

THE USES AND REINTERPRETATIONS OF FASCIST SYMBOLS THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF ITALIAN POLITICS.



> a virtual exhibition

> By Federica Gozi, Bianca Faelli, Caterina Guderzo
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“A fascism of the future—an emergency response to some still unimagined crisis—need not resemble classical fascism perfectly in its outward signs and symbols. Some future movement that would “give up free institutions”¹¹ in order to perform the same functions of mass mobilization for the reunification, purification, and regeneration of some troubled group would undoubtedly call itself something else and draw on fresh symbols. That would not make it any less dangerous.”

Robert O. Paxton

The Future of Fascism

Robert O. Paxton, 2017

PREAMBLE

“A fascism of the future—an emergency response to some still unimagined crisis—need not resemble classical fascism perfectly in its outward signs and symbols. Some future movement that would “give up free institutions”¹¹ in order to perform the same functions of mass mobilization for the reunification, purification, and regeneration of some troubled group would undoubtedly call itself something else and draw on fresh symbols. That would not make it any less dangerous.”

Paxton, Robert O. (2017).



To start off, we decided to have a preamble so as to set the stage for our project. We clearly want to communicate the intentions and ideas of the framers, the museographs - us - and the purpose of the museum. This idea is inspired by the preamble in the Munich Museum, this last being a great source of inspiration for our project which read: "The power of the archive lies not only in its documentation of events that ought to be remembered but also in the records it holds of histories that some might otherwise prefer to forget". ("How Munich Museums are confronting their Nazi history", 2021).

To guide you throughout our exposition exploring narratives around a particular history, we deemed it necessary to define the term museography, our role as museographs and how we intend to display our objects of study in a suitable and flowing manner. We want the visitor to be fully aware that they are walking in a designed space for a specific purpose, and thus are witnessing a specific representation of history. As such, it is a center of interpretation as well as documentation.

Currently museography is essentially defined as "the practical or applied aspect of museology, that is to say the techniques which have been developed to fulfill museal operations, in particular with regard to the planning and fitting out of the museum premises, conservation, restoration, security and exhibition." ("Museum: Museography Concept", 2015).

Museographs take into account the scientific programme and collection management, and aim to display the objects selected by the curator in a suitable manner.

The core idea of the aim behind the architecture of our virtual museum is inspired by Alberto de Bernardi, one of the members of the international scientific committee that cooperated with the Institute of History during the project of the exposition of The Totalitarian Italy ("Intervista a Alberto De Bernardi sul progetto museografico per l'ex Casa del fascio e dell'ospitalità di Predappio", 2018). Now although this was centered around fascism, we understood that we too wanted our focus to expand on the concepts of memory and identity.

The museum you are about to enter has a specific design, aimed at guiding the visitor not simply through the interconnection of past and present, but towards developing a personal reflection. Although the information put forward aims to be impartial, the project itself aims to trigger within the reader a reflection about the narratives of the past, its uses/abuses and representations/misrepresentations today.

Before addressing the display that we aim to use, it is important to state how the dominant color will be black, the color that branded fascism and is very present today. Moreover, special attention will be given to luminosity - this last is key to a museum, and coupled with the black background will enable the visitor to give exclusive attention to the sources we present and have no other distraction. The museum has a specific order so as to end up in the room in which you began, aimed at showing the cyclicity of the process.

The display of the museum aims at bringing the ideas mentioned above to life. As such, we deemed it necessary to start first and foremost with an academic overview of post and neo fascism in Italy, which will be the first wall.

The second wall will be dedicated to the grassroots of post fascism, in order to show the echo and appeal of some fascist elements within Italian society and its effect on distorting history.

The third wall will be exploring the chronology of the propaganda of the parties,. Here, just as Alberto de Bernardi suggests, we must confront how neo fascism is representing itself today, and this means guiding the individual towards deeply analyzing these concepts so as to activate a reflection within the individual. Once again, this aims to highlight the importance of narrative and representation in putting forward one kind of story.

On the fourth wall, the visitor will be able to explore the discourse and symbolism of Meloni's party (Fratelli d'Italia) with reference to patriotism, nationalism and fight against immigration. The aim here is to connect the first and second room, the fascist elements of our society and how our current political leader is using these narratives to gain popularity.

The fifth wall is dedicated to exploring the dichotomies, that is, comparing national discourse against the foreign interpretation of the rise and victory of Fratelli d'Italia.

In the sixth room, the visitor will be exposed to a comparative approach of this phenomenon with other European countries.

We will thus ask whether the results of our research go in the same direction as to what has been found when looking at other European countries where extreme right parties have ruled longer. We will see whether they all pick up certain narratives related to the past, looking at the relationship between Nazism and the rise of the extreme right in countries like Austria, for instance.

To conclude, the last room will offer the visitor to delve deeper into the content presented throughout the exhibition. This part will include the translated transcript of the full interview conducted with Filippo Focardi - full Professor at the University of Padova in Contemporary History. His work focuses on the memory of fascism and the Second World War, on the restitution of the victims of Nazism and on the punishment of Italian and German war criminals. Moreover, an epilogue will



include the key takeaways and proactive suggestions on how to counteract false narratives. Finally, this last part will include the credits to all the other sources we engaged with throughout the creation of this exhibition. As previously mentioned, the visitor will end up facing the first room, that of echoes of fascism within our current society, so as to highlight the (re)using and (mis)representation of history.



Internazionale Storia, Nascita di una dittatura. Internazionale.

Translated title: "Birth of a dictatorship: how the world press reported the advent of fascism", October 2022

On 28 October 1922, thousands of fascist militants set off from all over Italy for Rome in what was to be the first act of a brutal twenty-year dictatorship, culminating in the Ethiopian War, the ignominy of the racial laws and the tragedy of the Second World War. In recent years, there has been a return to the widespread talk of fascism, in Italy and elsewhere, in the wake of the success of populist right-wing formations that do not hide a certain sympathy for the authoritarian regimes of interwar Europe. However, already a hundred years ago, in the heat of events, Mussolini's political experiment was followed with curiosity and attention by the international press.

In the large number of articles that were published, one can find everything: from the criticism of the socialist newspapers, which had immediately realised the violent nature of the movement, also from direct experience, to the analyses of the liberals, for whom it was clear that fascism marked a clean break with democracy and parliamentarism. But there are also many apologetic contents, based on a rhetorical and bombastic interpretation of Italian history or fuelled by stereotypes about the national character, always ready to rely on the strong man of the moment. There is also no shortage of openly reactionary readings, which hail Mussolini's success as the beginning of the end of agonising parliamentarianism. Many of



the more benevolent analyses come from countries with a solid democratic tradition, such as the United States and the United Kingdom.

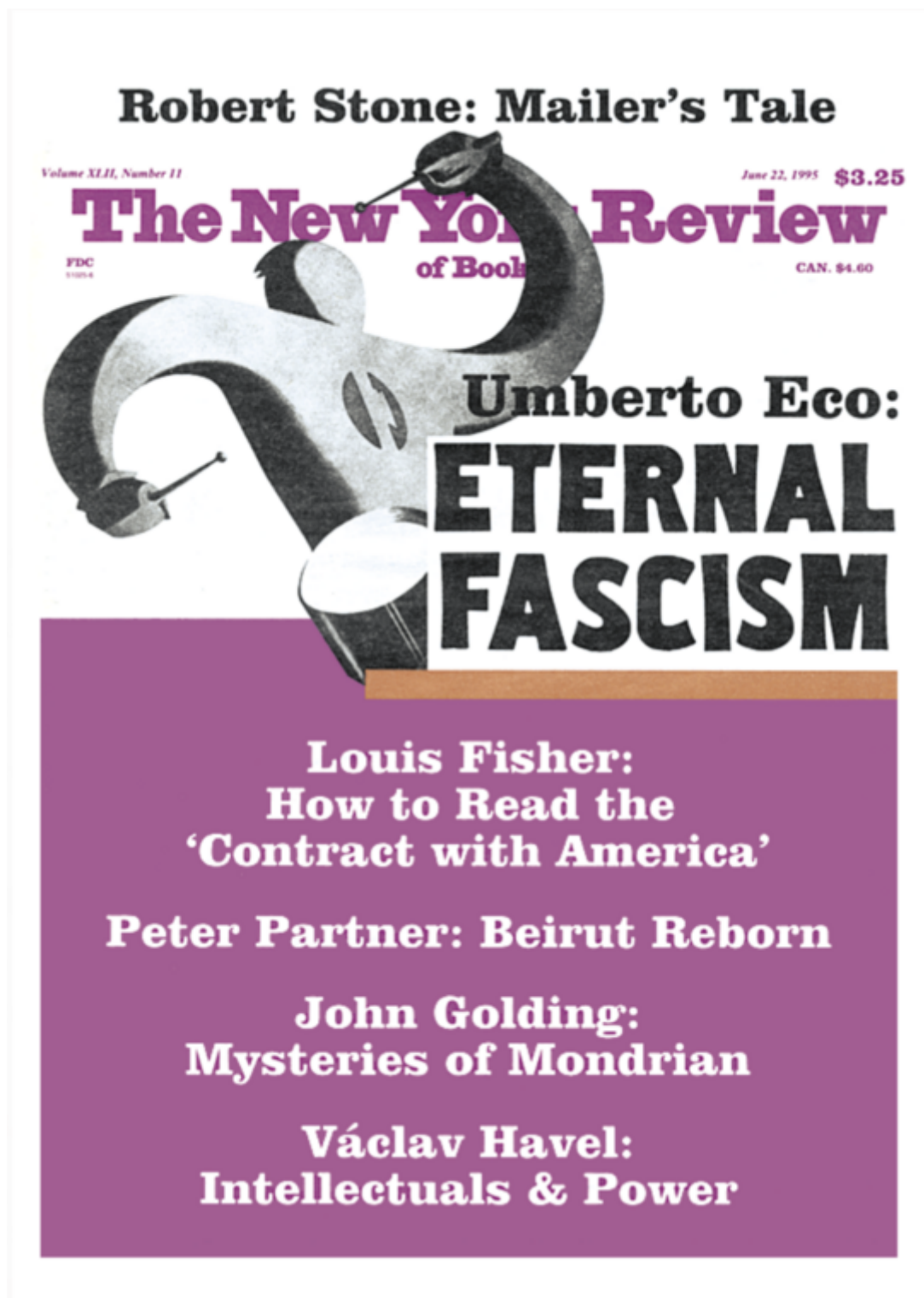
In the light of events, and considering that already in 1922 the true face of fascism was clear to careful observers, the tone of some of the Anglo-American press should give us pause for thought. The reasons for this sympathy are diverse. In the United Kingdom, for example, if the imperial elites saw in Mussolini an anti-communist bulwark and a guarantee of stability rather than a dictator; moreover, young people were mainly attracted "by the modernist face that fascism presented to foreign observers", writes Tony Judt in *Novecento* (Laterza 2012). "In Italy, above all, [fascism] was not so much a doctrine," Judt continues, "but a political style. It was young: ambitious, energetic, in favour of change, action and innovation. For a surprising number of admirers, fascism was in short everything they missed in small, old, nostalgic, grey England". As is well known, within a few years this attitude would radically change. And the cruelty of the regime would appear in all its evidence even to Mussolini's early admirers.

Thanks to this newly published magazine (October 2022) – which collects more than 50 articles from the world's press describing the advent of fascism between 1921 and 1922 – it is possible to draw a juxtaposition between how Italy was seen from the outside and how it was described from the inside but at the time and drawing comparisons with Giorgia Meloni's rise to power. Ultimately, as highlighted by Andrea Pipino, this helps us understand that defending pluralism and freedom also involves the ability to identify the signs of possible authoritarian tendencies in the political novelties that current events offer us.



Part 1: Terminology and Introduction to Fascism, Neofascism and Post-Fascism

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The New York Review of Books, Umberto ECO, 1995

ROOM 1: OVERVIEW OF TERMINOLOGY RELATED TO FASCISM | Ur-Fascism, Umberto Eco: Freedom and liberation are an unending task. (Cover of The New York Review of Books), June 1995

If we think of the totalitarian governments that ruled Europe before the Second World War we can easily say that it would be difficult for them to reappear in the same form in different historical circumstances. If Mussolini's fascism was based upon the idea of a charismatic ruler, on corporatism, on the utopia of the Imperial Fate of Rome, on an imperialistic will to conquer



new territories, on an exacerbated nationalism, on the ideal of an entire nation regimented in black shirts, on the rejection of parliamentary democracy, on anti-Semitism, then I have no difficulty in acknowledging that today the Italian Alliance of the Right (Alleanza Nazionale), born from the postwar Fascist Party, MSI, and certainly a right-wing party, has by now very little to do with the old fascism. . . . Nonetheless, even though political regimes can be overthrown, and ideologies criticized and disowned, behind a regime and its ideology there is always a way of thinking and feeling, a group of cultural habits, of obscure instincts and unfathomable drives. . . . I think it is possible to outline a list of features that are typical of what I would call Ur-Fascism, or Eternal Fascism. These features cannot be organized into a system; many of them contradict each other, and are also typical of other kinds of despotism or fanaticism. But it is enough that one of them be present to allow fascism to coagulate around it. . . . Ur-Fascism is still around us, sometimes in plainclothes. It would be so much easier, for us, if there appeared on the world somebody saying: 'I want to reopen Auschwitz, I want the Black Shirts to parade in the Italian squares.' Life is not that simple. Ur-Fascism can come back under the most innocent of disguises.

Full Essay



Il Popolo d'Italia, 1921

Mussolini's speech two years after the birth of "The Fasci", March 21st 1921

What does it mean to talk about fascism today? If we wish to study current political movements through the prism of historical fascism, we must firstly distinguish what fascism was in the Ventennio, vis a vis what today post and neo fascism are.

The basic task of defining fascism or the adjective fascist is complicated in itself, as the ideology created by Mussolini in the



beginning of the last century has subsequently expanded and evolved across the globe to assume relatively different meanings, according to the where's and when's.

The overarching common traits of the Duce's movement were nationalism, authoritarianism, racism, anticommunism and totalitarianism. It refused parliamentarism and democratic principles, in favor of a monolithic presidentialism supported by practices of violence and "arditismo" (boldness; a value of strength, courage and arrogance typical of the "Fasci" or "Squadristi"). In addition, it defined itself as "reactionarily conservative", but "revolutionary" against the institutions of capitalist liberalism and liberism.

In Mussolini's own words:

Noi agiamo dei valori morali e tradizionali che il socialismo trascura o disprezza; ma soprattutto lo spirito fascista rifugge da tutto ciò che è ipoteca arbitraria sul misterioso futuro. Noi non crediamo ai programmi dogmatici a questa specie di cornici rigide che dovrebbero contenere e sacrificare la mutevole cangiante complessa realtà. Ci permettiamo il lusso di assommare e conciliare e superare in noi quelle antitesi in cui si imbestiano gli altri che si fossilizzano in un monosillabo di affermazione o di negazione. Noi ci permettiamo il lusso di essere aristocratici e democratici: conservatori e progressisti; reazionari e rivoluzionari; legalitari e illegalitari a seconda delle circostanze di tempo di luogo di ambiente in una parola «di storia» nelle quali siamo costretti a vivere e ad agire. Il Fascismo non è una chiesa; è piuttosto una palestra. Non è un partito; è un movimento; non ha un programma bello e fatto da realizzarsi nell'anno duemila per la semplice ragione che il Fascismo costruisce giorno per giorno l'edificio della sua volontà e della sua passione.

Digital Archive of Italian historical newspapers

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Il Popolo d'Italia, Benito MUSSOLINI, 1921

Detail defining what fascism means to Mussolini, 1921

"We promote traditional and moral values which socialism neglects or despises; but above all the fascist spirit shuns anything that is an arbitrary mortgage on the mysterious future. We don't believe in dogmatic programs and this kind of rigid framework that should contain and sacrifice the ever changing complex reality. We allow ourselves the luxury of adding up and reconciling and overcoming those antitheses towards which others become enraged, fossilized in a monosyllable of



affirmation or negation. We allow ourselves the luxury of being aristocrats and democrats: conservatives and progressives; reactionaries and revolutionaries; legal and illegal depending on the circumstances of time, of place and of environment - simply, "of history" - in which we are forced to live and act. Fascism is not a church; it is rather a gym. It is not a party; it is a movement; it does not have a ready-made program to be implemented in the year two thousand for the simple reason that Fascism builds day by day the building of its will and its passion."

To think that the resurgence of fascism today as the movement defined above by Mussolini, would be futile and unproductive. Historical fascism must be understood as a phenomenon belonging to and defining the past of Italy, which nevertheless contextually can't be redefined in its present. Indeed, recalling fascism in today's political turmoil without review and consideration, causes confusion and historical inaccuracies. So, although it allows us to make historical and political analogies, it inhibits us from fully understanding what the current filo-fascist political appearances effectively mean. Indeed, many authors have argued that after 1945, fascism was stripped of its actual meaning, as it was inherently the product of a particular and unique plight deriving from the cultural pessimism of the beginning of the 20th century, the massification of people and their nationalization, the scars of World War I which the new liberal democratic regimes couldn't handle, and the threatening Bolshevik phantom.

So, when looking at contexts, the interwar period is in now manner comparable to the postwar one, especially the years immediately following World War II. These were the years of carefree consumerism and of the economic Boom, where globalization was welcomed with open arms, and the prospect of conflict in Western Europe, even standing the Cold War, was soon accepted as impossible.



VARIOUS, ForzaNuova & FronteNazionale1997, Movimento Fascismo e Libertà1991, Casapound2003

Logos of Neo-Fascist movements

On the other hand, the movement itself never died out. For at least 40 years, Giorgio Almirante's Movimento Sociale Italiano, the neofascist party which openly claimed its legacy with Mussolini, remained in the backgrounds of politics, although not gaining credibility and parliamentary power. This is due to the fact that, at least on to the 1990s, the concept of fascism remained associated with some kind of cultural repugnance, as the witnesses of history were alive and remained committed to recount the atrocities of the Ventennio.

Nevertheless, history is easy to forget, especially if the golden years of the post-war era were suddenly faced with a series of socio-economic crises, which needed scapegoats and enemies on whom to bear their responsibilities. Indeed, this is when the particularity of neo and post fascist movements arose, in deeply different contexts from fascism itself, but overtly or



covertly preserving its ties to it.

In order to avoid confusion in surveying extreme right wing political parties and movements, the typologies of “neo” and “post” fascisms have emerged as analytical categories to understand what is currently at stake.

Neo fascist groups openly revindicate their historical legacy and continuity with fascism. Their ideology is in direct alignment with that of fascism, and has violence, anti-democratic motives, racism and misogyny at its core. There are currently 16 active groups in Italy who openly identify as neo-fascist, of which the most famous and influential are: Forza Nuova, Fronte Nazionale, Movimento Fascismo e Libertà - Partito Socialista Nazionale, Casa Pound.



Facebook, Giorgia MELONI, 2022

Facebook statement by Meloni, August 2022

100 x 300 x 3 cm (h x w x d)

On the other hand, post-fascism's relation to fascism is more complex to understand, as, officially, it claims that it has fully emancipated and moved on from it, as Giorgia Meloni attentively underlined this summer during her electoral campaign.

(The Italian Right has handed fascism over to History”).

This process of unchaining from fascism has been formally addressed by numerous politicians of post-fascist parties (from Alleanza Nazionale to today's Fratelli d'Italia), but informally seems to preserve several propagandistic elements, might they be only nostalgic, of fascist reminence. This attitude of inexplicit and ambiguity with its past, is often called “Fascismo in doppio petto”, literally “Double faced fascism”. This type of stance which simultaneously rejects fascism and underlyingly

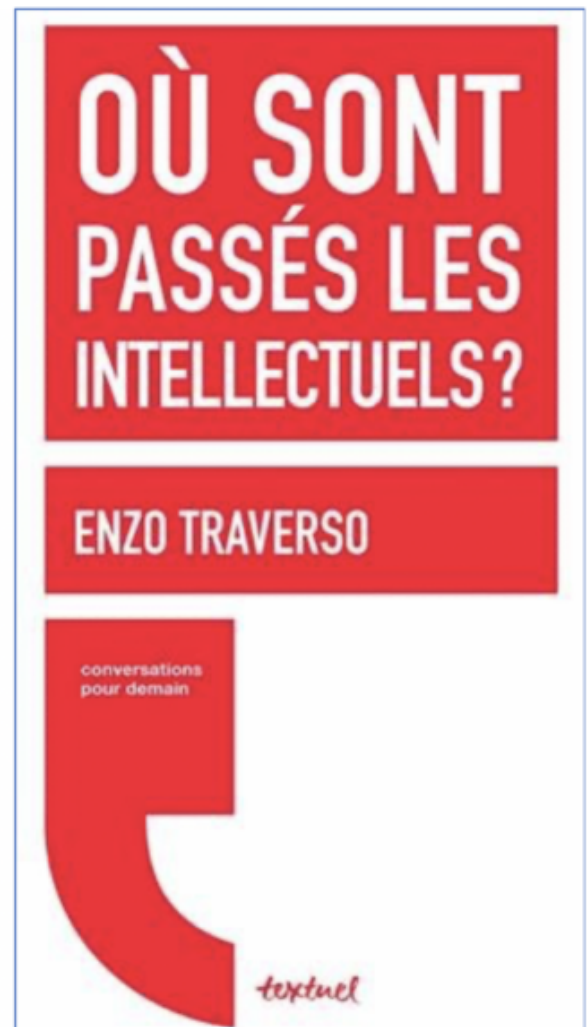


preserves it, is done in order to gain credibility from public opinion and be accepted by it, by at the same time not l support from the traditional fascist aficionados.

We must first of all distinguish between regime and movement. A regime can be defined as fascist when it suppresses political and civil liberties and resorts to violent repression against all opposition and counter-powers. In this sense it is a transhistorical phenomenon. The situation is different for a movement or a party that lives in a liberal democracy or in any case in an environment that is hostile to it and in which the definition of fascist is stigmatizing and even used as an insult.

In addition, we must revisit the traditional elements of fascism as seen in today's post-fascism.

Facebook

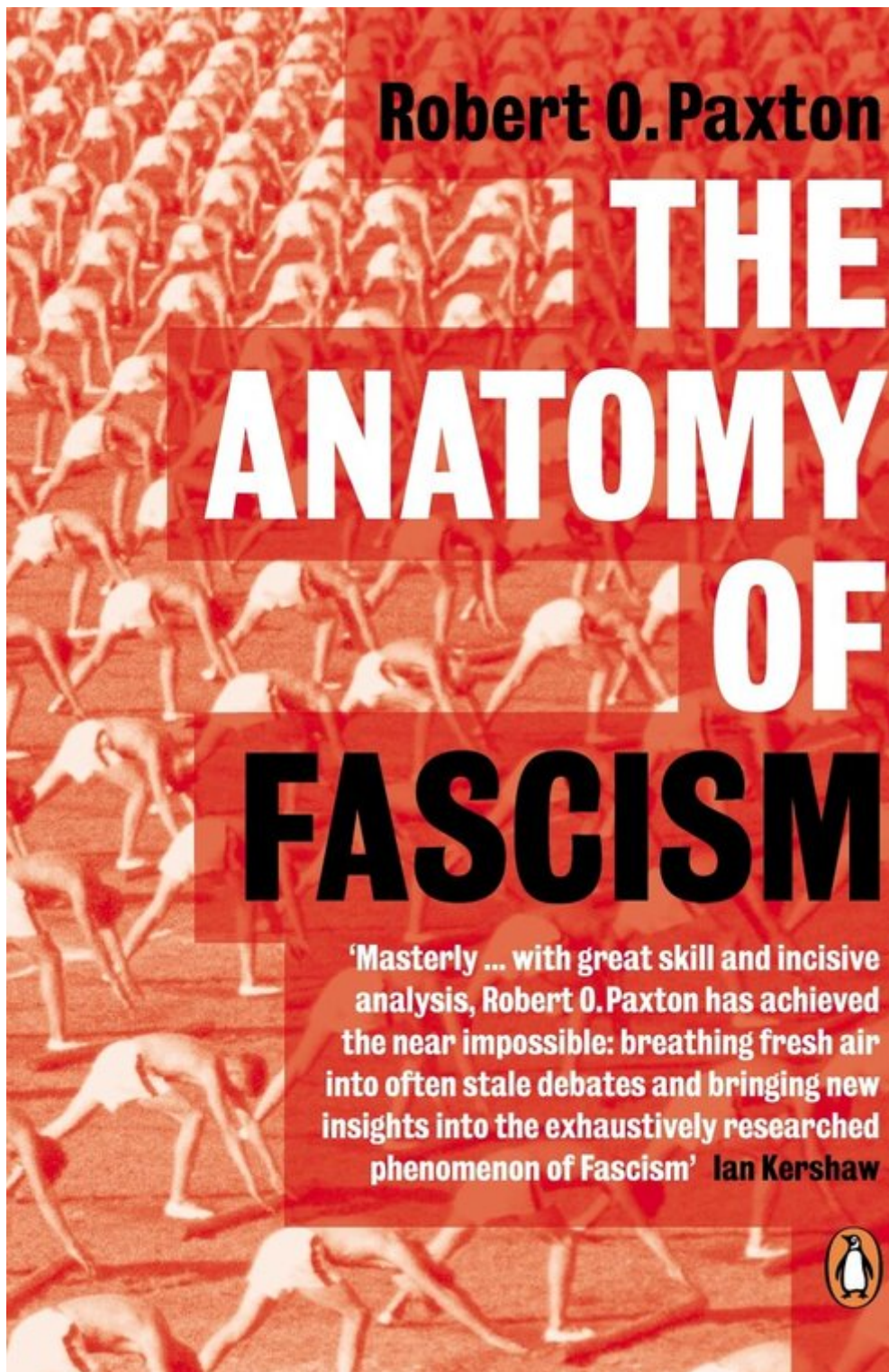


Ugo PALHETA 2018, Enzo TRAVERSO 2013

La Possibilité du Fascisme, U.Palheta and Où sont passés les intellectuels? , E. Traverso, 2018 and 2013

The end of utopias, the loss of "horizons of expectation" and presentism have imposed a post-ideological attitude on post-fascism, which can no longer define itself by virtue of the anti-communism on its own.

To survey a few evident differences between Mussolini's fascism and today's far right groups, the first thematic which comes to mind is that of misogyny and sexism. As one of the founding elements of fascism was that of violence and virility, the archetypical consequence to this mentality is that of sexism and misogyny. Indeed, under fascism, women were second class citizens and confined to housework. Today, the heads of the biggest post fascist parties in Europe are women - Marine le Pen (Front National) and Giorgia Meloni (Fratelli d'Italia). This would have been inadmissible in the Ventennio, as women were not but the wives, the mothers, the breeders of the Nation. Nevertheless, simple representation isn't sufficient to call victory, and feminism is definitely distant from both leaders. As an example, as banal as it may be, upon election as Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni decreed that her title would not be "La Presidente", but "Il Presidente". Such a grammatical subtlety, points at an internalised and cultivated sexist and misogynistic mentality, which can't attribute the role of President to the feminine, and proves an ideologic alignment with the Ventennio.



Robert Paxton, 2004

The Anatomy of Fascism, 2004

80 x 35 x 2 cm (h x w x d)

Another fundamental difference between the two is that of the choice of the scapegoat and enemy in society. While for fascism antisemitism was central in the accountability of society's flaws, in post-fascism it isn't. Moreover, clear efforts have been made on behalf of post-fascist leaders to condemn antisemitism and the Holocaust, as is demonstrated by Gianfranco



Fini's trip to Israel in 2003, where he deplored fascism's participation in the Shoah. Or, on another note, with the fall of the USSR and its constantly impending communist threat, fascism loses one of its core values: anti-communism. The clear enemy is no longer out there, and thus, fascism can't be either.

However, drawing from Robert Paxton's theory of functional equivalents, it is clear that, the function of having an enemy is more important than what the enemy's name is. The instrumentalization of politics for the identification of a menace to the homogeneity and integrity of the national people and values, is a constant which stayed in post fascism. We can see that although the contextual contingencies of post-fascism profoundly separate it from historical fascism, it recurs to "functional equivalents" which substitute the traditional ideological forms by other means.

The motives of xenophobia and racism have been perpetuated to present day, however the scapegoat has been substituted with another community, no longer the Jewish one. Migrants, often Muslims, are now the bearers of that role in society, and post-fascist parties instigate hatred and intolerance against them. FdI doesn't pull any punches in using the expression "migrants' invasion", nor does FN in that of "Islamification" when voicing concerns regarding the migrant's crisis in their countries. This type of rhetoric is chosen to create a defined image of the "national identity", extending the patriotic and nationalistic ideology of fascism. However, of course nationalism assumes a different cue in a globalised world, and in this way the focus is placed on the national identity rather than the nation itself. Examples of this are visible in the insistent use of the words "Patria" (motherland) and "patrioti" in addressing the country and its citizen, which shows an intention in cultivating the sense of common belonging to the nation - which must be defended from the cultural incursion poised by the Islamic / foreign infiltration set by migrants.

Likewise, an enemy has been found to substitute as a functional equivalent the USSR, in the Troika's institutions. Still relying on the nationalistic leitmotif, Euro-scepticism is found commonly in post-fascist movements across the members of the EU. Indeed, as the role of violence in democratic societies is no longer either central nor praised as it was under the Ventennio, it can't be overtly appreciated today in the same manner. This however doesn't exclude the structural presence of, even if only rhetorical, violence in post-fascist movements. An example is the logic of dehumanization of the enemy and of exceptional treatment that combines violence with racism. This is amplified and possible through the delegation of violence to small groups on the margins of the main party, such as Casa Pound, Forza Nuova, and youth sections of the party. And, aligned with this philosophy of oppression and repression, are legislative advances that have already been made by the newly instituted government with the "Anti-Rave decree", which prohibits for more than 50 people to associate and assemble, if this causes "public disturbance", effectively putting at risk the right to freedom of association and protests.



source: Bloomberg, 2022

Giorgia Meloni's election in September 2022, 2022

ROOM 2 - LOOKING AT THE GRASSROOTS OF POST FASCISM

The right in government seeks above all to distance itself from fascism. Meloni has constantly tried to dissociate herself and her party from it, as she knows that deep down the Italian population is anti fascist. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge and individuate the ways in which she carries out certain ideas in disguise, indirectly uses history and gives space for a certain narrative to rise. In this section the display aims to take the visitor through events that highlight the nationalist feeling that Meloni gives space for, which redirects the narrative of history and normalizes certain types of behavior that echoes fascist feelings.



Part 2: Looking at the grassroots of today's Fascism in Italy

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source: Torcha, 2022

Nostalgics of fascism gathered in Predappio to commemorate the centenary of the March on Rome

In November 2022, about 2,000 people gathered in the Emilia-Romagna municipality (where Benito Mussolini was born and is buried) to commemorate the centenary of the March on Rome, the event that started the fascist dictatorship in Italy. Black shirts, fascist fezzes, banners, and flags appeared in large numbers. Greetings to those present who were given by Orsola Mussolini, the great-granddaughter of Mussolini. Many raised their arms, doing the fascist salute, waiting to enter the crypt.

This event is not a new occurrence, and happens every year in Italy, however, it remains extremely shocking. Still, and especially considering the current political situation in the country, it makes us question whether fascism ever really left Italy. It specifically links well with the question we're asking with this project, as we want exactly to understand whether things such as Meloni's election makes it easier to make resurface this kind of happenings, whether her election legitimizes these behaviors, whether there is a real risk of the consolidation of neo fascist movements because of her presence, and whether this is linked to a specific use of history.

Now, as underlined by professor Focardi in the occasion of our exchange with him, Predappio has been an integral part of the identity of the neo-fascist right fringe in Italy. As such, these gatherings, visits, have taken place for years, they're not new. If we took a comparative approach, a similar happening would have been absolutely unthinkable in countries like Germany. In Italian legislation, there surely are laws aiming at tackling this sort of gatherings, dating back to 1952 and 1993, however, and as it has been pointed out by various scholars, they present serious limitations as to their power to oppose neofascist demonstrations. In 2017, the Italian parliament had approved the proposition of law put forward by Emanuele Fiano, which outlawed and considered punishable by law every kind of fascist and neofascist demonstrations, including the roman salute, gadgets with references to Mussolini... If the law passed, everything would have become condemnable from the point of view of penal law. However, the law only got approved at the Chamber, and didn't pass in the Senate. With all the right wing parties, such as Fratelli d'Italia and Lega, that energetically and actively opposed it. In addition, Fiano, who is



a politician and son of a jewish man who had ended up in Auschwitz, didn't even get elected during these last 2 elections. He was a candidate in the city of Milan, but in his place was elected the daughter of Pino Rauti, one of the historical leaders of the Movimento Sociale Italiano (a neofascist oriented party), something the professor himself characterized as worrying.

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source: Torcha (2022)



source: La Repubblica

The reappearance of archived, past symbols in the present.

To go further, we conducted an analysis of the symbols present in the gathering. We observed the reappearance (or rather the maintenance, the non-disappearance) of archived, past symbols in the present.

This gathering illustrates how certain elements of fascism seem to be omnipresent in the present day. One first noticeable aspect is the color of the shirts worn by the people present. In fact, the choice of the color black is not random. Black has been associated with fascism since its birth. In fact, the color is mainly associated to the “squadre fasciste”, these small groups of people who implemented a regime of terror before the arrival of Mussolini to power, instilling fear and committing violent acts against opponents, most specifically socialists. They would always be wearing black, a color that remained, because of its symbolic appeals. In fact, black is a color that reminds of violence, and more specifically, of death. The message was thus clear: going against fascism would have meant death.

The fez was the headgear of the Arditi, the force formed that was a model for early fascism, as it participated in the exaltation and the cult of war. Seeing it worn in the present definitely has a symbolic meaning, as it is obviously and directly linked to fascism.

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sources: Il Foglio (2015), Corriere (2013)

LA MAPPA DELLA DESTRA DA STADIO

ORIENTAMENTO POLITICO DEI GRUPPI TIFOSI



Source: Cronaca, 2017

Clubs tainted black - fascism in football

There are manifold relationships between football and various phenomena associated with ideas of nationhood, nationalism and national identities. Far from being an exhaustive list, three main aspects can be differentiated within this broader context: (1) football as an alleged expression or reflection of specific national identities, (2) football as part of nationalistic practices and politics, and (3) football as a discursive bearer of the very idea of the nation.

Thus the idea of nation can arguably be defined as the common denominator of football. However, Italy is one of the countries that takes it to the extreme. Here we witness the reinterpretation of football whereby we can clearly see the revaluing of fascist elements. Football in Italy has always been politicized in the sense that the fascist elements have never left. There has been a progressive institutionalization and acceptance of elements that may echo fascist ideology. In this case, we have stadiums as rendering manifest the fact that there is a file rouge between fascism and Italy, and fascism and the right.

They do not represent the majority, but every Sunday some Italian fans are tinged with black colors. These are the groups that declare themselves openly fascist, filling not only the stands of Serie A, but also (and especially) those of Serie B and the Lega Pro. Specifically, of the 328 active groups, 151 are politically oriented. Of these, 40 are extreme right-wing 'Fascism in the curves,' recalls L'Espresso, 'infiltrated during the Ventennio (the twenty years of Fascism): sport appealed to the people and popular interest in football increased, fuelled by the successes of the national team with the two victories at the World Cup in '34 and '38, and the gold medal at the Olympics in '36. All to increase the sense of national identity. Right-wing fans 'are more active groups, at least politically, than left-wing fans: they communicate online, focus on image,



slogans, organize meetings on topical issues and consider themselves committed. Politicised, however, means more than just the display of a banner or the singing of some chorus. In some lands, football and politics are intertwined, with club leaders and important members of the fans having close ties or being part of the ranks of parties and movements. On the right the groups are well known: Forza Nuova, Casa Pound, skinheads, but also the Northern League'.

The fascist elements that have never left our society are and used by neo fascism to pursue the gradual acceptance of fascist elements within our society are represented in Curva Nord, with Lazio fans being historically black (black in the sense of fascists). In fact, it is also one of the fans that maintains ties across borders precisely because of its political ideas. "The black thread binds Europe from east to west, the Ultras Sur, a group of Real Madrid fans, the Poles of Wisla Krakow and the Hungarians of Levski Sofia, with whom the Romans are twinned, support Lazio". The intensity of these feelings and the interconnectedness on the international level are further proof of the resonance of the extreme nationalism, that becomes mere violence, that has elements all too similar to fascism. This is also strengthened by the example of Verona club, where Hellas Verona 'have become known over the years for fascist and openly xenophobic episodes', or Inter fans, known as Inter's Boys San (the acronym San refers to Benito Mussolini's Action Squads). We also have Atalanta, whose stadium's atmosphere is one of the most heated in Italy and its ground is often referred to as a relic of Mussolini's Italy.

This phenomenon opens the doors for a broader discourse. Professor Focardi discusses how "there is a permanence of very strong, explicit cultural fascist iconographic elements in certain political movements: Forza Nuova and CasaPound. These explicitly are neo-fascist. Here there is something new to be analyzed by taking Cheles (the second article I am sending you)" What is particular about these movements is that "Not only do CasaPound and Forza Italia explicitly, evidently refer to fascist propaganda, they refer to Nazi propaganda". Once put next to each other, CasaPound and Forza Nuova billboards are shown to be exactly the same as those used by German Nazis, with the slight change of the German phrase being changed into Italian. This is shocking, the Italian far-right movements (CasaPound and Forza Nuova) clearly refer to fascist propaganda, both of the RSI regime and even Nazi propaganda. And here is when we connect again with football. According to Professor Focardi, this phenomenon of appeal to nazism is not surprising "after all because I am told that the same thing happens in the fan clubs. Italian right-wing fans close to fascism are actually very close to Nazism as well." Thus, we see the strong affiliation between extreme political right appealing to feelings that are already buried within a part of the population.

Source: "What are the far-right supporters in Italy. A map" Cronaca 2017, "Atalanta: Serie A alternative club guide" The Guardian 2014.



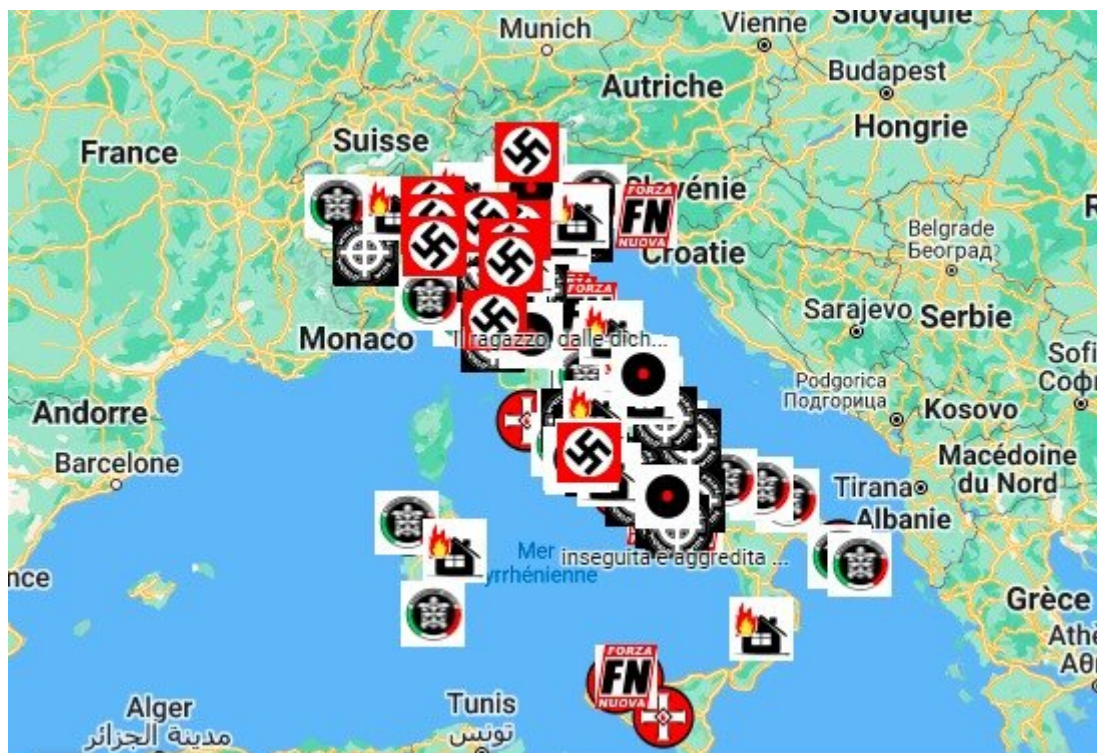
Source: Tiscali Cultura, 2021

'Bella Ciao' being ghettoized

Creating a narrative must necessarily entail excluding some aspects of the story - effectively distorting history. In the case of neo fascism, we are talking about Bella Ciao, the Italian liberal anthem that emerged during WWII. 'The Guardian view on Italy's resistance anthem: sing it loud, sing it proud' showcases the attempts by Italy's radical right to ghettoize Bella Ciao are part of an attempt to airbrush history. Over the years, this ballad of a young partisan who says goodbye to his lover and heads for the mountains to fight Hitler and Mussolini has become an international hymn to liberty. However, for obvious reasons - its celebration of the defeat of Mussolini's Italian Social Republic, the rump fascist state established in northern Italy in 1943 - the song has never featured on the playlists of the Italian far right. "The left will be saying Bella Ciao to power after the election," Salvini said. Bella Ciao is not a leftwing song; it is not leftwing to oppose fascism and insist on universal human rights and freedom from oppression. But it is a song that draws uncomfortable attention to past connections the modern far right wants to airbrush out of history. Brothers of Italy comes from the same political tradition as the MSI and its successor, the National Alliance. Its logo still carries the MSI's tricolor flame. Numerous politicians of the far right in fact refuse to sing this song, an example being Salvini in the attached video where he honors Laura Pausini, an Italian singer, for not singing Bella Ciao, as these politicians claim that it is extremely instrumentalized.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyuNP1OYZIU>). This is a clear example of the attempt to reinterpret history and create a narrative that excludes key elements of our past - and reinforces the strength of fascism on today's public.

Source: "The Guardian view on Italy's resistance anthem: sing it loud, sing it proud" The Guardian 2022.



Source: Corriere Della Sera, 2018

"Italia Nera" (Black Italy), 2018

By "Italia Nera" is it meant Black Italy in the sense of Fascist Italy - as fascism's color was effectively black. This artwork showcases the map of 2018 showcasing the aggressions and attacks by fascist militants in Italy from 2014 to 2018. The purpose of this map is to showcase how today Giorgia Meloni has a particular appeal due to the fact that she interprets and gives voice to a creeping feeling of the positive connotations of fascism. In fact, she is the most popular in the areas where fascism was popular and is remembered for its positive effects - such as Latina and the infrastructural work it underwent under Mussolini. Fascism is very much still present within our societies and among our very soil.

Control, order and homeland. Roma Nord, Lombardy of North East, Latina, Veneto are just a few of the many areas in Italy that have strong neo fascist elements. More than 70 years after the Liberation, the black wave of the extreme right seems to have swept over the Italians to the rhythm of the old never-fading slogans 'Italians first' and 'Italy to Italians'. For example, the artwork showcases Veneto Front Skinheads, which emerged in the second half of the 1980s with a strong anti-Semitic and racist slant. The Celtic Cross movement is in good company. Like its associates, who are inspired by neo-Nazi skinhead movements, there are also the Skin4Skin of Milan, who for their logo, not surprisingly, chose two symbolic S's. And also waving the black flag in Italy are the crossed hammers of Hammerskin and the lictor fascies of Fasci Italiani del Lavoro and Fascismo e Libertà, a national socialist party. These places where Meloni reflects the most the voice of the majority of the inhabitants also help us understand how this complements well with the fact that Meloni coupled with Mussolini, whose party is strongly rooted in the North of Italy.

Thus also highlights another phenomenon, and that is the fact that not only is fascism still present, but that its 'positive' narrative prevails in many of these areas. The narrative that ruled at the time of Mussolini and that partly stayed within our public discourse is that he had done good too within our society - namely within the infrastructural and reconstruction work. For example, in Latina the Duce is not only considered a "founding father" but is also the subject of guided tours aimed at showing tourists the "good things" done by Fascism. Latina still calls itself by its original Fascist name: Littoria, referring to the "lictors", the Roman troops who carried the bundles of rods, or fascies, that gave the party its name. The town was re-christened by law post-war. The narrative here focuses on Mussolini's draining of swamps, constructing railways and investing in the construction of Sabaudia and Circeo in Latina - now very popular locations among Italians in the summer.

Source: "Neofascist aggressions, the interactive map to monitor them on the territory arrives" La Repubblica 2
ARCHAEOLOGICAL LATINA & ARCHITECTURAL RESTORATION: Littoria, Fascist Architecture - "Mussolini's Latina remains
a Living Monument of Fascist Nostalgia," NEWSWEEK, USA" Wordpress 2015.





Source: La Repubblica, 2022,
Neofascism in fashion

"Neofascism, from the selfie in the ultras curve to the sweatshirts in the Pivert shop: here is the black map of Milan". This article from La Repubblica, one of the major Italian newspapers, showcases the 'wolves or warriors' who believe in the 'new Italian man' of a Mussolini memory. The groups are branded by CasaPound's hoodies in Milan. Similarly, the artwork depicts Milan in March 2021, when a group wearing Pivert sweaters sees two women tearing down a poster illegally hung by neo-fascists (help up in the picture) on the anniversary of Sergio Ramelli's death (today the usual remembrance with Roman greetings and 'presente!' in Via Paladini). Women are hit with spit, kicks and punches.

The aim of this art piece is to introduce the debate of how fashion is reflecting the strong hold that fascism still holds in our everyday life, as well as the progressive process of rendering less negative the use of fascist symbols in clothing. Below two cases will be explored to showcase through politics (through Salvini wearing Pivert - next artwork) and in the public eye (through Montesano's scandal - artwork after Salvini).

Pivert, the brand just mentioned, is a key component of fashion as appropriating itself of a part of history in order to represent it in a way that many find appealing - including Salvini. Pivert, they dubbed it a 'fascist clothing line'. The manager denies the accusations but nevertheless admits that 'the CasaPound guys like it'. Pivert is a company based in Rome that produces casual clothing such as polo shirts, sweatshirts, jackets and hats. It was set up about a year ago and has seven sales outlets in central Italy - Rome, Viterbo, Pescara and Florence - and has concentrated mainly on e-commerce. A company like dozens of others. The only fact is that if you want to contact Pivert by phone, you have to dial the same phone number as Il Primato Nazionale, an online newspaper close to Casapound. Its owner is Francesco Polacchi, one of the leaders of the extreme right-wing movement CasaPound, sentenced to one year and four months for the violent clashes in Piazza Navona in 2008 and now under investigation for the scuffles that followed CasaPound's raid on Palazzo Marino against Mayor Beppe Sala in June 2017. The simple fact that these brands are for sale highlights how the showing of these symbols is more accepted or at least tolerated than before, exploiting the underlying tools for acceptance.

Source: "Neofascism, from selfies on the ultra curve to the sweatshirts of the Pivert store: here Milan's black map" La Repubblica 2022, "Pivert, they renamed it 'fascist clothing line'. The manager: 'It's not like that but the CasaPound guys like

it" Il Fatto Quotidiano 2016





Source: La Repubblica, 2018

Salvini wearing the jacket symbolizing CasaPound

Salvini went to the Stadio Olimpico stadium in Rome in 2018 with this very jacket, and it gave huge visibility to the brand.

While it may not be correct to say that Pivert is CasaPound's clothing brand, we certainly cannot fail to point out the collection's many references to that world and that imagery, from the names of the garments - 'semi-God', 'fighter', 'martialis' or 'victores' - to the aesthetics of the models in the photos on the website. Moreover, it is an established fact that Pivert garments are favorites for many CasaPound sympathizers. Thus, we see an implicit move on behalf of Pivert to use the popular figures that echo elements of extreme right to attract new buyers. Salvini's case, aside from proving the attempt of the leader to get support of CasaPound followers, showcases an attempt to unmark these brands - that is, to dilute the negative connotations and make them more acceptable. This reflects Meloni and Salvini's aim of making these symbols and ideas more accepted in order for them to be able to take very radical stances when speaking in government and being perceived less controversial or 'fascist' compared to before.

Source: "Salvini ultras version at stadium: among VIPs wearing 'CasaPound's iconic jacket'," La Repubblica, 2018.



Source: TG24, 2022

Fascist tshit live on Italian TV

Another example of fashion reflecting a gradual acceptance - or a decrease in attack - of fascist symbols is the scandal regarding Montesano in November 2022. Enrico Montesano is an Italian actor and showman that is currently participating in the most followed television program of Italian tv on Saturday nights - Ballando Con Le Stelle (Dancing With The Stars). On November 12, 2022, Montesano appeared in a clip that was shared live on Saturday night wearing an X MAS shirt, the very same X MAS of the previous artwork regarding 'Golpe Borghese'. His association with X MAS, the legion created by fascists of the Republic of Saló and as its head Borghese, instigated a lot of scandal throughout Italy. What is important about this event is to understand the degree to which traces of neofascism can be found even on live tv for all of Italy to see - and only a part to criticize. This is a clear, tangible surfacing of beliefs and more tolerance of certain beliefs and values.

Source: "Enrico Montesano wears Decima Mas shirt, controversy erupts on Dancing with the Stars" TG24 2022



Source: Ferlandia Shopping Website

'Ferlandia' - the fully fascist brand available online

“Better to live one day as a lion than one hundred as a sheep” - Benito Mussolini. This is the first phrase that shows when opening the website of the shop ‘Ferlandia’, which is situated in Predappio. This shop offers t-shirts honoring Mussolini, posters, rings, bracelets, coins, famous phrases of the Fascist Ventennio... Once again, this is further proof of an accepting and blind behavior towards clearly fascist elements within our society.

Source: Ferlandia shopping website



Source: Il Giornale, 2016

Fascist statues - Italy not dealing with its past

As Italo Calvino, a renowned Italian writer shows, Fascism had colonized Italy's public realm. He states, "I spent the first twenty years of my life with Mussolini's face always in view," the writer recalled. Today, in 2022, those statues are still there, a reminder of the omnipresent past. It was easy to have the feeling, as described by Calvino, that fascism would have colonized all Italian public spaces.

"In Italy, which has allowed its fascist monuments to survive unquestioned, the risk is different," writes the historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat. "If monuments are treated merely as depoliticised aesthetic objects, then the far right can harness the ugly ideology while everyone else becomes inured."

Italy, the first Fascist state, has had a long relationship with right-wing politics, with the election of Silvio Berlusconi, in 1994, the country also became the first to bring a neo-Fascist party to power, as part of Berlusconi's center-right coalition. This means that, when Berlusconi brought to power the Italian social Movement, his rehabilitation of fascism was aided by a series of places and monuments that still exist today. However, this alone is not but this alone is not enough to explain Italians' comfort with living amid Fascist symbols. Italy was, after all, home to Western Europe's biggest anti-Fascist resistance and its most robust postwar Communist Party. Until 2008, center-left coalitions maintained that legacy, often getting more than forty per cent of the vote in elections. So why is it that, as the United States has engaged in a contentious process of dismantling monuments to its Confederate past, and France has rid itself of all streets named after the Nazi collaborationist leader Marshall Pétain, Italy has allowed its Fascist monuments to survive unquestioned? It is because it has still not confronted its past, or it has but chose one narrative to put forward to allow us to constantly overlook the explicit reminders of fascism. There is a debate about keeping them as pieces of heritage, in Italy there is a tension as the architecture does not solely reflect a message that was closely connected with the time it was erected, and thus should not be erase but rather explained. No, this is not the case, as in Italy the statue is a presence of the past in the present. Many of the beliefs it represents are still felt today among the Italian population, it is le passé qui ne passe pas.

Examples of these systematically displayed symbols are the obelisk shown in the art piece, with Mussolini Dux craved into it.

Another is the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, a sleek rectangular marvel with a façade of abstract arches and rows of neoclassical statues lining its base, is also another architecture built under Mussolini. On its exterior engraved with a phrase from Mussolini's speech, in 1935, announcing the invasion of Ethiopia, in which he described Italians as "a people of poets, artists, heroes, saints, thinkers, scientists, navigators, and transmigrants." The invasion, and the bloody occupation that



followed, would later lead to war-crimes charges against the Italian government. The building is, in other words, a symbol of the abhorrent Fascist aggression. Yet, far from being shunned, it is celebrated in Italy as a modernist icon. In 2004, the state recognized the palazzo as a site of "cultural interest." In 2010, a partial restoration was completed, and five years later the fashion house Fendi moved its global headquarters there. Thus we see how a certain narrative of the past is physically, visually and publicly present - and to a large extent accepted - within Italian society.

Sources: "Why are so many fascist monuments still standing in Italy?" The New Yorker 2017, "Fascist monuments remain standing" International 2017



Source: BBC, 2022

"The first truly fascist monument"

Historian Jeffrey Schnapp has described it as "the first truly fascist monument". This is another example of fascism before our eyes. The artwork represents a striking arch made of white marble, with columns sculpted to resemble fasces, the bundle of sticks that symbolized the fascist movement. It has an ethereal, almost ghostly presence, rising like a mirage out of the gray apartment buildings and green trees that surround it. Along its frieze, an inscription in Latin reads: "Here at the border of the fatherland set down the banner. From this point on we educated the others with language, law and culture." It has been a rallying point for far-right marches and the object of several attempts to blow it up. Just like the other documents previously discussed, it is a great source of fiction, that every time that it is addressed in an attempt to resolve the conflict, this collapses into mutual incomprehension.

Here we address once again to the historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat, New York University professor of History and Italian studies, who states that "In Italy, which has allowed its fascist monuments to survive unquestioned, the risk is different." "If monuments are treated merely as depoliticised aesthetic objects, then the far right can harness the ugly ideology while everyone else becomes inured." However, it is important to reiterate that this does not necessarily entail a suppression of these monuments and a burying of history. Instead, a debate is opened in regards to sensibilizing, as Ben-Ghiat puts forward, we must appeal to "a awareness, launched while the right is resurging just about everywhere, to reflect on how to interact with these buildings and the legacy of history to which they are tied to".

Source: "What happens to fascist architecture after fascism?" BBC 2022, "A debate on the past" Internazionale 2017



Source: Corriere Della Sera, 2018
La Russa and the Statue of Mussolini

Ignazio Benito Maria La Russa, note his second name as reference to Benito Mussolini, is an Italian politician who is serving as President of the Senate of the Republic since 13 October 2022. He is the first politician with a neo-fascist background to hold the position of President of the Senate, the second highest-ranking office of the Italian Republic. A month ago, he was saying "We are all heirs of the Duce". In this video he is shown to have statue of Mussolini in his house, highlighting how tangible symbols that echo fascism are not only very present within our society, but in the very house of very much present within Italian society. In fact, they are in the very house of one of Italy's representatives. This also showcases how, despite creating polemic and scandal, in the end these discourses tend to augment the degree of acceptance of such elements, and thus giving more space for a certain narrative to be welcomed.

Source: "Ignazio La Russa new president of the Senate. To a postfascist the second office of state. A month ago he said, "We are all heirs of the Duce."

" Il Fatto Quotidiano 2022, "La Russa and his collection of Mussolini busts: "That time I slapped the leader of the State University. He still remembers them."" Il Corriere Della Sera 2018, "Cabinet, League points to Fontana for House. La Russa elected to Senate without FI support" Il Fatto Quotidiano 2022



MSI, Giorgio ALMIRANTE, 1956
Logo of the Movimento Sociale Italiano, 1956

40 x 120 x 2 cm (h x w x d)

Origins of the "Fiamma Tricolore" (Tricolour flame), originating in the Neo-fascist party MSI after World War II, which is still present in today's far right party logos

Source: Secolo d'Italia



Part 3: Tracing the roots of "Fratelli d'Italia" in Italian history

Part 3: Tracing the roots of "Fratelli d'Italia" in Italian history



Alleanza Nazionale, 1995

Logo of Alleanza Nazionale, 1995

80 x 80 x 2 cm (h x w x d)

Logo of Gianfranco Fini's party, Alleanza Nazionale (1995-2009) which conserved the tricolour flame in order to maintain the legacy with the extinguished MSI

Source: Fondazione AN



Fratelli d'Italia, 2012

Logo of Fratelli d'Italia, 2012-

80 x 80 x 2 cm (h x w x d)

The final format of Fdl's logo, featuring at its center the tricolour flame.

Source: Fdl official website



VARIOUS, Azione Universitaria 1996, Schoolbooks and Medals, Ventennio Fascista

Reminiscence of Fascist symbols in Azione Universitaria, 1996-

150 x 60 cm (h x w)

Azione Universitaria is the student branch of Fratelli d'Italia, previously of Alleanza Nazionale. It operates in universities and organises events for extreme rightists.

Its logo shows an open book with the feluca placed on it. The feluca (two-cornered hat) was the typical hat which academics



and intellectuals were made to wear under Mussolini's regime.

There is a direct reference to the Gruppi Universitari Fascisti, (University Fascist Groups). The medals' of subscription to the GUF show a decoration which has the book, the musket, and the hat. Azione Universitaria has simply removed the musket, and maintained the same design. It is important to note how under the Ventennio, the motto for education was "Libro e moschetto, fascista perfetto" (Book and musket, perfect fascist"), and indeed the official schoolbooks made under the regime had covers images portraying this mentality. The idea of education as study and action united to violence, is still very present in today's post and neo fascist student movements.

AU Logo: Official website of AU

School books: Altervista, Storiaestorie, 2018

GUF medal: Numismatica Ferrarese

Sources: detailed in description; on the feluca:



Alleanza Nazionale, 2005, Regime Fascista, 1932

Romanitas

80 x 140 x 2 cm (h x w x d)

Source postcard: i Bolli (27/10/1932)

In occurrence of the 10th year anniversary of Alleanza Nazionale, the party organised a series of events for its celebration. It is interesting enough, to see that instead of calling it "decimo anniversario" (10th anniversary), the chosen expression was "decennale", (decennial / decade), recalling to the latin expression rather than the Italian one, as was per usual in Mussolini's propaganda. Following this path to explicit the value fo Romanitas, a 2 month journey was conducted by the leader of AN, Fini, who toured and rallied the whole country in an experience which was given the, once again latin, name of "Iter Italiae".

To conclude, another evident connector is that of the visual choices of the poster for the Iter, which sees Fini with a appearance, looking to the right, and in the background an image of the Via Appia, the millennial street built by the Romans which led to Rome... just as was symbolised in a very popular stamp of the regime.

Source: poster



Alleanza Nazionale, 1995 - Fascist Regime, 1922

Analogies in post-fascist and fascist propaganda, 1995 // Ventennio

60 x 180 x 2 cm (h x w x d)

In the first poster, we see a vast sea that seems to make the viewer lean into a serene horizon, over which the party's logo hovers as the goal to reach. The words "Cresce la nuova Italia" (The New Italy emerges") are displayed on the sea's surface. In the postcard from the Ventennio, a commemoration of the March on Rome is depicted. There are blackshirts on their way towards the capital, saluting Mussolini's hovering face.

There is a graphic reminiscence in the former of the latter, which alludes to the similar alluring direction that wants to be suggested.

Source for postcard: Archivio Libero.

Sources: Archivio Manifesti Libero // Cultura Italia



Unknown, Ventennio Fascista

Mussolini's portrait, "Salute the Duce", Ventennio

150 x 70 x 2 cm (h x w x d)

Potential reference for the image provided in the AN poster.

Source:

PDF generated by www.kunstmatrix.com



Alleanza Nazionale, 2003

AN poster advertising a conference on productivity, 2003. on, 2003

150 x 70 cm (h x w)

The poster was issued in October 2003, and advertised a conference on productivity for the small and medium businesses, it depicts a worker holding a metal stake. His face appears to remind a very well-known portrait of the Duce, as the strong mandibular features are highlighted in a way that can't go unnoticed.



The very hat has been made to be the helmet of the worker.

The text says "With Fini, to give voice to an Italy which produces".

A rhyme is made in Italian between the words "voce" and "produce", in a way that makes the second half of the second word more pronounced. (Not to note that the metal stake divides the word produce in PRO- DUCE).

AN Poster

Part 4: Political Discourse and Symbolism of "Fratelli d'Italia"

Part 4: Political Discourse and Symbolism of "Fratelli d'Italia"



Corriere TV, 2022

ROOM 4: POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND SYMBOLISM OF FRATELLI D'ITALIA Meloni: "Fascismo consegnato da decenni alla storia, condannando infami leggi anti-ebraiche", Corriere TV, 2022

Rome, 10 August 2022: "The Italian Right has for decades consigned fascism to history, unambiguously condemning the deprivation of democracy and the infamous anti-Jewish laws", says FdI leader Giorgia Meloni in a video message in three languages to the international press. (Agenzia Vista/Alexander Jakhnagiev - CorriereTv).

One aspect that is key for the visitor to capture is today's political discourse and symbolism used by Giorgia Meloni and her party (Fratelli d'Italia). Indeed, one can draw many parallels between today's political arena and the fascist ones in terms of common themes for propaganda. In this extract of a video in which Giorgia Meloni is addressing her public in three languages (French, English and Spanish, with Italian subtitles), Meloni clearly states that "The Italian Right has for decades consigned fascism to history, unambiguously condemning the deprivation of democracy and the infamous anti-Jewish laws".

This room aims at analyzing whether the political discourse and the symbolism of her party is compatible with such an affirmation, or whether we can see traces and uses of fascist discourse and symbolism in today's politics.



Simona Granati - Corbis via Corbis via Getty Images, 2021

Meloni and Patriotism/Nationalism, 2021

The first concept that needs to be explored to understand Giorgia Meloni and Fdl's political discourse is the appeal to nationalism. Already by looking at the party's name – Fratelli d'Italia – there is a reference to the national anthem of Italy. As explained by Professor Focardi, the main value carried out by Meloni's discourse is nationalism, declined in the forms of patriotism. "Noi patrioti" (Translation: Us patriots), she underlines that nationalism and patriotism is altogether something to strive for. The choice of using 'patriotism' instead of 'nationalism' is exactly made for this purpose: while nationalism is sometimes used to connote something negative, patriotism is more difficult to attack by opposite parties.

This political discourse comes from a tradition developed in the 1990s, when AN (the party in which Giorgia Meloni made her first steps in Italian politics) referred to 'i ragazzi di Salò' (translation: the young comrades of Salò, meaning the soldiers who decide to stand with Mussolini instead of fighting with the Resistance), as good guys because they were fighting for the nation. According to the 1990s right wing Italian parties, these 'ragazzi di Salò' could be justified in their actions because they thought they were fighting for the patria. This was one of the first steps enacted by these parties to legitimize a sort of nostalgia of their supporters to the fascist era. Giorgia Meloni comes from this tradition and exploits patriotism for her propaganda. However, as Professor Focardi has highlighted, this was a misrepresentation of the Fascist era. Indeed, while the supporters of the Resistance were fighting for a free and democratic Italy, the 'ragazzi di Salò' were fighting for a Fascist, racist Italy and nothing more. This distinction is omitted in right wing political discourse, this legitimizing the non-condemnation of Fascist nostalgia among their supporters.

In order to strengthen this political discourse, Fdl also underlines that antifascist sentiment is divisive. Instead of being the element from which our Constitution was founded upon (which de jure is still valid), Fdl substitutes antifascism (something too 'divisive' because they would lose nostalgic supporters) with patriotism.

Professor Focardi, however, also highlighted that this is another misrepresentation of the Fascist past. Fdl never directly addresses the fact that patriotism was one of the elements that mostly represented a terrible sciagura (translation: a curse) for Italy.

In this picture, the visitor can see one of the many photographs taken of Meloni talking behind an Italian flag, representing her strategy to appeal to patriotism and increase her supporters.



When Giorgia Meloni appeals to patriotism, stating that a President needs to be a patriot at all costs, she is necessarily implying that any other President not chosen by her cannot be considered a patriot and should be evaluated as an enemy of the Italian Nation (Huffington Post, 2021). What Meloni is capable of doing through her political discourse is creating a civil war between who can embody the essence of the Italian Nation (Meloni is known to have called herself many times “Giorgia, an Italian and Christian mother”) and everybody else who are transformed into ‘enemies of the nation, of the people and of the tradition’. Meloni therefore proudly refuses democratic values, though she tries to distance herself from fascism in words, her actions suggest quite the opposite.



Il Fatto Quotidiano, 2017

Forza Nuova Poster (on the left) and Fascist Poster (on the right): Defend Her! – Forza Nuova against migrants inspired by Fascist's propaganda of American soldiers, 2017

This appeal to the Fascist era's discourses is explicitly portrayed in this Forza Nuova (far-right party allied in Meloni's government coalition) propaganda poster. The poster reads "defend her" and portrays a migrant who is trying to sexually assault an Italian woman. The idea for this propaganda slogan was taken directly from a Fascist poster portraying an American soldier, 'the invaders' according to the Republic of Salò who were portrayed as sexual assaulters of Italian women to convince the citizens to stick with the Fascist side instead of joining the Resistance. The same narrative is reused by Forza Nuova slogans, in direct reference to the Fascist discourse.



Twitter, 2019

Meloni on Twitter: "Immigration is a phenomenon controlled by speculators and globalists", 2019

"Dietro l'immigrazione incontrollata non c'è il tentativo episodico di persone che sperano di sbarcare in Europa. C'è un movimento organizzato che lavora per immettere nel mercato europeo migliaia di disperati come manodopera a basso costo. Non a caso #Soros finanzia queste Ong." Translation: Behind uncontrolled immigration is not the episodic attempt of people hoping to land in Europe. There is an organised movement working to bring thousands of desperate people into the European market as cheap labour. It is no coincidence that #Soros funds these NGOs.

From this Twitter post, the visitor can understand that the other big political appeal in FdI's political discourse, alongside



nationalism, is the fight against immigration. According to Professor Focardi, her party's appeal to anti migrants seems to find its roots in the 2008 economic crisis. As in many other countries, Italy was hit hard by the crisis, leading to mass impoverishment and social instability.

Similarly to what Front National had already started to do in the 1970s, FdI developed in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis a discourse on ethnic nationalism, meaning they developed a discourse on the cultural and social exception of Italian people in contraposition to the 'dangerous enemy', the migrants that are trying to 'steal the jobs of Italian and change our culture'.

FdI particularly looks at the labor market, exploiting the increased competition in the aftermath of the economic crisis, both the 2008 one and the Covid crisis.

Though not explicitly appealing to the biological nationalist discourse developed in the Fascist era, FdI declines this discourse into an ethnic-cultural exceptionalism discourse.



source: Fratelli d'Italia's website

Fratelli d'Italia's Logo

The tricolored flame finds its origin as the symbol of the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), a party that was founded in 1946 by former fascist personalities, who were also part of the Repubblica Sociale Italiana, which was Italy's primary extreme right party for 50 years. The flame has been designed by Giorgio Almirante, one of fascist Italy's most prominent personalities, who notably reinforced the collaboration with Nazi Germany, before becoming MSI's leader. The history behind the symbol is ambiguous, but many historians find its origin in a link with the symbology attached to the "Arditi". The Arditi were a section of the Italian army which played a fundamental role in constructing the foundational myth around fascism, and which was



frequently called "black flames". However, other historians see in the symbol another symbology. According to this, the trapeze that encapsulates the inscription M.S.I represents the grave of Benito Mussolini and the flame of a lighted lamp. What remains certain is that the flame has been recurrently used by all neofascist and post-fascist parties in Italy, even after the breaking apart of the MSI in 1955. It thus occupies a central place in right-wing symbology, and still nowadays resonates with a part of the electorate, as it appeals to certain references of the past, winking at certain figures and discourses.

source: Il Foglio (2022)



source: Alamy, 2017

MSI's logo

One question that we thus had when we encountered professor Focardi was: why would Giorgia Meloni keep in her logo an obvious reference to a fascist past, if she officially wants to distance herself from it?

His answer was that Fratelli d'Italia does not remove it because there is a part of their electorate that maintains nostalgic positions. That would be 20% of Italians, looking at the 2018 poll by Repubblica, that came out just before the February 2018 elections and that was done by Ivo Diamanti with Demos. It said that more than $\frac{1}{3}$ of the right-wing voters, so including Meloni's party Fratelli d'Italia, had a positive opinion on Mussolini and fascism. So this means that at least $\frac{1}{3}$ of FdI voters like that flame, or at least they don't see it as an inconvenience. Giorgia Meloni, but not only, also people like Lollobrigida, and overall most of the leaders from the party all come from that same background there, they stem from that history. When they were young, they would be part of hyper nationalist groups like Youth Action, and they built and picked up their references there. And according to them, there is nothing to be ashamed of with that.

Thus, another big question is: how come there is no shame? To draw a comparison, in Germany, the nation is ashamed of Nazism. But in Italy there is less shame of fascism, and it's barely a problem politically. Giorgia Meloni thus doesn't remove the flame because there is a part of the electorate that is attached to that very flame. Removing it, in the professor's view, would be a move that FdI considers as potentially politically and electorally more counterproductive than keeping it. That flame there is liked and cherished by a certain percentage of the electorate, and if it was to be taken away, that same percentage of the electorate would feel outraged.

But in the end the problem is not so much with that percentage, but rather the others, the voters who are not so attached to the flame, are not affected by it. Surely, a core of voters is sentimentally attached to fascism. Of course, no one wants to reinstitute fascism as it was, install a dictatorship, or use violence against opponents (all things historical fascism did). And that's a point the professor insisted on. Still, there is a part of Meloni's party that is attached to certain symbols, to a certain



past that it does not want to disown, sentimentally nostalgic. One additional thing is that there is a part of the party doesn't have any problem whether there is that flame as a symbol. And that's because in Italy, people have not come to terms with fascism. Fascism is thought to have been that not so bad regime, that had great mass acceptance precisely because it was not that bad, as framed by the narrative of the right-wingers.

There is, however, one last detail to note as to the use of fascist symbols in present day politics. In fact, it is important to point out that references to fascism are usually rather implicit. Meloni is exactly successful because she hides these references. She wants to hide any tie to fascism, she does not make any direct references. While she has kept the flame because she personally comes from that environment, she's linked to that history, it remains one of the few, if not the only symbolism so explicit and direct to her fascist past.

Part 5: Exploring Dichotomies – National discourse vs foreign interpretation of the rise and victory of "Fratelli d'Italia"

Part 5: Exploring Dichotomies – National discourse vs foreign interpretation of the rise and victory of "Fratelli d'Italia"



Miscellaneous, 2022

Collection of International Newspapers on Meloni's Victory, 2022

This section explores how foreign and Italian newspapers reported the news of Giorgia Meloni's victory on September 25, 2022. A comparative analysis allows the visitor to understand how foreign newspapers are much more prone to identify Meloni as a post-fascist politician by looking at her – at times visible and at times concealed – references to fascist symbols and ideologies. Whereas, in Italy, this tends to be avoided and Meloni's victory was reported as a center-right victory, usually not referring to fascism in any way.

In the image above:

NYT (US), 2022: "Italian voters ready to turn a page for Italy: with the hard-right candidate Giorgia Meloni ahead before Sunday's election, Italy could get its first leader whose party traces its roots to the wreckage of Fascism."

The Guardian (UK), 2022: "Giorgia Meloni is a danger to Italy and the rest of Europe"

CNN (US), 2022: "Giorgia Meloni claims victory to become Italy's most far-right prime minister since Mussolini"

Le Figaro (France), 2022: "Legislative election in Italy, Meloni claims the direction of the next government" ... "A post fascist part about to enter power alongside Salvini's eurosceptic far right part and the conservative party of Silvio Berlusconi"



El Mundo (Spain), 2022: “Meloni’s hard right wins in Italy and shakes the European Union” .. “Meloni, the post fascist streets enters government”

Zeit Online (Germany), 2022: “The fascism of decent Italians Giorgia Meloni's rise is no accident, and fascism in Italy is not returning with her - it never left.”

BBC News Mundo (UK), 2022: “Giorgia Meloni: what is neofascism, why is it coming forward in Italy and what are the consequences for the rest of Europe.”

This collage of newspaper titles, published during the days of Meloni’s election (right before or right after) of 25 September 2022 highlights the language used by international newspapers. The visitor is able to compare this collage with the next artwork portraying Italian newspapers’ titles in the same days: understanding that no Italian newspaper was using words such as Fascism (here, the Zeit), neofascism (here, BBC News Mundo) nor post fascism (here, NYT and Le Figaro) or extreme/hard right (here, El Mundo, the Guardian, CNN).

This leads the visitor to ask himself: Why does this happen? Why is there such a different narrative within the country? What is the alternative narrative brought forward inside the country that makes it possible for explicit Fascist references to be ignored by national press and public debate? The visitor can start to find some answer in the successive artwork.



Miscellaneous, 2022

Italian Newspapers on Meloni's Victory

Translation of the articles' titles:

Libero (defines itself as a "conservative newspaper"), 2022: "Left defeated, free !!! Now it is her turn"

La Repubblica (defines itself as a "progressivist newspaper"), 2022: "Meloni seizes Italy"

La Stampa (defines itself as a "centrist newspaper"), 2022: "Italy goes right"

Corriere della Sera (defines itself as a "moderate newspaper", 2022: "Giorgia Meloni has won"

Il Giornale (defines itself as a "right-wing, conservative newspaper"), 2022: [word pun] "Italy woke up/Italy went right"

Il Fatto Quotidiano (defines itself as a "centrist, independent newspaper"), 2022: "Meloni wins alone, Conte heels Letta"

Looking at this collage of national press's titles on the days of Meloni's victory, the visitor is immediately captured by the striking difference in respect to international ones. Indeed, there are no references to Fascism, Post-Fascism nor to extreme/hard right. Instead, Fdl is rather defined as a party in the coalition of "centre-right".

Why is that the case?



As also highlighted by Professor Focardi in the interview (see extras at the end of the exhibition), Italy is – de jure – a Republic founded on anti-fascism but in fact fascism, or better social portrayal of fascism is very different. Looking at the polls that have been done (Nel Cantiere Della Memoria: Fascismo, Resistenza, Shoah) in 2018, on the eve of the general elections, there is an average of 20% of Italians have a positive opinion of Mussolini and Fascism. E.g. La Lega, 38% who express a positive opinion of Mussolini. This is because there is the idea that fascism was a ‘good-natured’ dictatorship’. Some of the narratives that are conveyed at the national level sound something like “Fascism was awful, HOWEVER, it made trains arrive on time, it drained the swamps etc. Furthermore, Italians have always, since the post-war period, tended to judge our fascism on the yardstick of Nazism. The Nazis are ‘the truly cruel, evil ones, Hitler the bloodthirsty one’. So ‘compared to them the fascists were not so bad’, says the constructed narrative. This is something to bear in mind. What used to be called anti-fascist prejudice, that is, anti-fascism as an axis of legitimacy, is not at all solid in Italy. Precisely because there is a not so bad idea of fascism. This narrative is maintained in language, and this could be an answer to explain why Italian newspapers are so reluctant to associate Meloni’s party with Fascism. There is a general tendency to ignore or justify these parties’. references to Fascism are either ignored, downgraded or justified.

Furthermore, this is a direct consequence of the ‘good Italian, bad German’ narrative (Focardi, Filippo. *Il Cattivo Tedesco e Il Bravo Italiano ;La Rimozione Delle Colpe Della Seconda Guerra Mondiale*. S.l.: Editori Laterza, 2016) , which at the time, however, was also promoted by international newspapers compared to today. Italians have been legitimized by this constructed and misleading narrative.

Professor Focardi has further clarified this aspect; “For us, the Germans were a convenient alibi for the Italian national conscience, all the blame was placed on them. ‘Fascism is nothing compared to Nazism’. ‘The real monster was Nazism, fascism much less’. ‘Our soldier did not commit crimes, on the contrary they saved the Jews, while only the Germans did the crimes. This is simply inaccurate.”

International public opinion not always but tended to legitimize this sweetened view of fascism for which Italians were the ‘macaroni and mandolin’ ones, e.g. the movie “*Il mandolino del capitano Corelli*” (2001). The international attitude towards the Germans or the Japanese has historically been completely different. They were forced to come to terms with the dark sides of their past.

But then visitors may ask themselves: Why was Italy not capable of coming to terms with the dark sides of its past?

Professor Focardi, during the interview, put forward a possible interpretation that seems to be the most shared among historians of fascism of our time. There was never an Italian Nuremberg. Though there were 1,200 Italian war criminals on the UN lists, no one has ever been tried. The democratic Italian state chose not to hand over anyone. Not only did Italy not have its Nuremberg as Germany had it, just as Japan also had its (Tokyo Trial). But Italy never had trials even in the 1990s, when for example France had a couple of big trials e.g. Maurice Papon. Trials are important because they bring a society to confront itself. In Italy this did not happen. Therefore, from the point of view of the judicial route, the reworking of memory has been completely blocked in Italy. Not only compared to Germany or Japan, but also compared to a country like France.

This is another element that the visitor must consider: the failure to punish fascist Italian war criminals. The national narrative that this atmosphere has created, has perhaps led to the tendency of Italian newspapers to avoid condemning parties such as FdI when they tend to reappropriate Fascist symbols in their political discourse and propaganda.

Part 6: A comparative approach in the European prospect

Part 6: A comparative approach in the European prospect



source: Financial Times, 2014

the FPÖ Party, Austria, A European phenomenon or an Italian specificity?

60 x 60 cm (h x w)

Room 7 - A COMPARATIVE EUROPEAN APPROACH

Is this phenomenon an Italian specificity? What are the similarities with other countries where extreme right has come to the head of states? Do they also pick up some narratives related to fascism?

The research of the scholar Piero Ignazi, who extensively worked on extreme right-wing parties. For him, contemporary right-extremist parties differ in their nature compared to the past. Starting in the 1980s, what the Italian political scientist observes is that in the revival of the contemporary extreme right, fascism is not the "mythical reference" of either the parties or the voters. This point of view is also shared by other scholars. However, with our research we did find various resonances of fascism in the Italian case of extreme right ruling. Our results would thus rather go in the direction of scholar Art's research (2006). In fact, in reference to the previously mentioned work of some scholars, he urges some caution when considering these factors. Looking at Austria's extreme right party FPÖ (Freedom Party of Austria), which showcases an ideology comprehending nationalism, anti-immigration, anti-islam, and national conservatism, he finds some clear connection with the country's past and the party's ascendance in politics. According to him, the FPÖ's successes, especially its historic result in 1999, must be understood precisely in the context of Austria's relationship to its Nazi past. This seems to be a similar process when we consider Fdl's success in Italy.

source: Wikipedia, "Extreme droite et pouvoir en Europe" by Pascal Delwit and Philippe Poirier



The awakening of European Fascism, Paolo Marchetti (Italy)

60 x 60 cm (h x w)

THE AWAKENING OF EUROPEAN FASCISM

The interest in this sort of awakening of European Fascism has not only captured the attention of scholars, but also of artists, and photographers. Paolo Marchetti is an Italian photojournalist that has worked on a contemporary photography collection entitled "Fever", in which he gathered photos of extreme right groups around Europe. The starting point of his project was to understand, investigate the feeling that, along with fear, pushes some people into the embrace of ideologies like Fascism and Nazism: which he found to be anger.



Nelle pagine precedenti: Maccarese, vicino a Roma, 2011. Un raduno a tema hawaiano a cui partecipano skinhead provenienti da tutta Europa.

In alto: cimitero del Verano, Roma, 2011. Militanti di Forza nuova visitano la tomba di Massimo Morsello, terrorista italiano dell'area dei Nuclei armati rivoluzionari e fondatore di Forza nuova insieme a Roberto Fiore.

In basso, Colleverde, vicino a Roma, 2010. Il quartier generale del gruppo di skinhead più importante d'Italia, gli Spqr. La sede si trova in una scuola abbandonata, occupata dal 2007 con l'aiuto di Casa Pound e chiamata Casa d'Italia Colleverde.

The awakening of European Fascism, Paolo Marchetti
orza nuova militants visit the grave of Massimo Morsello

70 x 70 cm (h x w)

One of the photos of the exhibit with which our project resonated the most portrays Forza nuova militants visit the grave of Massimo Morsello, an Italian terrorist from the area of the Revolutionary Armed Nuclei and founder of Forza nuova together with Roberto Fiore. Projects as such display the internal disjunctions on representations of post fascism from a national point

of view, a project as such tends to overemphasize it, but local newspaper and mainstream media such as television accessed by lower classes have been analyzed to actually avoid comparing Meloni to any kind of Fascist discou





source: paolomarchetti.org

The awakening of European Fascism, Paolo Marchetti

40 x 40 cm (h x w)

In his report on European neo-fascist organizations, Marchetti immersed himself in the everyday life of their affiliates, observing first-hand how the logic of the herd operates; in the group, doubts dissolve, intellectual autonomy is put aside in order to adhere completely to a creed in which violence can be used against those who are considered enemies. For the photographer, anger works like a virus that contaminates all those who breathe the air in which it is found. In Fever he has chronicled neo-fascist groups in Italy, Spain, Finland, Germany and Hungary.

This photo for instance was taken in Germany, and displays a sort of celebration, an admiration and devotion to the past and Nazism. It does remind us of events such as the Predappio gathering previously mentioned, where fascism seems to still be mystified and glorified, with no shame.

His photographs do show that there seems to be a persistence of these narratives and symbologies in other countries, providing a point of comparison with the events and symbols used in Italy that we've been able to analyze with our research.



Patria Indipendente, 2022
Professor Filippo Focardi Full Interview, 2022

Full transcript, interview with Professor Focardi: Saturday 21 November 2022, 18h. Translated from Italian.

Introduction by Professor Focardi:

Looking at the article I sent you prior to this interview – Cheles, Luciano (2010) – it is important to highlight a few elements. Cheles does not distinguish between Alleanza Nazionale (AN) and Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi), but there is a big political difference between Fini and Meloni. You have to take this into account. Fini has been a young secretary of the Italian social movement since the 1980s, second half of the 1980s. He is the one who began a path of transformation of the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) into a new political entity: AN with the Fiuggi Congress in 1995. A path of transformation in a post-fascist sense of the party that lasted several years. Still at the beginning it was not very clear if indeed Fini wanted to transform the social movement into a modern conservative, liberal, nationalist party still rescinding the roots with the fascist past from which he came. Also because, to speak of the contradictions and ambiguities that still characterized the 1990s, he on April 1, 94, gave an interview to the Turin press in which he described Mussolini as the greatest statesman of the century. Then the next year at the congress in Fiuggi, he said: 'we must no longer talk about -ISM (fascism or anti-fascism) but we must move forward', he took an anti-totalitarian position. Replacing as the axis of political legitimacy anti-fascism with anti-totalitarianism.

QUESTION:

Therefore, post-ideological in a sense?

ANSWER:

In theory, post ideological; however, in my opinion, we also have to be careful about this because when you choose anti-totalitarianism, formally you are post ideological but in reality it can become another ideology. He simply says that anti-fascism is not good because there can be political forces, i.e., communists, who are anti-fascists but are not anti-totalitarian; e.g., USSR (yes fighting against fascism but could hardly call itself a democracy). So that is his reasoning. And yet then we were in those years there and in 1994 when Berlusconi won Berlusconi, he entered the government, with a right-wing party where the MSI-AN participated (both acronyms were still in place in this first government). This caused quite a lot of concern in the European chancelleries, because these were not yet the times of today when we have Orban and Meloni in European



governments. Back then, the fascist-derived right wing scared so much, starting with Le Pen. The first big scare was precisely Front national in France, which was already a political force with substantial support in the 1990s.

So Fini had a need to legitimize himself in the eyes of the European public and its chancelleries. He did this by focusing attention on a specific aspect of fascism, which are the laws against the Jews of 1938. To do so, he conducted a whole series of actions, he went to visit for example Auschwitz. Then he gave an interview to an Israeli newspaper to precisely condemn these laws. Even, in 2003, he went to Jerusalem to visit the Jewish national body that remembers the Shoah and we have a picture of him with the Kippah, there, he called Fascism an absolute evil as it is co-responsible for the Shoah.

At that point he began to lose supporters within his party. E.g. Alessandra Mussolini left AN and founded her own party (Social Action). Fini did not stop there, though. I myself critiqued him saying: 'Fini, you are criticizing only one aspect of fascism (anti-Semitism), you should condemn fascism as such.' But actually I was wrong, because after he went ahead and as Speaker of the House of Deputies in 2008, he went so far as to condemn fascism (everything) as a dictatorship that you cannot accept. Not only anti-Semitism. All of it. And in doing that, in my opinion, held a European conservative right-wing position that had, however, severed all ties to fascism. The problem is that he then precisely lost all his own supporters. He was left alone. Those who are now in the government (E.g. La Russa, Gasparri, Meloni, who was at the time very young), they all dumped him.

This is the political difference that needs to be kept in mind, the cut with the past made by Fini was a sharp, very sharp cut. I have a personal experience of this because I had written in 2005 my first book (Focardi, Filippo. *La Guerra Della Memoria: La Resistenza Nel Dibattito Politico Italiano Dal 1945 a Oggi*. Roma: Laterza, 2020), and in that book, because I had written it in 2004, that is when Fini had not yet completed this journey of his, meaning when actually one could think that he in a somewhat opportunistic way had only condemned the racial laws of fascism. And I went to present my book at a festival in Pordenone, talking about Fini's only partial examination of conscience. And in the front row was a distinguished, young man, who then eventually came up to me and introduced himself as a deputy from the province of AN and said that Fini was getting serious about severing the ties with fascism. He said 'we, AN, are getting serious about reckoning with the past'. He was a Finian. And he was right. The point is that Fini in fact disappeared from the scene and the others left him, contesting him on the reckoning of the past. In 2008 he was challenged by Alemanno, mayor of Rome, and by Ignazio La Russa who had gone to attend a commemoration of the youth of the fascist Italian Social Republic (RSI).

This is interesting because in my opinion, Meloni and FdI as political characters all have in their past an experience that is either MSI if they are older but at least AN if they are young like Meloni. So they come from that post-fascist experience of Fini, however, they left him alone. One of the reasons for the breakup was precisely this: his total reckoning with the fascist past, that is, abjuration of the fascist past that they did not do in those stark terms as Fini did. For example, for Fini it also meant affirming civil rights e.g. recognizing LGBT rights. As a right-wing politician he had still come to say: we have to make a leap forward in society. But eventually they left him and they didn't, not surprisingly in my opinion.

QUESTION:

So, according to you, this is the ultimate evidence that if FdI potentially exists as a nostalgic element of fascism it is precisely evidenced by the fact that they left Fini behind when he tried to cut the ties with fascism?

ANSWER:

Not exactly, that is not the position. My position is that it is appropriate to make a difference. To reconstruct the genesis of FdI, we have to do it not starting from when it was born (2012) but starting from when a right wing was first established in Italy of the Second Republic. That is, from the 1990s. The great demiurge of everything was actually Berlusconi. Berlusconi in 1993 for the first time said in local elections (for electing the mayor of Rome) – when a candidate of the right was Fini who was then MSI secretary – he said 'if I were in Rome I would vote for him'. Then he put him in his government, there were in fact 5 MSI ministers in Berlusconi's first government in 1994.

This to explain that the reading of Meloni's party, in my opinion, has to be long term, it cannot be focused only on 2012 (birth of fratelli d'Italia). It has to be a reading that looks at the birth of a right wing in Italy that did not exist before. Before there was only MSI but it was excluded from the government and also from parliament, albeit partially.

From the mid-1990s, with the collapse of the First Republic, all the parties that were born with the resistance (CLN, Communists, Socialists, Christian Democrats, the Republican Party, etc.) ended. When these ended, the First Republic ended. With the birth of the Second Republic there were center-right forces that did not have roots in the Resistance, that is, in the process of the origin of the Republic. If they did have them, like the Italian Social Movement, they even had them in counter-memory, antagonistic, rancorous neo-fascism. A counter-memory to that of the Resistance. But from then on, you have a right wing in Italy that in order to self-legitimize itself develops a discourse about the past. And it says for example



that antifascism is no longer good: because antifascism 'is divisive' they say.

It is divisive because half of Italy voted for them (2022) and they assume their electorate is not anti-fascists. They want to assert a new nationalism. It is no coincidence that Meloni today talks about patriotism. But this proposal was already provided from the mid-1990s. The whole debate about the nation and the return to Italy: the death of the homeland, etc., is a debate from the 1990s. One has to start from that genetic moment, mid-1990s when the Second Republic was born and realizing that Berlusconi was the great demiurge of this; he invented the new Italian right. He legitimized not only the Partito della Libertà (PdL) which is now called Forza Italia, but also the Lega Nord (now Lega), both MSI and AN.

So that is the genetic moment that we have to keep in mind, then there is a path that goes precisely from the 1990s to Meloni today. And there it is interesting because there is a transformation of the MSI into AN with a leading role of Fini, who, however, it is interesting to note that he did cut the ties with the fascist past.

To complicate the matter, leaning on these articles (Cheles, Luciano, 2010), it is interesting to notice that he puts everything on the same level. According to him, even Fini's AN, even in the years when Fini had decisively condemned fascism, he continued to use images (in propaganda) that recall fascism instead. And he gives several examples of election posters, e.g. Fini filmed holding his hand up to greet his supporters that looks like he is giving the fascist Roman greeting. He puts it in perfect continuity with FdI.

These similarities also appear for Meloni's party. This summer the issue of the flame in the symbol of FdI came up. But, of course, FdI is doing nothing more than bringing forward again the symbol of the MSI logo. Yes, there are various readings of where it comes from, in any case it is the flame of the fascist faith. Whether it's the flame reminiscent of Mussolini's coffin or something else, in any case there's no doubt that that is an element that recalls fascism, an element full of continuity between MSI and FdI.

When Meloni was asked by other members of the Parliament to take it off their party's logo - including by Senator Liliana Segre this summer - she refused.

Cheles seems to confuse Fini's AN with Meloni's FdI. Because Fini had come to a decisive condemnation of fascism, calling for protection of LGBT rights for example. Meloni, on the other hand, neither clearly condemns fascism nor is in the forefront of defending civil rights.

I did bring up this issue during a conference when I met Cheles. Cheles, in response to this doubt of mine, replied that yes Fini politically had accomplished this full path of renewal; however he too, precisely in order not to lose his electorate, at the iconological level had maintained, in the party propaganda, elements of recall of a fascist past. So from the point of view of party positions he had become a post-fascist party, but that actually, in the propaganda, there were still callbacks. This however is his interpretation and it can be discussed. For Cheles, this was an intentional thing to not lose the electorate that was still nostalgic of the fascist past.

QUESTION:

Is this not a paradox considering that the Italian Constitution was born precisely with an anti-fascist spirit inscribed in it?

ANSWER:

The problem that needs to be addressed, in my opinion, is that de jure we have a Republic founded on anti-fascism but the social perception of fascism is de facto very different. It's the social depiction, the social perception, e.g. I go to the bar and take 10 people and ask what they think about fascism, many of them will have a positive or at least not a negative view.

There are some surveys (Focardi, Filippo. *Nel Cantiere Della Memoria: Fascismo, Resistenza, Shoah, Foibe*. Roma: Viella, 2020.) that have been done (you can find them in my book "Nel cantiere della memoria"), done in 2018 on the eve of the general elections, so I'm talking about 4 years ago. There, an average of 20 percent of Italians held a positive opinion about Mussolini and fascism. If one goes and looks at the electorate of the right-wing parties, there we have in the Lega (Salvini's party) a 38% who express a positive opinion about Mussolini. This is because (and for many more reasons, but to make a long story short) there is a widespread idea that fascism was a 'rose-water' dictatorship, good-natured, 'made the trains come on time,' 'draining the swamps,' etc. This whole narrative.

But mainly because we Italians have always, since the postwar period, tended to judge our fascism on the yardstick of Nazism. The Nazis are the really cruel, evil ones, Hitler the bloodthirsty one. So 'compared to them the fascists were not so bad,' says the constructed narrative. Fascists good guys compared to them. This is something to keep in mind. What used to be called the antifascist bias i.e., antifascism as an axis of legitimacy is not at all solid in Italy. Precisely because there is a not so bad idea of fascism.

But mainly because we Italians have always, since the postwar period, tended to judge our fascism on the basis of Nazism.

The Nazis are the 'really cruel, evil ones, Hitler the bloodthirsty one.' So 'compared to them the fascists were not so bad,'



says the constructed narrative. Fascists: good guys compared to Nazis. This is something to keep in mind. What us called the 'antifascist bias' i.e., using antifascism as an axis of legitimacy, is not at all solid in Italy. Precisely because there is a not so bad idea of fascism.

QUESTION:

According to you, Italy has therefore always remained fascist, meaning that it has always had a right-wing nostalgic slice of the electorate, or was FdI born to ride a wave of resurrection of fascist sentiments in the 2000s?

ANSWER:

From an electoral point of view, you only have to go and look at the electoral results of the MSI to see that they had their highest result of the years of the first republic (early 1970s) which I think was just above 10 percent. And on average they had 5-6% as an explicitly neo-fascist party. So a substantial voter base (5-6% means millions of votes). It was the largest neo-fascist party in Europe. This has to be said. Despite having only 5-6%, it was the largest neo-fascist party in Europe.

Then with Berlusconi in 1994, Fini's party got 13.5 percent.

I can explain this to you with an anecdote: one of the greatest and most famous conservative journalists (Indro Montanelli), one of those who used to say that fascism had done 'even good things, it was never racist,' etc., had said that it was racist. e.g. In an interview, Montanelli said that Mussolini had told him 'racism is only for blondes,' as if to say that only Germans are racist, 'we Italians are not'. Showing that Montanelli is a right-wing man. Yet, Montanelli in the 1970s said 'we need to vote Christian Democrats.' Montanelli did not vote for MSI. He was voting Christian Democrats (DC) as an anti-communist bulwark. MSI was not so popular despite being the biggest neofascist party in Europe. But then, after the DC ended, with the Second Republic, Berlusconi government, that's where that conservative electorate that had voted DC until then, was free perhaps to also vote AN, as they vote FdI today. There is not a perfect passage of neo-fascist electorate in the first republic that passes tout court today. There is also a more complex argument to be made.

It is clear that Meloni has been incredibly successful, just think of the fact that she had 4 percent in the 2018 election and now she got more than 26%. She has drained the Lega. I teach in Veneto, Veneto used to be one of the most pro-Lega regions. The last election (2022), even in Veneto, FdI got many more votes than the League. So there you wonder why they voted for Meloni and not Salvini. One of the answers may include the fact that Salvini did not do a good job when he was in government.

And with respect to the relationship to the fascist past, however, as that 2018 poll I mentioned shows, there is no difference between the Lega and FdI, indeed, one thing that struck me very much about that poll was that there were more pro-fascists in the Lega than in FdI. 38% Lega voters who gave a positive opinion about fascism, while of FdI it was 32%.

The real issue is that there is a permanence of very strong, explicit cultural fascist iconographic elements in some political movements: such as Forza Nuova and CasaPound. These explicitly are neo-fascist. Here there is something new to analyze again looking at Cheles's article. Not only CasaPound and Forza Italia explicitly, evidently, refer to fascist propaganda, but they refer to Nazi propaganda. He puts them next to each other, CasaPound and Forza Nuova billboards that are exactly the same as those used by German Nazis. Same images, only the German phrase is changed to Italian. This is shocking, the Italian far-right movements (CasaPound and Forza Nuova) clearly refer to fascist propaganda, both of the RSI regime but even Nazi propaganda.

This does not surprise me after all because I am told that the same thing happens in the stadium supporters, the tifoserie italiane. The right-wing Italian fans close to fascism are actually very close to Nazism as well.

This is as far as CasaPound and Forza Nuova are concerned, on FdI it is good to talk about its genesis (when this new right wing starts, the 1990s and Fini), but it should also be pointed out that there is a big difference between Fini and Meloni.

At the level then of references to fascism etc., one can look at Cheles. Cheles highlights continuities and he is somewhat right but perhaps one could counterargue that some similarities are perhaps a bit forced, exaggerated (e.g. postures: Fini's salute juxtaposed with Mussolini's Roman greeting, or Fini's arms folded like Mussolini's). Other things, however, are obvious; he is right.

The real issue is that of nationalism.

QUESTION:

Could you elaborate on the issue of nationalism in FdI propaganda?

ANSWER:

Already the name, "brothers of Italy" Fratelli d'Italia is the national anthem. If you like, the same idea is there in Forza Italia (Berlusconi). The idea that the core value is that of nationalism and Meloni declines in terms of patriotism: 'We Patriots.'

There is a parallelism with the French 'Front National' name. They are keen to point out that nationalism and patriotism are –



regardless of anything else– always a good thing. When they (right-wing parties) were talking in the 1990s about the 'Salò boys,' the Salò fighters who went over with Mussolini, they said that all in all they were good guys too because at least they thought they were fighting for the nation. They talk about 'ethical patriotism', the young men of Salò from this point of view (according to them) can be equated with the partisans because they both thought they were fighting for Italy. But let's be clear! One is a fascist, racist, and whatnot Italy; the other is a free and democratic Italy. Yet this passage, this distinction, is omitted by these parties.

Moreover, they go so far as to say that antifascism is divisive. It is no longer a glue for the country while patriotism tout court should be shared. Yes, but historically fascist patriotism has been a disgrace, that's the problem.

QUESTION:

Why is it precisely with the fall of the First Republic that patriotism and nationalism return as a pivotal element as propaganda in Italian politics?

ANSWER:

Precisely because it is then, when there is this disintegration of the country, and there are so many elements: a country that had withstood the years of terrorism (1970s), the massacres both neo-fascist and the Brigade Rosse attacks, and had done so precisely by holding the memory of the Resistance: in the name of the Constitution born of the Resistance. But then it is a country in the 1980s that undergoes processes of disintegration, 1980s-90s, with the crisis of the Republic, a whole series of events such as the Mafia massacres begin to take place. The political system, born with great merit with the traditional parties, became the subject of a system of terrible corruption, with the scandals of Tangentopoli. Then there is also a territorial disintegration, the birth of the Leagues e.g. Bossi and Salvini's Lega Nord. The Leagues that precisely are a centrifugal element: they want autonomy, they say Roma ladrona. So this country went into crisis in 1992-93, because of so many elements, and maybe at that time the discourse about the homeland was revived because of the need to have elements to hold together a country that instead was falling apart, that was disintegrating.

So much so that this idea of the homeland is then revived in a big way by the Presidents of the Republic (eg. Ciampi, Napolitano). Who are the only national institution in the 2000s that still has the consent of the Italians, that poses itself as superpartes. If one goes to see the polls on Italians' trust in institutions, the data are dramatic except for the President of the Republic. The data speaks clearly (2018 polls, Focardi, Filippo. *Nel Cantiere Della Memoria: Fascismo, Resistenza, Shoah, Foibe*. Roma: Viella, 2020.): trust of Italians in parliament 30%, parties 12%, if you get to the President of the Republic instead, 75%. Presidents of the Republic then are the first to relaunch the homeland, Ciampi for example relaunched it in terms of the Risorgimento, Resistance, however, all in a neo-patriotic key. Of course he has in his past no fascism, in fact he was an exponent of anti-fascism.

But this is what it is, a country cracking down in the early 1990s and looking for an answer in patriotism, which, however, becomes a blanket that can also be used by the right-wingers, or especially the right-wingers to their advantage.

QUESTION:

Could you elaborate on nationalism today?

ANSWER:

One must keep in mind 2008: another time of very serious crisis. The international financial crisis of 2008 reverberated in Italy in a very strong way: impoverishment, social unrest. And here comes to light the other element that you have to deal with because fundamental to understanding the success of the right-wingers: the fight against immigration. So, we then have a country that again suffers a very strong economic crisis, like so many other countries, it's not just Italy. At the same time we have this increased influx of immigrants and, as Front National had already done in France since the 1970s when it was born (the trends are always the same), again you have a right-wing blowing on the fire of nationalism in the sense of defending the nation and culture. Developing a narrative of ethnic sense of nation.

In fact, the controversy on these issues had resumed in Italy in 2017 in a very strong way (you can find it in the introduction of my book *Nel Cantiere della Memoria*), a scoop by Paolo Berizzi of Repubblica who went to see a bathing establishment near Chioggia (Veneto), a seaside resort crowded with fascist objects. Run by a nostalgic fascist. All the newspapers wrote about it. From there, a series of other such episodes, and those were the years when it just so happens that Salvini was talking about the danger of ethnic replacement of Italians by immigrants of other cultures, religions etc. In that case, again, the appeal to nationhood and homeland, made by the right-wingers, has good play in that context. Again a context in which Italy is disintegrated, economic problem of poverty, immigrants arrive and the right-wingers bet a lot on that (eg. competition in the labor market), the right-wingers start exploiting that. Relaunching nationalism in ethnic racial key. It is not exactly biological as during fascism, but rather ethno-cultural.



It is no coincidence, for example, that at that very juncture in 2017, Forza Nuova, brought out a poster that featured a migrant trying to rape an Italian woman and said 'defend her.' And it is exactly a remake of a propaganda poster from Salò from Boccasile (so 1944) that was against the 'American invaders', 'the American soldiers raping Italian women'. So they recovered this narrative.

QUESTION:

Where does the natural coexistence of Italians with fascism come from? One hundred years after the March on Rome, what is it about fascist symbols that still have such a grip on our social fabric?

ANSWER:

Just go look at the streets and monuments still named after fascists. You may have read Ruth Ben Ghat's articles on fascist monuments. E.g. EUR, you know it is made of fascism, but one does not go there and say 'ah this is fascist.' In some cases there is not even this direct recognition of the fascist character of these monuments. But then, of course, a part of Italians is just nostalgic of fascism.

QUESTION:

What is the national vs. international perspective of fascism in Italy?

ANSWER:

My book *Il Cattivo Tedesco e Il Bravo Italiano; La Rimozione Delle Colpe Della Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (S.I.: Editori Laterza, 2016) is also about this. For us Italians, the Germans have been a very convenient alibi, an alibi for Italian national consciousness, we have given to them all the blame. 'Fascism is nothing compared to Nazism.' 'The real monster was Nazism, fascism much less.' 'Our soldier did not commit crimes, in fact he saved the Jews, while the crimes were only done by the Germans.' This is not true. Ok, the German's Shoah, but we also shot a lot of people for example in Slovenia, Croatia etc. As well as colonies.

International public opinion – though not always – tended to legitimize this sweetened view of fascism for which Italians were the 'macaroni and mandolin' ones.

The international attitude toward the Germans or the Japanese is completely different. They were forced to come to terms with the dark sides of their past. The Italians all in all not really.

At the same time, there was from international public opinion a concern about what was happening in Italy e.g. the publication (American magazine) of articles about Italian concentration camps, however, no one tended to say to us 'come to terms with your crimes.' As was always the case with the Germans.

QUESTION:

In your opinion, what is the appeal of fascist symbols to the Italian electorate?

ANSWER:

It is important to point out that, in reality, references to fascism are usually implicit. Meloni is successful because she is capable of hiding these references. She wants to hide the links to fascism, she doesn't make direct references. Yet, she has kept the flame because she comes from that history, let's face it.

QUESTION:

But then why does she not remove it if she wants to conceal these references?

ANSWER:

She does not remove it because there is a part of her electorate that has nostalgic positions. That 20 percent of Italians, looking back at the 2018 poll, which is all accurate data that came out in the newspaper *Repubblica* just before the February 2018 elections, done by Ivo Diamanti with Demos. A serious poll. That poll said that more than $\frac{1}{3}$ of the right-wing voters, therefore including FdI supporters, gave a positive opinion of Mussolini and fascism. So at least $\frac{1}{3}$ of FdI voters like that flame or at least it doesn't inconvenience them so to speak. So since then she (but not only, other members of her party such as Francesco Lollobrigida etc.), the leadership cadre of FdI (Except a few) all come from that background there, from that history. When they were young and they were parts e.g. *Azione Giovani*, their references were those. And according to them that is not something to be ashamed of.

Big point is how come there is no shame. In Germany you are ashamed of Nazism, in Italy you are not ashamed of fascism, and it's not a problem politically. They don't remove the flame because there is a part of the electorate that is attached to that flame. And removing the flame in my opinion they think of it as a move that could be politically, electorally more counterproductive than keeping it. That flame there is liked and cherished by (I say an unspecified percentage) 25 percent of the electorate, if I take it away, that 25 percent of the electorate feels outraged. But the problem is not so much them, but the other 75% who, though they are not so attached to the flame, it doesn't affect them. No one wants to remake fascism



and reinstitute fascism, a dictatorship, and use violence against opponents (things that historical fascism did). That is clear. But there is a part of the party attached to certain symbols and a certain past that it does not want to discard. I would call it sentimentally nostalgic. And the other part of the party has no problem if there is a flame. Because in Italy people have not come to terms with fascism. People think that fascism was that 'rose-water' regime that, e.g. made the trains arrive on time, and had a great mass acceptance because it was precisely not that bad, and certainly less 'bad' than fascism, this is the narrative of the right-wingers.

For example, we don't really know the war crimes of fascism, there was never an 'Italian Nuremberg'. There were 1,200 Italian war criminals on the United Nations lists after the war and not one was ever tried. The democratic Italian state chose not to hand over anyone for reasons related to Cold War balances, etc. But there is no one who has been tried. Clearly, the parallel with France appears here. Not only did Italy not have its Nuremberg as Germany had it, just as Japan also had its (Tokyo Trial). But Italy never had trials even in the 1990s, when for example France had a couple of big trials e.g. Papon. The Papon trial was a very big piece of French politics in the postwar period. Minister, police chief of Paris in the early 1960s, etc. And he was still tried and convicted for the deportation of Jews during World War II. Trials are important because they bring a society to confront itself. In Italy this has not been there, someone tried in 2008 (cf his book *Nel cantiere della memoria*), but no one was tried. So from a judicial perspective, the reworking of memory has been completely blocked in Italy. Not only compared to Germany or Japan, but also compared to a country like France that had Vichy, something 'much less serious' than Italian fascism. This is also something that one has to consider: the failure to punish Italian war criminals.

QUESTION:

Therefore, given the current government and the little antifascism that remains in Italian culture, what are the risks of this antifascism being completely eliminated?

ANSWER:

Even now, for the past few years, anti-fascism has been at risk. I point out to you that Berlusconi's right-wing governments tried until 2011 (that is, as long as Berlusconi remained in government), to propose bills that would have replaced April 25 (Liberation Day) with another national holiday that was identified by them as April 18. That is, April 18, 1948, the first general elections of the Republic in which the Christian Democrat bloc defeated the Socialists and Communists – who were together. According to this reading, the real birth of Italian democracy is not the liberation from fascism but is the defeat of the Marxist parties, pro-Soviet Union. This has been discussed very little in Italy, but it is substantial. Berlusconi in parliament with his people (in agreement with AN and the League), tried to get this bill passed and failed. I don't know if the current government intends to revive something like that, which would mean the sinking by law of April 25 and the Resistance. I don't believe that they will go in that direction because it might provoke strong reactions, 'ah but then you are really fascists.' Instead, I think they will play everything on nationalism, as they are already doing. And also they will attack communism, as the minister of education has already done. He wanted to celebrate 'Freedom Day', which was a law promoted by Forza Italia in 2005 to commemorate the fall of the Berlin Wall, and on that occasion the law says this: 'the nefariousness of every present and future totalitarianism.' So again it is the antitotalitarian paradigm, antitotalitarianism is substituted for antifascism. What was a scandal is that in the minister's letter only communism is mentioned and fascism is not mentioned.

To be added here, the narrative of fascist historians such as De Felice, Emilio Gentile etc. De Felice was one of the greatest historians of fascism and he argued that fascism was not totalitarianism because at the time there was monarchy, Catholic church etc so other powers next to Mussolini. Here, our Italian right explicitly refers to this historiographical reading which is now outdated. Now historians consider fascism a totalitarianism. The Italian right makes this argument: we are anti-totalitarian, but since fascism was not totalitarianism, as De Felice says, the problem lies with the communists. They are the ones who have to recognize that communism was a terrible thing, a terrible totalitarianism. So there is also this attitude about fascism.

QUESTION:

As a historian, what do you think about what happened in Predappio a few weeks ago, what does it represent?

ANSWER:

Predappio has been an identitarian site of the Italian neo-fascist right for years. So, these visits have been there for many, many years. Clearly such a thing would be unthinkable in Germany. The point is that the Italian regulations on fascist symbols, i.e. the two laws of 1952 and 1993, – as has been pointed out by many scholars – have substantial limitations to oppose neo-fascist demonstrations. So much so that in 2017, the Chamber of Deputies had approved Emanuele Fiano's bill proposal that would have outlawed, i.e. considered criminally punishable, all fascist and neo-fascist demonstrations e.g. the



Roman salute, Mussolini gadgets etc. It would have all been condemnable, liable to criminal conviction. But that law passed only in the Chamber of Deputies and did not pass in the Senate. With all the right-wing parties (Lega, FdI etc.) pulling up a huge battle against this proposal. And poor Fiano, who proposed that law, the son of a Jew who ended up in Auschwitz, was not elected in this election (2022). He was a candidate in Milan and in his place was (ironically!) elected in his constituency the daughter of Pino Rauti, one of the historical leaders of the MSI, among other things entangled in the subversive plots of the 1960s (the neofascist bombs). This is frightening.

QUESTION:

Do you, then, notice a kind of cognitive dissonance in Italians? As if Italy had no past almost?

ANSWER:

Yes, I agree with that. And in conclusion I think it is important to share with you an answer to the underlying question, 'How do you change the minds of Italians about fascism? How do you change a narrative?' Here, we need to consider two things. On the one hand, you have to show that fascism did atrocious things. While it did not do the same crimes as Nazism, it still did atrocious things. For instance, there is the need to underline that Fascist Italy has been at war continuously since 1935. In the 'vulgate of the bar' it is said 'Mussolini did so many good things, too bad he then made the mistake of allying himself with Hitler and getting dragged into the war.' No, that was exactly the natural direction of fascism. Italy has been at war since 1935, long before World War II. In Ethiopia, fascist Italy killed half a million men. This is something that is not told. In Spain, we bombed cities e.g. Barcelona is the first major European city to suffer a bombing on civilians done by the Italian air forces that had military bases in the Balearic Islands. We provoked many more deaths in Barcelona on March 15, 1938 than the Germans did in Guernica. Then, yes of course, Guernica remained a symbol of violence because of Picasso and other things but no one knows about the 'Italian Guernica'. Where among other things we centered a school of kids, and yes I use 'we' to emphasize the need for reappropriation: we Italians must, we must deal with what we have done. Kids torn apart, lying on the ground, dead, we killed them. We must readdress the criminal dimension of fascism. Violence is per se an identitarian element of fascism, violence is intrinsic to fascism.

The other point is about the so-called good things done by fascism. If I go to a neofascist and tell him about the crimes of fascism, he then maybe twists his mouth a little bit but in the end he says 'ah yes okay but Mussolini also did a lot of good things.' You must address this myth by creating a discourse. The discourse is that fascist dictatorships, like all modern mass regimes, modern dictatorships of the 1900s (like Communism, like Nazism), are welfare dictatorships. In the 20th century all regimes do welfare policies, otherwise you are not in the 1900s, you are in the 1800s. So it doesn't make sense to say that

Mussolini did trains get there on time, a good system of pensions etc. as elements that should build the merits of the regime. Because then if I go and look at what Stalin did, he did much more extraordinary things. He took a country that was underdeveloped and with three five-year plans (yet, at a very high social cost), he turned the Soviet Union into a great industrial power. Or, again, Hitler made 'wonderful highways, extraordinary kindergartens for blond German children.' So that cannot be the yardstick. It is obvious that Mussolini did something, he is inscribed in the context of a welfare dictatorship. So the discourse that needs to be addressed, starting in schools or with an exhibition like you are doing, is to place those accomplishments of fascism (e.g., the much-discussed monuments) in their context. Yes there are cities created out of nothing, important monuments, but it is not that this goes to change my judgment of fascism, it cannot push me to say that fascism then is good, it has nothing to do with it.

These two aspects should be addressed much more. Understanding the social and achievement dimension of this regime is crucial. Placing it in its time and context, for what it was.

EPILOGUE and CREDITS

Epilogue and Credits

The epilogue of this exhibition aims to help the visitor to become able to develop personal reflections with solid academic foundations. The aim of the exhibition's curators - Bianca Faelli, Caterina Guderzo, Carolina Pedrazzi and Federica Gozi - is highlighting how the narratives, uses and representations of history in a country can totally shape its current politics.

This performance seeks to bring to light the many misconceptions that still exist in Italy about its dark past.

But then, the visitor will ask, how does one change a national narrative based on inaccurate historical accounts? Or again, how do you change the minds of Italians?

The perspective of the exhibition's curators - together with Professor Focardi who accompanied the creation of this project from an academic point of view - is that the visitor should leave this exhibition with two main takeaways.

The first takeaway is that the public debate should be encouraged to bring about the fact that Fascism did atrocious things.

The narratives of "Mussolini did horrible things, BUT x, y, z needs to stop. Only education, and cultural events (as this exhibition tries to achieve) can help deconstruct these misconceptions. Italians and the international community must finally address the atrocious things that Fascism has committed during its time in power. There is a need to readdress the criminal dimension of fascism. Violence is per se an identitarian element of fascism, because violence is intrinsic to fascism.



Furthermore, the second point is to deconstruct the narrative whereby Fascism 'also did many good things'. The dictatorship, like all modern mass regimes of the 19th century – including Stalinism and Nazism – are welfare dictatorships. In the 20th century, all regimes made welfare policies. Therefore, it makes no sense to say that Mussolini 'made the trains arrive on time, or that 'he made 'a good pension system' etc. as elements that should showcase the merits of the regime. Mussolini is inscribed in the context of a welfare dictatorship. This discourse needs to be addressed at all costs, starting with schools or exhibitions like this: it is fundamental to place the achievements of fascism (e.g. the discussed monuments) in their context.

These two aspects should be addressed much more. Understanding the social and achievement dimension of this regime is crucial. To place it in its time and context, for what it was.

In the hope that this exhibition helped to do so, meaning it managed to reconstruct some of these misconceptions, we wish all the visitors great further reflections!

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