Rosario Forlenza • Bjørn Thomassen

Italian Modernities

Competing Narratives of Nationhood Italian and Italian American Studies

ISBN 978-1-137-50155-4 ISBN 978-1-137-49212-8 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-49212-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016916082

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2016

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the

Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifi cally the rights of

translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on

microfi lms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval,

electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now

known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this

publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specifi c statement, that such names are

exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information

in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher

nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the

material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made.

Cover image © Michele Castellani / Alamy Stock Photo

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature

The registered company is Nature America Inc. New York

Intellectual Hegemony and the Progressive Left

In addition to local politics, the party’s domination in the intellectual and

cultural sphere was the crucially distinctive asset of Italian Communism.

The PCI’s ability to polarize Italian intellectual life around itself, not only

in a broad arc of scholars, writers, thinkers, and artists, but a general climate

of progressive opinion, was without parallel elsewhere in Europe.

After all, the entire communist strategy, in the footsteps of Gramsci

as we have seen in Chap. 4 gave a paramount role to the fi gure of the

‘intellectual’. 34

The majority of young Italian intellectuals, including those tempted

by Fascism, had been formed in the shadow of Benedetto Croce. Yet,

in the situation of postwar Italy, Liberalism and idealism appeared incapable

of facing up to the challenges of the times. The real, stark alternative

was between clericalism—the conservative or even reactionary alliance

between the Vatican, the USA, and the DC—and political Marxism.

Disregarding all the complexities of political life, most Italians would

come to understand their choice as one of two: are you communist or

Catholic? Nowhere else in Europe was the cultural–political life of a nation

so thoroughly bifurcated.

From the perspective of Left positions, the hopes and aspirations of the

Resistance and Liberation were strongly felt, and even as the perspective

of political and social revolution started to demise, they remained active

at the cultural level. The prospect of a complete regeneration in national

life was highly attractive for intellectuals and writers. The reconstruction

was seen as a global project investing the whole organization of social life, COMPETING MODERNITIES: POSTWAR ITALY … 191

a qualitative shift with respect to the past, a new beginning. These hopes

fueled the passions of a large sector of intellectuals who took the leap

from Croce’s Liberalism to political Marxism, becoming the PCI’s most

talented young leaders—Giorgio Amendola, Lucio Lombardo Radice,

Emilio Sereni, to cite just a few. The PCI was also joined by men and

women disillusioned by the Action Party’s failure to put into practice the

aspirations of the Resistance, signaling the end of hopes for a leftist non-

Marxist alternative in Italian politics and culture. ‘Shamefaced Crocians’,

one writer called them at the time. 35

Presented as the voice of modernity in a land of conservatism and backwardness—

the only hope for social, economic and political reform—the

PCI was enlivened by a wide circle of intellectuals, scholars, writers, and

artists. The driving principles of the PCI’s cultural politics were the rediscovery

and rescue of indigenous roots and tradition, as well as the creation

of a progressive national culture. Yet, many of these intellectuals

looked elsewhere for inspiration. Thus, although the PCI struggled to put

itself in national life and in continuity with the progressive traditions of

Italian culture, a great number of the neo-communist intellectuals wanted

to reshape culture by breaking with the narrow-minded provincialism and

nationalism they had experimented in the years of Fascism.

Before the war, Cesare Pavese, Elio Vittorini, and many others had discovered

new horizons of freedom in American literature, from Steinbeck

to Faulkner. Others were fascinated by French or American cinema and by

new forms of music such as jazz. After the war the journal Il Politecnico ,

directed by Vittorini, tried to link the PCI to the avant-garde and open

Italian culture to new experiences and infl uences. 36 As Stephen Gundle

put it, Il Politecnico was ‘one of the most lively and original reference

points in the immediate postwar years’, opening its page to psychoanalysis

and existentialism—which had not been allowed to circulate under

Fascism—and surveys of working class and peasant life in Europe, Soviet

Union, and Japan. 37

With the division of Europe and the Cold War, all this came to an end.

The criticism addressed by the Soviets to the PCI at the fi rst Cominform

meeting in September 1947 revealed Stalin’s determination to bring Italian

(and French) communists under tighter control. Togliatti had no option

but to exercise Stalinist norms. This provoked public dissent among some

of the party’s intellectuals. Vittorini reminded Togliatti in an open letter

of January 1947 that ‘culture’ cannot be subordinated to politics, if not at

the price of truth. 38 Under the control of Moscow every instruction came 192 R. FORLENZA AND B. THOMASSEN

from above, everything was subordinate to politics (or, following Gramsci,

to the ‘Prince’ the party). ‘Culture’ was not a protected zone in which

party rule dissolved. Vittorini and his friends would have to accept the

party line, or leave. In short, there was only limited room for intellectual

activity within the ‘red counterculture’.

Over time, the PCI came even closer to Soviet absolute authority and

strict control. Vittorini and others took the consequence and left the

party. Il Politecnico was closed down after a few issues; relations with the

neorealist fi lmmakers soured; and the late 1940s saw the imposition of

Stalinist dogmas in culture. And yet, as Tony Judt has underlined, ‘despite

Togliatti’s unswerving loyalty to Moscow’ the PCI kept ‘a certain undogmatic

aura, as the only major Communist Party that tolerated and

even embraced intelligent dissent and autonomy of thought’, a ‘reputation

would serve it well in later decades’. 39

The PCI’s adherence to conventional and established model of culture

served certain well-defi ned ends, but coupled with an approach to

politics that placed all the emphasis on civil society to the neglect of the

state and even economic action, it revealed a general perspective that was

at odds with the emergent framework of Italian politics and society in the

mid-twentieth century. In later years, as economic development provoked

changes at all levels of Italian society, the party would fi nd itself increasingly

the prisoner of its own conservatism.

Two important points can be made about postwar Italian Communism

and its road to modernity. First: the ‘originality’ of the Italian road to

socialism as developed through Togliatti’s program should not be exaggerated.

The politics of national unity and collaboration while linked to

Italian realities—re-enacted the popular fronts policy introduced by the

Seventh Congress of the Comintern (Moscow, 1935). Togliatti’s strategy

was not in contradiction with Stalin’s will. In fact, secretly agreed upon

by Togliatti and Stalin on the night of March 3–4, 1944—on the very eve

of Togliatti’s departure from Moscow to Italy—it now matched too well

the Soviet struggle against Nazi-Fascism and the plan to increase communist

infl uence in those countries that appeared destined to fall after

WWII within the Western sphere. 40 The same ‘national’ turn again mostly

decided by Stalin was taken in November 1944 by the French Communist

Party led by Maurice Thorez. 41 Moreover, as a result of the 1948 elections,

as well as the attitude of the Church, Soviet criticisms of compromise politics

and the larger Cold War scenario restricted the PCI’s independence

from the directives of international Communism. This effectively put the COMPETING MODERNITIES: POSTWAR ITALY … 193

‘Italian way’ on ice, at least until 1956, when the Twentieth Congress of

the Communist Party of the Soviet Union acknowledged the possibility of

national versions of socialism.

Second: Togliatti and most other leading communists read Gramsci

quite selectively. 42 Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks began to be published in

1947, selectively in a way to leave out Gramsci’s criticism of Stalin and

his own party. The discovery of Gramsci as a major Marxist gave momentum

to Italian Communism in general—and the PCI’s search for a new

approach to the history of Risorgimento. 43 In communist mythology, the

Sardinian was, in Togliatti’s words, ‘our great one’, or, as the literary critic

Carlo Salinari said, ‘the most genial and prepared Marxist that Italy has

ever had’. 44 However, Gramsci’s thought was distorted to fi t the PCI’s

political strategy. He became the thinker of hegemony through persuasion,

a theorist of gradualism rather than revolution as an abrupt rupture. 45 The

notion of ‘war of position’ was stressed almost exclusively at the expense of

‘war of maneuver’, and the focus remained on transforming civil society,

rather than conquering the Winter Palace. Thus, as Jan-Werner Müller has

remarked, ‘politics became culturalized’, just as ‘culture became politicized’.

46 As Norberto Bobbio put it in retrospect: ‘the maxim that Croce

took as his inspiration in the early years of the century—that the only way

for an intellectual to be involved in politics was to become involved in

culture—was turned around to state that the only way to contribute to

culture was to be active in politics and do one’s bit toward the transformation

of society’. 47

RESHAPING THE PAST: WAR, MEMORY

AND POLITICAL LEGITIMACY

Nowhere was the ideological battle between DC and Communism more

clearly fought out than in the arena of memory politics. 48 In the anti- fascist

narrative that took shape between 1943 and 1948, the Resistance was interpreted

as the new national and patriotic war of liberation supported by the

entire populace rallying around partisans and soldiers; ‘un popolo alla macchia’

(‘a nation underground’) was the eloquent expression coined by the

communist leader Luigi Longo in 1947. A mythical image was created of

the Italians as recalcitrant victims of the fascist dictatorship who had fi nally

risen against the tyrant, demolishing the regime with all their strength,

fi ghting and beating the German invader, rising again to freedom, morally

regenerated and united, ready to take up their place in the world again. 194 R. FORLENZA AND B. THOMASSEN

On April 25, 1945, a combined Allied offensive and Resistance-led

armed insurrection drove the Germans out of Italy, brought the fascist

collaborationist government to an end, and executed Mussolini, exposing

his body to a ritual desecration in Milan. The war ended and the

political forces that had led the struggle against Fascism could eventually

engage with the task of giving Italy and Italians a novel political–cultural

myth. Naturally, they turned fi rst to the common experience of the war

of liberation.

In fact, the public memorialization of the war events began before

1945. Between 1943 and 1947, anti-fascist forces elaborated and imposed

a narrative of the war, which was to become the all-dominant public and

social memory of the Republic. That narrative was based on the image of

the Resistance as a second Risorgimento—a patriotic war of national liberation

from Fascism and from the Germans, and a spontaneous popular

revolt for national redemption. The Resistance was identifi ed as an expression

of the anti-Fascism of all Italians and was enshrined as the sign of a

harmonious national identity. One of its most durable symbols was Robert

Capa’s famous picture of a Neapolitan scugnizzo (street urchin), with an

anti-fascist and anti-German wall inscription fi guring in the background,

wearing a military style helmet and a chain of ammunition around his

neck, fi ghting against the invaders. 49

Other ‘vectors of memory’ such as neorealist cinema—most notably

Roberto Rossellini’s masterpiece Rome Open City (1945)—painted and

transmitted the Resistance as a unifi ed national movement, and as the

redemption of Italian people thanks to a historic compromise between

communists and Catholics. 50 Cinema had a crucial role in this representation.

Having fi rst experienced the inebriation of power, Italians had paid

for their crimes, made amends for their guilt, redeemed themselves with

pain and sacrifi ce, and fi nally gained freedom. The new Italian nation,

powerful and symbolically epitomized by the successful self-image of the

neorealist cinema, showed its sores, its miseries, its population in rags,

astonished among ruins, but already hard at work to reconstruct; in short,

a great example of a population regenerated from pain and shame.

The anti-fascist front aimed at displaying a regenerated sense of beginning

rooted in a bright past: the narrative reconstruction they proposed

was the basis for the self-understanding of the Italian nation, at the same

time legitimizing the political role of anti-Fascism and providing the

Republic with a founding myth. The key features of this narrative were a

portrayal of the Italians as victims of Fascism and of a war desired exclu COMPETING MODERNITIES: POSTWAR ITALY … 195

sively by Mussolini; a re-dimensioning of Italian responsibility in the Axis

war, the blame for which was laid entirely upon the Duce and the former

German ally; and fi nally, a glorifi cation of the role played by the Italian

people in the struggle against Nazi Germany and its fascist allies after

the armistice. 51 Italians, according to this narrative, had been always good

people (‘brava gente’): they had protected Jews from the racial laws and

form persecutions; they had fought alongside the Wehrmacht in Africa

and Russia, yet avoiding brutality and violence against the local population,

and actually protecting individuals from the abuse of the Germans,

the wicked or the evil. 52

Above all, this narrative highlighted the events of what became termed

the ‘second war’, the war fought by Italians between 1943 and 1945, the

‘real war’, in which the Italians had revealed their ‘true feelings’. The war

of the co-belligerent Italy and the Resistance was celebrated by a political

and intellectual class which had taken a leading part in it, and which

drew from it the source of its legitimacy as the country’s ruling class. With

the monumentalization of the years 1943–1945, not only the ‘fi rst war’,

1940–1943, but also the entire fascist period was obliterated from public

memory. As a result, the fi rst postwar generations of Italians never ever

acquired an offi cial image of Fascism. Fascism had been as Croce claimed

in 1944 a ‘parenthesis’ in Italian history, an external virus that had penetrated

its healthy body. 53 This image sustained and legitimized both the

public amnesia regarding the popular consensus to Fascism and the historicization

of the Resistance-second Risorgimento as the true face of Italian

national identity.

The process of oblivion was also fostered by the desire for reconciliation,

by the need to reintegrate society, by the need to turn over a new

leaf and live a new life. 54 For example, the invitation to forget the past

as an amnesiac came from Fernando Palazzi, one of the nation’s bestknown

philologists and linguists, in a widely read newspaper article of

June 1946. 55 Other Europeans shared the same thought: after all, a crucial

condition for starting anew in Western Europe after the war was a ‘blessed

act of oblivion’, as advocated by Winston Churchill in his famous Zurich

speech of September 19, 1946. 56

As we have seen above, in June 1946 Togliatti, as a minister of justice,

issued a general amnesty for the fascist crimes, in the name of national concord

and with the intention of integrating the fascist rank-and-fi le into the

nascent democracy. 57 Although amnesia and amnesty have the same etymological

root, Togliatti’s decision was not simply an act of forgetting but 196 R. FORLENZA AND B. THOMASSEN

rather one of forgiving—an attempt to put aside the well- remembered and

haunting violence of unity-threatening events in order to ensure national

cohesion and reinforce group solidarity. 58

In the years immediately following the war, Christian Democrats repeatedly

posed the analogy between the fi rst and the second Risorgimento—

not only the Resistance but its completion and continuation with the

postwar reconstruction led by DC—insisting on the theme of moral, spiritual,

and religious regeneration of Italy. In 1948—shortly after the fi rst

parliamentary elections in which Christian Democrats triumphed over

socialists and communists—De Gasperi told the Chamber of Deputies that

there had been a rebirth in the Italian people via those very ‘spiritual energies

of faith, liberty and civilization that made the nation great in its fi rst

Risorgimento’. 59 Communists supported and further motivated the interpretation

of the Resistance as a second Risorgimento—an interpretation

that quickly came to constitute a key discursive strategy adopted by the PCI

to establish its national-democratic credentials. Far from being an international

movement inspired by foreign ideologies, this narrative enabled

communists to portray themselves as an authentic indigenous force, deeply

rooted in national history and values, fi ghting for human dignity. 60 This is

why Togliatti changed the name of the party—no longer Partito Comunista

d’Italia (‘Communist Party of Italy, e.g. a branch of an international movement)

but Partito Comunista Italiano (‘Italian Communist Party’, e.g.)

an Italian party); this is also why the new symbol of the party was the red

fl ag with the tricolore appearing behind it. The PCI made massive use of

nationalist symbolism in their rhetoric, strategy, and electoral campaigns

(local and national), and this often included direct references to themes

and heroes of the Risorgimento, and above all to Garibaldi. By placing

themselves in a line of continuity from the Risorgimento to the present

through the Resistance Communists gave an implicit, although obvious

message: Communism was the offspring, nay the culmination, of Italian

sensibilities, Italian culture, Italian ingenuity, and Italian history. 61

It was therefore quite natural for the left-wing coalition (communists,

socialists, and other minor leftist forces) running for the fi rst parliamentary

elections in 1948 to choose ‘Garibaldi’ as symbol of their electoral

list. In fact, the left-wing political bloc had already run jointly in local elections

with the symbol of Garibaldi since 1946. On November 12, 1946,

for instance, the Blocco Popolare which had run in the local elections of

Rome two days earlier, arranged a torch-bearing walk through the Capital

to celebrate Garibaldi in front of the Campidoglio. COMPETING MODERNITIES: POSTWAR ITALY … 197

This evoking of Garibaldi and the larger left-wing appropriation of his

fi gure did not go unchallenged. The struggle for controlling Garibaldi’s

memory was vigorous and involved all the political forces, from Left

to Right, as well as Garibaldi’s family members, called upon by various

political parties. This was especially the case again for the elections of

1948, where the DC stamped its own election posters with references to

Garibaldi, who was seen to triumph and drive away the fake hero proposed

by communists. Christian Democrats also stamped a counter-propaganda

poster which took up the Left Bloc’s image of Garibaldi, and turned it

upside down, transforming Garibaldi’s face into that of Stalin: the ‘left’

Garibaldi, the Christian Democrats wanted to signal, was a cover for the

real purposes of the PCI, whose deeper loyalty lay with the ‘alien’. At the

dawn of the new postwar Italy, Garibaldi remained the iconic image of

democracy, just as he, for the fascists, had been hailed as the precursor

to Mussolini. Garibaldi’s Risorgimento remained the mirror into which

the new democratic forces wanted to see themselves and establish their

hegemony. 62

The Christian Democratic reference to the ideals, images, and traditions

of the Risorgimento corresponded to a specifi c political goal similar

to the communist strategy: to establish the DC as the ‘party of the nation’,

or a ‘national party’, becoming an embodiment not only of religious values,

but a political force with deep roots in national history. 63 In this vein,

the Christian Democratic leadership moved toward a reinterpretation of

national history which emphasized the role played by Catholic culture

but also assimilated or reinterpreted elements of national–liberal political

forces into a coherent narrative. 64 Thus, somewhat paradoxically, the role

played by Catholics—especially Antonio Rosmini, Vincenzo Gioberti, and

Alessandro Manzoni—and by the papacy was interpreted central to the history

of Risorgimento. Even Giuseppe Mazzini, due to his national popular

pedagogic approach and the clearly anti-Marxist and anti- Enlightenment

aspects of his thought, insisting on the primacy of moral values, could be

reinterpreted in a Catholic key and considered patrimony of the Christian

Democrats. 65

Different interpretations of the very same recent past thus coexisted,

and were only deepened by the Cold War and the breakdown of the

anti- fascist alliance which had fi rst fought against Mussolini and the

Germans and then, as we have seen above, collaborated in the political

transformation of Italy and in writing of the Constitution. These

differences were particularly evident on the celebration of April 25 198 R. FORLENZA AND B. THOMASSEN

(Liberation day), since 1946 the day of ‘our second Risorgimento’. 66

Communists considered Liberation day as a celebration to match the

epos of a fi ghting people guided by a partisan vanguard who wanted

to free their own country. This celebratory structure favored a militant

memory that considered the Resistance as an ethical choice to be made

over and over again because the mission was still to be accomplished. By

contrast, for Christian Democrats, the Resistance had an essential ‘ideal’

value; it reached its aims and concluded its course by freeing the country

from the Nazis, thus opening the way for democracy. To Catholics,

the Resistance as a second Risorgimento was a fundamental step in the

process of national reconstruction, but also a phase of history limited in

a specifi c temporal boundary ultimately to be archived. Consequently,

they commemorated rather than celebrated the Resistance, retaining the

utmost composure and trying to reconcile the nation by honoring the

common sacrifi ce made by all servicemen. 67 On April 25, 1951, in his

hometown Trento, De Gasperi commemorated the Resistance insisting

again on the Resistance as a second Risorgimento, but not a socialist

one—highlighting its spiritual and quasi-religious values as a period of

redemption and rebirth. 68 These confl icting interpretations, far from

breaking up the collective imaginary, were ways to bring it to constant

life, making April 25a shared, albeit contrasted, symbolic space. 69

Indeed, the ritual of the Feast of Liberation commemorated the

Resistance as ‘chaos’ and a ‘golden age’ simultaneously. It might

sound paradoxical to see a civil war as the source of republicanism.

Nevertheless, the reconciliation of the deep contradictions between

supporters of Fascism and partisans required some, albeit precarious,

consensus about the unity of confl icting memories and identities. The

Italian national holidays represent a double funeral of sorts. It related

to physical burials, reburials of partisans, and arrangements of cemeteries

but also to symbolic burials, commemorating, tautologically, that

the dead have died. The survivors—the individuals and the community

(the Patria )—should liberate themselves from the dead, from death.

Partisans should be commemorated dead, not alive, as martyrs, not as

victors. 70 Accordingly, as Gury Schwarz has also pointed out, in stateceremonies

and offi cial celebrations, this commemoration assumed a

much lower profi le than November 4—the day of commemoration for

the victory in WWI—that became the day for remembering all those

who died during wartime. 71 COMPETING MODERNITIES: POSTWAR ITALY … 199

HEGEMONIC NARRATIVE AND FORGOTTEN MEMORIES

There is no doubt that the memory of the Resistance as a second

Risorgimento, although it grew from legitimate political needs, produced

a distorted version of history. 72 It denied public expression to those stories,

experiences, and memories that did not fi t with the Resistance as a popular

epic and founding moment for the new national identity. For instance,

more radical and revolutionary appeals of the Resistance—to many Italians

the beginning of a social ‘revolution’—were put aside. The identifi cation

of the war experience with the partisan Resistance was primarily a northern

phenomenon, and therefore marginalized the southern memories, where

German occupation had been violent, but extremely brief. The Resistancememory

also had little room for the counter-memories of many communities

that had suffered the atrocities perpetrated by Germans and fascists

as retaliation or pre-emptive strikes against partisan operations. 73 Quite a

few Italians had come to see members of the Resistance as ‘troublemakers’

that put civilians at risk, with little prospect of real military gain. Likewise,

the dominant offi cial narrative excluded from legitimate history the fate of

the defeated (the fascists) and the civil war character of the Resistance. 74 It

likewise excluded the violence perpetrated by Italians, soldiers, and civilians,

at home or abroad, against enemies and Jews; the divisions between

the forces of the Resistance, and the violence of communist partisans

against other partisans and, after the end of the war, against fascists and

other public fi gures such as Catholic priests; the question of the foibe —

the killings of Italians in the Istria region (north-east of the country, at

the border with Yugoslavia) by Croat and Slovenian communist partisans

closely co-operating with Italian communists. 75

The Italian experience of the war years could not but yield a divided

memory along geographical, political, ideological, and existential lines. 76

The war had been experienced in very different ways by the various sectors

of the population: soldiers, anti-fascist partisans, apolitical citizens,

members of the Fascist Party, supporters of the Nazi collaborationist

government, self-identifi ed Italians fl eeing from Istria, to name just a few.

The role of Italy in the war was unclear, as the country was simultaneously

loser, occupied, resister, victor. As a consequence, memories of war

were not only fragmented and confl icting but also anomic, juxtaposed,

un-related, and referred to different and noncommunicating universes.

As in the Athens studied by Nicole Loraux, multiple and noncommunicating

memories were made to merge by the dominant political authorities 200 R. FORLENZA AND B. THOMASSEN

into a public memory (the memory of the winners) so as to lay foundation

of a new collective identity. In this process, oblivion or the manipulation

of events in order to construct an image that caters to necessity became

essential. 77

With the selective historical image of a second Risorgimento, the anomic

crisis could be overcome. Interpreted as a re-enactment of the Risorgimento,

the Resistance became the origin of a new Italy and the confi rmation of

an unalterable and unaltered national essence. With the symbolic/cultural

image of the Risorgimento-resurgence—freed from fascist meaning and

variously blended with Catholic and/or communist references—the birth

of the new democratic and republican Italy after the civil war could be experienced

as an epochal break with the past and as the realization of a submerged

national continuity (Risorgimento- Republic). The affi rming of a

forever resurgent Italy served to underpin a legitimate political order of the

present with historical and quasi-religious foundations.

THE RESISTANCE, THE RISORGIMENTO

AND ITALIAN CULTURAL MEMORY

Yet, the Resistance as a second Risorgimento cannot simply be done away

with as a myth constructed in order to legitimize democracy and the new

ruling political class, a myth invented to uphold the political, social, and

moral renewal of Italy. 78 The Risorgimento was not only a postwar invention,

but also a trope deeply embedded in what Aleida and Jan Assmann

would call ‘Italian cultural memory’, or Foucault a set of rules for thinking

and speaking about the world. As we have seen in previous chapters, the

semantic matrix involved in the appeal to the Risorgimento, understood as

a ‘return to the present via the past’, goes far back in time in Italian history

and arguably has to do with an inherent feature of modernity which

the Italian case only brings to light in its own particular way. This symbolic

imagery at various points in history, this deeper-lying symbolic imagery

became linked to the political present. This never happened in a random

fashion: the invocation of a past that could resurrect the present always

took force in historical transition periods. Using the terminology proposed

here, the need to re-anchor the present in the past became an urgent need

in liminal periods. Translated into politics, the image of resurrection would

become tied to a perceived need to free Italy (or parts thereof) from a poisoning

and moral threat, whether endogenous or exogenous. It is as such

a ‘mythscape’ 79 that the Risorgimento had become the object of dispute COMPETING MODERNITIES: POSTWAR ITALY … 201

and contestation, but also a reference point that could serve to overcome

divisive memories of civil war or contested nation- building. And in fact,

the trope of the Risorgimento had often helped to remove such divisive

memories. In other words, whenever facing crisis or even a dissolution of

the political community, Italians from all corners of the political spectrum

would identify themselves as Italians and rebuild a sense of community

relying on the image of a resurgence in the making.

After WWII, once again, in order to establish a meaningful political

society and rebuild a political community torn apart by a war—which had

also developed into a civil war—Italians resorted to the image of the resurgence

in the making. In post-WWII Italy, as time and again in the past,

the Risorgimento represented an arsenal of symbols that helped Italians to

face crisis and transition; to face the dissolution of the symbolic markers

of authority and power provoked by the collapse of Fascism, the end of

monarchy, the violence of the civil war. It served once again as a symbolic

reference for the reconstruction of the community. It made the present

meaningful, fi rmly rooting it into the past: the old contained the new and

the new was built on the old. It silenced and repressed divergent memories,

yet it integrated and incorporated the civil war into a fragile, but

substantial democratic national identity. Following a prolonged period of

liminality and uncertainty, the memory formation that took place between

1943 and 1948 posited the Risorgimento as the contested yet effective

roots of Italian democracy and its republican Constitution—the closing of

the liminal period.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Emilio Gentile, La Grande Italia: The Myth of the Nation in the

Twentieth Century , trans. S. Dingee and J. Purdey (Madison, Wisc.:

University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 292.

2. Alcide De Gasperi, La Democrazia Cristiana e il momento politico (Rome:

SELI, 1944), 33.

3. Rosario Forlenza, ‘Sacrifi cial Memory and Political Legitimacy in Post-war

Italy: Reliving and Remembering Word War II’ History & Memory 24, no.

2 (2012): 73–116; Massimo Baioni, ‘Miti di fondazione. Il Risorgimento

democratico e la Repubblica’, in Maurizio Ridolfi (ed.), Almanacco della

Repubblica. Storia d’Italia attraverso le tradizioni, le istituzioni e le simbologie

repubblicane (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2003), 185–96.

4. On this see Rosario Forlenza, ‘In Search of Order: Portraying the

Communist in Cold War Italy’, Journal of Cold War Studies 18, no. 4 COMPETING MODERNITIES: POSTWAR ITALY … 205

upside-down ; see, for example, the propaganda docu-fi lm Accadde a

Sopradisotto , production: Christian Democracy, duration: 12 minutes,

1951; Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio (Rome).

32. See a 1950 document in Istituto Gramsci Archivio del Partito Comunista

Italiano [hereinafter IG, APC], mf. 325, ff. 1299–1348. The town council,

as stated by the communist regional committee of Emilia on April 19,

1950, was a ‘tool of the class struggle’, not a mere administrative organ

(IG, APC, mf. 325, ff. 655–94).

33. Luca Baldissara, Per una citta ‘piu ‘bella e piu’ grande. Il governo municipale

di Bologna negli anni della ricostruzione (1945–1956) (Bologna: Il

Mulino, 1994); Simon Parker, ‘Ricostruire la citta’ socialista: amministrazione

locale, organizzazione politica e mobilitazione della classe lavoratrice

a Londra e Bologna 1945–1951’, Ricerche di storia politica 9 (1994):

59–87.

34. This section on the relationship between the PCI and intellectuals follows

closely the insightful points and arguments by Tony Judt, Postwar: A

History of Europe since 1945 (London: Heinemann, 2005), 207–8; see also

Nello Ajello, Intellettuali e PCI, 1944 – 1958 (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1979);

Albertina Vittoria, Togliatti e gli intellettuali: Storia dell’Istituto Gramsci

negli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1992).

35. Quoted in Judt, Postwar , 207.

36. See Elio Vittorini, ‘Una nuova cultura’, Il Politecnico 1, no. 1 (1945): 1.

37. Stephen Gundle, Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists

and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943 – 1991 (Durham, NC and London:

Duke University Press, 2000), 25.

38. See Elio Vittorini, ‘Politica e cultura: lettera a Togliatti’, Il Politecnico 3

(25): 2–5; here Vittorini responded to Palmiro Togliatti, ‘Politica e cultura:

Una lettera di Palmiro Togliatti’, Il Politecnico 2, no. 33–34 (1946):

3–4. The debate on ‘politics and culture’ had been initated in May–June

1946 by Mario Alicata, with an article higly critical of Il Politenico and

Vittorini’s attempt at a new culture; Mario Alicata, ‘La corrente Politecnico’,

Rinascita 3, no. 5–6 (1946): 116; to Alicata, Vittorini had responded with

the article ‘Politica e cultura’, Il Politecnico 2, no. 32–33 (1946): 2–6.

39. Judt, Postwar , 208.

40. Silvio Pons, ‘Stalin, Togliatti, and the Origins of the Cold War in Europe’,

Journal of Cold War Studies 3, no. 2 (2001): 3–27.

41. Historians have observed that Stalin’s postwar policy never seemed consistently

directed at installing communist regimes in Western Europe through

revolutionary conquest, for he preferred a ‘divided and docile Europe,

rather than a Communist one’; Vojtech Mastny, The Cold War and Soviet

Insecurity: The Stalin Years (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 2.

On the ‘national front’ policy see Eduard Mark, Revolution by Degrees: 206 R. FORLENZA AND B. THOMASSEN

Stalin’s National-Front Strategy for Europe, 1941 – 1947 , Cold War

International History Project, Working Paper no. 31 (Washington, DC:

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholar).

42. This section draws on Müller, ‘The Paradoxes’, 90–1.

43. In the 1950s, a generation of historians infl uenced by the revisionist

Marxism of Grasmci applied sophisticated class-analysis to the Risorgimento.

44. Quoted in Richard Drake, Apostles and Agitators: Italy’s Marxist

Revolutionary Tradition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press,

2003), 206–7.

45. Carl Boggs, The Socialist Tradition: From Crisis to Decline (New York:

Routledge, 1995) 119.

46. Müller, ‘The Paradoxes’, 90.

47. Norberto Bobbio, Ideological Profi le of Twentieth Century Italy , trans.

L. G. Cochrane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 166;

Müller, ‘The Paradoxes’, 90.

48. This section is based on Forlenza, ‘Sacrifi cial’; Rosario Forlenza and Bjørn

Thomassen, ‘Social Dramas and Memory Formation: Resistance and

Resurgence in the Italian Politics of Memory, 1943–1948’, forthcoming.

49. The image was published by Life magazine in November 1943 and very

effectively established the stereotype of scugnizzo upon which neorealist

cinema elaborated further, with movies such as Roberto Rossellini’s Paisà

(1946). It was a posed picture, staged after Naples had been liberated by

Germans and conquered by the Allies.

50. On the various ‘vectors’ that transmitted the memory of Resistance see

Philip Cooke, The Legacy of the Italian Resistance (Basingstoke: Palgrave

Macmillan, 2011).

51. Filippo Focardi, ‘Reshaping the Past: Collective Memory and the Second

World War in Italy, 1945–1955’, in Dominik Geppert (ed.), The Postwar

Challenge: Cultural, Social, and Political Change in Western Europe, 1945 –

1958 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 42–63.

52. For further discussions, see Bjørn Thomassen and Rosario Forlenza, ‘The

Pasts of the Present: World War II Memories and the Construction of

Political Legitimacy in Post-Cold War Italy,’ in Christian Karner and Bram

Mertens (eds.), The Use and Abuse of Memory: Interpreting Word War II in

Contemporary European Politics (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers,

2013), 137–54; for the double image ‘good Italian/wicked German’ see

Filippo Focardi, Il cattivo tedesco e il bravo italiano. La rimozione delle colpe

della seconda guerra mondiale (Laterza: Rome-Bari, 2014).

53. Benedetto Croce, ‘Chi è fascista?’, Il Giornale di Napoli , October 29,

1943.

54. For an analysis of how amnesia enables (contemporary) nationalist discourse

to respond to external political pressure see Rodhanti Tzanelli COMPETING MODERNITIES: POSTWAR ITALY … 207

‘Solitary Amnesia as National Memory: From Habermas to Luhmann’,

International Journal of the Humanities 5, no. 4 (2007): 253–60. On forgetting

see Paul Connerton, ‘Seven Types of Forgetting’, Memory Studies

1, no. 1 (2008): 59–71.

55. Fernando Palazzi, ‘Amnestia e amnesia’, Nuovo Corriere della Sera , June

21, 1946; Antonio Baldini, ‘Beata dimenticanza’, Il Tempo , April 5, 1946.

56. Quoted in Walter W. Rostow, The Division of Europe After World War II:

1946 (Aldershot: Gover, 1982), 152.

57. Barbara Misztal, ‘Memory and Democracy’, American Behavioral Scientist

48, no. 10 (2005): 1320–38: 1324–6.

58. This cannot be reduced, as suggested by Ilaria Poggiolini, to a bifurcated

political system dominated by DC and by the amnesia it stood for, and

countered by a civil society penetrated by communists, which operated the

countercultural form of remembrance of the Resistance. Remembrance,

Poggiolini argues, inspired the Constitution whereas amnesia made prosperity

and military security in NATO possible at the cost of fi fty years of

Christian Democracy’s hegemony; Ilaria Poggiolini, ‘Translating Memories

of War and Co-belligerency into Politics: the Italian Post-war Experiences’,

in Jan-Werner Müller (ed.), Memory and Power in Postwar Europe: Studies

in the Presence of the Past , (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002),

223–43. In fact, things were far more complex and much less symmetrical.

As everywhere in Europe, amnesia and remembrance were tightly intertwined

within parties, institutions, and within society as such and often

even within single individuals.

59. Alcide De Gasperi, Discorsi Parlamentari , vol. I (Rome: Camera dei

Deputati, 1985), 371–91: 373.

60. Andrea Cossu, ‘Commemoration and Process of Appropriation: The

Italian Communist Party and the Italian Resistance (1943–1948)’, Memory

Studies 4, no. 4 (2011): 386–400; Gentile, La Grande Italia , 310–17.

61. On this see Forlenza, ‘In Search of Order’.

62. For further details here see Bjørn Thomassen and Rosario Forlenza, ‘From

Myth to Reality and Back Again: The Fascist and Post-Fascist Reading of

Garibaldi and the Risorgimento,’ Bulletin of Italian Politics 3, no. 2

(2011): 263–81.

63. Alcide De Gasperi, Non diserteremo il nostro posto! (Rome: SPES, 1947),

33.

64. Guido Formigoni, L’Italia dei Cattolici: Dal Risorgimento ad oggi

(Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010), 145–70.

65. Paolo Acanfora, ‘Myths and the political use of religion in Christian

Democratic culture’, Journal of Modern Italian Studies 12, no. 3 (2007):

307–38: 315–16.

66. On this see again, Forlenza, ‘Sacrifi cial’; Forlenza and Thomassen, ‘Social

Dramas’. 208 R. FORLENZA AND B. THOMASSEN

67. Yuri Guaiana, ‘The formation of a civil religion in republican Italy (1943–

49)’, Journal of Modern Italian Studies 14, no. 3 (2009): 329–45; Stephen

Gundle, ‘The “Civic Religion” of the Resistance in Post-War Italy’, Modern

Italy 5, no. 2 (2000): 113–32.

68. ‘Per il secondo Risorgimento d’Italia. Discorso di Alcide De Gasperi a

Trento il 25 Aprile’, Il Popolo , April 26, 1951.

69. Cristina Cenci, ‘Rituale e memoria: Le celebrazioni del 25 aprile’, in

Leonardi Paggi (ed.), Le memorie della Repubblica (Scandicci: La Nuova

Italia, 1999), 325–78: 330–1.

70. Forlenza, ‘Sacrifi cial’, 82.

71. Guri Schwarz, Tu mi devi seppellir: Riti funebri e culto nazionale alle

origini della Repubblica (Turin: Utet, 2010).

72. See again Thomassen and Forlenza, ‘The Pasts of the Present’; Paolo

Pezzino, ‘The Italian resistance between history and memory’, Journal of

Modern Italian Studies 10, no. 4 (2005): 396–412.

73. Paolo Pezzino, Anatomia di un massacro. Controversia sopra una strage

tedesca (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007).

74. Claudio Pavone, Una guerra civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità della

Resistenza (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991).

75. On these topics see Mirco Dondi, ‘Division and Confl ict in the Partisan

Resistance; Modern Italy 12, no. 2 (2007): 225–36; Gaia Baracetti, ‘Foibe:

Nationalism, Revenge and Ideology in Venezia Giulia and Istria’, Journal

of Contemporary History 44, no. 4 (2009): 657–74; Filippo Focardi and

Lutz Klinkhammer, ‘The question of Fascist Italy’s war crimes: the construction

of a self-acquitting myth (1943–1948)’, Journal of Modern

Italian Studies 9, no. 3 (2004): 330–48; David Bidussa, Il mito del bravo

italiano (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1994); Lidia Santarelli, ‘Muted violence:

Italian war crimes in occupied Greece’, Journal of Modern Italian Studies

9, no. 3 (2004): 280–99; Massimo Storchi, ‘Post-war Violence in Italy: A

Struggle for Memory’, Modern Italy 12, no. 2 (2007): 237–50.

76. John Foot, Italy’s Divided Memory (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009),

147–82.

77. Nicole Loraux, The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient

Athens (New York: Zone Book, 2002).

78. As, for example, in Philip Cooke, ‘La resistenza come secondo risorgimento—

un topos retorico senza fi ne?’, Passato e Presente 30, no. 86 (2012): 62–81.

79. Duncan Bell, ‘Mythscapes: Memory, Mythology and National Identity’

British Journal of Sociology 54, no. 1 (2003): 63–81.