

## MEMORIES

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## Introduction: Italy in WWII and the Transition to Democracy: Memory, Fiction, Histories

In the troubled period spanning the downfall of Mussolini's dictatorship on July 25 1943 to the victory of the Christian Democrats and the defeat of the Left in the general election of April 18, 1948, Italian intellectuals, from writers to artists to filmmakers, were deeply engaged in searching for and representing the truth of national history. The "smania di raccontare" Italo Calvino talks about in the much-quoted 1964 preface to his 1947 novel *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, was only partly due to the joy of regained freedom after the long serfdom under the regime and the cruelties of the war (vi). The truth of the recent Italian past could not be but a plurality of truths, coalesced in the plurality of a new political and cultural participation. In this sense the Resistance was a counterargument to the Fascist regime's nationalist ideology of history. By claiming the "history-making" quality of popular participation during the anti-fascist struggle, the Resistance quickly dismissed the previous regime's credo, which starkly refuted any idea of popular agency. Yet as the end of the Parri government in November 1945 demonstrated, the forces that led the Resistance failed to merge and consolidate the new Italy around the military success against Fascism. Commenting on the contradictions of the new European scene after WWII, Milan Kundera insightfully remarked: "the new European war will play out only on the battlefield of memory" (176).

Today, historical debate has assessed well the institutional and political continuity between the monarchy that supported Fascism and the newborn republic led by the center-right Catholic oriented coalition.<sup>1</sup> Historian Silvio Lanaro describes the subsequent 1949-1953 period as characterized by the "congelamento della costituzione e ripudio dell'antifascismo come ideologia costituente e veicolo di una rinnovata identità nazionale" (66). After the 1991 publication of Claudio Pavone's groundbreaking *Una guerra civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità della Resistenza* (1991), historical and cultural research in Italy and abroad challenged the monolithic notion of the seamless birth of the Italian republic from the armed struggle of the Resistance.<sup>2</sup>

Emerging scholarship contested the assumption of widespread popular participation and the ensuing myths of national regeneration, of which stereotypes about a supposedly Italian “national character” are the apparent facet of a more nuanced problem.<sup>3</sup> More recent studies have finally questioned the hasty and unconsidered liquidation of the Fascist past, of which Croce’s image of Fascism as a parenthesis in national history is an all but too eager dismissal of Italian responsibility in WWII.<sup>4</sup>

Intellectual and cultural histories of this complex transition are still at the center of scholarly investigation and of a fervid international exchange. Recent scholarship has concentrated on different aspects of the period such as the legacy and memory of the Resistance, both politically and culturally (Filippo Focardi, Philip Cooke, John Foot, among others); the demise of Italian tentative politics of great power (Emilio Gentile); the cultural and aesthetic continuity between Fascism and Neorealism (Ruth Ben Ghiat); the cultural politics of antifascism (David Ward); the legacy of Fascist education and ideology in postwar generations (Luca La Rovere); the controversial juridical aspects of the transition (Michele Battini); and the legacy of the Fascist (and liberal) myth of Imperial Rome (Richard J.B. Bosworth). Many other aspects, however, still need a thorough scholarly assessment: the contributions to this volume of *Nemla-Italian Studies*, entitled *Italy in WWII and the Transition to Democracy: Memory, Fiction, Histories*, challenge previous cultural and historical assumptions on this period and enrich our understanding of the complexity of this difficult transition.

The case studies in this issue of *NIS* address heterogeneous aspects of the Italian cultural field after WWII, from the philosophical debate of the late 1940s to the role of visual arts in reshaping the intellectual scenario of those years, to the politics of memory enacted by literature and film in the long postwar period. The essays in this volume analyze dissenting voices that elaborated contrasting narratives of the period, investigate (un)conventional intellectual trajectories, and finally, examine the memory of the Italian war as constructed in the decades following, surveying pivotal questions such as the legacy of violence and Italian responsibility in the conflict.

The diversified voices of this transition, however, are ascribable to a larger historiographical postwar paradigm that

characterized European politics and civilization after 1945. This paradigm positions the trajectory of Italian culture and society in a historical continuity, in which “postwar histories were shaped not just by the external context of the Cold War but also by their preceding wartime histories” (Biess 3). In the decades that followed, in Italy “the uncertainties of the immediate postwar years were forgotten,” as historian Tony Judt put it, due principally to the improvement of living and economic conditions, not unlike what happened in other Western European countries (6). Nevertheless, as Judt concludes, “the likelihood that they would take a different turn had seemed very real in 1945.” The intellectual and artistic voices discussed in Italy in WWII and the Transition to Democracy bear witness to such possibilities—in Italy—and to such uncertainties.

The volume is organized in three sections, entitled respectively “Trajectories,” “Counter-Narratives,” and “Memories.” The first section is introduced by Peter Carravetta’s examination of Antonio Banfi’s *Studi filosofici* and its impact on the shaping of critical thought in the years leading up to the liberation of Italy. In his introduction, Carravetta notes the absence from cultural studies of works exploring the Italian philosophical milieu during the years that precede and accompany WWII, a lack that he is prepared to address with “Italian Philosophy through the War Years.” Antonio Banfi’s journal, launched in Milan in 1940, is an excellent point of departure for the investigation of the role and task of Italian philosophy in a period that demanded the reframing of the relationship between metaphysics, knowledge, and praxis. Accepting the notion of philosophy as a central human activity, Banfi acknowledges the responsibility, as outlined in the opening words of *Studi filosofici*, to connect philosophy and critical thinking with culture, history, and action. As Carravetta observes, the demands of the time could not have been more pressing.

The main concern throughout the life of the quarterly is the status of philosophical thinking at a juncture where in the culture at large, and within academic and intellectual circles in particular, there was at first a feeling of stasis, coupled to a sense that the “bufera” was not long in coming, then the chaos and sense of disorientation when there were two invaders physically in the territory and three

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governments vying for authority and control, and finally the complex post-war debates that led to the toppling of the monarchy and the birth of the republic. (p. 2)

Banfi's *Studi filosofici*, as Carravetta illustrates, was a critical undertaking, as it proposed to put forth an alternative way of thinking that challenged the establishment by repudiating the olympic immobility of the two governing currents of Italian critical thought, Croce's idealism and Gentile's actualism, putting forward ideas that were already in circulation across the Alps and overseas. Italian "Philosophy through the War Years" follows Banfi's work as editor of *Studi filosofici*. It examines a selection of authors whose published work was a critique of both idealism and actualism, and it highlights what "correctives or alternatives" to their methods were proposed, introducing "new" theories and methods that will open the way to the philosophical elaborations of the postwar years. Convinced that philosophy had to contend with reality, Banfi championed a critical investigation which, as Carravetta notes, questions its own theoretical assumptions, pursuing with rigor and method the challenges raised by reason and understanding. To the "problematic nature of knowledge" Banfi opposed a "methodological attitude" that opened the doors to a more critical and creative analysis of social and historical reality, an attitude that no longer disdained the contribution of the sciences.

Maria Beatrice Giorio's contribution, "Arte italiana e transizione istituzionale: il contributo della scultura alla difficile rinascita," retraces the controvertial phases that led to the rebirth of Italian sculpture from WWI, through the fascist Ventennio, to the Liberation. Following a chronological paradigm, the author examines the artistic activities of the major sculptors, among them Marino Mazzacurati, Arturo Martini, and Giuseppe Graziosi, and their affiliation with the regime, which unambiguously championed the celebration of its ideology with monumental celebratory public works. The analysis takes into consideration the *damnatio memoriae* and the destructive campaign that befell the artistic representations of the regime immediately after Mussolini's demise, and records the difficult re-elaboration of a more introspective art in the postwar years. The central part of the analysis addresses the issue of how most artists,

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after a period of public censure and painful self-analysis, were able to reconcile their creative voice with the changed historical reality, proving that they had overcome the hyperbolic language of Fascism in the monuments memorializing the Resistance.

With "Dilettante e militante: l'Europa di Savinio (1943-1948)," Andrea Gazzoni sheds light on Alberto Savinio's work from 1943 to 1948, concentrating on his considerations on the destiny of Europe (*Sorte dell'Europa and Scritti dispersi* 1943-1952) as a conceptual framework in which to reorient the intellectual's mind and praxis after the devastation of WWII. An Italian of sorts, Savinio had an eccentric and de-centered position that shaped him culturally and poetically as a European, allowing him to develop, in his writings, the notion of a continent (Europe) in motion, of a place subject to continuous change and transformation. Having experienced in his life the overlapping of geographic *loci* and cultural dimensions, Savinio was deeply conscious of the necessity to reconfigure ethical and critical thinking and to embed it in a historical reality that was ever more multiple, fragmented, and uncertain. Europe becomes the core of Savinio's intellectual agenda, which Gazzoni follows and illustrates with the support of a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the author's literary and essayistic production. After identifying the foundational characteristics of Savinio's speculative universe and illustrating the different historical and cultural influences that shaped it, Gazzoni focuses his attention on the intellectual project the author hoped to see realized as Italy was in the process of developing its democratic and republican edifice. Against all attempts to submit to a restoration of the old values and order, thus in direct opposition to an idea of Europe as Curtius and Auerbach had conceived it, Savinio calls for a re-thinking and re-writing of the notion of Europe as "esile mito," (p. 88) as decentered and marginalized space that acknowledges its historical position as "part" (p. 90) of a larger cultural continuum. Resulting from these considerations are Savinio's rejection of the primacy of literature over other forms of knowledge and his urge to reclaim Europe's shared cultural matrix. Europe can only be re-imagined as a militant space, where solipsistic reflection and collective action find a common ground, where literature and contextual reality enter a dynamic collaboration, challenging the intelligentsia to a renewed

epistemological debate. Such a Europe, both written and imagined, was in Savinio's mind not only a possibility, but a reality that would emerge from the ruins of the past.

Ombretta Frau's article, "The Wanderings of a Provincial Cosmopolite," presents yet another interesting aspect of the period that goes from the fall of Fascism to the early postwar years. Salvatore Maraffa Abate, also known in Sicilian literary circles as Leodalba, was both a *bon vivant* and a self-styled literary *connoisseur*, who can be counted among the many opportunists who exploited the Fascist regime and, after its collapse, refashioned themselves to adapt to the changed political circumstances. Noting the marginality of Maraffa Abate's literary production and his consequent absence from the literary scene of twentieth century Italy, Frau concentrates on Maraffa's relationship to Fascism and on his numerous imaginative transformations, from editor of a Sicilian high society magazine, to political journalist, to Fascist propagandist, to Badoglio supporter, to Salò enthusiast and, finally, to unexceptional travel reporter.

Frau's exploration brings to the fore the many issues arising from the problematic transitional period Italy and the Italian population experienced. The case study offered by the life of Maraffa Abate in fact exemplifies the 'practical' solutions many major and minor figures devised to survive the fall of the Mussolini regime, and find a place in the emerging democratic state. Frau's examination reveals that Maraffa Abate's transformism, a recurring disorder affecting both the Italian political reality and its individuals, was on one hand the result of an urge to conform and please, and to be socially accepted, and on the other, an attempt to erase the past, as many fervent supporters of the regime had done after the war. Maraffa Abate's expedients allowed the majority of Italians to survive as best they could the ruinous times they were living, but also to wash away personal culpability and collective accountability.

Part II of this volume, "Counter-Narratives," is introduced by Carla Mereu's comprehensive analysis of the Italian edition of the film *Casablanca* (1942) and the extent to which the dubbed version of the film was prepared to be watched by Italian post-war audiences in 1947. In the first pages of "'As Time Goes By...' You Must Not Remember This: Burying the Past in the Italian Post-War

Edition of *Casablanca*," Mereu examines the war-related fictional contents of the film and the legislative background governing the Italian film distribution sector of the period, which prevented the film from being distributed in the country in 1943, following its successful run in the US, or immediately after the end of the war. Particular attention is given to the discussion of the "operational continuity" in matters of film censorship that characterized the Italian state-run film office during and after the Fascist regime. The analysis of the complex process of manipulation performed on the dubbed version of the film makes evident how references to Fascist Italy and to Italian colonialism in Ethiopia were neutralized, while the presence of shady Italian characters in the film was expunged. Mereu sheds light on the ideologically driven operations and censorship interventions that were common in post-war cinema and that affected both Italian and foreign productions, highlighting the absence of criticism *vis-à-vis* the historical past that is characteristic of post-war Italian cinema. The conspicuously modified edition of *Casablanca* explored by Mereu convincingly exemplifies "the question of controlled public amnesia ('You must not remember this')" (p. 130) while confirming the strong presence of "Fascist forces ... still at work in the post-war period, supporting mechanisms of partial reading and manipulating historical references to the dictatorship and to its negative legacy" (p. 149).

Letizia Bellocchio's contribution, "Difficult Years for *Anni difficili*" by Luigi Zampa (1948), analyses the controversial reception of a movie that unceremoniously exposed, on one side, the empty promises of Fascism, and on the other the collaborationist inclination of many Italians including church authorities, the ineptitude of the intellectual élites, and, in general, people's political opportunism and acritical stance towards Mussolini's dictatorship. The contextual reality of the movie is that of a small Sicilian town in the thirties and forties, while the attention is focused on the characters' individual stories and their personal dramas. Bellocchio examines in detail the criticism the movie received, in particular within the ranks of the Communist party, among intellectuals, politicians, and film critics. Despite its popular success and the consideration it received, Bellocchio recognizes that the film remained invisible until 2008, when it became available in the Cineteche of Milan and Bologna, after its restoration in collaboration with the National Museum of Cinema in Turin.

Bellocchio's article investigates why, after the movie produced such a contentious debate, it was quickly removed from the cinema shelves. Considering the historical background and the events that led to the film and the director's ostracism, Bellocchio traces the reasons of this prejudicial oblivion to the Italian critics' greater interest in "film d'arte" and their disinterest for the "commedia all'italiana," genre to which Zampa's cinema adhered and that he found more adaptable to paint his critical portrayal of Italian society.

The last contribution of the second part is Enzo Laforgia's "Curzio Malaparte e l'Italia del secondo dopoguerra," in which the author discusses the works the Pratese author published during his years in France, starting in 1947. From there, despite the conflictive rapport with his native country, Malaparte continued to follow and examine the events in Italy and to observe its many attempts to rise from the political, economic, and moral decline into which it had fallen during Fascism and the war years. Reading with apprehension about the rapid series of events that characterized the European and Italian post-war period, Malaparte documented his position, ideas, and opinions in many different articles and literary texts, assessing both the new political class in its re-organization of the new nation, as well as the troubled international context. With his detailed analysis of the texts published during the French years, works that have received little if no attention on the part of the critics, Laforgia considers yet another dimension of Malaparte's provocative intellectual output. Notable for the polemic vein that is so integral to his political and literary commentaries, these texts are interesting because they enrich the understanding of the author's situatedness in those years, and are integral to the interpretation of his most influential novels, namely *Kaputt* (1944) and *La pelle* (*The Skin*, 1949). Yet as Laforgia demonstrates in his article, these texts also serve to illuminate a less known side of Malaparte. Thus, the readers are able to reflect on the complexity of his thought, expressed in seemingly contradictory comments, and to become familiar with the ideological twists and turns of his public existence, as well as to consider his assessment of the ills that befell the Italian political reality.

Elgin Kirsten Eckert's article opens the third and final part of this volume, "Memories," with an exploration of Andrea Camilleri's

works dealing with historical memory and commemorative representations. In "Youth Raped, Violated, and Denied: The Ventennio in Andrea Camilleri's Narratives," the reinterpretation of the past, the author's childhood years spanning from Fascism to the Allied landing in Sicily, is the result of a process that involves mnemonic recovery and intertextuality. The critical notion of Eckert's analysis, drawn from Camilleri's *oeuvre*, is grounded in a re-evaluation of the past through the literary medium, as narratives offer the possibility to interpret the present reality through a parallel analysis of the past. Eckert's article focuses on the topic of childhood as represented in three different narratives: the Montalbano detective novel *Il cane di terracotta* ("The Terracotta Dog," 1996), the short story "Un diario del '43" ("A Diary from 1943"), published in *Un mese con Montalbano* ("A Month with Montalbano," 1998), and a historical novel, *La presa di Macallè* ("The Siege of Macallè," 2003). All these works explore, within the symbolic representation of rape, not only the passive acceptance of Fascism by Italian youth, but the irrational submission of many Italians to the mystifying promises, yesterday as well as today, of showbiz politicians and illusionists.

In the last article of the volume, Barbara Pezzotti reiterates the necessity of a critical re-thinking of the past. In her piece, "The Detective as an Historian: The Legacy of the Resistance in Macchiavelli and Guccini's Crime Series," she argues for the suitability of the crime novel to recount history and to reflect on its painful lessons. Following Luckács' and Cortellessa's theoretical framework, Pezzotti explores the *gialli* of Lorian Macchiavelli and Francesco Guccini. Through their crime series, set in a small village in the Apennines, they revisit the period of Italian history that goes from the years after national unification to the 1970s, in an effort to understand the roots of Italy's fragile democratic system. In particular, Pezzotti investigates the authors' representations of the Fascist period and the Resistance, narrated in works such as *Tango e gli altri. Romanzo di una raffica, anzi tre* (2008). Their main objective, as the authors of the Sansovito series were set to confront, was the dissolution of all distinctions between the warring sides, with the consequent justification of the regime's methods and the glorification of its supporters. Pezzotti's critical analysis highlights the moral imperative that sustains Macchiavelli

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and Guccini's narratives, as they call for a frank and straight-forward examination of the past, which subsumes a "presa di posizione" *vis-à-vis* individual and collective responsibilities.

The present volume constitutes a survey of some of the main directions of research about postwar culture in Italy. The contributors investigate specific cases representing, interpreting and remembering WWII on a national and, in some cases, transnational level. Cultural representations of the period forged memory, but also excluded from the main stage other memories that later elaborations would address with different political and ideological agendas. The "Secondo Risorgimento" myth envisaged by the generation who fought in the war yielded to the "missed revolution" trope widespread in the 1960s, to the more recent understanding of the last years of the conflict on national soil as a "civil war" (Fogu 147-156). On the other hand, memory profoundly affected the cultural production of the long postwar period, from feature films to poetry—from testimony of high moral and artistic value such as Primo Levi's memoirs to popular representation in the press, advertising and songs. Many histories of these exclusions are yet to be told. Still the numerous directions of this volume—which testify the intense scholarly interest in this subject—open up new avenues of research that will enrich our grasp of a most controversial period in Italian history and culture.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> For an accurate account of this process and its historiography, see Lanaro, especially the first chapter, "Il lungo dopoguerra," 9-236; and Pavone, *Origini della Repubblica*.

<sup>2</sup> See Lanaro; Pavone, *Origini della Repubblica*; and Duggan.

<sup>3</sup> For a historical account of the representations of the "Italian character" in modern Italy, see: Patriarca; and Bollati.

<sup>4</sup> See: Del Boca; and Zunino.

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## Italian Philosophy Through The War Years

...ché di ciascuna posizione obiettiva, come di ciascun limite ideale, noi avvertiamo la relatività, la complessa connessione di interdipendenza in un sistema in continua evoluzione

Antonio Banfi, *Vita dell'Arte* 29

### 1. Introduction

A world-shaping event such as World War Two constitutes a locus crucial to sociohistorical periodization, marking a watershed in the collective lives of peoples that can then inform critical comparisons and perhaps historical rethinking. Many things must be borne in mind when considering the impact the war had on Italian society, including foremost the fall of Fascism and the monarchy, emergence of several political parties that shaped public discourse for the rest of the twentieth century, a constitution, and representative democracy. We must of course not forget the cost in lives lost, maimed, destroyed, disrupted, with consequences for decades to come. Although there is no dearth of official documents (government, bureaucratic, military, etc.) to reconstruct what took place and what were the contrasting positions in the field, not to speak of the critical and creative production of hundreds and thousands of people who, in their different ways, have intervened in their historical present to rebuke or valorize, critique or justify, a truly chaotic reality—especially after September 8, 1943—very little in recent cultural studies has been dedicated to what one particular class of citizens was doing during those years, namely the philosophers.

In this brief sketch I would like to reflect on what I feel were some truly remarkable critical thoughts on the question of the role and task of the philosopher, how to reframe the relationship between metaphysics and knowledge, which new concepts were deemed to be in need of further exploration as fundamental beliefs and habits of