

Memories and Silences Haunted by Fascism: Italian Colonialism MCMXXX-MCMLX, by Daniela Baratieri, Bern, Peter Lang, 2010, 359 pp., £67.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-3-03911-802-1

This very interesting volume represents a re-elaboration of the author's PhD thesis. It combines a vast amount of primary source-based research with a sound historiographical and methodological approach.

Baratieri's main contention is that, contrary to what has been generally thought, colonial memory in post-war Italy was not characterised by a 'total silence' but by 'unnatural silences', which concerned only specific issues and perspectives on Italian colonialism. Drawing on sources including newspapers, illustrated press (the *rotocalchi*), newsreels and movies, Baratieri highlights the continuity between Fascist and Republican Italy regarding the way in which both historiography and popular culture after 1945 reproduced pre-war colonial discourse, without challenging any of its myths. The same 'common sense' that shaped cultural discourse regarding colonialism in the 1930s persisted after the war, retaining its Orientalist and racist character.

The book is in three parts. Part One deals with the cultural continuity with Fascist Italy that characterised illustrated press, newsreels and films produced in post-war Italy until the 1960s. Part Two – the largest, most interesting and successful section of the work – examines the 'unnatural silences' of post-war Italian colonial memory. Only some events were silenced – primarily the war crimes perpetrated by the Italians – while others were not. Similarly, only the voices and views of 'the colonised' were stifled. By contrast, 'the coloniser' monopolised the entire post-war colonial narrative: Italian colonialism was presented as a 'civilising mission', as had happened during Fascism (in this regard, the comparison that the author makes between newsreels produced by the Istituto Luce and the Settimana Incom between 1928 and 1966 is interesting). Baratieri analyses five popular illustrated magazines (*Epoca*, *La Domenica del Corriere*, *Il Mondo*, *Il Borghese*, *L'Europeo*) in order to highlight the presence of a typical colonial discourse, full of stereotypes, including those regarding sexual relationships between white men and black women.

Part Three explores the roots of an alternative narrative of Italian colonialism in the 1950s and 1960s, which would slowly spread in subsequent decades. Baratieri argues that changes in Italian colonial memory were not produced by a reflection on the Italian colonial past, but on the decolonisation process taking place in Africa in those years, in particular in Algeria and Congo-Zaire. Baratieri uses the release of two movies – *Africa addio* and *La battaglia di Algeri* – in 1965 to demonstrate (in the first case) the persistence of an unchanged colonial discourse and (in the second) the introduction of a dissenting voice, challenging the colonial version. In fact, while *Africa addio* was completely in line with the modernisation paradigm, *La battaglia di Algeri* questioned the merits and demerits of the French presence in Algeria, thus challenging the occupying countries' behaviour at the very moment they were leaving their colonies. The release of these two films, which were received in very different ways by critics and the public (Pontecorvo's movie won many Italian cinematographic prizes, while *Africa addio* was much more successful in terms of audience), demonstrated that alternative positions were emerging, which 'did not replace old truths, but remained rather in conflict with them' (p. 252). These 'nascent contradictions' would ultimately 'lead to the revision of Italian colonial history and the establishment of a divided memory' (p. 227).

Memories and Silences is an important book that is part of a wider trend in recent Italian historiography, led by young historians. It thus finds itself in good company (see, for example, the themed issue of the journal *Zapruder*, 'Brava gente. Memoria e rappresentazioni del colonialismo italiano', also published in 2010). Both Baratieri's book and the *Zapruder* articles shed valuable light on a forgotten page of Italian history, that is, the continuity between Fascist and Republican Italy regarding colonialism, especially in terms of the discourse and stereotypes that history books and popular culture (movies, cartoons, and illustrated press) continued to employ until the 1970s.

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La Grande Guerra nel Ravennate (1915–1918), edited by Alessandro Luparini, Ravenna, Longo Editore, 2010, 334 pp., 25.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-88-8063-661-8

As the centenary of the First World War approaches, there has been a boom in the cultural and social history of the conflict, in Italy as elsewhere. This edited volume, the proceedings of a conference held in Lugo (Ravenna) in 2008 and hosted by the *Istituto Storico della Resistenza e dell'Età Contemporanea in Ravenna e Provincia*, showcases a good cross-section of current research in Italy and more specifically in the Romagna area. Despite its local focus, this work has much to offer to scholars not only of the war but also of many other aspects of early twentieth-century Italy.

While most local studies of the conflict have tended to focus on the areas directly affected by the fighting, such as Trentino or Venezia-Giulia, or else on big cities like Rome and Milan, Romagna makes an excellent case study thanks to its distinctive political culture and social structures in this period. As Massimo Baioni notes in his introduction to this collection, the Ravenna area experienced particularly dramatic turmoil both during the *settimana rossa* in 1914 and during the rise of Fascism, and its republican and socialist traditions meant that popular responses to the war were both complex and unusual. The best contributions here successfully highlight these distinctive local features of the Ravenna area, although it would have been interesting to see this idea engaged with more effectively throughout the whole volume.

The work begins with a useful review essay from Antonio Gibelli exploring current research themes in the Italian historiography with reference to some other European, and in particular French, trends and debates. It is a shame that this awareness of international scholarship is not mirrored by other contributions since many of the arguments advanced here show stimulating points of similarity and difference with other local and national studies. Most of the essays in this collection argue implicitly for the Great War as a moment of rupture in the political development of Italy and a radical turning point in social and cultural trends, an argument that perhaps deserves more explicit and nuanced consideration in light of recent work on other combatant societies.