

REVIEW ARTICLE

Studying Fascism transculturally: Italian scholarship in the international arena

Rethinking Fascism: The Italian and German Dictatorships

edited by Andrea Di Michele and Filippo Focardi, Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2022, vi + 335 pp., £84.50 (hardback), ISBN 978-3-110-76645-5

Italian Fascism, 1914–1945: Themes and Interpretations

Claudia Baldoli, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, vi + 122 pp., £27.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-3-031-41903-4

Late Fascism: Race, Capitalism and the Politics of Crisis

Alberto Toscano, London/New York, Verso, 2023, xii + 208 pp., £17.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-839-76020-4

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In 2005, Enzo Traverso argued that a very problematic trend was affecting German memory culture and scholarship about Nazism. Echoing an alarm raised earlier by Timothy Mason, the scholar contended that at least since the 1980s there had been a progressive ‘disparition de la notion de “fascism” du champ historiographique’ (disappearance of the concept of ‘fascism’ from historiography) (p.94). The phenomenon observed by Traverso has found concrete materialisation in the EU’s politics of memory developed throughout the twenty-first century. As Filippo Focardi argues in his work *Nel cantiere della memoria* (2020), the EU memory discourse has been shaped around a totalitarian paradigm centred on the memorialisation of Nazi and Communist crimes, in which the notion of a general form of fascism finds little space, and Italian Fascism only exists as a marginal epiphenomenon. This situation has begun to change in recent years as the growing success of far-right movements across the globe has brought international attention to the concept of fascism. Many Italian scholars, who have never ceased to study fascism, are now

directing their efforts towards the international arena to contribute to a discussion that seems to have acquired particular significance for the understanding of our time.

The edited volume *Rethinking Fascism: The Italian and German Dictatorships* contributes to addressing the selective attention that Italian Fascism has received in international scholarship by bringing experts on Fascism and Nazism into dialogue. Overall, the book makes a twofold welcome contribution. Firstly, it makes available some of the most up-to-date results of the last 30 years of research on the two major fascist dictatorships to an international audience. Secondly, it offers relatively short and clear diachronic reconstructions of the scholarship concerning specific themes, providing a good reference point for anyone concerned with historiographical understanding of the Fascist and Nazi past.

The volume is divided into six sections, each of which contains chapters dealing predominantly with the historiography of either National Socialism or Fascism. The first two sections deal respectively with the tensions between national and transnational historiography and with the relationship between society and dictatorship. In their chapters, Arnd Bauerkämper and Frank Bajohr trace the lines of development of German scholarship on Nazism from the 1950s to present-day trends. The former concludes that German historiography has been strongly linked to the transformation of memory culture within the Federal Republic and unified Germany, where the understanding of the Nazi dictatorship as a unique phenomenon has largely 'obstructed comparative studies and the investigation on cross-border entanglements' (p. 30). The latter focuses on works of social history, which emerged around the study of resistance, persecution, gender, and everyday life. Bajohr shows that one of the main results of this strand of research has been a thorough understanding of the process of perpetration, which has led German culture to conceptualise Nazi crimes as something carried out by ordinary citizens rather than by perpetrators seen as 'a group apart from society' (p. 72).

Roberta Pergher's contribution focuses instead on the transnational historiography of Italian Fascism and general fascism, offering a balanced literary review that highlights both the potential of the latter line of enquiry – which has demonstrated 'how powerful, multifaceted, and interconnected was the global right in the interwar period' (p. 56) – and its limitations, which she identifies in a perspective that, by focusing on family resemblances among right-wing movements, 'has made it even harder to say what fascism is' (p. 57). Paul Corner's chapter directly engages with the problem that Traverso discussed 20 years ago: the marginalisation of Italian Fascism in international studies. This has facilitated the development of a benevolent view of Mussolini's dictatorship as a lesser evil – according to a perspective that already characterised Hanna Arendt's study of totalitarianism – and has supported, in Italy, the maintenance of a self-absolving memory centred on the trope of the Good Italian (p. 74). Corner criticises another element that has facilitated the formation of this uncritical discourse: the wide scholarship that has insisted on the 'consensus' that the regime enjoyed within Italian society. Distorted by Italian memory culture, the idea of consensus – which should actually constitute proof of the Italian population's indirect involvement in the dictatorship and, thus, raise questions of collective responsibility – became, in Corner's view, a justification of Italian behaviour, since it suggests that no one could be blamed for acting in accordance with what everyone else was doing (p. 77). To correct this distortion, Corner suggests going 'beyond consensus' and focusing instead on the violence that was used to exercise top-down coercion and social control (p. 78), as well as on diverse bottom-up processes related to collaboration, conformism, and complicity (p. 80).

The third section focuses on the figures of the two dictators. Wolfgang Schieder provides a precise reconstruction and analysis of all the occasions on which Mussolini and Hitler met, shedding light on how the Duce constituted a fundamental model for the German dictator and how the staging of their 'friendship', to which Hitler was always

loyal, was a fundamental element of the propaganda about the new world order that fascism sought to create. Richard Bosworth writes an elegant and witty piece on the figure of Mussolini, addressing the issue of the popularity that the dictator retained in Italian post-war memory, despite the fact that his regime was directly responsible for the death of about one million people – Bosworth’s count includes those who died during the Italian civil wars of the 1920s and 1940s, the colonial wars in Libya and Ethiopia, the Spanish Civil War, the antisemitic persecution, and the Second World War (p. 109). Bosworth shows that this posthumous popularity can be partially explained through the numerous stories and clichés that surrounded this charismatic populist dictator, which helped to turn him into a kind of ‘celebrity’ of mass culture (p. 121). Gustavo Corni’s contribution delves into the specific sub-genre of Hitler’s biographies, discussing the main works published by Alan Bullock, Joachim Fest, Ian Kershaw, and Peter Longerich, and the different perspectives on the dictator that stem from the two interpretative traditions that Mason defined as ‘intentionalist’ and ‘functionalist’.

Section Four deals with fascist violence. It includes a chapter by Sybille Steinbacher, who considers the effects of the ‘spatial turn’ in Holocaust research, and by Amedeo Osti Guerrazzi, who traces the history of the *Ventennio* from the prism of the human rights violations committed, discussing interesting case studies such as the memoirs written by 1920s *squadristi*. The chapter shows that, although squad violence was the ‘basis for the identity and political practice of Fascism’ (p. 171), it was largely ignored in Italian scholarship until Renzo De Felice’s research in the 1960s and the new wave of twenty-first-century studies on the Fascist action squads by Sven Reichardt, Mimmo Franzinelli, and Matteo Millan (pp. 170–171). Osti Guerrazzi’s chapter is particularly valuable because its footnotes provide international readers with references to the wealth of historiographical scholarship that over the past two decades has documented the Italian use of violence in the Axis War occupations, during which the Italian army resorted to the ‘colonial method’ practised in Libya and East Africa (pp. 178–179).

The last two sections of the book move the volume beyond the study of the interwar period. Section Five includes three chapters that discuss fascist monuments and architecture, confirming that, following Sharon Macdonald’s pioneering work on Nazism’s ‘difficult heritage’ (2009), the study of material heritage is at the forefront of today’s research on the memory of dictatorships. Albert A. Feiber and Thomas Schlemmer offer a fascinating visual essay about Hitler’s residence, the Berghof in Obersalzberg in the Berchtesgaden Alps. Following the structural transformations of this hub of power, from the 1930s to the end of the Second World War, the authors offer insights into the ‘Berghof society’ and the Italo-German relations thanks to a detailed analysis of numerous pictures – beautifully reproduced by the publisher – taken by Hitler’s photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann, or by Eva Braun. Paolo Nicoloso takes readers on a journey through postwar Italy to illustrate the diverse choices that were made in relation to Fascist buildings. The chapter weaves together case studies from central and northern Italy with Bruno Zevi’s reflections on Fascist architecture. The section is closed by Andrea Di Michele’s excellent essay on the most successful case of resignification of Fascist heritage in Italy, the Victory Monument and the *Casa Littoria* in Bolzano – the author was part of the committee that curated this intervention in the early 2010s. Di Michele traces the history of the two buildings, from the Fascist era to the present, discussing the innovative and non-invasive interventions that have transformed them from sites of contested history into dynamic spaces of critical antifascist memory. Besides the historical reconstruction, the chapter is enriched by an illuminating final reflection. Here Di Michele demonstrates the value of the memory work carried out in Bolzano, which did not only ‘disarm’ the Fascist monument but, through historicisation, challenged any attempt by the German and Italian speaking communities to create a self-justifying memory.

This intervention advocates for a critical pattern to address Fascism's difficult heritage that is not based on fixed models or ready-made solutions, but on a careful understanding of the specificity of each material trace and the local political context.

The last section of the book deals with neo-fascism and The New Right. Marzia Ponso discusses German parties, such as Alternative für Deutschland and Pegida, as well as movements gravitating around the *Neue Rechte*. In addition to identifying 14 features that tend to characterise contemporary far-right movements (pp. 300–303), Ponso centres her analysis on the language, keywords, and rhetorical style adopted by the New Right, showing that while many of these movements cannot be conflated with neo-Nazism (p. 304), they nonetheless tap into an imaginary and system of thought that has many common points with fascism. Matteo Albanese focuses instead on the Italian neo-Fascist movements CasaPound and Forza Nuova, discussing the differences between the two and their divergent re-actualisation of transnational political traditions dating from the postwar era, when Fascist ideology was re-thought and re-adapted to the 'new global environment' (p. 321). Roger Griffin's contribution stands out for the coherence of its argument, the clarity of its exposition, and the civic passion through which the scholar summarises the results of three decades of comparative fascist studies. Griffin's starting point is the key question in current political debates: how much heuristic value does the concept of fascism retain to make sense of the contemporary far right? (p. 277). His answer is based on a rigorous definition of the fascist phenomenon, according to an understanding of its ineliminable core – what he calls the 'fascist minimum' – that for him consists in the palingenetic revolutionary impulse of this ultranationalist movement (pp. 282–283). Griffin shows that this understanding enables us to follow the transformations of neo-fascism in the postwar era – which he brilliantly explains through the processes of 'disaggregation and innovation, groupuscularisation and miniscularisation, universalisation and internationalisation, metapoliticisation and culturalisation, virtualisation, and the terrorist turn' (p. 287). Moreover, it enables us to distinguish between fascism and other cognate political tendencies, such as illiberal democracy, constitutional authoritarianism, ethnocratic liberalism, and, most importantly, non-revolutionary populism.

Rethinking Fascism reveals how much the historiographical field has to gain from increasing collaboration and exchange between Italian, German, and transnational scholars. A notable result of the volume is the recognition that a lack of comparative approaches has long characterised the study of Fascism and Nazism and that, despite the flourishing development of comparative fascist studies, more work needs to be done in this direction. The volume itself is indeed a testament to how divergent views of the fascist phenomenon continue to divide scholars. The fascist minimum identified by Griffin, for example, is far from being shared by all contributors. In her chapter, Pergher draws attention to how violence constitutes a crucial element in understanding fascism (p. 57), a trait that Griffin instead dismisses as a 'not definitional element' as it is subsumed within the revolutionary nature of the movement (p. 285). Bosworth, in his account, transforms Mussolini into a populist (p. 122), thus dissolving Griffin's theoretical tools for drawing a useful distinction between fascists and populists. Another persistent tension within the volume is how Bajohr's strong conviction about the direct and indirect responsibility of ordinary citizens for the perpetration of Nazi crimes makes only a timid appearance, if at all, in the chapters dealing with the Italian scholarship of Fascism. For instance, Osti Guerrazzi concludes his well-researched piece on Fascist violence with the idea of the 'extraneousness of the Fascists, starting from the summer of 1944, to the Italian people' (p. 182). This idea may well capture a dominant attitude of the last years of the Second World War, but, without being further qualified, runs the risk of downplaying the implication of the Italians in the *Ventennio* and the sense of

responsibility that subsequent generations should cultivate. These examples show that there are still many positive insights that each academic tradition can gain from the comparative and transnational study of the fascist past and from the hybridisation of German and Italian scholarship and memory cultures. This is the fruitful direction that this stimulating edited volume has appropriately chosen, and which we hope will pave the way for further studies.

The transcultural intervention that Claudia Baldoli undertakes with her book *Italian Fascism, 1914–1945: Themes and Interpretations* moves in a different direction. The study is a much-needed work that aims to provide the international public with a concise and comprehensive overview of the main debates about Fascism in Italian historiography, from the time of the dictatorship to the present. In approaching this daunting task, Baldoli primarily has a pedagogical objective in mind. By summarising the main trends of Italian historiographical research – often in dialogue with British scholarship, the academic environment where the author worked for many years – the book aims to serve as a valuable pedagogical resource for students at any level who are seeking to understand the historiography of Italian Fascism. The book begins with the historical interpretations of Fascism proposed by intellectuals such as Angelo Tasca, Piero Gobetti, Luigi Salvatorelli, Filippo Turati, Antonio Gramsci, Pietro Nenni, Ernesto Rossi, Carlo Rosselli, Benedetto Croce, and Giovanni Amendola. The analysis sheds light into the liberal, Marxist, and radical-democratic interpretative traditions by focusing on five themes concerning the impact of the First World War, the crisis of capitalism, the political mistakes of the opposition, the weakness of the liberal state, and the limits of Italy's unification process. In addition to these antifascist interpretations, Baldoli also explores some of Fascism's self-understandings as developed by Gioacchino Volpe, Giovanni Gentile, and Giuseppe Bottai.

The book continues by discussing the main debates of the Cold War era, addressing issues such as the consensus that the regime enjoyed, the totalitarian paradigm, and Fascist culture, with particular focus on the work of Federico Chabod, Renzo De Felice, Giuliano Procacci, Giovanni Sabatucci, Mario Isnenghi, Alberto Aquarone, Angelo Del Boca, and Giorgio Rochat. Then, it dedicates a whole chapter to the historical research published from the 1990s onwards. This section is likely the most affected by the selectivity of the studied material, as the author primarily relies on works published up to the mid-2000s and on a few of the most significant publications of recent years. At the same time, this is also the most interesting section. Not only does Baldoli successfully identify some new trends of Italian historiography, such as the focus on political violence and the study of the continuities between pre-Fascist and Fascist culture, but she also demonstrates that, with the end of the Cold War era polarisation, the study of Fascism has become 'freer than that of preceding decades' (p. 65) and it has overcome many prejudices, such as the idea of the inexistence of Fascist culture, ideology, and economy. This has led to an improved understanding of the Fascist phenomenon through studies that have also considered everyday life under the regime and the condition of women. The book concludes with a short chapter that addresses some of the main publications about the Italian Civil War and the Italian Social Republic.

A clear result of Baldoli's journey throughout Italian scholarship is the simultaneous recognition of both the importance of De Felice's oeuvre and its significant limitations. The works that De Felice began publishing in the 1960s renovated the study of Fascism, which until that point had been too closely tied to the traditional interpretations developed in previous decades (p. 39), which sought to offer a rigid and monocausal explanation of Mussolini's movement (p. 32). Building on Chabod's line of analysis, De Felice emphasised the importance that the middle class had for the success of an interclass movement such as Fascism (p. 42), which constituted an ultranationalist revolutionary

movement (p. 47) with many connections with left-wing interventionism (p. 46) that managed to acquire forms of mass consensus (p. 48). Yet, research over the last three decades has corrected several of De Felice's problematic interpretations, such as the perceived incomparability between Nazism and Fascism (p. 65), De Felice's refusal to credit a general theory of fascism (p. 65), and his marginalisation of Fascism's aggressive foreign policy and colonial crimes (p. 84) – a problem that was immediately pointed out by Enzo Collotti and Giorgio Rochat. Baldoli highlights other important results of post-1990s Italian scholarship. Historians have produced a more thorough understanding of Fascist ideology – a line of inquiry closely linked to Emilio Gentile's work. Moreover, they have completely dismantled the stereotype of the good-hearted Italian that long characterised popular memory of Fascism, colonialism, and the Second World War, and they have put discrimination and imperialism at the centre of the Fascist experience (p. 88).

Baldoli's diachronic reconstruction of the interpretation and study of Fascism is pursued in response to a political question that is openly addressed in the introduction. The book aims to address a 'paradox' that has affected Italian society, wherein, despite a very rich historiography, public opinion is still influenced by 'simplified and distorted views' about Fascism (p. 1). The conclusion revisits this issue by considering Filippo Focardi's excellent research on the formation of Italian memory in the postwar years. According to Focardi, all the political traditions that supported the classic interpretations of Fascism presented the dictatorship as something 'external to Italy's history' and disconnected from the core of national identity (p. 113). This perspective allowed the formation of a memory discourse structured around the comparison between the Italian and German experiences – a comparative attitude that Bidussa famously referred to as the 'demon of analogy' (p. 114) – which resulted in a constant minimisation of Fascist crimes and Italian responsibilities.

Yet the continuous disconnect between historiography and public discourse, from which Baldoli begins her inquiry, cannot be explained solely through the power dynamics that shaped Italian memory almost 80 years ago. To address this issue, it would be necessary to investigate how the public, cultural, and collective discourse about the Fascist past has evolved over the decades. While the memory of the past is always a plural discursive construction influenced by a variety of media and cultural artefacts, historiography remains an important source to shape and calibrate a memory discourse. In this regard, it is significant that within the historiographical tradition reconstructed by Baldoli, it is possible to identify some areas of tension that did not facilitate the evolution of the Italian memory of Fascism beyond the self-absolving discourse crafted in the postwar years.

The most significant issue – as noted by Paul Corner's contribution in the previously discussed book – is the question of the consensus that the regime enjoyed, which Baldoli defines as 'the most debated issue from the 1970s until today' (p. 111). While Baldoli contends that after De Felice – who was the first to approach Fascism 'not simply as an oppressive dictatorship, but as a regime based on popular support' (p. 48) – only a few historians would deny that Fascism obtained the support of the Italian population, her excursus into Italian scholarship also reveals many tendencies to limit the scope of this interpretation. For instance, Giovanni De Luna has emphasised that during the *Ventennio*, in the everyday life of many Italians, familial and social ties remained more important than Fascism's political identity (p. 93). Salvatore Lupu has suggested that the term consensus remains debatable in the context of a dictatorship and that historians should more carefully distinguish between 'indifference, forms of opposition, conformist acceptance, or militant participation' (p. 92). Isnenghi has further problematised the whole notion of consensus by linking it to the freedom of expressing dissent (p. 93). Luciano Segreto has discussed how industrialists reacted with apprehension to Fascist

expansionist politics – an idea not shared, however, by Pier Giorgio Zunino in *La Repubblica e il suo passato* (2003, pp. 17–22). In her own research, Baldoli has emphasised the many instances in which Italians targeted by Allied bombardments lost faith in a government that proved unable to protect them (pp. 88–89), and she has tended to present the working class as largely alien to Fascism (p. 111). All these contributions are extremely valuable in generating a more complex picture of the past and fostering a deeper understanding of the dynamics of popular opinion under the dictatorship, which cannot be captured by a rigid use of the category of consensus. However, these interpretations also run the risk of reinforcing dominant ideas of Italian collective memory by reifying a distinction between the Italian people and the Fascist regime that obfuscates the involvement that the former, at every level of society, had in the dictatorship. This problem is especially serious in the Italian cultural context, which, in contrast to the German one, has tended to pay less attention to forms of indirect participation in injustice – an area of research that is currently gaining momentum within the field of memory studies thanks to Michael Rothberg’s theorisation of the ‘implicated subject’ (2019). Initiatives to deepen and problematise the understanding of consensus are a welcome advancement in the scholarship, yet they should be complemented by a greater emphasis on the various ways in which ordinary Italians were implicated in the tragedies of the twentieth century.

Alberto Toscano’s *Late Fascism: Race, Capitalism and the Politics of Crisis* brings a fascinating perspective into debates about Fascism by relying on the wide corpus of antifascist thought that has developed within political theory, philosophy, and critical studies. The book begins by posing a crucial question for our contemporary political environment: whether the ‘novel faces of reaction’ that have emerged in national contexts as diverse as Brazil, India, Israel, Italy, Russia, and the US can be fruitfully characterised as ‘fascist’ (p. x). This question was already at the centre of Griffin’s contribution in the first book discussed, but here it finds a completely different response. Toscano’s inquiry aims to show that answering this question through analogical comparisons between our time and the interwar period in which fascism was born would inevitably lead to partial and misleading conclusions. In his view, understanding today’s politics requires engaging with the history of post-Second World War fascism and the theoretical tools provided by generations of thinkers who opposed (neo-)fascism in the 1960s and 1970s by probing its connections with the forms of discrimination and domination produced by capitalism. This lateral move is refreshing and leads to important insights into the understanding of fascism – both past and present – although it also results in some questionable claims, at least from the perspective of this reviewer.

The book is structured around seven relatively short but profoundly dense chapters. The first one begins with a discussion of theorists from the 1930s, such as Bloch, Benjamin, Bataille, Löwenthal, and Guterman. It shows that as a movement born in a time of crisis, fascism is interwoven with multiple temporalities (p. 5) and requires a ‘unity trick’ (p. 17) that creates a false coherence among its heterogeneous features. The second chapter draws on antiracist theorists like Angela Y. Davis and Dylan Rodriguez to demonstrate that fascism is ‘deeply enmeshed’ in the history of power that dispossessed and enslaved human beings on American soil (p. 26) and more generally with the history of settler colonialism (p. 28). The third chapter – one of the most stimulating in the book – deals with the idea of ‘fascist freedom’. Toscano traces the defence of the notion of freedom – a recurrent theme in contemporary far-right discourses – within fascist rhetoric, showing that conceptions of freedom were not alien to interwar Fascism (pp. 52–59) and Nazism (pp. 59–62), which promoted a specific conceptualisation of freedom as the ‘freedom to dominate, to rule’ (p. 73). Through the focus on liberty, the chapter has the merit of emphasising that fascism has a ‘tortuous and less comforting’ (p. 51)

relationship with liberalism than a presumed antithesis would suggest. This argument helps Toscano pursue one of the main goals of his study which is, as the introduction anticipated (x–xi), to contest the antitotalitarian paradigm that posits a complete incompatibility between fascism and liberal democracy (pp. 64–65).

The fourth chapter engages more closely with the connections between fascism and capitalism, examining the roles of abstraction and contradiction in these systems. The fifth chapter delves into the relationship between time and fascism, developing a three-fold argument that considers the time of crisis in which fascism begins to appear as a viable solution (*time for* fascism), the past-present-future relationship in fascism's conception of politics (*time in* fascism), and the immanent and 'objectively subjective temporality' (p. 99) characterising the fascist worldview (*time of* fascism). The sixth chapter engages with the mythological dimension of right-wing imaginary through a sophisticated reading of Furio Jesi's *Cultura di destra*. The final chapter, before a brief conclusion that ties together the various strains of the argument, presents a penetrating and extremely important reflection on the erotic power of fascism. Dialoguing with Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, and Dagmar Herzog, Toscano presents a convincing analysis of fascism as a movement that responds to the ordinary person's desire for power (pp. 140–141) through an eroticised language that the masses – men and women alike – have internalised due to the structure of patriarchy (p. 144).

Late Fascism is a rich book offering significant insights to anyone interested in the history of fascism or the contemporary success of right-wing movements. Undoubtedly, it provides compact and well-considered conceptualisations to think through both the interwar years and contemporary politics, such as the idea of fascism as an 'anti-emancipatory politics of crisis' (p. 156) pursuing a 'forward-flight into the past' (p. 150) to conquer a 'radically revolutionised future' (p. 100). Moreover, it offers useful intellectual tools to both understand and oppose today's far-right movements, such as the concept of late fascism as a 'time of lateness and incipience' (p. 112) that must be resisted through 'combative counter-ideologies' (p. 44) that reconnect to the civil struggle of those marginalised people who, both then and now, have experienced the oppressive power of their society as something 'uncannily similar' to fascism (p. 47).

However, despite the value and validity of many of its ideas, *Late Fascism's* overall argument can be fully endorsed only by accepting its underpinning assumption, which is that fascism can only be understood in relation to 'capitalist domination' (p. xi). For Toscano, fascism 'evades exhaustive identification' (p. 155) and manifests differently in the post- and pre-fascist eras because it is tied to the broader history of capitalism. This is a philosophical position that has a long tradition, since it is rooted in the classical Marxist interpretation of fascism. However, as has been the case since the 1920s, this interpretation cannot but remain contentious among antifascist scholars who operate from different cultural and political standpoints. The main aporia generated by this perspective is that, with this framework, it becomes difficult to separate fascism from more general forms of domination and exploitation through which power enacts injustice. Throughout the book, Toscano discusses various forms of repressive power, such as the carceral apparatus promoted by racial capitalism, the US's history of enslavement and extermination, European settler colonialism, and racism. He argues that these *fascistic germs* predated interwar fascism and have continued to characterise the capitalist and neoliberal world-system in which we live. Hence, the book advocates for a political and ethical call to rally antifascist forces in the struggle against capitalism. This argument inevitably begs the question: why does the fight against capitalism require the use of the term fascism? Why cannot this political struggle focus on combating racism, imperialism, internal-colonialism, gender-heteronormativity, and other forms of discrimination that existed well before the 1920s without resorting to the concept of fascism? Such question is not only a matter of

terminology but has deeper political and ethical implications. In *The Ethics of Storytelling*, Hanna Meretoja emphasises the risk of what she calls ‘subsumptive narrative practices’ that assimilate singular experiences under ‘culturally dominant narrative scripts’ (p. 112). Categorising every form of domination under the umbrella term ‘fascism’ seems to fall into a subsumptive logic. Not only does this risk obscuring the understanding of fascism as a historical phenomenon with specific characteristics but, more importantly, it may also compromise our comprehension of the present, thus undermining the struggle against the injustices that continue to shape our time.

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Italian summary

L’articolo recensisce e discute criticamente tre opere recenti sul Fascismo italiano pubblicate in lingua inglese, esplorando alcuni punti di tensione nella storiografia contemporanea. *Rethinking Fascism: The Italian and German Dictatorships*, curato da Filippo Focardi e Andrea Di Michele, raccoglie capitoli di eminenti studiosi di fascismo e nazismo, fornendo al lettore le basi per un’analisi comparativa del dibattito storiografico sulle due principali dittature fasciste europee. *Italian Fascism 1914–1945: Themes and Interpretations* di Claudia Baldoli è preso in considerazione come un tentativo riuscito di offrire una panoramica riassuntiva e puntuale della storiografia sul fascismo italiano. La recensione elogia l’attenzione che Baldoli conferisce al problema del consenso del fascismo e sottolinea la necessità di portare avanti un’indagine ancora più rigorosa sulle complicità della società italiana nei crimini del regime. *Late Fascism: Race, Capitalism, and the Politics of Crisis* di Alberto Toscano offre delle importanti prospettive teoriche per riflettere sui fascismi e sui legami tra fascismo e capitalismo. Pur apprezzando molte delle intuizioni di Toscano, la recensione mette in discussione alcune delle sue conclusioni più generali. Nel complesso, la recensione invita a una comprensione più sfumata del concetto di consenso e sollecita gli studiosi a riflettere criticamente sul coinvolgimento dell’Italia, sia come sistema paese sia come sistema culturale, nelle azioni criminali del regime fascista.

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