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The racialisation of the political revolutionaries of Romagna in the late nineteenth century: Pio Battistini's murder trial

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Introduction

In the second half of the XIX century, within the context of the recently established Italian State, the significant semantic shift occurred in the conceptualisation of crime, in relation to the realm of politics: the political crime. Western societies were subject to the effects of the industrialisation and Italy was no exception to this process, which had a significant impact on the criminal phenomenon. There was a progressive decrease in crimes against the person on behalf of a significant increase in crimes against property: a range becoming wider also because of the centrality that penal codes had given to private property in the name of its legal defence.

Political crime ended up being involved in this process as a response to the rise of novel collective social actors that challenged both the form of government and its economic structure. The interpretation of political offences underwent a shift in meaning, precipitated by the dissemination of alarmist sentiments among the bourgeoisie. Despite the Penal Code, which was approved by the Parliament in 1889 and was shaped according to liberal values, political critique was no longer considered to be a category that included all those acts that demonstrated dissent against institutional power. All criticism and condemnations of capitalism and social-economic structures were deliberately excluded from the category to prevent any potentially influential and “dangerous” collective actors (such as socialists, republicans or anarchists) from benefiting from the privileges accorded to political crimes as outlined in the Zanardelli Penal Code.

Firstly, an analysis will be conducted of the manner in which this process of political “exclusiveness” occurred and its consequences on Italian revolutionary movements, which were becoming increasingly powerful

in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Secondly, an investigation will be conducted into the support offered by Cesare Lombroso and his criminological school in the repression of criminal deviance and political dissent. Positivism, in fact, posited a correlation between race and crime, proposing that specific physical, psychological and environmental features were associated with individuals lacking moral development and, consequently, were more susceptible to criminal behaviour. Within the Italian scenario, Romagna appeared to be distinguished by its propensity to perpetrate physical violence and to exhibit profound political fervour. A paradigmatic illustration of this combination is provided by the process conducted for Pio Battistini's homicide, the socialist leader of Cesena, committed in September 1891 by a group of local republicans. Through the analysis of its judicial papers, which are preserved in the State Archive of Forlì-Cesena, and thanks to the stenographic record of the process held by the Appeal Court of Treviso, it has been possible to study the infiltration of positivist theories, about the inhabitants and radical movements of Romagna into the imaginary of judicial institutions and public security agencies. This constitutes the third and final topic to be addressed in this paper.

1. *Political crime*

Since the eighteenth century and through the age of the bourgeois revolutions, a privileged treatment had been reserved for political offences, at least within liberal speculations, in accordance with the right of speech and in memory of imprisonments, exiles and capital condemnations to which patriots of the Risorgimento were subjected. The Classical School conceptualised political dissent as a behaviour that called into question the manner in which institutional power was structured; a fact that was regarded as relative and mutable.

Nevertheless, penal codes from the pre-unitary period received only limited influence from the Enlightenment doctrine. Indeed, these codes continued to reserve the most severe penalties, including the death penalty and forced labour, for crimes that jeopardised internal and external State security. Both the Sardinian-piemontese Penal Code of 1859, extended to the unified Kingdom of Italy six years later, and the Tuscan Penal Code of 1853 (which remained in effect in the territories of the former Grand

Duchy of Tuscany until 1889) are specific examples of this phenomenon.

The coexistence of two different penal codes was a cause of concern for a number of liberal jurists in Italy, including Giuseppe Zanardelli and Enrico Pessina, conceivers and promoters of the 1889 Penal Code. As the 1890s approached, Italy finally adopted a unified legislative system as the result of a more liberal e progressive shift in the country. Capital punishment, forced labours, and corporal penalties have been abolished in favour of reclusion; priority is now given to the legality, clarity and transparency of the law, penal moderation, emendatory and retributive functions.

In the context of the recently enacted Italian penal code, a special provision has been made for political crimes: the extradition of political offenders is prohibited (art. 9); detention is preferred over reclusion (art. 118-123); the utilisation of a popular jury is expected for trials conducted in Appeal Courts: a mechanism that will often end up showing a favourable predisposition towards political offenders.

2. The intersection of Criminal Anthropology and the “race” of Romagna

The term “racialisation” is employed to denote a cultural, social and political phenomenon which leads to pigeonholing a specific category of people within a hierarchical system defined by general characteristics such as ethnicity, language and religion. This process is characterised by the endeavour to categorize or marginalize subjects deemed to be inferior and dangerous, while concurrently delineating the identity of the ingroup to which the racist individual belongs.

The trust that was placed in science by men of culture and politicians has defined “race” as a fundamental conceptual category to build identity, both on a national and on a personal level. In the late nineteenth century, a cultural movement emerged in Europe and in Italy, rejecting metaphysics and idealism. This movement was influenced by the ideology of progress, which dominated the intellectual landscape of the time. New scientific discoveries and original methodologies suggest that modern societies will inevitably follow a linear and uninterrupted growth trajectory, and that men can exercise control and influence over their environment.

The Italian cultural milieu provided positivism with a conducive environment for the development of a national School of thought that

encompassed biological, anthropological and juridical domains¹. A pivotal figure in this process is Cesare Lombroso, a doctor from Verona who pioneered a paradigm shift in the realm of ethnographic research. The anthropological method was enriched by the advent of new sciences as scientific disciplines, including statistics and biometrics, which facilitated the systematic classification of deviances within taxonomies. In the belief that Italian population was marked by a natural proclivity towards illegality², and especially towards violence, the Positive School designed a survey of the country with the objective of defining the ethnic and racial characteristics of each group taken into consideration. As demonstrated by the official statistics published by the General Direction of Prisons, higher crime rates were identified in southern regions of Italy and its islands. Conversely, another region furnished pertinent indicators for offences against the person: that was Romagna.

The population of Romagna, therefore, is comprehensively classified within the taxonomies of anthropologists and jurists adhering to the Positive School. Identified as a race with clearly delineated features inherited from a process of ethnic amalgamation, Romagna is recognised for its impulsiveness, impetuosity and passion. This region has historically been influenced by various civilisations, including Ligurians, Umbris, Etrurians, Gallics, Celts and Romans. Among these, the last two civilisations would have left, more than others, a last lingering trace on the physical and psychological characteristics of the region's inhabitants. Biometric data demonstrated a brachycephalic pre-eminence: a cranial conformation that appeared to be associated with a natural propensity towards evolution³. Conversely, the psychological analysis of the temperament of this population suggests an inheritance from both the Celts and Romans: from the former, it received qualities such as liveliness, impulsivity and a gregarious spirit; from the latter, it acquired tenacity and political passion. Furthermore, the slowness of evolution of these people is of particular interest: their psychological and somatic features appear to remain intact, thus granting them a significant degree of "atavism".

¹ E.R. Papa, *Criminologia e scienze sociali nel dibattito europeo sulla "Scuola Italiana" di antropologia criminale (1876-1900)*, in Id. (cured by) "Il positivismo e la cultura italiana", Milano 1985, p. 16.

² M. Gibson, *Le prigioni italiane nell'età del positivismo*, Roma 2019, p. 71.

³ C. Lombroso, R. Laschi, *Il delitto politico e le rivoluzioni in rapporto al diritto, all'antropologia criminale e alla scienza di governo*, Torino 1890, pp. 110-111.

3. A “region by contrast” transformed into the crucible of anti-establishment movements

The positivist depiction of an impulsive, excessive and progressive Romagna is superimposed upon a preexisting stereotype that emerged in the 1860s: the stereotype of a *region by contrast*. The notion was embraced in part due to the efforts of Destra Storica aiming to delegitimize a growing movement of dissent among the inhabitants of Romagna. This movement was opposed to two unpopular measures: military conscription and a tax on mills. The considerable radicalism exhibited by the populace was attributable to a multitude of factors, including the horizontal nature of its society, which was characterised by the absence of an aristocratic class that wielded significant influence⁴, and the experiences during and following the Napoleonic occupation, particularly those involving the Carbonian and Masonic movement, played a notable role in shaping the radicalism of a segment of the population.

A robust republican and internationalist associationism permeated the spaces, places and mentalities of Romagna. At the onset of the 1870s, the city of Rimini played host to the inaugural congress of the Italian Federation of the International Workers’ Association, which constituted the first formal act through which a local movement, that challenged the capitalist socio-economic order and the prevailing production system, organized itself. The emergence of a novel form of militancy, operating within the same ideological terrain and support base of republicanism, has precipitated conflict among radical and anti-establishment associations. The 1880s will be regarded as a decade of even greater significance, as Mazzinian groups began to lose ground in favour of a political proposal that met the demands of the time. The foundation of the Socialist Revolutionary Party of Romagna, in 1881, transformed socialism from a doctrine that few understood and believed into a wide-ranging local party that would set up an important example for the future Italian Socialist Party.

Consequently, Romagna played host to two central groups of Italian radical movements that underwent development throughout the XIX century. The example of the Socialist Revolutionary Party of Romagna set by Andrea Costa represented a turning point, especially when compared to the experience of the International Workers’ Association, marked by

⁴ C. De Maria, *Il radicalismo delle élite romagnole*, in C. Arrighetti, *La violenza in Romagna dallo Stato della chiesa allo Stato unitario. Atti del Convegno*, Forlimpopoli 2017, pp. 21-22.

sectarianism and illegal practices. Without abandoning the revolutionary perspective entirely, the socialists of Romagna sought to conquer the commons and participate in elections as a means of opposing government influence at the local level. In 1882, Costa was elected as deputy: for the first time, a socialist representative to secure a seat in the Italian Chamber of Deputies. Concurrently, radical movements were gaining control over municipal administrations of Romagna and the number of party cells affiliated with socialism and republicanism was increasing. This substantial growth, which was local in nature, was a cause for concern for the ruling class, who were apprehensive that a coalition between socialist and republican movements and the radical party, which had already secured representation in the Italian Parliament, might emerge.

The demands articulated by anti-establishment associations did not align with the “political” category as defined by moderate and conservative ruling classes. The Classical School conceptualised political offence as a criminal act that could be sanctioned solely in cases of its excess, but not for its antagonism. However, the condemnation of the capitalist system was deemed unacceptable, as it was perceived as a threat to the prevailing social order. Within this theoretical framework, positivism offered a fundamental tool to delegitimise revolutionary claims and perspectives through the utilisation of presumed scientific evidence. In the case of Romagna, it provided a bleak picture of racial inferiority in order to demonstrate the felonious and dangerous nature of criminals moved by political passion. The persistence of violent practices within the political life of Romagna is explained not from a sociological point of view but from an anthropological one. The region, therefore, becomes:

uno degli ultimi e meno imperfetti esempi di società a tipo di violenza [...]. I sentimenti, le passioni, le usanze sono ancora quelle di un'età trapassata, che fuori di qui non si può conoscere che dai libri. Poiché la violenza è il primo periodo di una civiltà, è naturale che in Romagna la società e l'uomo abbiano molto ancora di primitivo⁵.

A primitive population, lacking the sophistication to formulate political claims without resorting to violent practices such as murder and homicide.

⁵ “One of the last and least imperfect examples of society of violence type [...]. Feelings, passions, customs are yet those of a departed era, which out of here can be known only by books. Since violence is the first period of a civilisation, it is natural that in Romagna society and men still are primitive”. A.G. Bianchi, G. Ferrero, S. Sighele, *Il mondo criminale italiano*, First series, Milano 1893, p. 280.

4. *Pio Battistini's murder*

The citation previously mentioned has been composed by Guglielmo Ferrero, a anthropologist belonging to the Positive School, who was present at the trial for Pio Battistini's murder, held in the Appeals Court of Treviso in 1893. A total of eight men were presented before the judges: Agostino Domeniconi, Antonio Mordenti, Urbano Valzania, Lodovico Valzania, Giuseppe Fabbri, Carlo Aloisi, Giuseppe Brandolini e Pasquale Brunazzi. Eight individuals all regarded as "pregiudicatissimi"⁶ and considered to be posing a significant threat, all of whom were members of the equally feared Squadra di Porta Romana⁷.

It is a case of true crime which left the entire region astonished. The city of Cesena saw the socialist leader and member of the Municipal Council falling to the ground, fatally hit by three bullets in his back. The individuals who were promptly attributed with responsibility for the assassination were affiliated with the local Republican movement, motivated by partisan animosity and a quest for retribution. Domenico Ferrini and Clemente Mariotti, two young republican militants, were, in fact, killed the week before by a group of socialists⁸.

The sequence of events that preceded Pio Battistini's execution is intricate and multifaceted. It is imperative to recall at least two episodes in addition to the one concerning Ferrini and Mariotti. The initial case under consideration is that of the murder of Count Filippo Neri, a member of the local aristocracy who maintained a deliberate policy of neutrality in the partisan conflict of Cesena. Killed in March 1889, for his assassination were suspected, but released in the absence of evidence, Giovanni Magnani e Agostino Domeniconi. Both men were affiliated with the republican movement. Two years later, during the course of the enquiry conducted by the investigating judge, Carlo Stuart hypothesised that Count Neri's assassination was likely to have been motivated by his desire to silence the latter.

Vaghi sospetti accusarono di quella azione vigliacca il Domeniconi e il Brandolini e sembra che il Battistini fosse depositario di qualche segreto che avrebbe compromesso la sorte di costoro. Volgevano così le cose in uno stato di tensione e di livore e specialmente contro

⁶ "Previous offenders".

⁷ "The Crew of Porta Romana".

⁸ D. Pieri, *La Squadra di Porta Romana. La Romagna del coltello e del revolver*, Imola 1989, pp. 7-30.

il Battistini che parlava sì forte e chiaro di tutti⁹.

Another significant event that must be considered when seeking to comprehend Battistini's murder occurred in the occasion of the political elections in November 1890. The socialist leader denounced a fraud in the counted votes inside a polling section he examined. Republicans responded to his complaint brandishing their weapons, an action reciprocated by Pio Battistini who consequently inflicted harm upon Giuseppe Brandolini, an associate of Porta Romana¹⁰. In the opinion of the investigating judge, the fact in question served to exacerbate the resentment already harboured by Brandolini, a "salientissima spinta a delinquere¹¹" towards his socialist rival.

The heated conflicts between the socialists and the republicans of Romagna were rooted in long term historical and social facts. Numerous armed conflicts had occurred between them immediately after unification. A truce seemed to be reached at the end of the 1880s when the decision was taken to participate as a coalition in the local elections that were held on account of the Reform introduced in 1888. Indeed, this reform resulted in the equalisation of political and administrative electorates and led to an expansion in the number of individuals who possessed the right to vote. The coalition achieved significant and unparalleled results in Romagna, attaining victories in Cesena, Forlì, Faenza, Imola and Ravenna, in addition to numerous smaller localities. In the case of Cesena, the development of tensions was rapid. The distribution of seats in the Council, which was weighted in favour of republicans, and the appointment of Egisto Valzania as president of the Charity Congregation of the city provoked the wrath of the socialists, who had received only one seat in the city government and two chairs on two committees¹².

The recurrent utilisation of private violence by the inhabitants of Romagna as a means of conflicts resolution was, to a certain extent, attributable to a deficiency on the part of the Italian State. In fact, the

⁹ "Vague suspicions accused of that coward action Domeniconi and Brandolini and it seemed that Battistini was the depositary of some secret that would have compromised their fate. Things were turning into a state of tension and livor and especially against Battistini who spoke loudly and clearly about everyone". Archivio di Stato di Forlì-Cesena [ASFC], *Tribunale Corte d'Assise*, b. 264, f. 1384, unnumbered volume, doc. n. 349.

¹⁰ D. Pieri, *La Squadra di Porta Romana. La Romagna del coltello e del revolver*, cit., p. 41.

¹¹ "The fact actively pushed Brandolini into committing crime". ASFC, *Tribunale Corte d'Assise*, b. 264, f. 1384. Volume non numerato, doc. n. 349.

¹² D. Angelini, *Alle origini del socialismo municipale: Pio Battistini nelle istituzioni amministrative*, in D. Angelini, D. Mengozzi (edit. by) *I Battistini. Una famiglia socialista alla fine dell'Ottocento*, Forlì 1994, pp. 82-84.

Kingdom of Italy had not succeeded in establishing a monopoly over the use of force in many regions of its territory, including Romagna. Moreover, the system of justice provided by national institutions was not regarded as a legitimate means to protect violated rights. In the context of radical and anti-establishment militants, the justification for this lack of trust was also evident in the intolerance and severity with which they were met by the prevailing legal framework.

However, the criminological phenomenon of Romagna was presented by positivism from a different point of view. The underlying causes of the persistence presence of violent practices could be attributed to the characteristics and disposition of the local populace. Depicted as impulsive and excessive in each of their needs, passionate and easily influenced, people from Romagna have been described as an atavist and primitive population, lacking the level of civilization of the rest of North Italy and Europe. The radical activists were more reminiscent of members of a criminal association rather than a political movement. Positivism assumed that radical militants from Romagna exploited an ideology of collective justice in order to commit criminal offences and evade punishment. In the context of Western European countries, Guglielmo Ferrero identified Romagna as a notable example of a society characterised by violence, a category that he believed to be one of the last remaining in Europe, a continent almost everywhere characterised by societies of fraud type.

5. The gaze of judiciary and public security over the political militants in Romagna

The trial conducted against the Crew of Porta Romana can be regarded as a valid lens to analyse the penetration of the positivist imaginary within the beliefs of judiciary and public security functionaries. The criminal prosecution was conducted in two phases: the first phase was a preliminary investigation conducted at the Criminal and Civil Court of Forlì; the second one, shorter but equally intensive, was hosted by the Appeals Court of Treviso. The documents pertaining to the preliminary investigations are to be found in the Archive State of Forlì-Cesena, whereas the stenographic report, which constitutes the second part of the process, is preserved in the Marucelliana Library of Cesena. A four pages daily bulletin was in fact published in May and June 1893 and was sold

for four liras per copy. This publication described the development of the trial against the republicans from Cesena¹³. The Battistini case had an extraordinary resonance: the courtrooms of Treviso were filled to capacity, the audience was keen to witness unexpected developments in the case and to experience the emotional impact of the family's testimonies, the prosecutor's accusations and defence's pleas.

An investigation was conducted from September 1891 to Novembre 1892, by the lawyer Carlo Stuat. He utilised circumstantial evidence and declarations reported by a plethora of public functionaries and local citizens. Many of them had personally witnessed the murder of Pio Battistini, which had taken place near by the central place of Cesena in the late afternoon, or had participated in the finding and capturing of the suspects. The utilisation of archive carts facilitates the reconstruction of the historical progression of the murder, thereby enabling the extraction of perceptions and stereotypes concerning radical movements and the inhabitants of Romagna from the perspectives of judicial authorities and law enforcement agencies.

Control institutions had been targeting socialist and republican "factions" for a considerable period, as these groups were considered to comprise dangerous individuals who were prone to criminal activity. The analysis of their criminal records appears to substantiate the hypothesis, with numerous convictions for unlicensed firearm possession, injury offences and verbal or physical assault on law enforcement officers¹⁴. In the aftermath of the homicide, the captain of the Carabinieri dispatched a missive to the procurator of the Penal Court of Forlì. This correspondence detailed "cinque dei più pericolosi repubblicani pregiudicatissimi¹⁵" for whom he sought to reinforce patrol services and enhance surveillance of the town, since

la setta socialista e la setta repubblicana [...] tengono in continua agitazione ed in continue ansietà il paese [...] tantoché ad ogni tratto risse ed uccisioni si alternavano, ora per ragioni socialista ed ora per ragion repubblicana in continue rappresaglie come se fosse in pieno vigore la legge del taglione¹⁶.

¹³ Cf. *Corte d'Assise di Treviso. Assassinio Pio Battistini*, Treviso 1893.

¹⁴ ASFC, *Tribunale Corte d'Assise*, b. 265, f. 1384, Vol. I p. I, doc. n. 41; 48; 49; 51.

¹⁵ "Five of the most dangerous republican offenders"

¹⁶ "Socialistic and republican factions [...] constantly make the city anxious and agitated [...] clashes and killings, for socialist or for republican reason, erupt in ongoing reprisals like there is in force the law of retaliation". In the ruling to demand to the Appeals Court

The testimonies of public functionaries immediately described a gloomy and bloody image of the political life of Cesena. Supported by a public opinion substantially concordant in considering the Crew of Porta Romana culpable for the murder, witnesses also proffered a psychological analysis of the suspects. The Subprefecture Inspector attributed them “un carattere prepotente¹⁷” and “una pessima fama¹⁸” which manifested itself in arrogant behaviour towards the local population¹⁹. It appeared that membership of the Republican movement bestowed upon its adherents a social status that engendered a combination of fear and respect. The components of the Crew of Porta Romana appeared to elicit a pervasive sense of jeopardy: they were regarded as “capacissimi di commettere un reato simile, essendo alcuni pregiudicati – sono quindi tutti non solo capaci ma spinti dal vincolo di partito a vendicarsi del Battistini”²⁰. This perspective is offered by two individuals with professional experience in this field: Annibale Marossa, a former Marshal, and Luigi Bernardi, a former police officer. Both men were responsible for the arrest of five members of the group. Acate Cianini, the captain of the Carabinieri in Cesena, denounced the criminal attitude and actions of the republicans, which he attributed to the “livore delle parti²¹”, and the local population’s involvement: he cited the example of Stefano Romualdo, the owner of Caffé della Speranza, who would have hidden republican weapons for an extended period, “in vista di qualsiasi eventualità²²”. Carlo Stuart’s perspective aligned with the aforementioned testimonies, as articulated in the Chamber Council Ordonnance, wherein he delineated the suspects as individuals motivated by a desire to exact retribution for perceived honor violations and for partisan hatred and feeling at ease in committing homicides. Lodovico Valzania “nutriva rancore verso i Battistini [...]

written by Carlo Stuart, clashes and killings between socialists and republicans become “reprisals” resulting from a primitive law, as the one of retaliation. ASFC, *Tribunale Corte d’Assise*, b. 265, f. 1384, Vol. III, doc. n. 19.

¹⁷ “An arrogant character”.

¹⁸ “A bad reputation”.

¹⁹ ASFC, *Tribunale della Corte d’Assise*, b. 265, f. 1384, Vol. I p. I, doc. n. 63.

²⁰ “Completely capable of committing a crime, since some of them already are convicted felons – they all are not only capable but pushed by the partisan bond to settle account with Pio Battistini”. ASFC, *Tribunale Corte d’Assise*, b. 265, f. 1384, Vol. I p. I, doc. n. 58.

²¹ “The rage of the parties”.

²² “In preparation for any eventuality”. ASFC, *Tribunale Corte d’Assise*, b. 265, f. 1384, Vol. II p. I, doc. n. 131.

e specialmente nutriva rancore verso il Pio che avevalo tacciato di vigliacco²³; Brandolini and Brunazzi “entrambi gregari della squadra, che attivamente e con influenza era capitanata dal Domeniconi pendevano dai cenni di costui; e perciò, sia per motivi di partiti e sia per motivi personali, odiavano il Battistini Pio²⁴”.

In another letter, the inspector of Cesena delineated the figure of the suspected and then convicted Battistini’s murder originator: Agostino Domeniconi, known by the sobriquet Beffuti. Within Porta Romana’s Crew, he stood out as a paradigm of the lombrosian category of “delinquente-nato²⁵”: a recidivist, persistent in both property-related and personal crimes, devoid of moral sense and remorse²⁶. During the course of penal proceedings, he exhibited characteristics that aligned him with the stereotype of the violent “romagnolo” as depicted by positivism. The subject’s proclivity for perpetrating murder as a legitimate instrument of political struggle, for which he did not evince any sense of abhorrence²⁷, was revealed through his interrogatories and the “cinismo ributtante²⁸” that he proved in Treviso to elicit the audience’s laughter²⁹.

A carico del Domeniconi, emerge che egli, individuo pregiudicatisimo, di carattere vendicativo, di tendenze sanguinarie, senza paura, e temuto dagli stessi correligionari, fu reputato più che capace d’aver messo insieme il piano, diretto l’uccisione del Battistini [...]. Immediatamente fu indicato dalla voce pubblica come il più attivo organizzatore del fatto, compiuto il quale, si diede alla latitanza: come uno dei capi della suindicata squadra repubblicana, e per certo il più temibile, poteva calcolare sulla obbedienza dei suoi.³⁰

²³ “Ludovico Valzania beared the grudge against Battistinis [...] and especially against Pio Battistini who had accused him to be a coward”.

²⁴ “Brandolini and Brunazzi, both gregarious of the crew which actively and with influenced was dominated by Domeniconi, fawned over his orders; and therefore, they hated Battistini Pio, both for partisan and for personal reasons”. ASFC, *Tribunale Corte d’Assise*, b.265, f. 1384, Vol. I p. II, doc. n. 469.

²⁵ “As a born criminal”.

²⁶ C. Lombroso, *L’uomo delinquente*, Torino 1876, p. 95.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ “Disgusting cynicism”.

²⁹ *Corte d’Assise. Assassinio Pio Battistini*, cit., n. 106-110 del 14 giugno 1893, p. 3.

³⁰ “Domeniconi, a convicted individual, with a vindictive temper, bloody predispositions, without fear but feared by his own coreligionists, was considered more than capable of carrying out the plan directed to murder Battistini [...]. Immediately, he was indicated by the public voice as the most active organizer of the fact after which, once accomplished, he became a fugitive; as one of the leaders of the abovementioned repub-

In addition to an innate proclivity for violence, a further characteristic that is recognised in each individual of the republicans of Porta Romana is their *suggestibility*, a trait that is widely held to be emblematic of the Romagna region as a whole. The Romagnol people are often depicted as lacking in psychological depth and imaginative capacity: an absence evidenced by the dearth of notable and innovative artistic exponents from Romagna, with the exception of ceramics³¹. This easily manipulable temper would lead people from Romagna to develop a *gregarious instinct*, propelling them to follow charismatic leaders who exert a profound influence over them. A phenomenon that reminds the experience of Antonio Mordenti, a young sulphur minor known as Barciocclin, who was the material executor of Battistini's murder.

Public security voices agreed in considering the subject undoubtedly capable of committing heinous crimes and “ammazzare un individuo per due lire³²”, since he had already given proves of crimes of the same kind and for the protection of the republican party. It was hypothesised that he was, in fact, “protetto dal partito repubblicano di cui egli fa parte³³”. A bleak image of this individual is offered by pretor Giuseppe Tassinari, who provided the punctual description reported by an “accountable” witness that believed Mordenti to be a “persona truce e sinistra³⁴”. The “malfattore” Barciocclin displayed a complete lack of interest during the investigative phase. When prompted by the prosecutor in Treviso, he demonstrated a preference for focusing on his moustaches rather than on the questions posed by the lawyers. The defence lawyer of Mordenti hypothesised that this detachment was due to the psychic inferiority of people from Romagna which rendered them susceptible to manipulation. The public minister Braida also believed that an ambiguous force was acting above the hit man: “una tale potenza da fargli preferire una grave pena, anziché dire una parola che potrebbe essere per lui più utile [...]”.

lican crew, and for sure the most fearful, he could count on the obedience of his fellows”. ASFC; *Tribunale Corte d'Assise*, b. 265, f. 1384, Vol. I p. II, doc. n. 469.

³¹ As meticulous and patient as artists from Romagna are, the anthropologist and pedagogue Vitale Vitali asserts that they lack artistic inspiration. They are equipped with capacity for learning but they are devoid of brilliance and individual inventiveness. The conformation of their mind and character more likely drives them to reasoning.

Vitale Vitali, *I romagnoli*, in “Studi antropologici al servizio della pedagogia”, Forlì, Luigi Bordandini Tipografo-Editore, 1896, p. 72.

³² AS-FC, *Tribunale Corte d'Assise*, b. 265, f. 1384, Vol. II p. I, doc. n. 56.

³³ AS-FC, *Tribunale Corte d'Assise*, b. 265, f. 1384, Vol. I p. I, doc. n. 88.

³⁴ AS-FC, *Tribunale Corte d'Assise*, b. 265, f. 1384, Vol. II p. I, doc. n. 33.

Mordenti Antonio è il sicario, - Mordenti Antonio è il braccio che agiva, - ma Mordenti Antonio ha agito per proprio impulso, oppure perché fu spinto da altri?³⁵”.

Subjugated by Antonio Domeniconi and operating under the influence of a political ideology deemed violent and subversive, the murder executor would have permitted his passion to run uninhibited and disregarded a moral sense that was already lacking.

Un reato commesso in un ambiente dove la passione si sente più potente che in un altro, ha una importanza maggiore [...]. La Romagna sarà sempre la Romagna di Dante con tutti i suoi pregi, con tutti i suoi difetti, conseguenza dei pregi suoi. Accanto al vigore e alla forza, sta la degenerazione della forza, che è la violenza, - la violenza portata al parossismo³⁶.

Beffuti was the leader of republican “bravi” from Cesena and he appeared to exercise a high degree of influence over the other affiliates as he was the head of a clan. Lombroso and Laschi frequently analysed political associationism from the perspective of legitimacy and criminality. Distinguishing between revolution and rebellion, positivism ultimately results in the delegitimization of all those forms of dissent that are regarded as excessive and dangerous to the status quo. The proof of their culpability would be ascertained, in the first instance, in their failure. Organizers and participants of rebellions, rather than political offenders, would be “born criminals” or “moral mads” reunited within the confines of ambiguous political associations. Established with the objective of advocating for higher principles, such as social justice, moral progress, and the redistribution of wealth, the actions of these organizations do not align with their stated principles. Instead, they may be driven by their own criminal instincts while seeking to maintain a favourable public image.

The republican movement in general appeared to be organised, in the

³⁵ “Such a great force that he preferred receiving a major sentence instead of pronouncing a single word that could be more useful for him [...] Mordenti Antonio is the material executor, - Mordenti Antonio is the muscle who acted, - but Mordenti Antonio has acted on his own or pushed by someone else?”

Corte d'Assise di Treviso. Assassinio Pio Battistini, cit., n. 111-115 of the 14th of June, p. 3.

³⁶ “A crime committed inside an environment where the feeling of passion is more powerful than somewhere else is more important [...]. Romagna will always be Romagna of Dante with all its qualities, with all its flaws as consequences of its qualities. Besides the force lies the degeneration of force, which is violence, - violence led to paroxysm”. *Corte d'Assise di Treviso. Assassinio Pio Battistini*, cit., n. 126-130 of the 15th of June, p. 2.

eyes of judicial authorities and law enforcement agencies, according to a tribal system: from the lowest level (referred to the Crew of Porta Romana) to the highest one (composed by the local heads of the Party), the republican organization seemed to be innervated by “primitive” relationships designated to defend its affiliates. On the 2nd June of 1893, the pretor of Cesena affirmed in front of the public minister that between republican leaders and militants existed an alliance made of a code of silence, which enabled the commission of misdeeds and crimes. The responsibility was reticular: the consequences of the actions of a single member had percussions for the entire movement which was, then, obliged to respond to them³⁷. Starting from this assumption, the sentence imposed on Battistini’s murderers was morally pronounced against the republican movement of Cesena in its entirety. The involvement of Pietro Turchi, recognised as the party theoretician, and of Urbano Valzania, municipal assessor, member of the executive council of Cesena’s Charity Congregation and president of Masini boarding school contributed to give further importance to the condemnation sentence³⁸.

The scandal surrounding the implication of these two political figures in Battistini’s murder, along with the penal proceedings to which Urbano Valzania, Egisto Valzania and Cesare Benzi were subjected and investigated for fraud in Cesena Charity Congregation management, offered to the clerical-moderate alliance the opportunity to reconquer the municipal government of Cesena. The entire republican movement, and by extension the socialist party, had become insular and unaccountable, and had fallen above them the responsibility for many bloodsheds and a last longing violence. Not surprisingly, Federico Comandini and Pietro Turchi decided in 1892 to dissolve the Republican Consociation of the administrative district of Cesena. In the name of enhancing public security within the local jurisdiction, the Ministry of the Interior and the Prefecture of Forlì ordered the militarisation of Cesena³⁹. In addition to the establishment of a climate of siege, the Royal Commissioner Pietro Gandin oversaw the political transition of the city until the administrative elections occurred in March 1892. At these elections, the liberal-catholic coalition won, thereby regaining control of Cesena, after the republican-socialist interlude⁴⁰.

³⁷ A.G. Bianchi, G. Ferrero, S. Sighele, *Il mondo criminale italiano*, cit., pp. 294-298.

³⁸ D. Pieri, *La squadra di Porta Romana. La Romagna del coltello e del revolver*, cit., pp. 67 e 81.

³⁹ D. Mengozzi, *La reazione governativa all’omicidio di Pio Battistini nel carteggio riservato di prefettura*, in D. Angiolini, D. Mengozzi (edit. by) *I Battistini. Una famiglia socialista alla fine dell’Ottocento*, cit., pp. 105-107.

⁴⁰ Ivi, p. 111.

Conclusions

The case of Cesena, within the framework of Romagna, offers a compelling illustration of the sedimentation of the positivist imaginary regarding anti-establishment movements in the late nineteenth century. Representing a chosen land for birth and growth of political organizations as republicanism, internationalism and then socialism, Romagna is also subjected to a process of racialisation aimed at delegitimising revolutionary associations. The right of expression exercised by local militants has been condemned as dangerous for the status quo on the account of its criticism of the capitalist production system. This right does not find place within the liberal category of “political”. The promulgation and entry into force of the Zanardelli Code, widely regarded as the first Italian liberal penal code, appeared to signal the dawn of a new era characterised by a commitment to moral and social progress. A promise doomed to failure when viewed in the context of the reactionary and liberticidal trends that characterised the final decade of the nineteenth century. A massive deployment of administrative measures, as an alternative option to the penal code, was attempted to mitigate the impact of revolutionary messages, circumventing legal guardianship.

Among the instruments used by ruling classes for the purpose of weakening republican, socialist and anarchist groups science played a significant role. The integration of Positive School theories and Criminal Anthropology perspectives has facilitated the translation of a political phenomenon, resulted from several and intricate contingencies, in a manifestation of social pathology. The legacy of Roman and Gallic influences, still evident in the “human exemplar” of Romagna, could provide a rationale for the observed contrast and the frequent expression of dissent showed by this population. Its political claims were not the results of an autonomous and collective reflexion; rather, they were the consequence of physiological behaviours induced by a genetic predisposition linked to “race”.

Concurrently, it is plausible that Italian public opinion did not fully assimilate the Romagna stereotype into its imaginary. However, certain elements of the positivist representation have been adopted by judicial institutions and public security entities. This can be seen by analysing the testimonies and affirmations of lawyers, magistrates, prefects and police officers who participated in the investigation and trial of Pio Battistini’s murder. Some of these elements have played a pivotal role in the weakening

of both republican and socialist local movements, thereby facilitating the re-establishment of the liberal-catholic order within Cesena.

Despite the repression and hardship endured during the final years of the nineteenth century, radical associations emerged and voiced their opposition to these challenges. The progressive abandonment of violent practices, such as homicide, and sectarianism, led to the adoption of alternative ways of action that were characterised by greater stability and maturity. A more extensive political agenda, with the capacity to encompass the entire nation, a generational shift in leadership among both republicans and socialists, and a prevailing commitment to a reformist outlook, that did not aim to abandon revolutionary results, fostered the establishment of novel organisations such as political parties, Labour Exchanges (“*Camere di Lavoro*”) and Trade Unions (“*Federazioni di Mestiere*”). These entities were poised to respond more effectively, during the initial decade of the 20th century, to the assaults of a political establishment that remained elitist and exclusive.

