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John Whittam

Review Article
Fascism and Anti-Fascism in Italy: History, Memory and Culture

R.J.B. Bosworth and Patrizia Dogliani (eds), *Italian Fascism: History, Memory and Representation*, London, Macmillan, 1999; 245 pp.; ISBN 0-333-71206-4
Ottar Dahl, *Syndicalism, Fascism and Post-Fascism in Italy 1900–1950*, Oslo, Solum Forlag, 1999; 180pp.; ISBN 82-560-1187-4
Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997; 303pp.; ISBN 0-520-20623-1
Stanislao G. Pugliese, *Carlo Rosselli: Socialist Heretic and Antifascist Exile*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2000; 295 pp.; ISBN 0-674-00053-6

23 March 1999 marked the eightieth anniversary of the founding of the fascist movement in Italy. During these eight decades since 1919, with the possible exception of the 1950s, there has been a ceaseless torrent of books and articles seeking to recount, analyse and explain the fascist *ventennio*, its origins and its legacy. Fascism as an ideology, the role of Mussolini, the relationship between party and state, between the secular and the religious, between domestic and foreign policy, have been dominant themes throughout. New areas of interest, however, have emerged in recent years and some of these will be briefly discussed later. All those contributing to our understanding of Italian fascism have, of course, tended to reflect the political, social and cultural situation in Italy and elsewhere that existed when they were completing their research. When applied to modern Italian studies there is some truth in the generalization that all history is contemporary history. There is another obvious consideration. Many historians relish engagement in current historiographical debates and enjoy promoting or attacking provocative and controversial theories. Polemical writing, character assassination of the dead and the living culminating in a tumultuous *Historikerstreit,* when historians wage war on each other, are often welcomed by editors of journals, publishers, journalists and the media in general. The decade of the 1990s was, undoubtedly, replete with tempting opportunities to recall, re-invent or forget the past, to accept or ignore new methodologies, to engage in historiographical warfare or to pursue a less contentious but perhaps more productive line of research.

The imminence of the third millennium recalled Hitler's unfulfilled intention of creating a thousand-year Reich. Similarly, as the century drew to a close, there was satisfaction in remembering Mussolini's false prediction that this was destined to be 'the century of fascism'. It was, however, the series of fiftieth anniversaries which attracted most attention. These included the Italian entry into the war in 1940, perhaps Mussolini's most fatal mistake; the coup which overthrew him in July 1943; the armistice with the Allies signed by Badoglio in September 1943; the dramatic events of April 1945; the climax of the armed resistance; the collapse of the puppet Italian Social Republic and the execution of Mussolini; the ending of the war in Italy and Europe in May 1945; the referendum of 1946; the republican constitution and the April elections in 1948. Historians did indeed respond to the stimulus provided by these anniversaries but they did so against a background of equally dramatic contemporary events. With amazing speed communism collapsed in Eastern Europe, Germany was reunified, the Soviet Union disintegrated and ethnic conflicts devastated Yugoslavia. Above all, the Cold War came to an end. Because the credibility of Italian Christian democrats and communists largely depended upon its continuance, this precipitated the fall of the so-called First Republic which was already floundering in a morass of corruption. The old parties disappeared or changed their names, regionalism in the north seemed to threaten national unity and the former neo-fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano* transformed itself under Gianfranco Fini into the *Alleanza Nazionale* and briefly joined a coalition government. Clearly the time had come to reassess fascism and resistance and the 40 years of postwar republicanism.

Renzo De Felice, the well-known author of a multi-volume biography of Mussolini, had embarked upon this task many years before. With his Rankean approach to the documents and his determination to write 'pure' history untainted by ideology, he launched a crusade against the anti-fascist orthodoxy which he claimed had dominated Italian historiography and the cultural life of the nation ever since the war. By the time he joined the editorial board of this journal in 1972, De Felice was a widely respected professional historian. Two years later, with the publication of the fourth volume of his biography, he became a national figure in Italy because of the furore provoked by his claim that the Duce had achieved 'consensus' in the early 1930s.[1] His *Intervista sul fascismo* in 1975[2] was widely read, he appeared on television with Denis Mack Smith and wrote many articles for newspapers. This was a very different De Felice from the historian who wrote such long, impenetrable sentences in his academic works. Popularizing his ideas in this fashion incensed his critics. Accused of being a fascist, he responded by dismissing his opponents as unscientific, prejudiced believers in a deliberate falsification of history or *vulgata marxista*. Twenty years later, De Felice was completing his massive biography and was dealing with the war and the resistance. It was 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of the collapse of Salò, the death of the Duce and

1 Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il duce: gli anni del consenso 1929–1936* (Turin 1974).
2 Bari 1975, rev. edn 1997.

the end of the second world war. Giorgio Bocca, a veteran of the anti-fascist partisan movement, and Mario Cervi, a former fascist infantry officer, both published books which presented very different perspectives.[3] Although Claudio Pavone had already written the best book of the decade on the resistance, calmly and humanely discussing all aspects of the conflict, passions were running too high for measured argument.[4] It was at this point that De Felice added to this febrile atmosphere by launching a brief but devastating critique of the 'myth of the resistance', the *vulgata resistenziale* which represented the core element of anti-fascism and the legitimization of the First Republic. *Rosso e Nero*, yet another published interview, was his last attempt to rectify a flawed historical narrative.[5] Rejecting suggestions that he was pursuing an ideological or political agenda, he could not resist the inclusion of many controversial assertions. These include the claim that Churchill and British agents ordered the killing of Mussolini to prevent the revelation of embarrassing contracts between the Allies and the Duce contained in a 'secret correspondence' which mysteriously disappeared. He refers to the armistice of 8 September 1943 as the 'tragic date' which inflicted such harm on Italians' concept of national identity, a theme elaborated the following year in Ernesto Galli Della Loggia's *Morte della patria*. De Felice also identifies as heroes or martyrs Alfredo Pizzoni, Giovanni Gentile and Prince Junio Valerio Borghese. To this curious selection he adds the name of Ezra Pound.[6] All four, he claims, were true patriots because they were not driven by ideological considerations and remained aloof from the political system. There was, of course, a fifth patriot, De Felice himself. It was his self-proclaimed neutrality, his *serenità*, his 'letting the facts speak for themselves' which so irritated his critics who condemned this false objectivity. He dismissed his opponents with contempt. Their 'stump-speech anti-fascism', their 'schematic interpretations that leak like colanders' revealed their crass, unhistorical approach to the past. An alleged attack on De Felice's property demonstrated the intense bitterness aroused by this debate. His death in 1996 did not terminate the controversy. The last volume of his biography was published posthumously. Also in 1997, his friend and fellow member of the editorial board, Emilio Gentile, wrote an eloquent obituary in the *Journal of Contemporary History*.

Richard Bosworth, whose thematic treatment of fascism and its historiography in *The Italian Dictatorship*, one of the most informative and entertaining books of the decade, is somewhat uneasy about the presence of De Felice and Gentile on this journal's editorial board.[7] It is evidence that these

3 Giorgio Bocca, *La repubblica di Mussolini* (Milan 1995); Mario Cervi, *Salò: album della repubblica* (Milan 1995).

4 Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile: saggio storico sulla moralità nella resistenza* (Turin 1991).

5 Milan 1995.

6 For a full discussion see John Thayer, 'Renzo De Felice, Rosso e Nero 1995', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 4, 1 (1999).

7 R.J.B. Bosworth, *The Italian Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (London 1998), 17.

historians were moving beyond their strongholds in Rome and the *Storia contemporanea* to extend their *clientelismo* and to expound the views of their 'school' which have been inelegantly defined as anti-anti-fascism.[8] In the introduction to *Italian Fascism*, the first of the four books under review, Bosworth and his co-editor Patrizia Dogliani assert that they and most of the ten other contributors are unashamedly of the anti-fascist persuasion. This form of labelling, however, must not be allowed to obtrude too much when reading these authors. It is far more interesting to observe the frequency and use made of what the learned periodicals now call 'keywords' or, in everyday language 'buzzwords'. They reflect the areas and methods of enquiry which have attracted the more innovative, usually younger members of the profession. In this collection of essays by five Italians, three Australians — the result of a Perth–Bologna axis which would have pleased a networker like De Felice — two British and two Americans, we can identify certain keywords and concepts which are still fashionable, often illuminating and generally useful in analysing both old and new sources. Dogliani, for example, deals with reference to the 'monumental representation of fascism and its denial in Republican Italy'. She describes how Mussolini's regime incorporated the postwar cult of the dead, reorganized cemeteries and memorials and linked the fallen of the first world war with the fascist martyrs of *squadrismo*, so that the memory of both could be included in fascist ideology, with its emphasis on heroism and sacrifice. Problems arose after 1945 as memorials to resistance fighters replaced fascist iconography and memory and anti-memory competed with each other especially with regard to the dead *repubblichini* who had fought for Mussolini's Salò. As the Cold War developed, the divisions among the anti-fascist partisans became more apparent and prompted questions about how to commemorate communists, catholics and actionists. The theme of 'anti-fascisms' is taken up by David Ward in his article on Benedetto Croce and Carlo Levi. It is a succinct version of the book he published in 1996.[9] As he has written elsewhere, 'the Italian Resistance is no longer the easily legible text it used to be'. Levi's novel *L'Orologio* of 1950 presents a fictionalized account of the fall of Ferruccio Parri's government in 1945 and Ward uses it to demonstrate the wide gulf separating Croce from Levi. With his unsustainable theory of the 'parenthesis', the Neapolitan advocated a return to the liberal era whereas Levi regarded pre-1922 Italy as the generator of fascism and called for a clean sweep of both the fascist and non-fascist past. For Croce, fascism had been alien to Italy and was, in any case, dead; for Levi, fascism had been an integral part of Italian history and only a thorough purge could prevent its reappearance. Ward's combination of history, politics, literature and film makes his contribution an excellent example of the broad approach adopted

8 See, for example, MacGregor Knox, 'The Fascist Regime, its Foreign Policy and its Wars: An Anti-anti-fascist Orthodoxy' in Patrick Finney (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War* (London 1997), 148–68.

9 David Ward, *Antifascisms: Cultural Politics in Italy 1943–46. Benedetto Croce and the Liberals, Carlo Levi and the 'Actionists'* (Madison, WI 1996).

by the school of Italian studies. The use of film is the subject of no less than three out of the twelve articles. Ruth Ben-Ghiat aims to use the cinema 'as a lens through which to explore the Italians' attempt to master the past'. The search for a 'usable past' is no longer the preserve of German historians and is increasingly a device for the examination of postwar Italy. Ben-Ghiat also introduces another concept, frequently used in Holocaust studies, the 'status of victimhood'. Millions of supporters of the fascist regime, because of the events of 1943–45, saw themselves as victims and not perpetrators. She illustrates this by reference to the films *Caccia Tragica* and *Riso Amaro* where Alberto, the collaborator/perpetrator is forgiven by the peasants he betrayed because of his last-minute change of heart. Likewise, Silvana is posthumously revered by the rice workers. Significantly, both had been corrupted by 'foreigners', by outside influences, by Croce's aliens. Ben-Ghiat also introduces the concept of '*italiani brava gente*'; like ordinary Italians during the fascist era, Alberto and Silvana were temporarily bewitched by outside forces. Identification of victimhood became proof of moral innocence and rectitude. Bosworth's wide-ranging examination notes the difficulties of 'reading' films from Roberto Rossellini's nation in arms view of the resistance in *Roma: città aperta*, through Bertolucci, Fellini and the Taviani brothers to the 1997 film *Porzüs*, an anti-anti-fascist portrayal of conflict among partisans on the north-east frontier. In his usually expert manner, David Forgacs deals with representations of fascist degeneracy in films of the 1960s but sees dangers in equating fascism with perversion and homosexuality, reminding us of how the Third Reich persecuted deviants.[10] In the related field of television, Guido Crainz comments on the representation of fascism in documentaries including RAI's *Combat Film* of 6 April 1994, which declared that 'the dead are equal' and spoke of the martyrs of Salò. This call for 'objectivity' and a usable past was clearly linked to the recent electoral victory of Berlusconi, Bossi and Fini. Glenda Sluga's analysis of national memory and national identity confirms her status as an expert on the problems of Trieste and the region bordering Slovenia and Croatia. It is a compelling article written against the background of the contemporary ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia, reviving memories of the *foibe* atrocities of 1945. The significance of the Risiera di San Sabba, Bosovizza and the heroes' monument to anti-fascist Slovenians is movingly related. Other contributors use oral history to attempt to write 'history from below' for peasants and Allied prisoners after September 1943 (Roger Absalom), for Italian workers in the Reich between 1938 and 1943 (Brunello Mantelli) and for the Greeks of the Dodecanese under Italian rule (Nicholas Doumanis). Elda Guerra deals with female autobiographies, making the interesting point that the older generation of women in the fascist era had memories of an earlier time which even a hermetically sealed authoritarian state failed to extinguish, while Mirco Dondi examines the fascist mentality

10 David Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era 1880–1980: Cultural Industries, Politics and the Republic* (Manchester 1990).

after 1945, when many thought that forgetting the past seemed the best way forward but soon realized that it was 'a past that will not pass away'. This lengthy review of just one of the books is justified because of all the issues, concepts and historiographical controversies which it contains. It is also refreshing to read a volume the authors of which are from Australia, Britain, Italy and the USA.

Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi's *Fascist Spectacle* is a welcome addition to the increasing number of books and articles dealing with culture and aesthetics. It complements rather than competes with Marla Stone's equally impressive *The Patron State*.[11] Falasca-Zamponi has an awesome array of archival sources, the 12 volumes of the Duce's *Scritti e discorsi* and secondary works at her disposal. She seeks to 'read' the myths, rituals and speeches to narrate the rise of Mussolini to cult status and his use of symbols to identify the novelty of his political regime. The secularization of politics, so effectively treated by Emilio Gentile, is a central theme.[12] There is a very long section on the deification of the Duce which incorporates the regime's use of radio, cinema, posters, newspapers, postcards and even graffiti. More intriguing is her account of how the Ethiopian war was staged as a melodrama involving Italy, which represented virtue and civilization, and Ethiopia, representing evil and barbarism. Also implicit in this was the concept of the aggressor as victim, Italy encircled by the League of Nations and her soldiers in Africa surrounded by tribesmen. As a sociologist, Falasca-Zamponi naturally employs terms and structures which may seem a rather abstruse method of stating the obvious, and there are those whose reaction to any mention of someone like Walter Benjamin is to reach for the whisky bottle. For the transformation of the Biennale into the Venice film festival, for the contribution of futurists, *novecento* artists and rationalists to the great Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution in 1932 and, indeed, for the whole question of 'aesthetic pluralism' and the cultural war among fascists, Marla Stone provides some fascinating evidence. It has always been puzzling why so many different styles of art were allowed to exist within an authoritarian regime dedicated to specifically fascist propaganda. Roger Griffin has provided an answer. His contributions to the study of fascist ideology published in the 1900s need no introduction.[13] In an article on 'the sacred synthesis', he explains that although rival aesthetic creeds were accommodated under the Duce they all had a common vision of the central role of culture in the regeneration of Italy. Just as his famous palingenetic definition of fascism provided his 'new consensus' for the understanding of this phenomenon, so he presents as the solution to this problem of cultural diversity the paradoxical formula of 'totalitarian pluralism'.[14] That it failed to achieve the desired

11 Marla Stone, *The Patron State. Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton, NJ 1998).

12 Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, MA 1996).

13 Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London 1991); idem (ed.), *Fascism* (Oxford 1995); idem (ed.), *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus* (London 1998).

14 Roger Griffin, 'The Sacred Synthesis: The Ideological Cohesion of Fascist Cultural Policy', *Modern Italy*, 3, 1 (1998), 5–23.

cohesion is as obvious as it is irrelevant to the main thrust of the argument. The same is true of Gentile's 'Italian road to totalitarianism'.[15] If the aim was unfulfilled, the intention was always present.

It was Gentile who proved a useful contact when Ottar Dahl moved south from Norway to conduct research for his *Sydicalism, Fascism and Post-Fascism in Italy 1900–1950.* Dahl has gathered material from archives and libraries from Brescia to Rome and kept abreast of the extensive literature on this subject. As Mussolini and generations of students have discovered, syndicalism and the corporative state can become tediously frustrating. A lively prose style is an enormous help and Dahl appears to have written this book without the assistance of a translator. He has also decided to cover 50 years in a rather slim volume. In addition, he is aware that Zeev Sternhell — who did employ a translator — has written a controversial but important analysis of syndicalism and fascism from 1900 to the 1930s.[16] Like Sternhell, unaccountably omitted from his bibliography, Dahl intends to concentrate on ideology, thereby setting himself a stiff challenge. Yet another problem was the need to avoid a mere repetition of what David Roberts had already written in his study of the syndicalist tradition and Italian fascism.[17] Perhaps Dahl should have entered more fully into a debate with these authors, but he chose, justifiably, to make his contribution by passing swiftly over the first 30 years to explore the more neglected periods of the late 1930s, the republic of Salò and the postwar years. The career of Edmondo Rossoni, for instance, who saw his syndicalist empire broken up in 1928, is already well documented. Dahl, however, introduces less well-known figures like Tullio Cianetti and Luigi Fontanelli, who played important roles in what appears to be an unexpected syndicalist revival in the late 1930s. They were exponents of a revolutionary fascism and took advantage of the anti-bourgeois tendencies which gained momentum in the pre-war period and which surfaced even more dramatically during the Salò republic. Angelo Tarchi's Verona programme, for example, sought more power for the workers and the restoration of a unified confederation of labour. The opposition of their German overlords prevented any progress along these lines, but Dahl emphasizes the continuity between Salò syndicalists and postwar trade unionists in the Italian republic. Many of them, including unreconstructed fascists, found homes not only in the political *Movimento Sociale Italiano* but also in the *Movimento Sindicalista* and eventually in the MSI's own trade union confederation, the CISNAL. Dahl has made a clear case for the continuity of the syndicalist tradition between 1900 and 1950 but a much fuller political, economic and social background is required. Concentration on the 'intellectuals' reveals their theoretical diversity but largely ignores the experiences of the rank and file, the *Alltagsgeschichte* so prevalent in Third Reich studies. Stanley Payne, author of the most com-

15 Emilo Gentile, *La Via italiana al totalitarismo* (Rome 1995).

16 Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology. From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (Princeton, NJ 1994).

17 D.D.Roberts, *The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism* (Manchester 1979).

prehensive history of European fascism published in the 1990s, called for a single-volume social history of fascist Italy.[18] Such a book could draw upon many of the sources used by Dahl to present a 'history from below'.

Stanislao Pugliese's biography of Carlo Rosselli is not history from below but it is history from the viewpoint of the opponents of Mussolini, of the dissidents, the exiles and all those anti-fascists whose existence challenged theories of consensus and consent.[19] The seventh volume of the history of the Communist Party, a series begun by Paolo Spriano in the 1970s, was published in 1998, taking the story up to 1956.[20] So the role of the communists as anti-fascists has been exhaustively covered. For anti-fascism in more general terms, the starting-point must still be Charles Delzell's *Mussolini's Enemies: The Italian Anti-Fascist Resistance*, published back in 1961. Carlo Rosselli, the driving force behind *Giustizia e Libertà* (GL), has long been recognized as perhaps the leading opponent of Mussolini. He is best known for his slogan during the civil war in Spain, '*Oggi in Spagna, domani in Italia*', and for his assassination, along with his brother, in France in 1937. But his writings and activities have demanded increasing attention, especially his book *Liberal Socialism,* published in 1930, which has been translated into various languages and republished many times.[21] One of the key chapters in Pugliese is his excellent treatment of liberal socialism and why Rosselli was accused of heresy. That this is still an issue today can be understood by reference to Prime Minister Tony Blair's recent remarks when he outlined his aim to re-unite 'the two great streams of left-of-centre thought, socialism and liberalism, whose divorce did so much to weaken progressive polities'.[22] Rosselli certainly discovered how hard it was to unite even his own GL supporters under the banner of liberal socialism let alone win over all the disparate anti-fascist groups. As Rosselli was an activist as well as an intellectual, his career as conspirator makes exciting reading. An article by Joel Blatt on the 'battle of Turin' between the GL and Mussolini's secret police in the mid-1930s whetted the appetite for a fuller discussion of such episodes.[23] Pugliese's biography, based on the extensive correspondence of the Rosselli family, archival sources and memoirs, provides the fullest account in English of a remarkable man. His strengths and weaknesses are ably assessed. In practical terms he was, of course, a failure. However, as a martyr and an icon of anti-fascism, he served as an indispensable link between earlier martyrs like Piero Gobetti, Giacomo

18 The call came in his review article in the *Journal of Contemporary History,* 35, 1 (January 2000); Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914–45* (Madison, WI 1995).

19 Philip Morgan, 'The Years of Consent? Popular Attitudes and Forms of Resistance to Fascism in Italy 1925–40' in T. Kirk and A. McElligott (eds), *Opposing Fascism* (Cambridge 1999).

20 G. Gozzini and R. Martinelli, *Storia del partito communista,* VII (Turin 1998).

21 For example with an introduction by Nadia Urbinati (Princeton, NJ 1994).

22 *Observer*, 7 January 2000.

23 Joel Blatt, 'The Battle of Turin, 1933–1936: Carlo Rosselli, Giustizia e Libertà, OVRA and the Origins of Mussolini's Anti-Semitic Campaign', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies,* 1, 1 (1995).

Matteotti and Giovanni Amendola, and the party of action during the resistance and in the immediate postwar period.

The struggle between anti-fascisms and fascisms has had a continuous history from 1919 to the present, both in the political arena and in historiography; in the Italian context, politics and history, myth and counter-myth are inextricably interwoven into the very fabric of high and low culture, history from above and from below. There is ample scope here for a further 50 years of research and debate. More specific themes also require further attention and refinement. Vera Zamagni's economic history might encourage research in this area; Italy and the Holocaust and comparisons between fascist Italy and nazi Germany will be growth areas.[24] It is to be hoped that historians like Victoria De Grazia, Luisa Passerini and Perry Willson will continue to shed light on the role of women.[25] More studies of church and state, like those by John Pollard, would be welcome as would new interpretations of foreign policy.[26] In different ways, the four books reviewed here have indicated the past, present and future lines of research. The next generation of historians will, of course, have to decide whether themes like memory or culture still hold their interest.

John Whittam

is Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Bristol. He is the author of *The Politics of the Italian Army* and *Fascist Italy*. His continuing research interests cover aspects of modern Italian history, generic fascism and the Trieste question.

24 Vera Zamagni, *The Economic History of Italy 1860–1990* (Oxford 1995); S. Zuccotti, *The Italians and the Holocaust* (New York 1987); Alexander De Grand, *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (London 1995).

25 Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism ruled Women: Italy 1922–1945* (Berkeley, CA 1992); Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class* (Cambridge 1987); Perry Willson, *The Clockwork Factory: Women and Work in Fascist Italy* (Oxford 1993).

26 John Pollard, *The Vatican and Italian Fascism 1929–32* (Cambridge 1985); MacGregor Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed 1939–1941* (Cambridge 1982).