

CONTEXTS AND DEBATES

Past, present, and future of the Italian memory of Fascism. Interviews with Luisa Passerini, Filippo Focardi, John Foot, Robert Gordon, and Philip Cooke

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(Received 28 June 2022; revised 10 July 2022; accepted 10 July 2022)

Abstract

This article consists of interviews with five world experts on the memory of Fascism. Taking the centenary of the March on Rome as an opportunity to rethink the development of Italian collective memory, the five interviewees were asked to reflect on different aspects of the Italian memory of Fascism, addressing the dominant conceptualisations, limits, and transformations of the discourses used to narrate Fascism in Italian culture. The result of these conversations, which touch upon issues related to the memory of the Resistance, the Second World War, the Holocaust, and colonialism, is a rich overview of the main trends and current trajectories of Italian memory culture, which can help us imagine the future directions of the Italian memory of Fascism and enhance interventions in this field by memory scholars and memory activists.

Keywords: Fascism; Antifascism; Memory; Holocaust; Resistance; Second World War.

Introduction

The date 28 October 2022 will mark one hundred years since Fascism's seizure of power. The peculiarity of this anniversary is not simply due to the negative nature of the event it recalls, but to the fact that it will constitute the beginning of two decades of potential commemorations. Remembering the March on Rome is just the first step of a long journey into the memory of the Fascist dictatorship, which will include the anniversaries of tragic events that deeply marked twentieth-century Italian history, from the murder of Giacomo Matteotti to the promulgation of the *Leggi fascistissime*, from the colonial wars in Libya and Ethiopia, characterised by crimes such as the Debre Libanos massacre, to the persecution of the Italian Jewish population, up to Italy's invasion and occupation of France, Greece, the former Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, during the Axis War. In the years to come, the shadow of the Fascist past will taint both our imagination and Italian public discourse, and debates about Italian memory will intertwine with other important anniversaries across Europe related to the history of Nazism, the Spanish Civil War, the Holocaust, and the Second World War.

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Anniversaries are arbitrary occurrences and, therefore, they should not dictate the research agenda. Scholarly work structured around a series of never-ending predictable commemorations would result in a monumentalisation of history, and it would produce a rigid and stagnant codification of the relationship between the present and the past. Yet, anniversaries are also useful moments to reflect on certain historical events and consider how their legacy has been constructed throughout the decades. In relation to the Italian memory of Fascism, such moments of collective reflection appear particularly welcome. In spite of the pervasive role that the ghosts of the dictatorship have played in the culture of democratic Italy, numerous aporias, insufficiencies, and limitations have affected the Italian collective memory. On the one hand, the fragile antifascist identity on which the Italian Republic was built was often challenged by revisionist discourses and heated controversies around the legacy of the Resistance, which hampered the construction of a solid historical consciousness. On the other hand, debates on the legacy of antifascism have often sidelined the memory of other unsettling – and therefore important – events, such as the discriminatory racial policies that the Italians enforced and the war crimes they committed during the many military campaigns they waged across the globe. As a result, in Italy, the Fascist past has been generally narrated through self-indulgent narratives, which led to a severe undervaluation of the diffused co-responsibilities that implicated the Italians in the crimes of the regime.

To understand more about how the Italian memory of Fascism was moulded, how it evolved, and what trajectory it is taking today, I interviewed five experts in the field whose work has directly contributed to shaping the ways in which we talk about Italy's Fascist past. The five scholars who kindly agreed to answer my questions are Professor Luisa Passerini, Professor Filippo Focardi, Professor John Foot, Professor Robert Gordon, and Professor Philip Cooke.¹ Each of them has been asked three specific questions related to different aspects of the Italian memory of Fascism. In addition, they have each been invited to reflect on three issues on which the article ends. The insights of these scholars on the state and transformations of Italian memory can help us grasp the future directions of Italy's continuous engagement with the Fascist past and identify the most fruitful interventions that, as academics, we can carry out through research in history and memory.

Guido Bartolini

Interview with Professor Luisa Passerini, European University Institute, Florence

GB: *To reflect on today's memory of Fascism, I think it is important to start from the last decades of the twentieth century, a period that saw important transformations, both at the national and international level, in the ways in which the past was discussed. Could you bring us back to that era and explain why, memory-wise, it constitutes an important moment?*

LP: My interpretation is that decisive changes in Italian memory culture took place around the 1970s when a growing interest in the practice of oral history as a conveyor of memory emerged. Obviously, oral history had existed since the 1950s and there had been great collectors like Gianni Bosio and Danilo Montaldi, but from the 1970s there was a sort of widespread movement, what I would call a cultural movement, of people – whether individuals or groups and collectives, most of whom were acting outside academia – carrying out interviews on the individual and collective past. This led to meetings of various types, publications, conferences, and workshops, which were also inspired by increasing contacts with Great Britain where oral history had already received more recognition. Many of these

practicians of oral history, despite being active and great collectors, such as, for instance, Nuto Revelli and Giorgina Levi Arian, repeatedly claimed to be neither historians nor experts. They improvised themselves as interviewers and learned by practice and experience, by trial and error. Their legacy, however, has been crucial also in territory of transdisciplinary research, between history, literature, and the social sciences.

Meanwhile, in the universities, oral history was not seen with a very benevolent eye, and we were accused of trying to use only oral sources in the writing of history. On the contrary, those of us oralists who considered ourselves as historians always tried to combine oral, written and other visual sources. I believe that the resistance within the discipline of history to this new practice was mainly due to the fact that at the time history and memory were somehow at odds with each other. This was certainly the case for the history and memory of Fascism. What oral history brought to light was the fact that the diffused and widespread forms of collective memory – a term that I think we should always use with some caution as it remains problematic to which extent a memory is really collective and shared – privileged aspects of the past that historiography would not consider. For instance, one of these aspects was the memory of jokes against Fascism, a mocking attitude which was part of a daily negotiation with the regime, a third ground besides the political domains of consent and dissent. This element was very present in oral memory but absent from historiography.

The diffusion of oral history in the culture of the 1970s and 1980s was something which progressively changed the ways Italian society conceptualised, discussed, and studied the past. Especially at the local level, many municipalities put out funds for projects aiming to document the memories of their citizens, including those related to the Fascist period. This allowed some important aspects of daily life under the regime to emerge in the public arena, such as the memory of fertility control under Fascism and the memory of symbols that were used both in favour of and against the regime (Passerini 1987). The attention that started to be given to these understudied political practices and to the ways they were reflected in both material and corporeal culture changed the cultural landscape in which the discourse about the memory of Fascism was produced.

- GB: *In a 1999 article, you talked about areas of ‘resistances to remembering’, referring to aspects of Italian history of Fascism and the Second World War that at the time remained excluded from public memory, such as the internal fights within the antifascist Resistance, the reprisals after 1945, and the humane behaviours of some German soldiers (Passerini 1999). More than 20 years later, are these issues still problematic? What are the main areas of resistance to remembering that, today, characterise the Italian public memory?*
- LP: Some of these issues are definitely still problematic. I would say that the question of the internal fights within the antifascist Resistance to some extent has been dealt with. By contrast, the behaviour of the German soldiers has not yet been approached in more nuanced perspectives. In its more general sense, this is an issue that concerns the representation of the enemy. This is why the book by Nuto Revelli, *Il disperso di Marburg* (1994), telling the story of Revelli’s search for the traces of a German soldier who was killed in Italy in 1944 and who is not remembered as an enemy in the oral tradition among the local population, is so important. However, in large sections of our culture there is still the tendency to represent the enemy as someone completely inhuman, while the moments

when they are somehow humane remain difficult to be introduced, especially in memory. This remains a striking problem that can also be traced in other historical contexts – including the present war in Ukraine.

If I look at today's memory of Fascism, however, what I find particularly problematic is how it is still difficult to recognise the value of cultural products and works of art by artists who were Fascists. I think that this remains a crucial point in order to disentangle the knots of the legacy of Fascism in Italian culture. We know that there were many artists and writers who were Fascists and that later became antifascists in accordance with a political trajectory that characterised many sectors of society but that was particularly common in the field of the arts and culture. This is not surprising, as for a young person living in the 1930s it was basically impossible to completely avoid all connections with the regime. Yet, in the case of intellectuals, writers, artists, and architects – by the way, architecture is a very important field to consider if we want to understand both the political action of the regime and its legacy – the problems of complicity and participation are particularly important.

For instance, I remember that one of my mentors, Norberto Bobbio, was pressed by a terrible feeling for having been in his youth entangled with Fascism – I mean not deeply involved but somehow entangled with it. In my own view about these issues, I would like to evoke the remark by Susan Sontag who argued that the artists' intentions and intents are less relevant than the value and significance of their works of art and cultural work. An artist may have been a Fascist, they may have meant to use their artistic and architectural practice as a praise of the regime, but the work that was produced with these intentions goes beyond the conscious intents. Although I find this perspective difficult to be contested, I understand how such reading can also appear problematic, since for some it is still difficult to recognise the value of an artwork in a relatively independent way from their creator. By saying that, in no way am I suggesting that art is not political. I am convinced that art is political, but it has its own politics which is not entirely coincident with the politics of the artist.

In my opinion, the question of the relationship of the artists with the regime and the interpretation of their works in the light of this relationship still constitute an area of resistance to remembering in today's memory culture. We should reflect more on the role of writers and artists under the regime and on how we should understand their work today. Doing so would force us to deal with some of the most perturbing and challenging, and, therefore, important aspects of the memory of Fascism. I conceive this as a kind of triangle that concerns art, daily life, and politics, three aspects that are always intertwined in complex and changing ways. The resistance to remembering such entanglements is especially strong when it comes to daily life because daily life touches everybody, not only the ruling class and those in power. That's why it constitutes one of the most important fields in which the memory of Fascism should be addressed.

GB: *It is usually agreed that Italy has been unable to deal with its Fascist past. However, since the 2000s, we have seen the proliferation of academic works that have addressed the darkest pages of the history of Fascist Italy, delving into the Italian war crimes of colonialism and the Second World War (Labanca 2002; Rodogno 2003; Gobetti 2007). Moreover, numerous contemporary Italian writers are now addressing the Fascist past with renewed energy, breaking with many of the rigid ideological assumptions that characterised Italian culture in the Cold War era – as an example of this, we can take the novels by Francesca Melandri*

(2017) and Antonio Scurati (2018 and 2020). Aren't these the signs that Italian society is developing a more thorough and mature engagement with its dictatorial past? Or is this a too optimistic and simplistic reading?

LP: I don't think it would be too optimistic and simplistic; but I believe that it would be a bit too partial in the sense that there are uneven areas in which the memory of the past is shaped. In some of these areas what you say is ongoing, but in others the process is less advanced. In other words, in today's Italian culture, attempts to deal with the past exist but are not evenly present, and it is important to distinguish between various political and cultural dimensions. For instance, in the field of literature, the process may have reached an advanced stage of elaboration and representation. However, in other areas like popular opinion, daily exchanges, and small talk, it would be less advanced. So, in some specialised areas, Italian culture is going in the direction that you mention, but this is not something shared by the whole of society in all its manifestations.

In the last years we witnessed that something is going on in the field of the memory of Fascism and colonialism and in the dimension of gender. I'm thinking here of the discussions on Indro Montanelli's statue and the stories about his attitude towards his wife. Of course, this was an episode of the larger war of opinions about statues, something that is not only Italian but points toward a wider phenomenon. Yet, if we look at the Italian case, there aren't many reasons to be optimistic as it seems that the memory of colonialism in connection with the question of gender is still underworked and under elaborated. This is a topic that still evokes rancour and hostility and, at the same time, strong defensive attitudes linked to stereotypical conceptualisations of Italian men and women. These attitudes are very relevant because they concern the colonisation of minds and mentalities. In other words, if we look at current debates about the colonial past, not only can we observe a repetition of old colonial stereotypes such as the idea that the Italians were treating the colonies and the colonised women well, in accordance to the myth of the Good Italian; but we can also perceive, at a deeper level, a colonisation of the minds, which includes sticking to interiorised images of ourselves. There seems to be an especially strong resistance in the field of gender, a dimension that Italian culture finds particularly difficult to deal with. In this regard, the ambiguity of the figure of Mussolini presented as 'mamma' in some school texts, which I have explored in my *Mussolini immaginario* (1991), would be worthwhile to be studied more deeply.

Interview with Professor Filippo Focardi, University of Padua

GB: *When we talk about the Italian memory of Fascism, we refer to a discursive formation that is inevitably heterogenous, since not only does it involve numerous experiences, such as the dictatorship, the colonial expansion, the racial persecution, the Second World War, and the Italian Civil War, but also the varied perspectives that the Italians had on these events. Yet, your research on the memory of the Second World War (Focardi 2013) shows that throughout the twentieth century Italian memory was affected by recurrent common features. Can you describe this dominant discourse and explain the effects it had on the way Fascism was remembered?*

FF: We can identify a series of dominant traits in the ways both Fascism and the Second World War have been narrated since the postwar era. A first pillar of this hegemonic narrative – which, as Tony Judt points out, is also a common element of European

memory (Judt 2010) – consists in the glorification of the antifascist Resistance, which was presented as the result of a unanimous and widespread choice through which the whole of Italy had revealed its true political feelings. This interpretation of the Resistance presented the Italians either as ‘non-Fascists’ [*a-fascisti*] or directly as antifascists and, therefore, it also entailed a specific conceptualisation of both Fascism and its wars as something that the Italians disapproved of and had not supported. All the antifascist parties, from the Liberals to the Communists, backed up this narrative, which, as I showed in my research, served the political purpose of trying to avoid a punitive peace treaty with the Allies. This meant that already before the end of the Second World War, the Italians tended to overlook the Axis War and celebrate the war they fought after September 1943 at the side of the United Nations against what was defined as the mutual German enemy. This resulted in a stark separation between the responsibility of the Italian people and the responsibility of the regime, which, non-coincidentally, was an argument that both Allied and Soviet propaganda had already put forward.

The other central element of this hegemonic memory discourse is the clear tendency to evaluate both the war and the Fascist regime by comparing and contrasting the Italian case with the German one. This is a long-lasting feature of Italian culture that David Bidussa has called ‘the demon of analogy’ (Bidussa 1994) – his argument was developed in relation to antisemitism, but the phenomenon actually had a much broader scope and has strongly characterised the Italian memory of Fascism both then and now. This is not to say that comparisons cannot be useful for the scientific understanding of both the present and the past. In many instances they can be illuminating. What is significant – and problematic – is that since the very beginning of the elaboration of the Italian memory of Fascism, the regime has been judged in comparison with Nazism. This trait can already be found, as underlined by Giuseppe Galasso, in Croce’s interpretation of Fascism as a ‘parenthesis’ in Italian history (Galasso 1998). In Croce’s account, Fascism and Nazism are repeatedly compared and Nazism is seen as the revealing culmination of the degenerative development of German history, according to a process that would have its alleged origin in the lack of Romanisation. In my work, I tried to prove that this interpretation of Fascism was not a prerogative of Liberal culture but also characterised the Christian and Marxist ones. For the former, Fascism was a form of totalitarianism that had been restrained by Catholicism, in line with Jacques Maritain’s argument (1946). For the latter, both Fascism and Nazism constituted capitalist counter-revolutions that the bourgeoisie implemented against the working class. And yet, Marxist thinkers often identified some fundamental distinctions in the two movements, which were due to the radical difference of German and Italian history.

This comparative perspective led to the assumption that Nazism constituted the quintessence of evil, and that it was characterised by a solid, consistent, mad, and antisemitic ideology linked to pagan racism. Fascism, instead, was seen as a movement without a precise ideology that remained quite mild when it came to the use of violence. This comparison affected and continues to affect the judgement that is passed on Fascism. It is at the basis of the retroactive process of de-fascistisation that Emilio Gentile described, which led the Italian memory to remove the salient traits of Fascism, meaning its violent, oppressive, and criminal nature (Gentile 2002). Having said that, it’s clear that we cannot reduce everything to this schematism. There were also more complex narratives, such as those developed by Actionist culture, which spoke about Fascism as the autobiography of the Italian nation. Yet, in my view, what really allows us to understand the development of

the Italian memory is the convergence of the various political cultures on a series of dominant narratives that juxtapose the good Italian with the evil German.

GB: *The Italiani brava gente myth and the stereotype of the evil German have been largely exposed by the scholarship. But what's the situation outside academia? Do you think that these tropes are still active in today's culture? Moreover, what are the ideas and tropes that you think are becoming dominant in today's memory discourse about the Fascist past?*

FF: The stereotypes of the good Italian and the evil German had great longevity and proved to be surprisingly effective on public opinion. Although we are inclined to think that conceptualisations developed at the time of the Second World War must today be outdated, it only takes a moment to realise that they are still here with us. Just think about the 2008 economic crisis, which strongly revamped anti-German slogans and feelings in the Italian and European debates, especially in Greece. In Italy, the public discourse tended to emphasise the wickedness of the Germans, which immediately evoked the difference between Fascism and Nazism. Despite the *longue durée* of this phenomenon, there are also signs that something is changing. For instance, some recent works have challenged the stereotype of the bad German. This is not an entirely new topic since we already had Michela Ponzani's works on the children born in Italy from relationships between Italian women and German soldiers (Ponzani 2015), or the research of oral history by Matthias Röhrs – although his study remains quite unknown in Italy – about the German soldiers who joined partisan formations (Röhrs 2009). Today, however, this issue has been moved to the centre of the Italian historical debate thanks to books such as the volume edited by Mirco Carrattieri and Iara Meloni (2021) on the German deserters who participated in the Italian Resistance, or the book by Carlo Greppi (2021) on the figure of the 'good German', which had a significant impact in the newspapers. It is difficult to tell to what extent such debate can produce new ways to conceive of the past: however, there are undoubtedly important innovations in the public discourse.

The other important aspect to consider regards what Cristina Baldassini called the 'indulgent memory of Fascism' (Baldassini 2008). This, too, is a long-lasting feature of the Italian memory of Fascism: it can already be traced in Indro Montanelli's *Il buon uomo Mussolini* (1947), and, in the following decades, it largely pervaded weekly popular magazines and, from the 1980s, television programmes. This is neither a nostalgic memory nor a neofascist one, but an indulgent perspective about the Fascist past that found great support among the Italian middle class. In this perspective, Fascism is reduced to *mussolinismo*, according to a representation of Mussolini as the embodiment of the vices and virtues of the Italians, as a generous and histrionic leader of a regime full of rhetoric but rarely violent, who was surrounded by party officials who were open-minded critical Fascists. This is at least how figures such as Dino Grandi and Giuseppe Bottai have often been represented in the public arena, when instead these men were firstly some of the most infamous *squadristi* and then highly involved in the totalitarian project.

This indulgent narrative basically popularised and simplified for the Italian media Renzo De Felice's theses and led too many to believe, as unfortunately we often hear, that Fascism 'also did good things'. This view today is still effective, and it basically overturns the strictly antifascist position according to the following reasoning: if Fascism was a very soft dictatorship, there is no problem in admitting that all the Italians were Fascists, and we should feel neither astonished nor

ashamed by this fact. This narrative gets to the opposite conclusion of the idea that all the Italians were antifascists. Both views, however, are historically unsubstantiated and they are also misleading. As we know, the relationships between the Italians and the regime were extremely complex. To understand them properly, it would be necessary to carefully analyse the mechanisms that regulated both consensus and dissent in Fascist Italy and address the issue of the popular opinion about the regime – I find the latter a more useful concept than that of ‘public opinion’, since we are dealing with a regime that did not allow any forms of opposition (Corner 2015).

To counteract this indulgent reading of the Fascist past, I think that more should be done to understand Fascism against the backdrop of twentieth-century welfare dictatorships. So far, as scholars, we have mainly tried to re-establish the violent and oppressive nature of Fascism. There is, however, another important point – which is closely linked to the issue of the consensus that the regime had – that we need to investigate further, which concerns the social policies that the regime put in place. In other words, besides drawing attention to the violent crimes that Fascism committed, we need to historicise and critically assess the actual social policies that it implemented, as at the level of public history Francesco Filippi has started to do (Filippi 2019). Above all, we should reflect more broadly on the concept of welfare dictatorship. Fascism, like every other twentieth-century mass dictatorship, could not but put in place social policies, which were obviously paired with measures aiming to control and repress dissent. Establishing pension schemes or investing in public works cannot obviously be a proof of the righteousness of Fascism as unfortunately it is often claimed. This is a significant point that we still need to historicise with more precision so that we can then have a greater impact on the public discourse.

- GB: *The Italian memory of Fascism is part of a broader discourse promoted by the European Union to preserve the memory of twentieth-century totalitarianisms. How do you evaluate the EU's memory politics? Can a European memory be developed or does it risk producing a uniform dominant discourse that cancels the idiosyncrasies of national memories and the significant differences that exist in the memory cultures of Eastern and Western Europe?*
- FF: In the last 20 years, the EU has made significant efforts to create a common memory discourse, which is seen as something that could foster cohesion among member states after the failure of the European Constitution. I am very critical of what has been done so far. European institutions have created a memory centred on two main pillars, which are the memory of the Holocaust and the anti-totalitarian paradigm. The latter became a central tenet of the EU discourse especially after the entry of Central and Eastern European countries into the Union. The discourse that has been promoted is centred on the figure of the victim and the ideas that the victims of Communism should have the same dignity as the victims of Nazism. This perspective reflects legitimate feelings of countries such as Poland, Hungary, and other nations that were under Communist regimes for over 40 years. However, if we look at the 19 September 2019 resolution *On the Importance of European Remembrance for the Future of Europe*, we can see that this project is marked by both strong limits and great risks.² First of all, it provides the majority of Europeans with a kind of alibi, since the EU discourse focuses on German responsibility for the Holocaust and Russian responsibility for Communist crimes, but it overlooks the various forms of pro-Nazism collaborationism that existed as much

as the issue of the autonomous origin of Communist movements in many Eastern countries. It is also interesting to point out that a strange friction exists between these two pillars of EU memory, since the idea of the uniqueness of the Holocaust, which is reaffirmed in the European documents, cannot easily coexist with the idea of the equal dignity of all the victims of totalitarianism. Rather than a memory created through top-down processes, we should have projects aiming to train history teachers across Europe, so that in every country there could be experts who know how to address and deal with their national history while also situating it within a European framework that can reveal the interactions between the national and transnational dimension.

Finally, in the European memory, there is also a problem related to the memory of Fascism. It is true that thanks to an amendment promoted by social-democratic parties, the resolutions about the memory of totalitarianism also condemn Fascism (Focardi 2020). However, it is clear that the centre of the discourse lies somewhere else, since EU memory is focused on Nazism and Communism, which are presented as the main types of totalitarianism and the real enemies of liberal democracy. This leads to a further problem related to the antifascist Resistance. In the European discourse, the Resistance fighter who is taken as a model is Witold Pilecki, a brave Polish officer who fought first against the Nazis and then against the Communists, who executed him on 25 May 1948, which is the day that the European Parliament would like to dedicate to the heroes of the anti-totalitarian resistance. In this way, though, it seems that the only opposers who can and should be remembered are those who fought against both Nazism and Communism. A narrative of this kind can work well in the Polish context, but it cannot be applied to the Italian or French one. For instance, someone like Enrico Berlinguer cannot be compared with an agent and torturer of the Stasi police. I believe that it is important that the EU leaves more space to national specificities. We should definitely encourage the study and understanding of Eastern European history in Western European countries, but it is important that this exchange of knowledge also goes the other way round.

Interview with Professor John Foot, University of Bristol

GB: *In your work you have shown that the idea of divided memory was a crucial concept to understand the Italian memory culture of the 1990s and early 2000s (Foot 2011). The scholarship of Memory Studies suggests that in every context collective memory is always plural since it results from tensions among different conceptualisations of the past. What made Italy a particular case study and, therefore, the concept of divided memory so useful to understand the Italian memory culture of that time?*

JF: In Italian culture, the idea of divided memory originally emerged, historiographically speaking, from studies by oral historians like Giovanni Contini and others on the massacres that the Nazis carried out in Italy in the Second World War (Contini 1997). Oral historians 'discovered' that in the areas where the massacres took place there was a very strong anti-Resistance memory and some surprising and quite shocking forms of divided memory, where, for example, the partisans were blamed for the Nazi massacres. The now classic work on the Fosse Ardeatine by Alessandro Portelli (1999) pointed in the same direction. This is the historiographical debate on which I worked for my book *Italy's Divided Memory*. If I was to make a critique of my own book, I think that there are mainly two problems with the idea of divided memory, or at least with the ways I used this concept back then.

First of all, I think that the idea of 'divided memory' is too binary as it gives the false impression that there are only two sides of memory. In this regard, I think a much more useful conceptualisation is that of a fragmented series of memories. For each event we can find a series of fragmented memories, which are often very opposed to each other, but they're not on a binary. For example, if we look at the Italian memory of the massacres in the Second World War, we have an anti-partisan memory and a more classic Resistance memory, but also many middle roads, which are neither one thing nor the other necessarily. I think that a focus on this plural fragmentation is a kind of more complicated, but probably more useful way of seeing how Italian memory worked.

The other aspect that is important to stress is that divided memory, obviously, is not just an Italian thing. We can find divided forms of memory in most societies. There may be a particular Italian take on this, which emerged from the way the Second World War played out in Italy or in relation to historical events such as Piazza Fontana. But if you took into consideration the national histories of other geographical areas, let's say for instance the Balkans, you would find almost extreme forms of divided memory. The concept of divided memory is definitely useful to discuss certain aspects of Italian memory, but I think it would be important to expand it away from a kind of particularly Italian root and develop, instead, more trans-national approaches.

The other important thing I would add – because, throughout the years, I noticed that on this point my book has been often misinterpreted – is that I don't see divided memory as something that has a negative effect on memory. Many people interpreted the idea of divided memory as an anti-Italian or, at least, as a kind of bad feature of Italian memory. Actually, I think it's a good thing. I believe that we do not need a strong and homogenous collective memory to be a proper nation. Many Italian historians, however, seem to have that kind of ethical idea. You know the claim that *'siamo un paese senza memoria'* and this continual sort of auto-flagellation. To me, instead, divided memory seems incredibly interesting and rich. In Italy, there have been long-running historical debates that have been kept alive by these conflicts. If we look at the present, I think that the period of divided memories is coming to an end and it's not necessarily a good thing as it attests to the end of a generation and the end of a historical debate.

GB: *Many historians have deplored the banalisation and trivialisation that affected Italian memory. Emilio Gentile has famously talked about a de-fascistisation of the memory of Fascism. As a result of these processes, many Italians had and have distorted opinions of what the Fascist dictatorship entailed. How did these processes take place within Italian culture also considering the important role that antifascism had in the liturgies of the state?*

JF: The first thing to underline is that, from the Constitution onwards, antifascism became the sort of official ideology of the Italian state. Through this officialisation, however, the ways antifascism and the Resistance were memorialised, understood, and celebrated became very ossified and ritualised. In this memory discourse, the so called *vulgata* of postwar Italy if you like, all the difficult and complicated parts of the Resistance were ignored, making it into a myth. It is also true that antifascism was often celebrated without any real reference to, or serious discussion of, Fascism itself. And then '68 comes along and many from that period contest that idea of the Resistance and attach themselves to a much more radical memory, along the idea of *'La Resistenza tradita'*. While gaining momentum in '68 and the 1970s, this more

radical perspective was always there on the ground. There have always been different antifascisms. There was the *vulgata*, but then underneath there were all kinds of things going on.

Among these multiple approaches to the past, we must include the attitudes that the Italians had about Fascism. I don't think that the problem was so much that people forgot Fascism or misunderstood it. What characterised Italy was, first and foremost, a fragmentation of responses and the absence of a centralised perspective. I mean, there wasn't even a general discussion about getting rid of Fascist murals or monuments and everyone at the local level did their own thing. On the one side, Fascism was said to be over, and people stressed that they were now living in a different period and they did not need to remember. On the other side, people very strongly felt that Fascism was a crucial thing to remember. For many, memory and the maintenance of the antifascist tradition became a duty. I think it is much more useful to put emphasis on the multiplicity of the discourses about the Fascist past than making moral judgements. I disagree with arguments that go like the Italians don't understand Fascism, they forgot Fascism, and they are ignorant about it. There have been massive discussions about Fascism in Italy, all the time, continually. It's just that they're very complicated. However, it is also true that in the public sphere, and in public memory, Fascism was often ignored completely.

In relation to the processes of banalisation, trivialisation, and de-fascistisation, I think that there has been a very strong opinion carried forward by a lot of the media that gave the idea that Fascism wasn't too bad. To understand this perspective, we should study more someone like Indro Montanelli. It's easy today to pigeon-hole him and try to dismiss him, but I think that he remains a very influential figure to look at if we want to understand more the moderate public opinion in Italy. The other crucial aspect is that there has also been a fascination with particular aspects of Fascism, particularly with Mussolini and his family, wife, and lovers. While I believe that these are real problems that have affected Italian memory culture, I think that we shouldn't take a moral approach and blame the Italians for not remembering enough about Fascism. That's not a very useful approach, which I find as damaging as thinking that scholars should always be lining up and take a moral stance on these questions. What I find more useful and I like to do in my work, instead, is to get down to the micro level, which is where you start to understand a lot more. When talking about memory, a macro level approach is not going to work.

GB: *A particularly important issue when we talk about the memory of the past concerns the comparability of different historical experiences and to what extent such parallels are appropriate. The Italian memory of Fascism is permeated by continuous re-uses of the word fascista in political debates. The re-actualisation and resemantisation of the word is part of the political history of the 1970s, but it has also marked the narratives around strong and controversial political leaders such as Bettino Craxi, Silvio Berlusconi, and, at the international level, Donald Trump. Do you see comparisons as something that can illuminate both the present and the past or as something that risks obfuscating both?*

JF: I think this is a difficult point because it's concerning issues that are so emotional. We need first of all to acknowledge the significance of the word *fascista*, which refuses to die. It is an Italian word with strong roots in the Italian context – Italy invented Fascism, it was the first country with a Fascist regime, and the first country to get rid of it – but now it is a global word that everybody uses.

Every time historians think that it's gone and it's now just a historical past, well, this word reemerges and we cannot get rid of it even if we would like to. There's a lot of emotion around this concept since the idea that Fascism is returning constitutes a very emotional statement about the political world. What I personally find problematic in the way this very emotional word is sometimes used is that it contributes to shutting down debates. If you call someone a Fascist, then you're basically saying we're not going to talk to you.

Despite this danger, I strongly believe that we cannot dismiss historical comparisons. They can't obviously be drawn directly as we're never in the *same* historical period, but I think they're useful. Using the word 'fascist', it remains useful. This is also due to the fact that there are people around today who still look back to that time and still call themselves Fascists. There are actually a lot of people. Obviously, what they mean by that is an interesting question and, perhaps, we may just call them 'nostalgic'. Nonetheless, they create connections to historical Fascism. Moreover, let's not forget that there are also real Fascists. In postwar Italy, for instance, there were Fascist parties and people who reclaimed the history of the regime. There are these types of continuities in Italian politics and even today, despite all differences, you can trace Giorgia Meloni's ideological roots back to that political family.

More importantly, when there are events like the Capitol Hill riot or the attack on the CGIL in Rome, I think it's absolutely natural that we think about Fascism and events such as the March on Rome or *squadrisimo*. Anyone who studied these issues cannot but think about the parallels because they are obvious. How could you not make the comparison? I think it's important that we understand the reaction of those who draw heavily on that parallel. Then, this doesn't mean it's the *same* thing; it doesn't mean we're in the same period, or that there are not important differences. But I don't think we can get rid of the comparison, nor that we should. What I don't like in the way some historians approach this issue is that they seem to suggest that if it isn't exactly the same, then we can't use the word. But nothing is exactly the same in history. I think that comparisons with the Fascist past can be useful and they are also a political warning. When, as historians, we dismiss all that, we take refuge again in the ivory tower and we do not engage with the emotional and political level.

Having said that, I would also add that comparisons can be misleading and problematic. For instance, a continuous trope of Italian political debates has been the comparison of Italian leaders to Fascism. This happened with Craxi, but even more with Berlusconi. The work of Umberto Eco on 'eternal Fascism' (1997), the idea of *squadrisimo televisivo*, and other similar conceptualisations are certainly interesting, but I don't think they were particularly useful in terms of how to understand Berlusconi. I think that something fundamental to understand what Fascism was about revolves around the role of violence. Berlusconi didn't use violence. He used violent language, but he didn't use physical violence and there was no sense that he was ever going to use it to take power. That wasn't the way he worked. I think that, in his case, the Fascist trope was not a useful comparison. It was a misunderstanding of populism to call it Fascism and not a particularly useful one as it just shut down debates.

Interview with Professor Robert Gordon, University of Cambridge

GB: *The evolution of Holocaust memory in European culture has usually been described as a movement from silence to commodification. After the indifference of the postwar years, the Holocaust progressively gained importance and, around the 2000s, became the centre of collective memory in many European countries and, as a result of that, the subject of*

commodification and trivialisation processes. In which regard does the Italian memory of the Holocaust align with and diverge from this global trend?

RG: I would say, first of all, that these frameworks of overarching chronologies in the history of memory are both useful and deceptive at the same time. They clearly present mechanisms for linking different local or national case studies, which is something that is welcome, but they can also trip us up when we try to apply them too tightly to delimited areas with their own histories and their own processes for elaborating memory. So, I think it's important to know how to use these simplifications, as Primo Levi himself pointed out in *I sommersi e i salvati*, but also to be suspicious of them in some regard.

One example is the assumption that there was a period of widespread silence and indifference around the Nazi genocide of the Jews immediately after the war, which I think is true to a significant degree in the Italian case, but which has also been interestingly queried. In the 1940s and 1950s, at a broad-based macrocosmic level, there was a lack of awareness and, indeed, a lack of vocabulary for talking about the Holocaust, for separating out the experience of the concentration camps from the broad experience of Nazi violence. And yet, it's nevertheless the case that already in the mid- to late 1940s, there was a rich and complicated varied body of material and acts of memorialisation taking place on the personal level, the communal level, the social, the pedagogical and so on. So, one can demonstrate that the paradigm of silence simply isn't valid in literal terms. Having said that, this memorial activity remained largely under the radar and so if you have to conceptualise and historicise a long historical era, there is some validity to saying that what we now call the Holocaust didn't take up a prominent position in Italian culture of the 1940s and 1950s.

As much as we need to be careful when using the generalising paradigm of silence, so we need to be careful when talking about questions of commodification and trivialisation of memory in the 1990s and 2000s. In this phase, there is definitely a meshing together of a kind of late-capitalist or postmodern cultural sphere, with the recoding and representing of the Holocaust, which is now constantly being worked over and reworked in a new kind of highly globalised transnational and transmedial cultural sphere. So yes, there is a process of commodification – which was initially labelled Americanisation – but in Italy, as elsewhere, there are also counter-trends that have their own validity. In some overarching sense, it is correct to characterise the contemporary era as one of messy, transversal fragmentation of cultural mediatisation, of games being played, if you like, with the Holocaust. A popularising thrust, or a kind of cynical trivialisation of the very grave events of the Holocaust that, however, also implies the evolution of a shared vocabulary of history and memory. A very vivid recent example of that is the film *Freaks Out* (2021) by Gabriele Mainetti: a commercially viable, big-budget fantasy film that tells a story about Nazism, which, we can argue, is completely trivialising and knowingly cynical, but also has something serious to say about the state of knowledge, awareness, and memory of the war and the Holocaust in Italy.

GB: *If we consider the importance that the Holocaust obtained in the Italian culture of the last few decades, one would almost feel inclined to see this memory discourse as a positive example of a thorough engagement with the past. Is there something true in this view? What are the problems that continue to affect the memory of the Holocaust in Italy?*

RG: There's a strong tendency within Italian culture and Italian historiography to adopt a position of critique – and not just in relation to the Holocaust, but more broadly – with relation to Italy's own history and its past, through comparison with other national cases, particularly European ones. In this framing, Italy repeatedly emerges as one of those countries which has failed to come to terms with its past, with the Holocaust, has failed to acknowledge its complicity, or has displaced a discourse of responsibility onto the Nazis as opposed to Italian Fascists. I think this is a tendency that sometimes needs to be resisted and itself historicised, so that we can step back and take a slightly less militant position. This is probably easier to achieve for someone working from the outside and focusing on cultural history rather than a heavily politicised or civically charged kind of historiography that needs to intervene in a debate that has central implications for the public sphere or for national education. What you can do if you study culture is to map a terrain in a slightly more neutral way, but also sometimes in a slightly more variegated and complex way. And when you do that, rather like I was saying in the answer to the previous question, what you find is a mass of a complicated strands of transmission of stories that are told about images of memorialisation of the Holocaust that have a layered presence all the way through the post-war era. Before we dismiss Italy as a failed case study, as a nation that simply never came to terms with the Holocaust or with its responsibilities, I think it can be useful to pause for a moment, to reflect on and analyse the sheer depth and variety and richness of this cultural material.

At the same time, we should not flip the discourse too much to the other extreme and argue that Italy was a brilliantly successful case. That would be equally wrong. If I were to propose any paradigmatic conclusions, I would say that, yes, certain institutions took a long time to acknowledge the centrality of the problem of the Holocaust within the legacies of the years of Fascism and the Second World War. There was a kind of top-down indifference that contrasted with the rich body of material produced by individual survivors and their communities, or with the local efforts by, say, schoolteachers to create and then transmit an awareness and a memory of the genocide. I think that the most important thing is to hold on to the different layers and strands of memory that coexist at the same time. Despite the top-down indifference, there were many local manifestations: inevitably, this included survivors, or at least those who found it within themselves to start talking or writing about their experiences; groups and local associations that grew up around them; lines of dialogue or intersection between, say, partisan memories, concentration camp memories, and different kinds of Jewish memories, such as memories of exile or hiding, as well as memories of deportation. All this processing accumulates at a low level, bubbling along, and often is ignored, but it doesn't disappear entirely. So, there's a complicated array which is not served well, I think, by that sometimes too easy criticism of saying that Italy simply did not have it within itself to acknowledge the shared memory of its own recent past.

GB: *In his 2009 work Multidirectional Memory, Michael Rothberg has shown that the memory of the Holocaust can help us address other historical injustices, such as those related to Western colonialism. Recently, however, Valentina Pisanty, in I guardiani della memoria (2020), has shown that multidirectionality can also have negative effects, since a memory culture heavily centred on the Holocaust can also enable nationalists and xenophobes to talk about their own perceived forms of victimisation and legitimise, therefore, exclusionary memory practices. How do you evaluate the multidirectional processes that have affected Holocaust memory in Italy?*

RG: Michael Rothberg's idea of the multidirectional nature of memory is a very important conceptualisation: it adds another crucial layer of complexity of the kind I've been talking about and helps us discuss the Holocaust in less isolated ways than had perhaps happened in the past. Prior to the diffusion of this perspective, we may point as a comparison to the intense, decades-long debates about the uniqueness of the Holocaust. There were fierce discussions about whether or not, and to what extent, it was correct to treat the kind of violence invented by the Nazis in the extermination camps as somehow historically unique. This position, which in some cases was moralistic, had its genuine rhetorical power and indeed its moral power, and it allowed the Holocaust to take up a position right at the heart of a problematic around modernity itself that really no other comparable event has managed to do. Today, perhaps, this role of historical touchstone for the very nature of Western modernity has shifted away from the Holocaust towards discourses of colonialism, in ways that Rothberg explores. The discourse around the uniqueness of the Holocaust had its power but also created risks of over-simplification, even a kind of metaphysics, since it suggested that there was 'pure' discourse to be had on the Holocaust, a discourse that was sealed off and couldn't, mustn't, come into contact with other comparable problems or historical phenomena. Visions of multidirectionality are surely far more reflective of the permeability of memory and the impossibility of containing one historical phenomenon once it becomes named and acknowledged. Once the Holocaust is present and circulating in the cultural mainstream, say from the 1950s-60s onwards, it really isn't tenable to suggest that you could hold it separate from other contemporary or historical phenomena. And nor should we. It would be like King Canute trying to hold back the water of cultural flow.

Such multidirectional flows have a long history, then. Already in the 1960s, there was an extraordinarily important, but for some trivialising, emergence of language, of loose metaphorical fields around the Holocaust. So persistent did the concentration camp become to the cultural discourse of the time that it became an easy metaphor for all sorts of other institutions and practice of oppression, as seen by many activists and protest movements. So, for instance, the factory starts to be described as a Lager; or, as John Foot's work shows, Basaglia and his movement compared the asylums to concentration camps (Foot 2015). If you wanted to present a devastating critique of prisons, schools, and all sorts of state-controlled 'total' institutions, any and all of them could be metaphorically described as like the camps. For many at the time and since, this is outrageous, and it's certainly historically absurd as a literal comparison, and quite contemptuous of the reality of the extermination camps. On the other hand, we always metaphorise. We always understand one history in relation to another history and the language in which we do so is always dynamic and productive, pushing at boundaries of similarity and acceptability. I think it's important to be aware of the difficulties of this kind of analogy, but also to hold onto the energy of a shared cultural imagination and not to dismiss them too quickly nor too moralistically.

While multidirectionality is important, we should be wary of creating simple causal connections between different phenomena. In his formulation, Rothberg is interested first and foremost in that kind of back-and-forth movement of language and analogy. Valentina Pisanty's work is brilliant, but whenever it veers into a hypothesis of causality – such that by dint of talking about the Holocaust to excess, somehow new forms of populism and racism were made possible or were encouraged in early twenty-first-century Europe – it seems to me less plausible. When we

talk about the Holocaust, we are inevitably dealing with language, we are performing what I call ‘Holocaust talk’. Because of the inevitable fluidity of how language functions and evolves, Holocaust talk is elusive but also extremely pervasive, and it creates all sorts of knock-on effects and consequences, which we can’t control. This language pervades our terrible contemporary cultural moment without accounting for it. There’s a kind of paradox to this which merits our attention.

Interview with Professor Philip Cooke, University of Strathclyde

GB: *With all current discussions addressing Fascism and its legacy in Italian culture, it seems that we are talking less about antifascism. Is this the sign of a loss of the paradigmatic values that informed Italian political culture? What is the state of antifascist memory within both the academic and public discourses over the Italian past?*

PC: As it is often the case when we talk about memory, the situation is complex. On the one hand, when it comes to antifascism, there seems to be much less interest in today’s political sphere than used to be the case. If you look, for example, at what political parties declared on the occasion of 25 April, my impression is that most of them – at least those that are not critical towards antifascist memory – essentially pay some respectful, but almost empty, acts of homage to 25 April. There generally seems to be a rather tired rhetoric, a certain sense of *stanchezza*, in the political commemoration that comes down every year, which is also due to the fact that today’s parties cannot really trace their heritage to the Resistance as was the case up until the early 1990s. On the other hand, though, there has been a widening of the meaning of antifascism. If you look, for example, at the *centri sociali*, such as the XM24 in Bologna and what we could call antifa movements, you can see plenty of young people who are interested in antifascism both as a historical event and political practice. I think that in the broader political area, if we include fringe organisations, we find more discussions about antifascism than in orthodox and mainstream political parties.

Having said that, I think that we should also avoid depicting the present as a moment in which something has been lost. First of all, because I’m not sure that there was ever such a thing as an antifascist paradigm, at least not within Italian society in its broader perspective. It would be important to look back and ask ourselves whether this paradigm ever really existed as a strong model for Italian society at large. Rather than speaking about the dissolution of the antifascist paradigm and suggesting that it collapsed from the early 1990s onwards, I would say that it is more useful to question whether there was such an all-embracing and all-encompassing cultural paradigm. To be honest, I’ve never been fully convinced that this was the case.

Yet, I sense that things are even more complicated. On 25 April this year, the first taking place after Covid, there was an awful lot going on. By looking around and following the papers, I would say that there was a heartfelt participation. For example, I went to Fosdinovo (MS) where they’ve organised for years and years a *pranzo sociale* on 25 April. This year they had it at the Resistance Museum. I went along with a few friends. Eric Gobetti was there, he gave a short speech, there were the usual partisan songs ... you know, for those who attended, the memory of the Resistance was something genuinely important. This belief is not limited to a few activists, but it is reflected in many other initiatives. We can consider, for instance, the Laterza series *Fact Checking. La Storia alla prova dei fatti* edited by

Carlo Greppi, which comprises many successful books that are committed to antifascism, including Greppi's *L'antifascismo non serve più a niente* (2020) that correctly argues that antifascism still plays a role in contemporary Italy. Many Italians would agree with this statement, including the numerous people at Fosdinovo who were singing partisan songs with me on 25 April.

GB: *At least since the 1990s, revisionist ideas have affected debates over the memory of Fascism and antifascism, attracting both supporters, mainly from the right, and detractors, especially from the left. What have been the results of this revisionist wave? Is revisionism still playing a role in today's memory culture?*

PC: Revisionism is a very loaded and emotive word and I've always argued that it's probably better to avoid it. As Bruno Bongiovanni once wrote in *Passato e presente* (2003), it's better to leave revisionism to the *revisionisti* as it is a term that tends to play into their hands. One can think for example of Giampaolo Pansa who entitled one of his books *Il revisionista* (2009). The cover image even has him cocking a snook – in Italian *fare marameo*. Pansa constitutes a quite astonishing editorial case. You know, he continues to publish now, even though he's dead, with a few books that came out posthumously. I remember once I was in Florence in the Feltrinelli book shop, and there was this man sitting there, probably in his 60s or 70s, with the copy of one of Pansa's books. I got into conversation with him and asked why he read Pansa and not other books that were on the shelves, such as Claudio Pavone's or Santo Peli's. And the man insisted that he was reading Pansa because he thought he was an extraordinary journalist who wrote very well. I think this small example shows the extent to which Pansa had acquired a very wide readership after *Il sangue dei vinti* (2003), a book that was literally a best seller at the time.

My impression is that the kind of movement of which Pansa was perhaps the most well-known expression has faded over the last few years. Filippo Focardi in the foreword of his latest book, *Nel cantiere della memoria* (2020), supports the idea that in terms of historical writing the revisionist tendency of the previous years seems to be fading. I think there has been a fight back in recent years. Historians understood that writers like Pansa appealed to large numbers of people because they know how to write; and so there have been attempts to produce rather more digestible works of history. I mean, even Santo Peli, who is very much an academic historian, has just written a book, *La necessità, il caso, l'utopia* (2022), which has a writing style that makes it much easier to read than some of his earlier works. Another good example of that could be *Storia della Resistenza* that Marcello Flores and Mimmo Franzinelli have recently published (2021). Then, there are other more populist interventions such as Aldo Cazzullo's book *Possa il mio sangue servire* (2015) or the whole Gad Lerner phenomenon, which includes TV programmes with interviews with the last few partisans that are still around, the book *Noi, partigiani. Memoriale della Resistenza italiana* (2020), and now even an edition aimed at young people (Lerner and Gnocchi 2021). Lerner's operation has done a lot to get the Resistance on the agenda, whether you like it or not – and I'm not sure I particularly like it, as it tends to push the idea of the partisan choice in ways that simplify matters, presenting a kind of homogeneous picture of what was really a very complicated moment. With a perspective of this kind, it almost seems to go back to the version of the tricolour Resistance, which dominated in the 1960s. Many, however, have really appreciated Lerner's work, including my friend Argante Bocchio, who is now 96, who was delighted to have had the opportunity to be interviewed and talk about his experience as a partisan.

GB: *We live in a postcolonial age in which the decolonisation of knowledge constitutes a pressing concern. What do you think is going to be the future of the memory of the Italian Resistance? Will it remain an indispensable element of the Italian collective memory or will new generations inevitably end up focusing on other segments of the past?*

PC: I think it is necessary to bring in the war in Ukraine here as the Ukrainian resistance against Russian invasion has forced a lot of people to think again about the Italian Resistance. There were also good arguments against this comparison. We had, for instance, Alessandro Portelli, who is definitely someone with authority on the matter, saying that this is a historical parallel that doesn't work. Although we can probably agree with him that at the historiographical level it doesn't necessarily hold, I think you can understand why, at a kind of psychological level, the comparison has been made. I think it is undeniable that the ongoing situation in Ukraine has rekindled ideas of resistance and sparked debates, especially after ANPI got involved. The pacifist position of many ANPI members has raised eyebrows in many sectors of society, with some people questioning the right that the association has to speak about the Resistance now that there are basically no partisans among its members. These issues have definitely provoked debates with clear national relevance.

Besides the current war in Ukraine, I think that ANPI is and will be a big player in the maintenance of the memory of the Resistance. The decision to open the association up to anybody that subscribes to their ideas and has sympathy for the values of the Resistance has allowed new generations to come in. In this way, ANPI will continue to have an impact on Italian culture and will keep the Resistance and its values on the agenda. All this is to say that I think that the Resistance is going to have an important role to play in the future of Italy. And I don't see this role threatened by the very full *calendario civile* that Italy now has, which has progressively introduced new dates to commemorate the past and has rightly given great attention to the Shoah. Now there is even the idea to dedicate a day to the Alpini on 26 January, the day of the battle of Nikolayevka, which is a proposition that is in many ways problematic and has, therefore, caused a huge amount of dismay, except obviously from within the Italian parliament where almost everyone approved the motion. Personally, I don't think that a commemoration of this kind is going to take attention away from 25 April. I think, instead, that a day about the Alpini can be an opportunity to focus more critical attention on the first half of the war, on the Fascist war, as you have done in your own research (Bartolini 2021). This can actually be a welcome development since there's still a lot to be done when it comes to understanding the nature and the memory of the Fascist war. Moreover, this can also have an almost paradoxical positive effect, as it will allow us to place the Resistance in its true context.

One final point that I must make is that to guarantee the future of the memory of the Italian Resistance, I would much rather see further developments in terms of the European memory of resistances. Again, there are good signs here from the historiography, such as the works that have explored the transnational aspects of partisan movements as well as those about, for example, the Austrians and Germans in the Italian Resistance (Gildea and Tames 2020). But I think that much more should be done in this regard. The Resistance was not a coherent European movement, but there were many 'European Resisters' in countries such as Italy, France, and Yugoslavia that resisted against Fascism, which was an attitude that also entailed an idea of what Europe should become. For me it would be a good move to try to widen matters out, break down national barriers, and foster a more transnational understanding of the antifascist phenomenon.

Three common questions: limits, initiatives, anniversaries

GB: *In your opinion, what have been the main limits of the Italian memory of Fascism?*

LP: According to me, one of the main limits has been an insufficient conceptualisation of the links that daily life and daily culture had with politics. Another important limit, which is related to this first one, revolves around the figure of the dictator and the difficulty in conceptualising both the specificity of his supremacy and the cult of his figure. In Italy, the admiration for the Duce remains as difficult to digest as it is difficult to deny. I think that as intellectuals, but to some extent as citizens too, we should do more to understand the specific Italianness of that figure and ask not simply why Italy needed a dictator, but why it needed that dictator.

FF: I would say that one of the main limits has been the failure to recognise violence as a central component of the Fascist phenomenon. Another limit has been the incapacity to critically come to terms with the consensus that the regime had in relation to its social policies.

JF: I would say that the main limit has been the underestimation of violence and how central it was to Fascism. The overemphasis on Mussolini and the cult of his personality, both in historical work and general memory, took place at the expense of a thorough investigation of what I see as the central plank of Fascism, which is the organisation of political violence through *squadristo*. This has been largely forgotten or underplayed, and this omission patterned everything else.

RG: I certainly think it took a long time in Italy to take on board the complicity of Fascists, both ordinary Fascists and the Fascist state, in relation to the Holocaust. I think that now it is very important to think again in relation to colonialism. Both the broad history of Italian colonialism and, then, Fascist colonialism within that history, has struggled to emerge as a central facet of Italian memory and its sense of national history.

PC: I would say that a problem of the Italian memory that is often disregarded concerns the Fascist war. There's still so much ignorance about the Italian involvement in the Second World War, not only in Italy but especially abroad. There are now Italian scholars who have worked on this and we can just hope that their work will disseminate knowledge about the crimes that the Italians committed in Yugoslavia and other war theatres; but outside Italy there is colossal ignorance and we continue to know very little about this part of the Second World War.

GB: *What are the main cultural initiatives that should be put in place today to enhance the Italian memory of Fascism?*

LP: I feel rather strongly that initiatives should be taken in the field of education and especially in schools and universities. This is something that has been already undertaken by many teachers and professors, but I would insist on the importance of promoting and giving visibility to these efforts, which remain too often implicit and little known.

FF: There are many initiatives that should be put in place, since the vectors of memory are manifold and have an impact on different generations. To reach those who are

older than 50, it would still be useful for television programmes to contribute more to disseminating knowledge about Fascism's violence and crimes, showing episodes in which the Italians were not victims but perpetrators. Then, we need more historians committed to the field of public history and involved in the training of school-teachers. To support school activities, an initiative that has been under discussion for many years and that I personally approve would be the creation of a new date for the civic calendar to remember the victims of Fascism and Italian colonialism.

JF: I think it's a terrible thing that Italy doesn't have a museum of Fascism, above all in Rome. Germany has a lot of museums of Nazism, lots. The fact that Italy doesn't shows the kind of resistance to such a problematic subject. I mean, we can't even get left-wing historians to agree on it, let alone other people. For instance, Bologna, where Fascism was so important, doesn't have anywhere in the public realm which discusses what Fascism was and how it was born. This is quite a serious issue because it concerns how we can communicate Fascism and Fascist history to a younger generation. I don't think that this can be done through a *manuale di storia* in a classroom. We need new forms of communication, not a new book – and not a new monument, as I don't think anyone under 40 even looks at monuments today. We need something innovative, such as a new form of museum or some digital initiatives that can embrace communication with young people. For what I see, this is completely failing, and not because of the content but because of the form.

RG: I am not particularly sympathetic about the project for a National Museum of Fascism in Predappio, since I see the risks associated with that particular place and the local and national battles fought over it. In principle, it is important that there should be a concerted national effort to make a collective statement about the memory of Fascism. However, I also wonder whether the time has actually passed for a top-down, state-sponsored intervention of this kind. A century is really a long time to sustain meaningful dimensions of memory and to have a chance of rooting that memory in younger generations. Does it make sense to isolate and monumentalise the *ventennio* at a distance of a century? In other words, I think that the most viable cultural initiatives on a grand scale should aim to reconnect the history of Fascism to the present or to an entire century's worth of history, for instance, by dealing with the emergence of democracy and its fragility, or with the kind of dramatic social transformations of the 1920s compared with the modernisation brought by new technologies today.

PC: I think it is important to mention the Scurati phenomenon, with his successful books about Mussolini that, I think, are going to have a high degree of impact on Italian culture. So, I would say that cultural products can definitely help to raise awareness about the past. I am not sure, instead, whether a museum of Fascism could actually be useful – and certainly not in Predappio, which is mainly a place for *nostalgici*. I think the best thing we can probably do is to maintain a high level of academic scholarship.

GB: *How can this year's anniversary, and those that will come next, have a positive effect on Italian memory?*

LP: Anniversaries can have double-edged results. These processes often amount to an institutionalisation of memory, which is to some extent useful and helpful: we

can dedicate a certain day to the memory of an event or a series of events, and that is a collective recognition that I accept. However, institutionalisations also raise forms of resistance and criticism. In my youth, for instance, we were very critical of the institutionalisation of the memory of the Resistance, to which we opposed our appreciation for living partisans whose voices constituted a key force to demystify official memory narratives. If institutionalisation leads to some rigidification and crystallisation, the resulting memory will not connect well with younger generations. We need to find ways of honouring memory that are helpful in the task of transmitting it.

- FF: Anniversaries are undoubtedly arbitrary, but I think – and hope – that this can be a good opportunity to address the two main lacunae of the public discourse about Fascism by reinserting Fascist violence in the public debate and by dealing with the question of the so-called consensus for the regime.
- JF: The March on Rome is a difficult thing to remember. It was a coup, it ended Italian democracy, and at least 50 people died. Although Italian historiography long dismissed it as a kind of *opera buffa*, it was a very violent event, as recent works, such as that by Giulia Albanese (2006), have correctly pointed out. We can't ignore it, while we cannot, obviously, commemorate it. I expect that there will be academic conferences, books, documentaries, a lot of cultural production. Will it have a positive effect? I don't know. I think it is a very difficult thing to remember and it will be very interesting for people like me to see what is done. The Italian state will struggle with such an 'anniversary', that is for sure.
- RG: I'm not a fan of anniversaries at all and I don't think we should pay excessive attention to centenaries. However, one effect that I think has been salutary over the last two or three years of rolling centenaries of the rise of Fascism has been the shift of attention back towards 1919–1922, so not a period of anything like totalitarian control, but a far messier one where democracies are falling apart and populisms, nationalisms, and emergent totalitarianisms are taking over. I think it is a salutary shift for our society and our time, because, to offer an obvious example, to compare Trump to Nazi Germany or to the late 1930s is too easily dismissed; but to compare the assault of Capitol Hill of 6 January 2021 to the March on Rome is far more real and unsettling.
- PC: I'm not sure that the anniversary can have much of an effect on Italian memory. But what it has done, clearly, is to raise interest and generate academic conferences, books, and publications of diverse types. I think that more than anything anniversaries can provoke vigorous and fertile historical debates. And perhaps we shouldn't ask for too much more than that.

Acknowledgements. The interviews and research conducted in this publication were funded by the Irish Research Council through the Government of Ireland Postdoctoral Fellowship scheme under grant number GOIPD/2020/730.

Notes

1. The five interviews were carried out on Zoom between 24 February 2022 and 9 May 2022. After my transcription, the texts were revised and approved by the interviewees. The interview with Professor Filippo Focardi was originally held in Italian and then translated into English.
2. European Parliament resolution of 19 September 2019 *On the Importance of European Remembrance for the Future of Europe*, 2019/2819(RSP), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0021_EN.html.

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Italian summary

L’articolo è composto da interviste con cinque insigni esperti della memoria del fascismo. Cogliendo l’occasione del centenario della marcia su Roma come un pretesto per ripensare lo sviluppo della memoria collettiva italiana, i cinque intervistati sono stati invitati a riflettere su aspetti diversi della memoria del fascismo soffermandosi sulle concettualizzazioni dominanti, i limiti e le trasformazioni dei discorsi che sono stati usati per narrare il passato dittatoriale italiano. Il risultato di queste conversazioni, che si soffermano sulla memoria della Resistenza, della Seconda Guerra Mondiale, della Shoah e del colonialismo, è una ricca mappatura delle tendenze e delle traiettorie della cultura del ricordo in Italia che può aiutare a immaginare le direzioni future della memoria del fascismo e in tal modo facilitare gli interventi culturali che possono essere compiuti da ricercatori e attivisti nel campo della memoria italiana.

Cite this article: Bartolini G (2022). Past, present, and future of the Italian memory of Fascism. Interviews with Luisa Passerini, Filippo Focardi, John Foot, Robert Gordon, and Philip Cooke. *Modern Italy* 27, 303–325. <https://doi.org/10.1017/mit.2022.30>