

of deceased heroes from Lombardy (in this case the members of the Cairoli family) within the urban landscape of Italian cities from Pavia to Udine, Lucca to Rome, before returning to the more 'biographical' approach of the other essays. While the preceding chapters look at the national through a local lens, De Martini's reverses the gaze, and provides a balanced conclusion to this exciting book.

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L'inchostro dei vinti. Stampa e ideologia neofascista 1945–1953, by Elisabetta Cassina Wolff, Milan, Mursia, 2013, 398 pp., €18.00, ISBN 97-888-425-4558-3

In her book, Cassina Wolff takes us on a journey through the ideological trends, stances and aspirations of so-called neo-Fascists in the aftermath of the fall of Mussolini's Repubblica Sociale Italiana (RSI) and the end of the Second World War. The title echoes Gianpaolo Pansa's revisionist bestseller *Il sangue dei vinti* (2003), although the scope – and quality of scholarship – could not be further removed.

Cassina Wolff ensures through early disclaimers that the reader knows exactly what kind of material they can expect to engage with. The scope of the investigation is well defined both in a thematic sense (ideology is thoroughly explored, but not the ideological influences on political activism per se) and in its sample size: although she concentrates on the years 1945–1953, she tackles a wide spectrum of neo-Fascist titles and publications (circa 70). Cassina Wolff explains her sampling strategy as a decision to maintain a consistent, clear focus on the specifically and explicitly ideological above anything else. The appendix offers an interesting sample of the publications and documents she consulted and cited, dating from the *ventennio* (e.g. the 1927 *Carta del Lavoro*) to the RSI. The reproduction of documents and papers in their entirety, aside from their intrinsic historic value, is particularly helpful in understanding and navigating through the array of attitudes, trends and critiques offered by the various neo-Fascist authors, whose writings are helpfully grouped by themes rather than chronologically in the main body of the work. Offering a cross-section of testimonies of *agguerriti* Fascist theoreticians (among others, Pini, Cione, Pettinato, Costamagna, Soffici, di Lauro, Evola, Massi, and Erra), the book demonstrates the eclectic nature of the neo-Fascist credo, far from the nostalgic, reactionary brush it is often painted with in the mainstream anti-Fascist Resistance culture: if anything, the movement's champions were 'nostalgic for the future' (p. 269).

Indeed, a *leitmotif* of the book is the conviction of leading neo-Fascist intellectuals that, far from a lost cause, Fascism still had much to offer post-war Italy. The majority of thinkers considered here, although they do not adopt an aristocratic-elitist stance, are determined to distinguish themselves from post-war values and attitudes, and stand apart from both capitalism and communism as a third alternative. Cassina Wolff uses excerpts from printed dialogues and monologues to convey the myriad different declinations and attitudes within Italian neo-Fascism.

Breaking away from and openly critical of the *ventennio*'s tyrannical form of dictatorship, the social strand of the movement (the *socializzazione* promoters) aimed to establish a strong, authoritative totalitarian state that would look after the interests of all social classes, and yearned for a corporation-style economic system where workers would share in the profits of their companies, without becoming the leaders. This model, essentially, called for a full awareness of the different roles, hierarchies and responsibilities of each stakeholder as far removed from predatory capitalism as from communism.

In a more moderate, non-social strand of neo-Fascist thinking we engage with authors willing to enter a dialogue with political life and mainstream parties (the DC in particular and, intriguingly, the PSI). At the other end of the spectrum, we encounter the scathing elitism of those, such as Julius Evola and Ardengo Soffici, who appear rigid in their negation of any democratic compromise and venomously critical of the 'vilifying', demeaning effects of the French Revolution on the Italian spirit and morale.

The chapter on Julius Evola is almost a stand-alone review of the neo-Fascist philosopher, still an influential figure in the cosmology of European neo-fascist groups. This chapter is also the one in which the topics of racism and anti-Semitism are dealt with best. While elsewhere Cassina Wolff writes that 'mentions of the RSI's anti-Semitism are carefully purged' in the publications under review (p. 63), she does not formulate her understanding of the rationale leading to such expunction from the sources, nor does she really question how representative or surprising this erasure (or silence) is. The exception is her dissection of Evola's thinking, centred, she argues, on a racism defined as 'spiritual' rather than anthropological/biological. In her treatment of Evola's racist theories, she argues that despite his declared distaste towards coarse physical racism, his thinking was closely aligned with National Socialist anti-Semitism (anti-Levantine) and biological racism (South American natives and black Africans as inferior races). Yet, despite a reference in the introduction to Evola's continuing cult status among young neo-fascists in the former eastern bloc in particular there is no further mention of these proselytes in the relevant chapter. This would have further enriched the international breadth of her assessment (most evident in the section on the concept of Europe as nation).

In her conclusion, Cassina Wolff surveys the cultural-political landscape after 1953, sketching the developments and progressive 'democratisation' of the MSI/AN. Here we also find references to the infamous far-right and xenophobic fringe groups, ebbing and flowing in their visibility within Italy's contemporary multicultural society. The Lega Nord earns one very short mention as 'heir' to the neo-Fascist ideological culture.

The overall impression one gets from Cassina Wolff's account is that, despite the various ideological strands and trends within the movement, there was a pervasive discontent and disgust with the weak, 'squalid' and 'low' *partitocrazia* of the post-war period, of *Italietta* playing with democracy but in reality a puppet stuck between the Americans and the Soviets. All neo-Fascist authors were ultimately united in their acute, bitter awareness of the impossibility of a return to a non-democratic regime in Italy.

L'inchostro dei vinti is a work of solid scholarship, deserving of recognition as a fresh re-engagement with the multi-faceted, eclectic affair that is neo-Fascism.

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