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# Fascism in Italian Cinema since 1945: The Politics and Aesthetics of Memory

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Following a reconstruction of the two opposed radio systems and of the *Radio Londra* speakers and contributors, the book moves on to consider the impact of the BBC broadcasts. Building on research carried out by historians of public opinion, Lo Biundo argues that the law against listening to foreign radio stations was widely disregarded, and that the very existence of such a law increased suspicion among the citizens. The incredible popularity of Colonel Stevens, a broadcaster of Italian origin with a clear British accent, gives an indication of at least a section of public opinion. Many Italians, mainly from the middle classes, regularly listened to his programmes; some went as far as to write to him either to express admiration or even in search of advice. Some of the letters are interesting examples of the complex relationship between civilians and the Allies even before the period of 'liberation' turned into one of 'occupation'. The ambiguous perception of an enemy that presented itself as the liberator while raining destruction on Italian cities is also explored in a chapter of the book that focuses more closely on the content of the *Radio Londra* speeches. Recent historiography on the myth of the 'good-hearted Italian' gains an interesting added perspective here, because this research suggests that this widespread belief was strongly encouraged by the Allies themselves. This can be shown through the example of radio speeches that distinguished Italians from Germans, depicting Italians as victims of a long-hated Teutonic traitor who, for example, had not helped in the defence of Italian cities, and had abandoned the Italian army at El Alamein. Italians were also victims of Mussolini's dictatorship, which did not organise their protection from bombing: the many dead in Italian cities in 1943 were not due to Anglo-American bombs, which were bearers of liberation, but to the dictator's criminal decision to enter war against Britain and his incapacity to organise both civil and anti-aircraft defences.

With the landing on Sicilian soil, *Radio Londra* began to summon Italians to take part in their own liberation – while always careful to avoid hurting the Italians' sense of guilt or honour: in this case, Italian soldiers who had surrendered to the Allies were described not as cowards but as courageous, as their refusal to fight showed that they were brave enough to reject the dictatorship. The final act in which Italians could regain their dignity was the anti-German Resistance after the armistice of 8 September. During the war of liberation from the German occupiers the interest in *Radio Londra* grew, as the Allies became increasingly perceived, in areas that waited for the end of the war, as liberators rather than former enemies. This work ends with the armistice, suggesting that there is certainly room for further investigation on the relationship between *Radio Londra* and the Italian Resistance.

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**Fascism in Italian Cinema since 1945: The Politics and Aesthetics of Memory**, by Giacomo Lichtner, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, xii + 262 pp., £58.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-230-36332-8

As the author of another book on selected Holocaust films in French and Italian cinema first published in 2008 and reprinted in 2015 (*Film and the Shoah in France and Italy*), Giacomo Lichtner's treatment of Italian post-war images of Fascism maps out a large stretch of territory from Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* to the present and may well be considered as a companion piece to his work on Holocaust cinema. One of the guiding principles of his analysis is that memory concerns the political interpretation of the present rather than the historical analysis of the past. For Lichtner, Italy's memory of Mussolini's era and the Second World War produced two stereotypes in its search for a path to comprehend what had occurred in the peninsula: (1) the stereotype of *Italiani brava gente* (to paraphrase the title of Giuseppe De Sanctis' important film of 1965), the view that Italians were fundamentally good people caught up in an unjust political system that wanted war but were fundamentally not bellicose themselves; (2) a caricatured image of Italian Fascism as pompous and arrogant but fundamentally incompetent and basically rather harmless. To undermine these views, Lichtner identifies four stages of this long trajectory in the history of Italian cinema that comprises some 140 films: Resistance; Reconstruction; Revolution; and Revisionism. In the process of discussing the image of the Resistance in the immediate post-war period, he devotes a very interesting special chapter to the five films by Luigi Zampa that depict Italian Fascism, a very timely reconsideration of this interesting director. When considering the 40-something films that appeared in the early 1960s as part of the heritage of neorealism (the 'Reconstruction'), with such works as Rossellini's *Il Generale della Rovere*, Comencini's *Tutti a casa!*, or Salce's *Il Federale*, Lichtner's view is that these films were superficial and characterised by an apolitical commitment, works still damaged by the *Italiani brava gente* mythology. A single chapter devoted entirely to Salce's single film provides a much needed and comprehensive view of this important film. Marx and Freud provide the basis for most of the films during the 'Revolution' period, which include such major works as Fellini's *Amarcord*; Bertolucci's trilogy, *Il conformista*; *La strategia del ragno*; and *Novecento*; and Scola's *Una giornata particolare*. As before, Lichtner focuses an entire chapter on one film (Scola's *Ordinary Day*) after outlining its historical context. Quite rightly, he declares that if metonymy was the preferred rhetorical device of post-war neorealism and of its 1960s revival, allegory and symbolism dominate these works where characters reflect not so much a social group but an idea or a psychological drive. In his view, Scola courageously refuses both the *Italiani brava gente* alibi, common to so many Italian film treatments of Fascism, and the usual class-based explanations of Italian Fascism of the time. Lichtner concludes correctly that this film represents one of the most original works of the entire post-war period. A final chapter outlines the most recent treatments of Fascism since the Berlusconi era (including some unusual analysis of Italian war films set in Africa). Lichtner places much of the blame for cinema's reticence to face its own production of cinematic stereotypes on the centre-right political culture of Berlusconi (in particular, the white-washing of Italy's record in its African colonies that almost always presents the preferred image of *Italiani brava gente*).

Lichtner obviously wishes, as do I, that the Italian equivalent of Marcel Ophul's *Le Chagrin et la Pitié* might have appeared during the last half century to set the historical record straight about Italy's Fascist past and particularly its very much less-than-noble record in its colonial wars and collaboration with Nazi Germany, 1943–1945. I would go even further than this and wonder why there is no real equivalent in Italy to the late lamented Tony Judt's devastating ideological portrait of French intellectuals in *Past*

*Imperfect: French Intellectuals 1954–1956*. After all, the intellectuals of Italy (and I use the term broadly to include writers, university professors, journalists, politicians, directors and screenwriters) are the people who created the historical stereotypes on both the right and the left that have dominated Italy's glance backward to the rise and triumph and then rapid collapse of Fascism during the Second World War. The blame can be shared not only by those who worked in the cinema but also by others in a variety of fields. Self-serving mythologies are always popular on every side of the political spectrum.

*Fascism in Italian Cinema Since 1945* raises thought-provoking issues and provides a useful guide through a very large number of films over a long period. No analysis of such a topic can fail to arouse objections, suggest alternative views, or reject some of the author's theses out of hand. But Lichtner's book presents an argument that will be difficult to dismiss, and his combination of ideological awareness with a keen aesthetic sensibility remains very refreshing in a work of film criticism that privileges placing an important era of Italian film-making in its historical and philosophical context.

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**Historical essay on the Neapolitan revolution of 1799**, by Vincenzo Cuoco, edited and introduced by Bruce Haddock and Filippo Sabetti, translated by David Gibbons, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2014, li + 312 pp., US\$75.00, ISBN 978-1-4426-4954-3

'The ideas of the Neapolitan revolution could have obtained popular consensus if they had been taken from the nation's own foundations. But instead they were taken from a foreign constitution, and hence were far removed from our own' (p. 85). This extract from the *Historical Essay on the Neapolitan Revolution of 1799* (*Saggio storico sulla rivoluzione di Napoli*) epitomises Vincenzo Cuoco's judgement on the 1799 Neapolitan Republic.

Structures of governance, Cuoco argues, are not mere overarching frames that can be transposed *sic et simpliciter* and easily adapted to different environments and circumstances. Institutions and their effectiveness are the results of historical, social and cultural development, and Cuoco dismisses the uncritical adoption – inspired by French-derived *esprit géométrique* – of constitutional models based on the 1795 French constitution, during the so-called *Triennio giacobino* (1796–1799). This argument, in turn, encapsulates the concept – indeed a historical category – of a 'passive revolution' (as in the case of the Neapolitan revolution), opposed to an 'active' one, that is to say a revolution not enforced by narrow elites but sanctioned by popular support. This, of course, was a distinction that Antonio Gramsci would later endorse and apply to the Italian Risorgimento.