

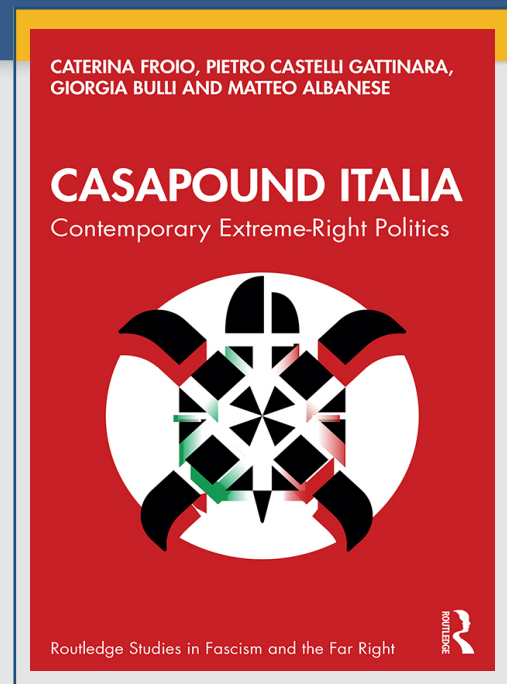
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ISLAMIC MILITARY COUNTER TERRORISM COALITION



BOOK REVIEW



CASAPOUND ITALIA

CONTEMPORARY EXTREME-RIGHT POLITICS

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Book Review

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Book Review

CASAPOUND ITALIA CONTEMPORARY EXTREME-RIGHT POLITICS

In 2018, The Guardian described the CASAPOUND ITALIA (CPI) as the fascist movement that brought Mussolini's ideologies back to the forefront. **CASA POUND ITALIA: CONTEMPORARY EXTREME-RIGHT POLITICS** reviews the CASAPOUND ITALIA history and phases, ideology, internal structure, identity, mobilization methods, strategies for communication, and expansionist methods and ubiquity socially, culturally and politically. **CASA POUND ITALIA: CONTEMPORARY EXTREME-RIGHT POLITICS**, co-authored by Caterina Froio, Pietro Castelli Gattinara, Giorgia Bulli, and Matteo Albanese, features than twenty maps, pictures, and diagrams, in addition to several appendices, which contribute to clarifying the reality, goals, and objectives of CPI.

Overview

This Book is part of the Routledge book series on Studies in Fascism and the Far Right. The Book opens with a clear introduction of the history and ideology of CasaPound Italia (CPI). CPI started in 2003 and its name and origins relate to a squatting movement, to protest a housing crisis in Rome. The group was then named CasaPound (The House of Pound) because casa is the Italian word for house and Pound refers to the American poet Ezra Pound (1885-1972) who moved to Italy in 1924 and supported Mussolini.

The history of CPI is first explained by the Book, but the details are interwoven throughout, making the book easy and enjoyable to read, while emphasizing a context-specific lens. Overall, this is an informed, accessible, and well-researched contribution to a current understanding of far-right groups and their engagement in electoral politics. The co-authors' in-depth research backgrounds and research positions in far-right extremism and politics, and strong institutional affiliations from Oslo to Berlin to Florence inform the discussion. This book is part of the Routledge book series on Studies in Fascism and the Far Right.

Pound wrote publications on housing rights and ownership, believing that both were basic human needs. Today, the building of the initial squat protest is home to the CPI headquarters, acting as another symbol of its roots and narrative, despite CPI's trajectory into electoral politics.

CPI's growth from 2013 to 2018 led to its current name reflecting its national scope – CasaPound Italia. CPI local chapters are now across Italy with over one hundred sites. From 2014 to 2019, CPI opened 94 new local chapters as it grew from grassroots social protests to challenging national elections.

The journalists have nicknamed CPI, the Fascists of the Third Millennium, and its members welcomed that recognition as CPI is a self-described fascist group. In 2012, CPI deputy president Simone di Stefano stated, "...if you have not read The Doctrine of Fascism and

you come here [to CPI], you are out of place...The link with Fascism is total". CPI upholds its roots in classical historical Italian Fascism as it believes that its founder and leader, Gianluca Iannone, embodies the group itself. Yet, CPI ideology is not fully ring-wing extremist since it is not separate from democracy. It bridges extreme and radical aspects of the far-right – a hybridization that makes them hard to categorize and more appealing to democratic mainstream audiences.

CPI began as a social movement and has no electoral support nationally. It holds legal status as a non-profit organization in Italy, but continues to bridge a focus on social movements, especially in local chapters, and national engagement, seen in electoral politics. This blending of approaches is evident in their symbols and communication strategy, including a change from their 2013 slogan in national festivals (Direction: Revolution) to (Direction: Parliament) in 2018. The co-authors share much detail in the early chapters and throughout the Book to show how CPI, and other far-right groups are using hybridization to engage the public and gain legitimacy.

Book Chapters

The Book has eight chapters: Introduction, History and Focus Themes. Chapter One (CasaPound Italia: Hybridization in the contemporary extreme right); Chapter Two (History and Context of CasaPound Italia); Chapter Three (Ideology); Chapter Four (Internal Structure); Chapter Five (Collective Identity); Chapter Six (External Mobilization); Chapter Seven (Political Communication); Chapter Eight (Conclusions). It concludes with four appendices that document methodology, over 20 maps, figures, tables, and analysis, while offering suggestions for future research. The Book concludes with four appendices and includes more than 20 maps, pictures, and graphs that document the methodology and analysis.

The Book begins with a recognition for a potentially new era and approach to right-wing extremism and far-right politics that has been present in parts of the world for



decades, but only emerging in others – hybridization. The co-authors explore the resourcefulness and strategies of new fringe groups especially with respect to how emerging groups, such as CPI, gain such high public profiles themselves and are able to share their perspectives in mainstream and electoral political debates, despite no electoral support and its explicit extremist references.

As such, the co-authors' focus on this hybridization approach and CPI's focus on obtaining quality media coverage in order to routinize its extreme-right ideas in the public sphere thus contributing to radicalizing mainstream debates is a timely and highly relevant contribution in Italy, Europe, and abroad.

Moreover, the Book contributes to an understanding of how democratic societies are relating to the extreme right through a variety of hybridization tactics. For example, the Book presents how local chapters are using community engagement with various students, young adults, females, and other local community groups via social movements, such as volunteering, musical social gatherings, and sports, in addition to protests. In this way, the co-authors offer a comprehensive perspective of how CPI members engage with one another and aim to engage with larger society in a manner that challenges the stereotypes about most traditional far-right groups. Additionally, the co-authors present these

details to show that a hybridization approach can be a theoretical framework to study a subset of far-right groups; thereby, challenging the commonly accepted notion of complex heterogeneity of far-right groups that make them hard to understand and analyze.

Emergence of CPI

The co-authors present an honest account of themselves and CPI. They begin with the clarification that, despite being a group of scholars studying far-right politics and right-wing extremism, they had never heard of CPI when a self-affiliated CPI member attacked their home-base in 2011. While they lived in Florence in December 2011, a 50-year-old accountant and sympathizer of CPI drove into a Florence market, shot at a group of Senegalese market traders, killed two men, and then killed himself.

Although other scholars in their circles felt that CPI was an irrelevant group, the reason we studied CasaPound was not because we thought that Fascism was about to win elections or to come back. Rather, we wanted to explore how a group with no electoral support and inspired by 'old' ideas does politics at a time when the role of ideologies and conventional forms of political activism are dissolving. In revealing this humble perspective about their lack of familiarity with CPI, they present an argument of why potentially minor fringe groups need to be studied more and not dismissed by

discussing CPI's strategic approaches in this Book.

The co-authors present a clear and well-organized discussion to present their argument. A subtle and important contribution is an emphasis on the importance of a contextual awareness throughout the Book, including a clarification on the difference between German and Italian Fascism. The harmonious underlying awareness of context is linked with references to historical ideology and roots that explain the complex blending of new and old among many organizations today – hybridization – that are context-specific. This offers an insight to a key concern for most groups – recruitment methods that relate to emerging groups involving youth in our globally and technologically connected world. This discussion greatly informs how messaging, ideology, and identity are communicated to recruit more and gain public acceptance and legitimacy. The Book presents detailed examples to illustrate each finding and point, validating the lengthy and in-depth five-year data collection of the co-authors.

Research and Data Set

The Book was multidisciplinary and incorporated scholarship from political science, sociology, and contemporary history. The co-authors used mixed methods data collection over five years of research across Italy. This included months of overt observation and in-person interviews. Data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative measures. The five-year period enabled the co-authors to study the progression of CPI from its establishment in December 2003 to the Italian general election in March 2018, the most recent general election at the time of publication in 2020.

The co-authors explored the internal workings of CPI and chose their methodology and methods strategically in order to study CPI ideology, internal structure, collective identity, external mobilization, and political communication. To study CPI political communication and engagement, the co-authors studied CPI's focus on media outreach and desire for visibility and legitimacy, specifically in quality newspapers.

To study the internal structure and engagement, and external mobilization, the co-authors reviewed party manifestos and literature, official campaign and online material, books, face-to-face interviews, and fieldwork notes. Data collection for this began in 2012 but continued infrequently until April 2019, extending beyond the main five-year study period.

The Book includes two appendices about some CPI internal literature that was reviewed, including campaign material and election manifestos, online press releases and social media content and the recording of 17 face-to-face interviews with leaders and activists in six Italian cities. The data garnered quotes seen throughout the Book and was analyzed using qualitative textual analyses. The manifestos were analyzed using standard content analytical approach.

Their overall data set highlighted five crucial ideas and areas of focus to analyze the internal engagement with CPI: hybridization of ideology, internal structure, collective identity, external mobilization, and political communication. A brief explanation of each area of focus is noted below and corresponds to a more thorough discussion from chapter three to seven.

Hybridization of Ideology

CPI aims to hybridize extreme-right ideology and action with pop culture symbols and communication that are common among left-wing progressives. They explain that we defined hybridization as the strategy by which a group combines: a) ideas and symbols inspired by different political cultures, and b) the organizational features and forms of mobilization of political parties and social movements.

Through the means and strategy of hybridization, CPI, and other fringe groups the co-authors contend, are able to combine ideas, images, and tactics that are traditional and contemporary; thereby, creating a brand that engages the contemporary population. They explain that this approach is exceptionally of interest for CPI in order to find resources, such as funding and recruitment, and gain recognition and visibility to gain legitimacy in the public sphere. For this reason, CPI refers to far-right ideologues, other far-right groups, such as the French Nouvelle Droite (New Right, ND), while promoting action-oriented and violent protests where necessary with electoral politics, alongside cultural and intellectual engagements such as local debates and concerts.

The co-authors highlight three core features of CPI ideology: nativism, authoritarianism, and socio-economic stances.

Nativism Mixed with Ethnopluralism: CPI's form of nativism incorporates ethnopluralism, a form of nativism that insists on shared traditions, not just a traditional sense of nativism that distinguishes native from non-native groups. For CPI, traditions are based

on cultural, ethnic, and religious characteristics. They believe that the migration crisis is causing problems because it is mixing people's traditions which is linked to their nation, challenging their value that traditions are territoriality and nationally distinct; in a given territory, national traditions should not mix. From their perspective, mixing traditions threatens the culture and security of receiving societies, while also spoiling migrants of their own national and cultural identity.

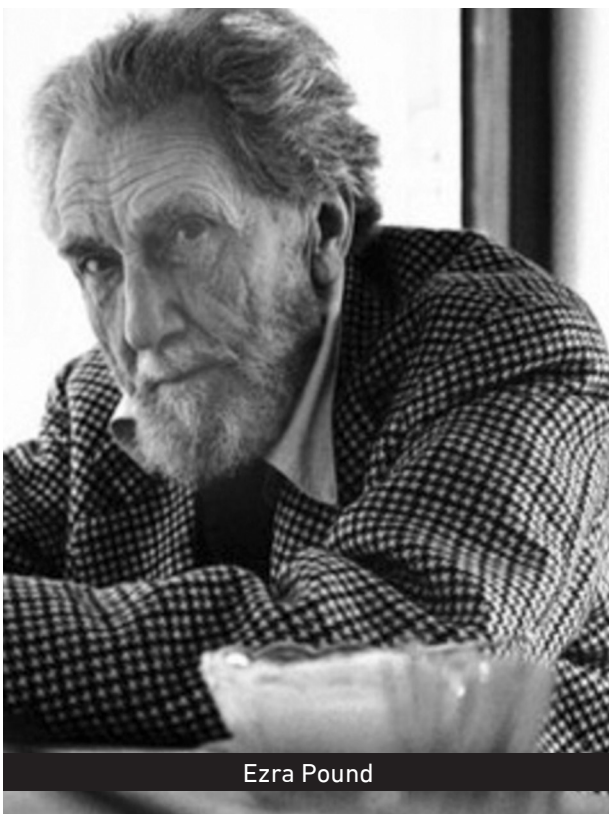
Linking these ideas to politics, they present their concern of immigration as an economic threat. Migrants are discussed as responsible agents for worsening the labour conditions of native workers by acting as a reserve of cheap or 'slave' labour, while benefiting from social services and public housing at the same time. The movement believes that Muslim communities have the right to preserve their identity and customs, provided that this is outside Italy and Europe.

Authoritarianism: CPI is inspired by writings from Mussolini, American poet Ezra Pound and other texts by historical and contemporary extreme-right thinkers, such as Alessandro Pavolini, Julius Evola, Alain de Benoist, among others. CPI also refers to post-war Fascism in Italy and Europe often. CPI describes democracy as a political model that is ill-suited to respond to the will of the citizens and sees

mainstream political parties, in particular governing ones, as the origin of the loss of national sovereignty. Opposing democracy and criticizing representative democracy from a fascist-revolutionary perspective, while regularly running for elections, is perhaps the most important element that CPI openly borrows from the authoritarian tradition of historical Fascism.

Socio-Economic Stances: CPI considers home ownership a sacred right on which to establish the family unit; it is an inviolable right central to a person's dignity. This is in line with its name and the origins of the group. Following the thoughts of Pound who believed that rent was violating one's sacred right and should not be monetized, CPI calls for a subsidized home-buying scheme to encourage individual private property. However, CPI calls for the government to manage the economy by nationalizing businesses, such as the Bank of Italy, telecommunications, postal, and transportation services in order to protect Italian natives. This would protect Italians' welfare and businesses. These two align with their ideology and illustrates hybridization in its stance on government.

In addition to these three core features, CPI ideology also engages with four less primary concerns: 1) Support for Europe but against the European Union, 2) The environment, 3) Gender, and 4) The support for



Ezra Pound



Mussolini



Gianluca Iannone

colonial empires. All four are discussed in detail in the Book and is another example of hybridization.

Internal Structure

The CPI structure is a hybrid of political party structure and that of social movements. Like many political parties, it is organized by a national headquarter in Rome and local chapters that report to it. Each local chapter has a youth wing, which exists alongside project-based organizations and issue-specific associations that are based on themes. This includes student associations across 53 chapters and associations that focus on mountain hiking and sport, environment, international humanitarian volunteering, and health assistance.

The headquarters is led by CPI founding leader, Gianluca Iannone, who embodies the group, in alignment with classic Fascism. Iannone is described as soldier, brother and friend who is not challenged but respected due to his participation in group leisure activities, volunteer work, public relations on behalf of CPI, and his concerts and music as the lead member of ZetaZeroAlfa.

As Iannone leads from the apex, he is supported by an advisory council who manage core activities and group ideas, such as training activists, managing events, demonstrations, and campaigns in local chapters. Yet, Iannone's input is pivotal in all the decisions and personnel selection. He leads strategization, operations, decision-making, and manages cohesion in the group. Ideas are distributed through online and

print copies of CPI's newspaper. Funding sources and use are unclear but CPI receives donations and government exemptions due to their non-profit status.

To attract militants and sympathizers, registration is easy, fun, and local. People can inquire and register at local chapter locations or join social activities at gyms, bars, theatres, music halls, or tattoo shops, to join an association affiliated to CPI. These social activities can be volunteer work or sports events. Some may become web supporters by paying a lower membership fee than those who join in person to become full members. Web supporters support marketing and communications online by distributing messages and images. Actual members participate in most activities and be active members.

Most members of CPI see it as part of their identity and liked being part of a community with likeminded people, discussing typically marginalized perspectives. First, there are identity motivations, which explain movement participation as an expression of personal identification with the group; second, ideological motivations describe participation as a search for meaning for one's own views; and finally, instrumental motivations see participation as an explicit attempt to change the political and social environment.

The youth association's purpose is to bring CPI into schools and universities. It's main aims are to increase the representation of Italians in schools and universities

and free public education for Italians. Due to a number of violent and confrontational acts between 2006 and 2018, its members and local representation has decreased. In some cities where CPI faced opposition, they mobilized by engaging locals on social issues, by distributing food to (Italian) families, by offering counselling to (Italian) workers and job-seekers, and by seeking to open a clinic for (Italian) people who struggled to access public health services.

Collective Identity

CPI attracts urban appeal, as it has limited presence in rural and smaller towns, it offers a common identity that is promoted through shared meanings, symbols, practices, and narratives found in songs and materials. In particular, the co-authors highlighted four areas of identity creation: imagery in items and visual symbols, style of clothing and aesthetics, music, and violence as an expected and agreed upon way for activists to behave. The co-authors explain that commitment to CPI results from shared hybrid images and practices, which trigger a network of relationships of trust among activists. Collective identity in CPI is thus not only explained by the adherence to a set of classic extreme-right symbols and rituals, but by a more complex combination of extreme and coded references,

mediated by different political cultures. This mix of extreme right, pop-culture and left-progressive references supports the engagement of individuals in CPI, by consolidating the group's internal identity and by ensuring public recognizability. This is evident in the four areas of identity creation:

- **Image:** Symbols in the style typical of left-wing political movements is a signature of the group. Symbols with Mussolini create nostalgia and they blend historic symbols with Italian Futurism architectural styles as they promote youth, speed, and 'dynamism'. This left-wing representation is created with an aim to attract members but more so for the media, politicians, and public to recognize them more easily.
- **Style:** Commercial goods and tattoos are used to promote CPI style, rather than the stereotypical look of far-right skin heads who wear bomber jackets and have shaved heads. CPI members dress in simple jeans and t-shirts. Women have even less consistency and prescribed style to reflect their membership. Rather, CPI brands the ZZA logo, pirate flags, and lyrics of ZZA songs on a variety of clothing items like t-shirts, backpacks, hats, and hoodies that appear every day to non-





CPI Italians, but is an identifier for members of the group. It is a way to promote Italian-made products, insider knowledge of one's collective identity. CPI also owns a tattoo shop in Rome where members can visit to get tattoos of the CPI turtle logo, the Jolly Roger symbolizing piracy, some Celtic and ancient Roman symbols, and traditional Fascist icons.

- **Music:** ZetaZeroAlfa (ZZA) songs and lyrics are a crucial and highly invested method to attract and show the youth that they are heard, and to spread the message of CPI and create solidarity among listeners. Its role in CPI cannot be understated, evident as its roots are in the ZZA band and song lyrics from the late-1990s, detailed in Chapter Two.
- **Violence:** There are three dimensions of violence.
 1. Violence as part of CPI's self-proclaimed repertoire of action as a means to defend CPI's goals. CPI's stance is that it is always ready to act if needed.
 2. An emphasis on the narratives of violence among militants, where violence is a way to show loyalty and a way to defend its social movements, such as oppression and marginalization it perceives from the economic system, globalization, and consumerism. The narrative is shared throughout its music.
 3. Identity building in violent language; in fact, most of the activists we interviewed made use of a 'battlefield' type of language, which includes a wide array of

expressions, words and concepts linked to the idea of war, conflict and struggle. People who act in violent ways to protect their identity and 'struggles' are seen as courageous and are celebrated as warriors and comrades.

External Mobilization

Like all its other core operations, CPI combines social movement and political participation as a hybrid approach to gain media support and high profile. In this way, its tactics shifts over time based on current events and public discussion. In line with its past focus to address housing issues, the economy, and social welfare, it used grassroots and social actions, e.g. protests and squatting, as its general mobilization style until 2011. Since then, members ran as independent candidates in centre-right coalitions. In 2013, it had an electoral list and agenda linked with anti-immigration proposals and concerns about the European Union. This may be most obvious in its electoral slogan in 2013 Direction – Revolution to the most recent in 2018 Direction – Parliament.

Its mobilization-related focus changes too based on current issues. For example, it has mobilized based on concerns related to the economy, Europe, law and order, civil rights, immigration, and Fascism. The focus on each concern fluctuates depending on current events. The largest shift in focus coincided with the increase of their public image in 2014. Attention to such concerns

fluctuates with current events. The biggest shift in interest coincided with an increase in its presence in 2014. At that time, their focus on immigration grew substantially compared to other traditionally large focuses on the economy and Fascism.

The co-authors present a detailed analysis and graph of the degree of attention CPI has placed on different political issues. Approximately 50% of its content consistently focus on five key issues: macroeconomics, employment, immigration, government, and social welfare (in descending order). Despite its history and symbol of the turtle, housing and law and crime are minimally discussed today in comparison.

Political Engagement

CPI's hybrid communication approach combines the communication style of social movements and political parties along with varying media approaches to reach a broad audience. It always aims to attract and expand media attention, legitimize the group, and meet growing needs of its political engagement.

To reach internal members, CPI publishes a monthly online news journal *Il Primato Nazionale*. It promotes its ideology through references to far-right leaders and political figures that align with its historical Fascist roots, views from CPI leaders, and discussion of key issues at a given time. This is a way to communicate and teach members on issues of importance and how to defend their views. To reach internal and external audiences, CPI uses

its website, web radio, web TV, Facebook pages, social media profiles, and other online media. The website is not updated as frequently but other mediums host daily updates. They all post interviews from local and national CPI officials, music, and debates.

According to the co-authors' analysis, the CPI Facebook page is more popular than that of any other extreme-right parties. Their desire to gain media attention in quality media helped it reach an even wider audience and legitimacy.

Summary

The Book presents a well-researched study on complex ideas that are shared in very clear and succinct descriptions. It articulates and illustrates how CPI uses hybridization to meet its key aims of acquiring new resources (e.g., recruits, funding) and recognizability and distinction from other far-right, grassroots, and anti-immigrant groups.

It contributes to existing research and encourages future studies to explore collective action and citizen protest as an approach of political parties and the 'restyling' of far-right ideologies and practices to meet mainstream needs.

In concluding, it strongly encourages increasing studies of non-electoral far-right politics globally, as they shift the understanding of liberal democratic values. Through hybridization the far right may adapt to liberal democracy, with the goal of radicalizing mainstream ideas and audiences.



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