

BOOK REVIEWS

The Politics of Everyday Life in Fascist Italy: Outside the State? edited by Joshua Arthurs, Michael Ebner and Kate Ferris, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, xii + 265 pp., \$109.99 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-137-59418-1

Se lo sapesse il Duce (if only the Duce knew), that widespread and pernicious lament that implied both Mussolini's concern and his remoteness, conveyed *in nuce* the ambivalence of sentiment towards the Fascist regime. Resignation, hope, despondency, faith, despair, excitement, fear: reactions to Fascism were varied and, inevitably, contradictory. The historiography of Italian Fascism has tended to gloss over nuance in favour of staking unambiguous ideological positions to present grand narratives that familiarise Fascism. Recent studies, however (e.g. Christopher Duggan's *Fascist Voices: An Intimate History of Mussolini's Italy*, 2012), have calibrated the historical optics to discern the particular in lieu of the general. Instead of emphasising how Fascism imposed itself, they explore how people reacted, coexisted, defied, and embraced it. What these 'reception' approaches share is a formal acknowledgement that the Italian *consenso* conveys both active consent and passive consensus. These historians no longer accept the term as a homogenous pole in binary opposition to anti-fascism, but understand it as one that allows for a range of responses and attitudes to the politics and practices of the Regime.

The ten essays in *The Politics of Everyday Life in Fascist Italy* make an original and substantial contribution to this 'people's history' by eschewing the dichotomy of 'fascist vs. anti-fascist' to examine the complexities of everyday experience through which 'historiographical problems – about totalitarianism, consent, coercion, culture, and society' (p. 3) emerge from new critical perspectives. Specifically, these studies strive to move beyond the three dominant historical critiques – anti-fascist (i.e. a regime imposed upon Italians), revisionist historiography (e.g. Renzo De Felice's studies), and culturalist (e.g. much of anglophone scholarship) – by adopting a 'fourth way' to examine the *ventennio*. What unifies these diverse essays is a 'from below' methodology, which draws on the German microhistorical approach of *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life), devoid, however, of Marxian undertones. Of course, *Alltagsgeschichte* is not new – its origins date to 1970s West Germany – but, until now, it has attracted limited interest as a means to consider daily experiences in Fascist Italy.

In the Introduction (pp. 1–17), the three co-editors define the parameters of 'everyday life' – a rather amorphous concept. Drawing on Giorgio Agamben's definition of an 'apparatus', they argue that the 'everyday' provides a flexible analytical framework to explore aspects of human agency, ranging from daily routines to out-of-the-ordinary circumstances (p. 6). Rather than defer to the quotidian, the co-editors emphasise the methodology's coherence in its 'focus on the subjective experiences of individuals and on their role as historical agents capable of shaping their own lives, even if in a limited way' (p. 7). Subjectivity is both the strength and weakness of *Alltagsgeschichte* and was the underlying accusation that social science historians leveled against it in the late 1980s. For these critics, in particular with regard to Nazism, stressing the quotidian risked normalising the abhorrent. The editors deftly parry this criticism as 'misplaced' (p. 5) because the examination of human actors evinces the interplay between institutions and societies.

The abstract chapter titles belie the concreteness of the analyses. Matteo Millan's 'Origins' (pp. 19–49) examines *squadrista* violence against individuals, families and communities. The argument builds on his study *Squadristo e squadristi nella dittatura fascista* (2014). By personalising the violence, Millan seeks 'to understand the choices, values, and individual behaviours of its ordinary perpetrators, placing them in relation to models of behaviour condoned by their culture and more generally by the social and political contexts of their time' (p. 21). The legitimisation of violence and the normalisation of its perpetrators present a paradoxical and disturbing origin story. 'Masculinity' (pp. 51–75), authored by Lorenzo Benadusi, proffers an interpretation of Fascism's relationship to masculinity that is rooted in behaviours and identities rather than one based on an abstract or projected image. In 'Coercion' (pp. 77–98), Michael Ebner draws on his groundbreaking work *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini's Italy* (2011), itself a significant contribution to *Alltagsgeschichte* studies, to examine how repressive practices impacted on everyday living. This inquiry serves as a 'next chapter' to 'Origins' in tracing how violence permeated the political and the social. Alessandra Gissi's fascinating analysis of clandestine abortions in 'Reproduction' (pp. 99–122) explores both how the Regime attempted to control reproductive health and how women (and their social networks) interacted with the norms, mores, and laws that were redefining the public and private spheres. Kate Ferris, in 'Consumption' (pp. 123–149), revisits an argument in her aptly titled *Everyday Life in Fascist Venice, 1929–40* (2012) to consider consumption practices in Venice following the League of Nation's economic sanctions (November 1935 – June 1936) against Italy for invading Ethiopia. Ferris enters the spaces of everyday consumption (e.g. the Rialto market, shops, and kitchens) to reveal the micro-mediations between political authority and personal autonomy that produced highly differentiated responses to the demands of autarchy. In chapter 7, 'Borderlands' (pp. 151–178), Maura Hametz focuses on the *Lega Nazionale*'s efforts to 'Italianise' the Slavic minorities in Istrian preschools during the 1927–1928 school year. The *Lega Nazionale*'s purpose was to establish Italian culture in what had been historically Habsburg provinces, but, in 1929, the politically connected *Opera Nazionale Balilla* and *Italia Redente* supplanted its scholastic services. This compelling and nuanced analysis demonstrates the numbing nature of violence: after generations of oppression, minority populations experienced persecutory policies not as exceptional but as ordinary. In 'Empire' (pp. 179–204), Roberta Pergher turns to Libya to discuss the strategies that administrators and settlers used to normalise an extraordinary colonisation. Here too, settlers' diverse responses resist the binary oppositions of fascism and anti-fascism: they subverted colonial policies without challenging them directly. Joshua Arthurs examines Mussolini's fall in 'Memory' (pp. 205–232) by exploring intersections between everyday life and memory in terms of reactions to both the arrest announcement (25 July 1943) and its aftermath (8 September 1943). He argues that these 43 days are an *intermezzo* with distinct recollective experiences that warrant consideration and that contrast with the contested memories organised around post-8 September. Geoff Eley pens the elegant conclusion (pp. 233–255), which builds upon the introduction's theoretical exposition as well as its overview of the historiographical literature to suggest the utility of *Alltag* as a means to compare German and Italian fascism.

The Politics of Everyday Life in Fascist Italy is a thought-provoking, engaging, and eminently readable collection. Because each essay tends to explicate its methodology, the *Alltagsgeschichte* referencing can be repetitive in a cover-to-cover reading, but this limitation becomes an advantage when reading is restricted to individual chapters. If interpretations are cautious and conclusions tentative, the result is not to strip Fascism of its Fascists, but rather to understand that human agency necessarily resists facile moralising and categorising. As this volume demonstrates,

Alltagsgeschichte suggests promising new areas of inquiry in Italian historical studies while providing opportunities for cross-national comparisons with other totalitarian regimes.

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Architecture, Death and Nationhood: Monumental Cemeteries of Nineteenth-Century Italy,

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Scholarship on post-Unification Italy is hardly short of important work on bodies. We have a rich set of studies on the rise of public hygiene, demography and statistics, newly scientific methods of baby-care, and ideas of race and biopower in the constitution of the nation, including Italian physical anthropology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In many ways, the anxieties and hopes of a newly unified Italy sought description and resolution in governmental, institutional, and scientific investments in the Italian body.

For this reason it is startling to realise that the scholarly possibilities of *dead* Italian bodies in the same era have been left untapped – until Hannah Malone’s book on the new cemeteries that emerged rapidly once the dust of Unification had settled. *Architecture, Death and Nationhood* is an imposing study that delivers a number of insights, well-balanced between those that speak to architectural historians, and others that more directly address political and cultural historians. In a new nation with an embarrassment of past cultural riches on which to draw, it asks, which updated forms were best suited to bury the citizenry of the times? And at this distance, what can we learn regarding Italian society, class, taste, and ambitions of the era, from the funerary monuments and the monumental cemeteries that contained them? In addition, what do the sprawling new burial grounds of, for instance, Genoa, Verona, Brescia, or Rome reveal about Italian arts in comparison to parallel works in the countries to which Italians inevitably compared their own – France, Britain, Germany? These are the principal questions articulated (and answered) in this groundbreaking work.

Thanks to her ambitious research in archives, print, and cemeteries, Malone is entirely persuasive as she draws out the ways in which the latter can be microcosmic renderings of the cities to which they are attached, or when she refers to them as conveying ‘purified images of the societies that they served’ (p. 2). Her thorough readings of spatial arrangements, in fact, highlight these cemeteries’ formal innovations in arranging and celebrating the dead in deliberate, self-conscious correspondence with new forms of state life. In this regard, the book repeatedly teases out instances in which the cult of the dead slipped out of the total grasp of the Church, becoming one of the new Italy’s canvases for developing secularism.

At a formal level, historians of art and architecture will be convinced by Malone’s contextualisation of new Italian cemetery forms with respect to the Napoleonic contributions at the beginning of the century – to law and art – as well as her precise argumentation for the uniqueness of this new Italian invention, with respect both to other European models and earlier Italian ones. For social and cultural historians of modern Italy, most interesting will be the book’s compelling