civil War. Importantly, this first extract shows how similar in tone and vision the discursive strategy building the narratives of the vanquished can be, once compared. In redirecting the blame for the causes of war, its inevitability is associated with the political arrogance and blindness of the opposing side. Even though it must be noted that in this precise quote Mussolini is referring to the outbreak of WWII, and not yet of the Italian Civil War, this extract comes from the book of Romualdi, and represents a predictor of how both him and Almirante would blame the Civil War not only on the Allies, but on the Communist Party as well. To sustain my argument, it is necessary then to compare him with two quotes from the American case, starting with Pollard:

[...]in every measure that the ingenuity of avarice could devise, the North exacted from the South a tribute, which it could only pay at the expense and in the character of an inferior in the Union.  
[...] It was through such a train of legislation as we have briefly described that the South rapidly

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<sup>78</sup> Note to the reader: I am directly responsible for the translations in English of all the original Italian sources; Romualdi, *Fascismo Repubblicano*, 33;

<sup>79</sup>Romualdi, *Fascismo Repubblicano*,31.

declined in the Union. By the force of a numerical majority [...] a Union, [...] was made a conduct of wealth and power to the North, while it drained the South of nearly every element of material prosperity. [...] no resources would be left for the South than to remain helpless at the mercy in the Union or to essay a new political destiny. We shall see that in the year 1860 the North did choose to *act in mass*, and the South was thus [...] impelled to the experiment of Disunion.<sup>80</sup>

And again,

[...] of all the compromises proposed in this Congress for preserving the peace of the country, none came from Northern men, they came from the South, and were defeated by the North! [The Crittenden Compromise] It constituted under the circumstances the only possible existing hope of saving the Union. But unfortunately for the peace of the country, the North deliberately defeated it.<sup>81</sup>

For context, the first Pollard's quote is extracted from an early chapter of the book (III Chapter), dedicated to the construction of a militant narrative depicting the North as culprit of the South material demise, ongoing since before the Civil War had even been in its early gestation. The second quote is from Chapter V, focused on a convenient retelling of the events leading up to and during secession, starting with South Carolina's secession, where the proposition of the state's rights trope takes central stage.

Comparing these authors, whether the American author refers to the compromises on slavery, rebutted time and time again by Washington to impose its will upon the South, or Romualdi through Mussolini's words hints at the unwillingness of the French, British and Americans to revise the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles to accommodate for a different path of development for post-war Germany (and Italy), the blame appears to rest always on the same side, the opposing side, and going only in one direction. Furthermore, focusing on the Italian case, an almost verbatim rhetoric is used again when both Almirante and Romualdi explain their decision to join the R.S.I. after the 1943 armistice, at the onset of the Italian Civil War. Once again, the outbreak of the Civil War is blamed on the other side, the Allies alongside the treacherous King and General Badoglio, and in later arguments, even upon the communists. In a specific segment, Romualdi (once again from the first chapter)

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<sup>80</sup>Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 62;

<sup>81</sup>Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 93.

expresses himself again through the words of Mussolini, or what he claims to be Mussolini's words, since this quote is a personal recollection of a private meeting he had with him:

The are some old comrades that did not want to follow us [...] that now wonder why I have accepted to govern Italy after those disgraceful days of September. Yet, it would be necessary instead to ask if it would have been legit, according to them, to leave the Italians without any sort of government, at the mercy of the Germans. Surely, it would have been way more convenient for all of us to just don't care about it, but then an even greater shame would have befallen upon our national honour if not a single Italian would have rebelled against that ignoble and ill acted betrayal.<sup>82</sup>

By referring to those disgraceful days of September, the author is referring to the King's rushed and poorly managed escape toward the Allies, at that moment occupying southern Italy. The events concerning those days of September not only are used to justify their individual decisions arisen amidst the chaos the fleeing government had left behind, but are actually presented as the reason why the entire experience of the R.S.I. has to be understood as a practical and political solution mandated by the patriotic desire to save what could have been saved of Italy from the anger of the mighty Nazi Germany, furious for the betrayal. Not only to save their honour as soldiers and fellow comrades of the Germans for the previous three years, but a necessary evil to spare Italy the worst outcome. Relevantly, this last quote shows how the Discursive Strategy utilized originally to absolve Fascist Italy for its role in the outbreak of WWII is transposed in a slightly different guise, but to the same effect, to absolve those who decided to enrol in the R.S.I.. In fact, Romualdi insists on this concept again arguing that:

[...] the civil war, in spite of us, had entered a phase of full development which required prompt decision-making from the leaders and absolute obedience from the troop. Unless one foolishly willed to succumb, or leave free rein to the German authorities, always ready to directly intervene the moment our state machine had delayed beyond measure [...]<sup>83</sup>

In this quote from chapter four, dedicated to the actual formation of the R.S.I.'s government, Romualdi presents the Civil War as an event that was taking hold of the country despite the Fascist regime, and not as a direct consequence of it. Similarly, Almirante directs the blame for the Civil War towards the

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<sup>82</sup>Romualdi, *Fascismo Repubblicano*, 37;

<sup>83</sup>Romualdi, *Fascismo Repubblicano*, 54.

presence of the foreign Allied and German armies, with little to no reflection regarding the role played by the Fascist regime prior and during the entire war:

We were precipitated into the civil war by the presence of foreigners in our homeland. If there had not been foreign armies within Italy's borders, Italians would not have killed one another in the name of fascism and anti-fascism: evidence of this is the recognition that as long as Italy had not fallen into the hands of opposing foreign armies, the tragedy of the defeat had not yet degenerated into the gravest tragedy of the civil war.<sup>84</sup>

This quote was extracted from chapter six of Almirante's memoir, and it is titled *La Scelta* (that would translate into English as either 'the choice' or 'the decision'), dedicated to explaining the reason for his own and his fellow comrades' choice to enlist in the R.S.I. Notably, the self-absolving nature of the narrative transpires throughout this chapter. Relevantly, not only Almirante's argument is consistent with the Discursive Strategy of shifting blame and responsibilities, but he also willingly ignores that the struggle between fascism and antifascism had not been a victimless one prior to the conflict. The Fascist Regime rose to power by forcefully and violently repressing any opposition. The imprisonment, torture and murder of political dissidents constituted effective means to assert and maintain control whenever it was deemed necessary. The presence of foreign armies may have escalated the political struggle between fascists and anti-fascists into a proper armed conflict, but it was not the original spark that lighted the fire.

This rhetoric of blaming the Civil War on the other side, coupled with the risk of a possible German occupation, has evolved, 20 years later, and mutated into a twofold argumentation, presented in the following chapter seven, titled *La Guerra Civile* (English: 'The Civil War'), where a more general but single threat posed by all the invading/occupying armies (which indirectly depicts the Germans and the Allies as an equal level of threat), was accompanied by a brand new accusation moved against the Communist Party, which according to Almirante shares the blame for the Civil War with the Allies and the Germans, for it had been the main Italian political group to gain political stature from the outbreak of the Civil War. Specifically:

[...] A third truth must be remarked. Who benefitted, amongst the Italians, from the civil war? To whom must we refer the classical [...] *cui prodest*? There exists no doubt: to the fanatics on all sides, if we were to look at the individual vicissitudes; to a single, organized political force, if we are to look at the event in its political aspects: the communist party. [...] if it is necessary

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<sup>84</sup>Almirante, *Autobiografia*, 100.

to reach a logical and coherent interpretation of that frightening drama, if it is necessary to embark on the research of the masterminds which wanted the Italians hating each other's and throwing themselves into [...] the civil war, then we must go back to the objective responsibilities of the communist party, that through that path alone could become [...] the dominant and determining element of the event in an Italy where the Germans on one side and the Anglo-French-Americans on the other were the foreign masters.<sup>85</sup>

Evidently, this argument proposed by Almirante mirrors the one by Pollard presenting the Republican Abolitionist as the real warmongers of the Civil War, using the post-war political status-quo and the current (at the time of his writing) hegemony of the Republican Party to post-facto argue that the whole war had been rendered inevitable by the sole blind desire to dominate and unwillingness to compromise proper of the radical abolitionists. From an extract of chapter XXXIV, focused on Pollard's interpretation of the political divide between the Democratic Party of the North and the Republican Party, which he refers to time and time again as the Black Republican Party, Lincoln's party is yet again identified as the sole responsible for the ongoing Civil War. Pollard argues:

The proclaimed purpose of the war of the Black Republican party upon the Constitution, and of the organization which they proposed of the Union, was the abolition of slavery, and the securing of equal rights before the law to the African race. [...] These citations are abundant to show the animus and purposes of the men in the front rank of the Republican party [...] There were very few, if any, who were not determined to use the war as an instrument of abolition, and to prosecute it, not merely for restoring the authority of the Union, but also for securing the extinction of slavery in the South. [...] Such were the antecedents, character, and composition of the party which had succeeded in the Presidential election of 1860. [...] Composed of extreme fanatical elements, and brought for the first time face to face with the serious and grave responsibilities of office, under that Union to which they were obliged to swear support, and which they have designed to subvert. [However] They had received no support in one half of the Union; and in the other half, they had triumphed by only a majority of suffrages. They could not command a majority in either House of Congress [...] Thus [...] it was the interest of the Republican party [...] that the secession movement should go on, and that the threatened dissolution of the Union should be consummated. [...] the Black Republican party, on its accession to power, wanted dissolution and wanted war, but we are now aware that it is now denied. It is a historical truth. It is a historical conviction, confirmed alike by the action, the

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<sup>85</sup>Almirante, *Autobiografia*, 101-102.

interests, and the avowals of the party. It is indeed a fact which they had taken no pains to conceal. [...] The peace party was a peace party no longer.<sup>86</sup>

Arguably, the content and the wording of the last two quotes are strikingly similar. In other words, they share a comparable Discursive Strategy. One could switch the words Republican Party and Abolitionists in the American source with that of Communists and Communist Party in the Italian one and both content and rhetoric would mostly stay unaffected. In fact, the tropes of economic hegemony and the imposition of an unreasonable will to maintain the current political status-quo on part of the opposition, when not even the forcing of an even stronger will to supersede that very status-quo with a new one where the opposition could come on top in a state of total political hegemony, as presented in the sources, are almost interchangeable between the two cases and represent another corollary element to this Discursive Strategy sustaining their narratives. Factually, in the last two quotes presented, the only minor difference is represented by the fact that Pollard has only one target, politically speaking, being the Republican Abolitionists, whereas Almirante wishes instead to kill two birds with one stone -if not even three, considering the looming threat of the German occupation- by targeting both the Allies and the Italian Communists.

Reflecting on this aspect, it could be inferred the logical reasoning behind the devising of such a Discursive Strategy sustaining the narratives of the vanquished. Arguably, once a reader is led to at least consider similar premises, this last element of *cui prodest?* -as Almirante put it- can serve an ulterior motive: justifying those political and military actions of the vanquished that cannot be exempted from a qualitative judgement even by the authors themselves. Once again, this adheres to both the academic understanding of Discursive Strategy and the concept of militant memories, aimed at depicting under a positive light particular actions or actors. Specifically, we are talking of the justification of morally ambiguous political and military actions, achieved by depicting said actions as necessary means to obtain or at least preserve an economic independence, recognised as the basis of any state's survivability and prosperity. As a direct example, here is how Romualdi acknowledges, in his first chapter, the loss of personal liberties that affected Italians following the rise of Fascism and its process of militarization:

[...] too many forget the profound reasons that drove Mussolini to demand such a discipline. He used to call that kind of freedom, which others accused him of being a denier, the <<freedom of misery>>; he held as illusory [...] any kind of liberty recognised to the individual within a poor nation, economically and politically subjected to the desires and interests of richer and stronger nations. Real alone is the freedom granted to the citizen by a relative economic and political

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<sup>86</sup>Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 559-562.

independence and by national sovereignty. The freedom from necessity, as today is said with Rooseveltian rhetoric by the victors of that tragic match. [...] Only once specific needs and rights had been recognised, the Italians, alongside all the other poor peoples could have then indulged themselves in all the liberties. That is because [...] freedom is a luxury that poor individuals and poor nations cannot easily afford, if they wish to live and wear some clothes.<sup>87</sup>

Unsurprisingly, fascist historian and journalist Pino Rauti proposes a similar interpretation when addressing the loss of civil liberties brought about the Fascist Regime in exchange for the betterment of economic and social conditions. For context, the following quote was extracted from the fourth chapter of the first section of his book, and is dedicated to the presentation of the social innovations the Fascist Party had implemented in the 20 years of fascist rule prior to the war, presented as original implementations for the benefits of the Italian families, but that were factually based on already existing national institutions, often simply renamed, mostly inherited from previous administrations. To enhance the merits and absolve the misdeeds of Fascist Italy, Rauti depicts a drastic and dramatic picture of Italy's conditions preceding the rise of Fascism:

A cemetery of sort, afflicted by chronic poverty, a land to be left behind without any regret, often with hatred and disgust: this is what Italy had been like for the preceding fifty years. And it does not make sense, from this point of view, [...] to overly focus over the fact that fascism, in order to achieve certain goals, limited or completely eliminated the so-called democratic liberties; for imposing masses of Italians, they coincided with the freedom to starve, or to survive by moving thousands of kilometres away, and leaving their family behind, often for good.<sup>88</sup>

Arguably, framed within a similar dramatic fashion, any action of the opposition construed as a threat against economic independence can easily be reinterpreted as an act of aggression. Thus, presented under a negative light. Once more, such an argument can be found almost verbatim in both the Italian and American texts. In chapter six of Romualdi's book, dedicated to his own recollections over the last weeks of the R.S.I. before the collapse, between talks of possible last stands or daring escapes toward Switzerland, he once more proposes the same self-absolving narrative regarding Fascism, needed more than ever in a moment of impending final catastrophe, for which he could not fathom to bear the blame nor the judgment. In Romualdi's words:

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<sup>87</sup>Romualdi, *Fascismo Repubblicano*, 26-27;

<sup>88</sup>Rauti, *Storia del Fascismo*, 65-66.

[...] it cannot be denied that economic dependency is just another form of foreign government. Freedom from necessity, as it has been told from Roosevelt & co. Agreed. [...] If it is indeed true that an economic crisis can lead in a determining manner to spark political crises; if it is true that always, at every moment and in every continent, one of the leading causes of lesser and greater conflicts has been the economic one, nobody can then deny that economic dependency thwarts states' independence and national sovereignty. [...] The fact remains in all its rawness: three great imperialist powers, already owning nine tenths of the world's wealth, have crushed the hopes, the velleity if you wish, but also the vital necessities of some allied countries in an attempt to re-establish the equilibrium that has been unfortunately broken at Versailles.<sup>89</sup>

For comparison, this is how Pollard addresses the economic demise of the South, with another extract from chapter III, seemingly reaffirming the presence of a comparable Discursive Strategy:

It has been a persistent theory with Northern writers that the singular decline of the South in population and industry, while their own section was constantly ascending in the scale of prosperity, is to be ascribed to the peculiar institution of slavery. But this is the manifest nonsense that was ever spread on the pages of history. Negro slavery had no point of coincidence with the decline referred to; it had existed in the South from the beginning; [...] the true causes of the sectional lapse, in which the South became by far the inferior part of the American Union in every respect of material prosperity, will naturally be looked for in the peculiar history of that Union. [...] By far the more important cause of that decline [...] was the unequal legislation of Congress and the constant discrimination of the benefits of the Union as between the two sections of the country. [...] By the two measures, of the exclusion of slavery from the Territories and the interdiction of the slave trade, Congress turned the tides of population in favour of the North, and confirmed in the Northern majority the means of a sectional domination. [...] The early history of the tariff makes a plain exhibition of the stark outrage perpetrated by it upon the Southern States.<sup>90</sup>

Notably, there arguably exists a coincidence of themes in the accusations directed toward the victors: a pure will of economic and political domination oppressing any chance of prosperity for the future vanquished. Additionally, this type of argument is often reinforced with statements aiming at underlining the hypocrisy of the opposition, usually depicted as the holder of vast economic resources

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<sup>89</sup>Romualdi, *Fascismo Repubblicano*, 144-145;

<sup>90</sup>Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 57-60.

(hence the trope of economic hegemony, in turn a predictor of political hegemony), obtained with equally violent and despicable means. In fact, in such manners are presented the economic superiority of the industrial North in the USA before the Civil War, or the economic hegemony, achieved through centuries of colonialism, of the Great Imperialist Powers (UK, USA and France) before the outbreak of WWII. More interestingly, the argument concerning British colonialism and imperialism (of which the slave trade had been a fundamental aspect) constitutes one of the common theme used by both Italian and American vanquished in their post-facto argumentations in favour of their respective Lost Causes. This is understandably unavoidable in so far as colonialism, imperialism and slavery are faces of the same coin, laying behind the very concept of economic hegemony which is put under scrutiny under this trope in both the Italian and American cases. Either to justify the continuation of slavery in the South, or to excuse the pre-war military expansionism of Fascist Italy, the argument heavily relies on the exercise of accusing of hypocrisy the opposition. In this vein, the South accuses the North of having benefited from the slave trade to build up the capital that later allowed its industrialization, and only renounced it when its exploitation in the South had been recognized as a threat to the North's economic hegemony.

An argument that was found so convincing and convenient for the proposers of the Lost Cause narrative, that it left the pages of southern history books to find its way into actual novels. Specifically, in Dixon's *The Clansman*, where in two distinct moments of the novel, a variation of this argument is proposed to the reader. At first, through the words of President Lincoln. Later, in a debate between two fictional characters, a former confederate officer and the daughter of a fictional abolitionist leader, involved in a Shakespearian romance, acting as the two main protagonists. In the first case, the President is depicted in a heated argument defending his firm conviction to not indulge in petty vengeance and senseless cruelty against the vanquished. Through his 'own' words, the President is made recite some of the most recurring Lost Cause flagship claims:

[...] 'It was the fear of the black tragedy behind emancipation that led the South into the insanity of Secession. [...] Is not the North equally responsible for slavery? [...] Have not the Southern people paid the full penalty of all the crimes of war? Are our skirts free? Was Sherman's march a picnic? [...] In my place, radicalism would have driven the border states into the Confederacy, every Southern man back to his kinsman, and divided the North itself into civil conflict. [...] You cannot indict a people. Treason is an easy word to speak. A traitor is one who fights and loses. Washington was a traitor to George III. Treason won, and Washington is immortal. Treason is a word that victors hurl at those who fail.' [...]<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Dixon, *The Clansman*, 33-35.

Later in the novel, a variation of the argument that the North had been as much responsible for slavery as the South is presented during a conversation between two lovers, a former Confederate Army officer and the daughter of an influential -albeit fictional- northern radical abolitionist:

[...] ‘The gulf between us is real and very deep. Your father was but yesterday a slaveholder.’ Ben grinned: ‘Yes, your slave-trading grandfather sold them to us the day before.’ [...] ‘The South is no more to blame for negro slavery than the North. Our slaves were stolen from Africa by Yankee skippers. When a slaver arrived at Boston, your pious Puritan clergyman offered public prayer of thanks that ‘A gracious and overruling Providence had been pleased to bring to this land of freedom another cargo of benighted heathen to enjoy the blessings of a gospel dispensation’. [...] ‘Twenty-three times the Legislature of Virginia passed acts against the importation of slaves, which the king vetoed on petition of the Massachusetts slave traders. Jefferson made these acts of the king one of the grievances of the Declaration of Independence [...] The Southern men in the convention which framed the Constitution put into it a clause abolishing the slave trade, but the Massachusetts men succeeded in adding a clause extending the trade twenty years’.<sup>92</sup>

Notably, even though through the words of fictitious characters or imagined conversations held by historical figures, Dixon proposes basically the same interpretation of the history of American slavery proper to the Lost Cause mythology, putting on the same level, and thus indirectly accusing them of hypocrisy, the northern traders and the British rulers that allowed and supported slavery in the colonies to begin with.

Seemingly, and inevitably, since they have been the original proposers of said mythology, in both Pollard and Early the accusation of hypocrisy would include the British Empire from which, the authors argue, the abolitionist movement originated from, before reaching the United States. As the Discursive Strategy supporting this narrative demands, the authors note how the British, not unlike their northern compatriots, have renounced slavery and the slave trade only when it stopped being lucrative, and only after it helped build their gargantuan colonial empire, the might of their industry and their commanding Royal Navy. In the fourth chapter of his work, Early discusses the causes leading to secession, and focuses on the argument of states’ rights, yet he cannot avoid the paradox of denying the role played by the preservation of slavery when that is the only states’ right he focuses on for the entirety of the chapter. It is within this context that he remarks on the hypocrisy of northern elites, that as former slave traders long benefitted from the very trade that the British, now also labelled as hypocritical abolitionists, bestowed upon the world. In Early’s words:

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<sup>92</sup>Dixon, *The Clansman*, 83-84.

In the year 1834, the British parliament passed an act for the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies [...] Canada, Australia, New Zealand and her possessions in the East Indies furnished an ample field for British settlement and colonial trade, which dwarfed into very diminutive proportions the British interests in the West Indies. Great Britain could therefore afford to be philanthropic and at the cost of £20,000,000 (about \$96,000,000) she gave liberty to a very few more than 600,000 slaves, who were placed in a condition of apprenticeship for several years to enable the planters to accommodate themselves to the new order of things. She had abandoned the slave trade after, by the loss of the American colonies, she had ceased to have a large interest in the subject of slavery, and this grant of £20,000,000 for the freedom of all the negro slaves left in her dominions, was the final atonement she made for the millions she had consigned to slavery, and the millions who had been cast overboard, to meet the watery grave, on their route to slavery. To make her own gracious act more conspicuous, she turned propagandistic and commenced denouncing the system of slavery which she had been so instrumental in fixing upon the world, as un-Christian, inhuman and barbarous. [...] but she made no restitution of the hundreds of millions she derived from the profits of the inhuman traffic as she now styled it, and which had assisted in building up her marine, manufacturers and commerce.<sup>93</sup>

Arguably, comparing this argument with the one addressed in the paragraph above, the gist of the narrative concerning the hypocrisy of the opposition remains the same. Deconstructed, it would sound like this: Since THEY have been able to build their military and economic power by exploiting these particular means (Slave Trade, Colonialism), WE should be allowed the same (Southern Slavery Based Economy, Italian attempted Colonialism and Imperialism), and any argument against such claim should be regarded as an expression of hypocrisy, if not even of political aggression, as a threat against economic survivability. More importantly, if the morality of the victors is not being questioned, it follows, for the authors, that their side should not be questioned either, especially by the victors.

Evidently, the argument presented and deconstructed so far, supported by the primary sources, and concerning the Discursive Strategy sustaining the narrative of the vanquished, could be summarized as follow: a technical effort on part of the authors under scrutiny to rewrite the history of these events through a strategic narrative in such a way that it may, if attractive and effective enough, successfully redistribute blame and responsibilities in a pattern that differs from the History written by the victors. A restless attempt to cast doubts and shadows over the supposed moral superiority of the victors, and when possible, to accuse the victors of plain hypocrisy. Truthfully, if through a combination of deceptively sound arguments mixed with revisionist reinterpretations of ill-documented facts readers

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<sup>93</sup>Early, *Heritage*, 39.

could be convinced that the 'good guys' were not so good after all, they could as well be convinced that the 'bad guys' were not so bad either. Consequentially, if one could succeed in such an endeavour, it would be possible to propose such arguments as the idea that the preservation of slavery was not the cause of secession, or that Mussolini founded the R.S.I. with the sole aim to safeguard Italy and its people from the Germans' wrath. Germans that would have never become Italian allies to begin with if the Second World War had not been made inevitable by the arrogance and blindness of the Imperialist Powers. As such, the authors can argue that their respective civil wars are to be blamed on the other side, the victors' side, and readers back then and now could be deceived to believe that this history, their version of history, is the truthful one.

### **III.I Blame, Responsibilities, Inevitability: Putting the Results into Perspective**

Pivotaly, it must be acknowledged that the two Italian governments that arose after the armistice were both contending for the role of sole legitimate government of a single Italy. The Italian Civil War witnessed two sides fighting theoretically for a single whole. The R.S.I. was fighting for a fascist Italy under the Nazi's aegis while the Monarchy in the South was fighting for an anti-fascist Italy alongside the Allies. In this fashion, both sides could contend that ideologically and politically they were fighting for the preservation of Italy, to spare the nation from total devastation and dissolution. Importantly, it is this narrative, developed after the armistice, that has enabled the Fascists to argue that their re-doubled commitment to their German ally had to be understood as a pragmatcal necessity dictated by the likelihood of a total Nazi occupation of northern Italy. Consequentially, even the most diehard fascists that joined the ranks of the R.S.I. could argue, after the war and within the frame of this convenient memory, that their choices were driven by the patriotic desire to "save what could be saved"<sup>94</sup>. To support this stance, they would often note how the Allies were nowhere near to speedily invade northern Italy and relieve it from the occupier. As earlier discussed, this argument maintains that the abrupt and ill devised retreat of the King to the South left the Fascists in the North with little room for different courses of action than the one they took.

While this last argument may have some merits, as the King's rushed retreat had indeed left half of Italy, including many military commands, in utter decisional chaos in the most crucial of moments, the narrative of blaming such radical choices as direct consequents of the other faction's actions is not that far apart from the argument made by Confederates blaming their choices of secession on the North and its political actions. However, the first immediate impression that arises from this acknowledgment, when comparing the Italian sources and the American sources, concerns the style behind the narratives proposed, or more correctly, a different undertone: they conceal a different level

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<sup>94</sup>Romualdi, *Fascismo Repubblicano*, 17.

of awareness in respect of the post-war status quo in which the authors ought to publish their historiographical endeavours. Precisely, even though in both cases we are dealing with the aftermath of a civil war, the postbellum South of the disgruntled Confederacy differs, socially, economically, and most importantly geopolitically, from the reality of post Second World War Italy.

Specifically, it is evident that while both American and Italian authors do propose a revisionist interpretation of their respective histories, the Italian authors appeared as if being aware of the necessity to propose their arguments without causing too much open controversy, for the sake of political survivability. In simpler words, on the one hand, who fought or supported the Union during the Civil War did not necessarily need to be an abolitionist or an anti-racist as much as he just needed to abide by the premise that the present and future survival of the United States and its democracy rested on the overcoming and eventual defeat of the seceding States, at least until the army had been formed on a voluntary basis (before the implementation of conscription). On the other hand, whoever took up arms in Italy against the R.S.I. after the 8th of September 1943 was by necessity, from that very moment, an anti-fascist even if he had not been one before. This motivates the following realization: the American authors, particularly at the time of the first publications, could still meet the favours of a northern public as long as they appealed to sentiments like race-superiority and states' rights, meaning that their work would cause much less fuzz and rebuttal, and certainly would not have been interpreted as an attack to the standing government by the fact of its mere existence, albeit the overwhelming amount of criticism present, especially regarding the era of Reconstruction. On the other hand, the Italian authors appear aware of the fact that by necessity of fate and events, the post-war Italian status-quo was an anti-fascist status quo, and appealing to the other side is and was a harsh and somewhat impractical task, if taken without precautions.

One of the first consequences of this differentiation is that the Italian authors read and sound even more self-absolving, and thus apologetic, in their writings in comparison to their American colleagues, although being apologetic may not have been their conscious intent. This transpires for example when we note how the Italian authors carefully avoid acknowledging Italian involvement in war crimes, especially when that would encompass responsibilities concerning the Holocaust. As already pointed out, this is partially due to the fact that neither the post-war Italian Government nor the Allies have ever been fully committed to forcing Italy to face an international judgment, as instead happened for both Germany and Japan. Moreover, while it could still happen with some die-hard extremists, it would have been impossible for former fascists to argue with a straight face for the 'merits' of war crimes and deportations, as instead many proposers of the Lost Cause myth would constantly due regarding their interpretation of slavery and its 'civilizing' merits. In fact, a Pollard (for reference, chapters II, IV, XXI of his *The Lost Cause*) or an Early (for reference, chapters II, IV and VII of his *The Heritage of the South*) would spend much more ink trying to justify or downplay the brutality of slavery than Almirante and Romualdi would to even touch upon the argument of roundups and

shootings. On the contrary, the only time Almirante writes about the delicate subject of Italian deportations of the Jews, as eventually enacted by the RSI government, he does so only to remind the reader of the one “Jewish friend” he helped escape that fate<sup>95</sup>. In the same guise, Romualdi seems more concerned to remind the reader of the crimes committed by Tito’s partisans, without contextualizing them within the complex history that was the Fascist occupations of the Balkans<sup>96</sup>. Arguably, it is exactly the deliberate avoidance or downplaying of such pivotal events that betray this unconscious apologetic undertone in the Italian sources, that is instead considerably less overt in the American ones. Nevertheless, in both cases the narrative remains self-absolving. If the Italian authors have chosen silence to avoid judgment for war crimes and their involvement in the Holocaust, the American authors kept firmly attempting to twist the narrative over the merits of slavery and its role in the outbreak of the Civil War.

In fact, underplaying and mischaracterizing some of the most pivotal aspects of the war and its causes is exactly what is being exhibited when the American authors attempt to sanitise slavery throughout their writings. If we could momentarily ignore what we have presented thus far, we could argue that after a thorough analysis of the main sources regarding the proposition of the Lost Cause narratives and mythology, it would appear that southern authors were indeed right in arguing that the American Civil War was in fact a war fought for defending states’ rights and lawful institutions. The argument could end here and now were it not for the fact that those authors conveniently misrepresent how those states’ rights and lawful institutions are meant to be understood. That is, states’ rights and lawful institutions refer mainly to the rights of private property and the constitutional recognition of slavery as a legitimate institution recognized and defended by states’ legislatures, and reaffirmed in the framing of the Confederate Constitution. The reader is bombarded with the dual trope that slavery was not as bad as the North depicted it, and, as we have already seen, the North was as much responsible for the existence of slavery as the South.

Consequentially, as much as those authors insist that the South did not secede for the purpose of preserving slavery, this is exactly what transpires from reading and analysing their words. As discussed in the introduction, this is exactly one of the Lost Cause myths that Bonekemper has thoroughly deconstructed in his studies<sup>97</sup>. In concert with his argument, it appears clear that every time these Lost Causers argue for the rights of property and state institutions, they are arguing for the preservation of slavery. This is all the more evident the moment we stop to ponder on the fact that as long as black slaves were legally recognized as property and not individuals, these authors did not need to mention slavery specifically -albeit they would do it nonetheless- once they had spent enough time advocating for the respect of a citizen’s right to own and defend his private property or a state’s right

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<sup>95</sup>Almirante, *Autobiografia*, 133;

<sup>96</sup>Romualdi, *Fascismo Repubblicano*, 134;

<sup>97</sup>Bonekemper, *The Myth of The Lost Cause*, 73-74.

to preserve its existing institutions, under the guise of Conservatism<sup>98</sup>. Evidence for this argument is brought about by those same authors when they argue the opposite view that purports the Union as the culprit behind the real cause and motives of the war, being transformed from a defence of states' rights for the seceding states, to a war to end slavery unleashed upon the South by a tyrannical North. To that effect, in chapter XXI of his work, dedicated to discussing the role played by the North in the war, Pollard went as far as declaring the emancipation proclamation a crime. In his own words:

Thus was consummated the triumph of the Abolition party of the North. Thus was [...] avowed the war upon slavery, and thus deliberately planned the robbery of the Southern people [...] Its bold iniquity was traced [...] The deliberate attempt [...] to do that which was repugnant to civilization and all morals. The misinterpretation of the emancipation proclamation, as a deed of philanthropy, was absurd enough. [...] an act of malice towards the master rather than one of mercy to the slave. A crime was attempted in the name of liberty and humanity; and various hypocritical pretences were used to cover up what was an unholy infatuation, a ruthless persecution, a cruel and shameful device, adding severity and bitterness to a wicked and reckless war. [...] in the place of resurrected and promised liberty to four million blacks, the North had the destruction of that liberty which the past eight hundred years had awarded to the Anglo-Saxon race.<sup>99</sup>

Arguably, unless one were to concede those authors a free pass on what could be considered cognitive dissonance enabling them to depict the war, and not slavery, as an act of aggression, a crime, a robbery, and a destruction of liberty, waged by the North upon the South, we must embrace the realization that the moment these authors recognise that the Confederate States of America were born with the goal of preserving southern states' rights and lawful institutions, they are necessarily admitting that the Confederacy was factually created with the preservation of slavery as the main purpose. Ultimately, whether it is a case of cognitive dissonance, or of self-deception functional to the development of a different historical narrative, or a combination of both, Confederates did indeed fight for their rights and freedom: those specific rights and freedom allowing them to hold other people in chains and in endless servitude.

Notably, looking at the Italian sources, a similar case of apparent cognitive dissonance emerges when the menace represented by the possibility of Germany occupying northern Italy is proposed to justify the creation of the R.S.I. and the continuation of the war effort alongside the Germans, while ignoring any fascist involvement in war crimes and deportations. As argued, this argumentation adheres

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<sup>98</sup>Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 178;

<sup>99</sup>Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 359-362.

to the Discursive Strategy aiming at shifting blame and responsibilities for the outbreak of the Civil War. Moreover, within this argument, the impression of cognitive dissonance being present in the Italian sources emerges from what is implied at its core: the recognition of the superior evilness always represented by their very ally, Nazi Germany. Interestingly, the way the fascist authors have reframed the role of the Germans, is not that different from that depiction of the German soldier as the newfound yet primordial enemy that had already took place within the imaginary of those Italian, on the other side, joining the Resistance, as discussed by Pavone<sup>100</sup>. Relevantly, for both the American and the Italian case, it seems likely that it was to put a band aid on these expressions of apparent cognitive dissonance, that those authors focused their efforts of blame-shifting on the idea that the very outcome of the war constituted definitive evidence of its inevitability: those who are now benefiting from the current status quo are the ones responsible for it. The Imperialists, the Communists, the Radical Abolitionists.

Factually, the only way they can present a convincing narrative that could rewrite history in such a way that it might convince future generations of the worthiness of their struggle, is by proposing the reader their ideological convictions misrepresented as facts. What they do is proposing their own interpretation of specific pivotal events labelled as “historical conviction”, as Pollard himself word it<sup>101</sup>, that must be embraced as factual the moment subsequent events can be interpreted in the light of that first convenient representation. In the American case for example, with a similar strategic approach toward their narrative, they can argue that the Republican Party passing the Emancipation Proclamation at first, and eventually the 13th Amendment later, constitutes factual validation for their historical conviction regarding the real cause and motives of the Civil War. Specifically, the proponents of the Lost Cause narrative depict the Republican Party as the real culprit of the war, for in their version of the narrative, Republicans needed “dissolution and wanted war”, as war represented the only means for the Republican Party to hold into power and unite the North, under the pretence of saving the Union, after an election barely won put them under unprecedented critical distress<sup>102</sup>. Consequentially, if these authors can successfully convince the reader that not only the radicals of the Republican Party made secession inevitable, but actually worked around the clock to spark its fire, the next implication in a similar flow of thoughts would imply that the North, hijacked in its route by the Radical Abolitionists, would have found any means necessary to come up with whatever *casus belli* they would saw fit, regardless of what eventually took place the very moment the first shots of the war had been fired in response to the Confederate occupation of Fort Sumter.

Nevertheless, it should be argued that if these authors were to follow the logical flow of thoughts behind their own narratives, they should have come to terms with the fact that their own beloved southern States indeed seceded for the main purpose of preserving the institution of slavery,

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<sup>100</sup>Pavone, *Una Guerra Civile*, 210;

<sup>101</sup>Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 560;

<sup>102</sup>*Ibidem*.

menaced by what they perceived as a warmongering abolitionist party. However, a similar realization is nowhere to be found. Nor anywhere to be found is the fascist realization that if they had truthfully always known what uncompromisingly evil threat Nazi Germany had always represented, they would not have followed it into a war of aggression where honour and allegiance were not as much the driving forces as pure desire of conquest and imperialist aims had been instead.

Clearly, a similar mental exercise is not how academia deals with the study of history, or of any other subject. While we are allowed and encouraged to interpret facts, we cannot transform personal convictions into historical facts so that we may be able to rewrite history in a way that fits our own narratives. We derive conclusions and interpretations from discernible facts and recorded events, not the other way around. However, as historians like Richardson, Domby, Filippi and Focardi have discussed in regard to these Lost Causes<sup>103</sup>, it is exactly the interpretation of historical events under the lenses of personal historical convictions, that enables political parties to sway the support of relevant part of the masses in their favour, possibly with a very similar Discursive Strategy to the one unveiled thus far. Specifically, a Discursive Strategy centred on blaming the other side for both the outbreak and the outcome of a civil war, with the ultimate goal to revise history in order to present themselves under a positive light, and ultimately avoid accountability, often for the sake of political survivability in the post-war status quo.

### **III.II Touching Upon the Issue of Accountability**

Through the identification and presentation of a Discursive Strategy upholding Lost Cause myths in comparable manners between two different historical cases, we can begin to answer how Lost Cause myths appear so seemingly resilient, how they function. Their endurance rests upon their consistency and their straight focus on shifting blames and responsibilities onto the other side, where accusations of hypocrisy and claims of inevitability are necessary corollaries, often functional to avoid definitive accountability. The vanquished' task to revise history in their favour necessitate the use of such a Discursive Strategy, with the same consistency of a hammer restlessly striking always upon the same spot on the anvil.

As studied in psychology, it is indeed repetition that can create the illusion of truth, as repetition makes statements easier to be processed, often leading the recipients of those statements to the false conclusion that they are more truthful. Relevantly, it has been demonstrated that this affects the formation of socio-political and historical opinions as well<sup>104</sup>. Arguably, the proposition of a consistent

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<sup>103</sup>See the Introduction and Chapter II of this thesis;

<sup>104</sup>Lisa K. Fazio, Nadia M. Brashier, Keith B. Payne, Elizabeth J. Marsh & Isabel Gauthier, "Knowledge Does Not Protect Against Illusory Truth", *American Psychological Association* Volume 144, Issue 5, (2015), 993-994.

Discursive Strategy enables the formation of this illusion of truth, through which Lost Cause authors transform their ‘historical conviction’ into the ‘historical truth’ they wish the readers to embrace.

However, while identifying a Discursive Strategy allows us to understand how Lost Cause narratives are constructed within the language of selective memories, it is not enough by itself to understand their endurance in the post-war socio-political sphere. Factually, if the goal of the original proponents of Lost Cause myths had been the proposition of a counter-narrative to dethrone the academic historical truth, it is the argumentative political tool they represent, that helps further explaining their resilience. As the American Historian David Blight has argued “[...] all Lost Cause myths find their lifeblood in lies [...] born of beliefs in search of a history that can be forged into a story and mobilize masses of people to act politically, violently, and in the name of ideology”<sup>105</sup>. As it appears then, the endurance of Lost Cause myths can be explained combining these two answers of the how and why, that can easily be blurred together, for the effectiveness of the Discursive Strategy identified rests on its ability to build and reinforce the illusion of truth that in turns allows it to be exploited as a historical narrative, readily available for political discourse.

Arguably, this is more convincing once we focus on how political parties on the right-wing of politics (Italy’s MSI, Southern Democrats) in the two cases analysed have indeed embraced after the war, under various guises, the core tropes of their nations’ Lost Cause myths to pursue their own interests. As shown through the words of the authors object of this analysis, by creating an illusion of truth, at their core these Lost Cause narratives proposed an idealized interpretation of the vanquished, defeated while fighting the inevitable changing tides of history, with “[...] compelling stories about noble defeats that were, with time, forged into political movements of renewal [...]”<sup>106</sup>and self-absolution. In this process of self-absolution and subsequent self-representation, a consistent Discursive Strategy is used to revise history and sanitize all those aspects which would implicate efforts of proper unbiased scrutiny, serving specifically the purpose of avoiding proper accountability.

Necessarily, a last reflection arises, and it concerns indeed the fundamental aspect of addressing accountability. As unfolded, through the constant proposition of a precise Discursive Strategy, an illusion of truth, fuelled by selective militant memories, can be created with the core aim of turning a partisan historical conviction into an historical narrative embraced as factual and truthful. Specifically, this Discursive Strategy shared by both the American and Italian authors manipulated the discourse to present their side under a positive light, by mainly blaming every major political, social, and military responsibility onto the other side. This was argued to serve the goal of avoiding definitive accountability, for the sake of political survivability. Necessarily, this leaves us with the ultimate realization that a relevant part of the reason why some Lost Cause myths are seemingly resilient where

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<sup>105</sup>David W. Blight, “How Trumpism May Endure”, The New York Times, January 9 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/09/opinion/trump-capitol-lost-cause.html>;

<sup>106</sup>Ibidem.

others may be not, potentially rests on the willingness of the victors to enforce a proper political process aimed at holding those responsible accountable, whatever the cost for the reunified nation may be.

Factually, as earlier noted, Italian Fascists did not face the same level of scrutiny nor punishment that Germans and Japanese had to face after the War. Indeed, this is true on so many levels, that even if we were to set aside legal argumentations concerning the post-war trials, one could compare how differently Italian and German governments dealt and still deal with the depiction and representation of their respective Fascist and Nazi past on different media, from literature, television, movies and even videogames. It represents a complex topic, where the line between a rightful fight against apology and propaganda sometimes blurs into what could be perceived as state's censorship against freedom of speech and expression, and which, especially in Germany, has indeed been cause of both public and scholarly debates since before the reunification of West and East<sup>107</sup>. Moreover, while both in Italy and Germany the respective criminal justice systems have devised laws meant to eradicate the possibility of a resurgence of either Fascism or Nazism, the way those laws are differently designed and enforced depicts another striking difference on how seriously the issue is being dealt within the two countries, with Italy appearing demonstrably weaker in this regard<sup>108</sup>.

Furthermore, the issue of accountability becomes even more striking once we consider the American case: following an initial attempt to enforce it properly during the Reconstruction period, eventually, for the sake of unity and reconciliation the South was left to its own device on how to settle the issue of racial segregation and the preservation of its own heritage and way of life. Exemplificative are the cases of the President and Vice President of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis and Alexander Stephens, that after being indicted and convicted for treason, did not even serve three years in prison combined. As discussed, general amnesty was generously conceded in both Italy and the USA. Most certainly, nowhere to be found neither in Italy nor the United States was an unwavering will by the victors and subsequent governments to hold accountable those responsible for the war, in contrast to what instead took place in post-war Germany. Furthermore, only recently serious debates over the controversial merits of preserving monuments and symbols of both fascist and confederate nature have been taking place, with the matter still mostly unresolved<sup>109</sup>.

Ultimately, the resilience of Lost Cause myths appears then to be resting on the effectiveness and consistency of the Discursive Strategy upholding them, on their political usefulness in the post-war state, and on the weak effort put in place by post-war governments to hold the vanquished accountable

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<sup>107</sup>Eric Stein, "History Against Free Speech: The New German Law Against the 'Auschwitz' -and Other- 'Lies'", *Michigan Law Review* Volume 85, Issue 2, (1986), 314-322;

<sup>108</sup>Barbie Latza Nadeau, "Femme Fascista: How Giorgia Meloni Became the Star of Italy's Far Right", *World Policy Journal* Volume 35, Issue 2, (2018), 17-18;

<sup>109</sup>Domby, *The False Cause*; Nadeau, "Femme Fascista".

and to discourage the propagation of these counter-narratives, often for the sake of a hastened processes of national reconciliation and reunification.

## Conclusions

This work attempted to answer what explains, on the discursive level, Lost Cause narratives, more properly labelled as myths, to be so seemingly effective and resilient within the socio-political realm of post-conflict nations, shaping how a section of a country interprets its own history and sense of national belonging. To answer this question, I have adopted Discourse Analysis as the methodology for the comparative analysis, and I have identified the existence of a seemingly comparable Discursive Strategy, consisting of peculiar recurring tropes, driven by selective militant memories, proposed through similar content and rhetoric argumentations, permeating the writings of both the American and the Italian authors used as primary sources. Truthfully, the number of said sources was limited for time and capacity constraints to a selection of only six items, belonging to as many American and Italian authors, chosen upon a criteria combining the authority of the source with its accessibility. Nevertheless, I argue that the results presented here are enough to at least seriously consider the tentative explanation that there actually exists a consistent Discursive Strategy laying behind the consistency and cohesiveness of a vanquished narrative. Consistency, cohesiveness, and repetition, as if adhering to a fixed script, to the point of enabling the proposition of a historical conviction that the authors present as their interpretation of the historical truth. In fact, it seemed that they could achieve their vision of the historical truth by creating an illusion of truth, for which adherence to a Discursive Strategy emerged as a practical necessity.

As unfolded, this Discursive Strategy, once recognised and deconstructed, consists in an intellectual exercise on part of the vanquished in shifting blames and responsibilities, claiming inevitability, and accusing of hypocrisy the other's side, the victors' side. Furthermore, once this illusion of truth has been established and embraced as an historical conviction, it is used to provide the vanquished with self-absolution and a counter self-representation to oppose the one presented by the victors. Relevantly, it is in this guise that a Lost Cause myth can be transformed into a malleable political tool, for its salient characteristics thrive on the simplistic dichotomy of us vs. them upon which politicians often feed to round up support. As argued, a consistent Discursive Strategy provides a vanquished narrative its strength and focus through mere exercise of rhetoric repetition. A repetition that can be usefully exploited, for it is readily available and easily accessible, and reliant on a series of selective memories that permeate a large portion of the public. Additionally, it was recognised that a relevant factor contributing to the resilience of a Lost Cause myth is represented by the extent to which the political system that emerges after such conflicts is ultimately willing to hold those responsible both politically and legally accountable.

Moreover, deconstructing a Lost Cause narrative and identifying the presence of a consistent Discursive Strategy between two different historical cases not only suggests the possibility that with future research encompassing even more cases at once we could properly map the existence of a

historical and socio-political phenomenon on a wider global scale, and thus test for generalization, but it could help us recognise whenever the world of politics attempts to hijack the historical narrative for the detriment of a nation's own sense of identity and national belonging, for the sake of mere sectional interests. Factually, it could provide a tool to readily and properly thwart similar attempts the very moment they try to get a hold of the public discourse.

While this thesis has only touched the surface of what potentially lies ahead, for the nature of its smaller scale and scope, it has arguably helped to unveil a sensible nerve that cannot and should not be left further to rest. Furthermore, its findings on the discursive level of how such narratives are constructed reflect what Schivelbusch has argued concerning the cultural and psychological facets of a vanquished myth. Truthfully, and as we have already acknowledged at the beginning of this work, in the individuality of the single cases, investigations on the nature of Lost Cause narratives have already gone underway in both the countries here analysed. However, it is arguably the comparative nature of this work, following the path traced by Schivelbusch, combined with the focus on Discourse Analysis to detect a precise Discursive Strategy, that provides a much-needed contribution to this field of investigation, and as such I conclude with the hope that this work could humbly constitute an initial inspiration for further research.

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