

CONTEXTS AND DEBATES

The Italian historiographical debate and the Fact Checkers movement

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Abstract

The ‘Fact Checking’ series of titles published by Laterza since 2020 is, in the first place, a response to the proliferation of historical fake news, which has grown exponentially as a consequence of social networks. But it is also a response to an increasingly systematic political abuse of history – not only in Italy. The authors and the public firmly believe in the necessity of restoring complexity and value to historical research, as well as in the importance of playing a significant role in the public debate about our past. In many ways the political use of history works in an authoritarian and anti-democratic manner, spreading erroneous and dangerous convictions among broad sections of society. Among the examples which appear in various sections of the article, we discuss the books in the series which problematise the ‘official’ and victimist version of events which took place on the Italian-Yugoslavian border at the end of the Second World War. Other parts of the article examine the instrumental readings of the history and experience of twentieth-century communism.

Keywords: public and political use of history; academic works of history; fact checking; Fascism; communism

Historians on tour

The ‘Fact Checking festival tour’ is one of the significant developments in public history in Italy in recent years. Beginning in Pistoia in April 2022, the following year it was repeated in various locations in Tuscany and in Liguria. The meetings drew large audiences. For example, some 120 people assembled for the event held in the grounds of the audio-visual Museum of the Resistance at Fosdinovo in Lunigiana. The event, organised by a network of local associations, was significantly titled: ‘Fascism, Resistance and fact checking: a factual approach to history’.

The festival involved more than 30 organisations and associations, sites of memory, institutes and museums, and dozens of activists, all of whom are deeply committed to the significance of contemporary history and to the ‘contest’ around public memory. More than a thousand people, to which should be added the huge numbers of school pupils from the dozen or so schools involved in the project, followed the various events which took place in the area between Siena and La Spezia where there is a deep-rooted memory of the Resistance. The guest speakers, over the course of the last two years, have been the authors of the ten volumes so far published in the ‘Fact Checking’ series,

published by Laterza, which was launched in 2020 under the editorship of Carlo Greppi, and which sees four to five new titles published each year.

The ‘Fact Checking festival tour’ is only the most visible manifestation of a phenomenon which has seen, over the last few years, hundreds of events linked to the series taking place all over Italy. At these events, every aspect of the historiographical debate is discussed, with particular attention paid to the public use of twentieth-century Italian history – and to the distortions, mystifications and falsifications linked to the political use of this history. Beyond the inaccuracies which are so frequently a characteristic of the public use of history – deriving from it being recounted in a decontextualised and hasty fashion, and conditioned for decades by the demands of the market (Legnani 1992) – the Italian public arena is characterised by the way that a persistent political use is made of it. And that is, to summarise Nicola Gallerano (1995, 20–25), the public use of history, in other words the telling of history via a range of languages, becomes a weapon every time in the political battle ‘with more or less factional objectives, and a conscious effort is made to promote a more or less polemical reading of the past’ (Gallerano 1994; Fantoni 2022, 9–10). This is the context in which the ‘Fact Checking’ authors are operating.

For some of the books, there have been dozens of presentations and debates every year, the length and breadth of Italy, as well as abroad. A number of volumes in the series have been presented in Switzerland, and the specifics of the public use of history have been discussed in North America, in the USA by Eric Gobetti, and in Canada by Francesco Filippi. Filippi is the author of the ‘Fact Checking’ book *Prima gli italiani! (sì, ma quali?)* (2021b), which demolishes the myth of the idea of nations that ‘exist’ naturally. Filippi’s argument is built around ideas such as ‘imagined communities’ and ‘invented traditions’, categories which disciplines such as history, sociology and anthropology have taught us over the course of more than 40 years. The book’s title thus dismantles the nativist rhetoric of Italian neofascists and neonationalists. As we will discuss below, in some cases matters have gone well beyond debate, in the strict sense of the word, and have reached disturbing levels, with out-and-out clashes, intimidations, and threats.

The utilisation and manipulation of history for political and public purposes, as we will explore further, is not exclusive to Italy. However, the notion that a collective approach involving various collaborations is necessary to combat this phenomenon appears to be particularly characteristic of Italy. Politically biased narratives primarily revolve around the history of the twentieth century and its dictatorial regimes. Such narratives have now been welcomed in the highest institutions of the Republic, following the victory of the far right in the autumn general election of 2022, enabling a coordinated assault in the pursuit of cultural dominance, especially concerning the interpretation of the nation’s past. We believe that historians should be present in the public sphere, and that historical discourse should not be a plaything of contemporary politics.

‘Rovescismi’, or extreme revisionisms

The ‘Fact Checking festival tour’, just like the continuation of the ‘Fact Checking’ challenge, took to the stage in an unusual context: on 25 April 2023 the anniversary of the Liberation was celebrated, for the first time, in a context in which the neo- and postfascist narrative had taken its seat in the highest echelons of power, in the shape of the government of Mussolini’s ‘grandchildren’, led by Giorgia Meloni (Broder 2023).

It is a background noise which has consistently accompanied the lives of today’s forty-year-olds: the criticism during the 1980s levelled at the so-called ‘Resistance vulgate’ – as Filippo Focardi has written – was transformed at the beginning of the following decade into a ‘growing pressure on the institutions’ to ‘promote a new public memory no

longer chained to the binary opposition of Fascism/antifascism' (Focardi 2020, 201). There has been a general tendency to erode the antifascist narrative, but in Italy there has also been a process in which the language of the past has been recast in order to provide an opposing neofascist 'vulgate', whose roots are directly traceable to the experience of Fascism as a movement (1919–1921), to the years of the regime (1922/25–1943), and to the last ferocious period of the Italian Social Republic (Repubblica Sociale Italiana – RSI) between 1943 and 1945. The success of this process was embodied in the shift in identity from the Italian Social Movement (Movimento Sociale Italiano – MSI), to National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale – AN), which midway through the 1990s began to reap rewards, just as the nationalist Lega did, and as the party which would take over the mantle of the MSI/AN would do: Meloni's Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia – FdI). A quarter of a century ago, the historian Gian Enrico Rusconi issued a stern warning about the ongoing political-historical offensive, emphasising its strong focus on recognising the dignity and personal honour of the combatants of the RSI. However, Rusconi pointed out that something even more politically significant was being sought in public discourse – to openly voice the notion that the Fascists had a valid historical cause, particularly in their anti-communist stance. This approach, although not original, aimed to shift the political landscape towards the right (Rusconi 1995, 195–199). It appears that this operation has, indeed, been successful.

This offensive, moreover, has had from 2004 another weapon in its armoury: the 'Day of Remembering' ('Giorno del Ricordo'), a date in the civic calendar which – in opposition to the Day of Memory ('Giorno della Memoria'), commemorating the victims of the Shoah, of political deportation, and the military internees – is dedicated to the 'victims' of the *foibe* (that is, the episodes of violence which took place in 1943–1945 along the Adriatic borderlands – see below for more information), and the exodus that saw hundreds of thousands of people migrate towards Italian territory following the redefinition of the borders between Italy and Yugoslavia in the immediate postwar period.

In recent decades, there has been a growing tendency in the 'official' narrative to present the victims from a martyrological angle, emphasising their Italian identity as the sole reason for their persecution and killings. This narrative reveals a concerning political exploitation of nationalist sentiments, which the extreme right, represented by parties such as MSI-AN-FdI, has actively pursued and continues to seek. This trend has influenced a notable portion of the political and cultural sphere, which is not directly affiliated with neofascism but has nonetheless been shaped by the agenda set by these nationalist forces.

Almost 20 years of rhetorical operations linked to the 'victim paradigm' (to quote Giovanni De Luna [2010] and Daniele Giglioli [2014]), detached from the historiographical debate and nationalistic in their orientations, are the oxygen that has permitted what occurred in the years from 1943 to 1945 and subsequently, to be completely decontextualised. A healthy country must, above all, recognise its historical responsibilities for the crimes it itself committed, so that it can then start to understand the violence that followed, and which was in part related to these earlier crimes, as was the dramatic case of the *foibe* and the mass migrations. This is a point we have made frequently, most significantly in an open letter – signed by 137 Italian, Slovenian and Croatian scholars – sent to the highest state authorities on the eightieth anniversary of the Nazifascist invasion of Yugoslavia (Serri 2021; Pupo, Caccamo and Focardi 2021), an invasion which led to a million deaths (Tomasevich 2001, 737). The public narrative that the right has consolidated into a widely shared belief is, instead, based on the deliberate removal of the fact that Fascism wrought death and destruction in the world for two decades, as has been amply documented in works of history that have circulated widely, and to which we will refer below. From the conquest of Libya (from 1922, and, in particular, from the end of the 1920s to 1930–31), and of Eastern Africa (from 1935 onwards), followed by

the military intervention against Republican Spain (1936–9), Albania (1939), the war against the civilians in Greece, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia from 1940–1 to 1943, the Italian army in the Fascist period carried out appalling atrocities, exterminating the local populations, driven by a ferocious imperial hunger which is still, in large part, silenced in the mainstream narrative of twentieth-century Italy, or – even worse – recounted as part of the push towards a seat at the international top table. The massacres in Addis Ababa (Campbell 2017) and Debre Libanos (Borruso 2020) in Ethiopia, between February and May 1937, alone accounted for more than 20,000 deaths – four times more than the *foibe* – in a bloody manhunt that involved a large part of colonial society. By regurgitating MSI rhetoric, as well as the anti-fascist froth of the ‘grey zone of memory’ (Focardi 2020, 195–196; Chiarini 2005), the supremely nonchalant indifference which has surrounded for decades the memory of Fascism and the Resistance has led to the creation of a ‘new hegemony’ that sanctifies the Axis forces, as well as the ideology and the practices that devastated an entire continent, producing tens of millions of deaths, and reducing entire nations to ruins. The best known example of ‘rovescism’ (the phrase was coined by Angelo D’Orsi [2016])¹ is the photograph which was the subject of a hasty, upside-down interpretation that claimed it showed Italian victims of ‘Slav violence’. Instead, the photograph was taken in Loška Dolina, in Southern Slovenia, on 31 July 1942, and shows Italian soldiers shooting five inhabitants of the village of Dane who had been taken hostage a few days before. But there is also a more recent case. On 5 April 2022, with 189 votes in favour, and no votes against (as happened in the Chamber of Deputies in 2019), with one abstention, the Senate definitively approved Bill 1371, on the creation of the ‘national day of remembering of the sacrifice of the Alpine troops’ (*alpini*).

The chosen date, shortly before the Day of Memory, relates to the desire to commemorate the battle of Nikolajewka: in that location, which was at the time part of the Soviet Union, the *alpini* took part in an offensive designed to block the Red Army and allow what remained of the Italian armed forces and the German units to escape the Soviet encirclement and retreat. It was the only significant victory in the field in a climate of momentous defeat – the tragic epic of the retreat from Russia in which thousands of *alpini*, abandoned and lost in the cold, and badly equipped, fought tenaciously, with the aim of avoiding capture and returning home. All well and good. But what exactly were the *alpini* doing, together with other Italian units and the Germans in the area of the Ukraine–Russia border, some 3,000 kilometres from home, in the bitterly cold winter of 1942–3? In an article written by Carlo Greppi, Francesco Filippi and Eric Gobetti, we denounced the mammoth recasting of historical reality that was taking place, writing: ‘every day that the Italian soldiers fought on the Russian front, at first advancing then retreating, was a day which kept the gates of Auschwitz locked, while the horrors took place within, also allowing the Axis war of aggression to cut down millions of victims’, for which reason ‘the choice of 26 January [for the day of remembering], which could at a first glance seem simply inopportune, is in fact an insult, above all to the *alpini* themselves. Any military outfit in a democratic country should recoil in horror at the idea of it being passed down to history, celebrated in public memory, as a consequence of one of the most shameful episodes in the already terrifying history of European fascisms’ (Filippi, Gobetti and Greppi 2022). It was only after the protests of the historians, as the journalist Matteo Pucciarelli noted in the pages of *La Repubblica* in January 2023, that the Democratic Party admitted to having made a ‘grave error of historical judgement’. But the date has passed, almost unanimously, through the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. This is a cause for national shame, yet it has been supported with pride, as was also revealed in our article, by the councillor for schools in the Veneto region, the proven neofascist Elena Donazzan (Ferro 2021), who, when celebrating the defeat of the Axis on the occasion

of the Day of Memory, inserted into her speech a very telling adverb: ‘unfortunately’ (Pucciarelli 2023).

In Germany public debate, although it has been slow to move forward, has made significant progress in recent years, including at an institutional level. Over the course of the last 30 years, Berlin has become an open-air museum of the suffering that was meted out by Germany, and not the suffering of which it was the victim (see the ‘Fact Checking’ volume *La Germania sì che ha fatto i conti col nazismo*, by Tommaso Speccher [2022, 147–148 in particular]). In Italy, on the other hand, the debate has constantly orbited around the request for the recognition of the country’s own victims, and the claim for a shared memory which places in one patriotic-nationalist box the rights and wrongs of history, the innocent victims and the slaughterers, as well as those people who opposed the nightmare of the ‘black’ New Order, and in the Italian case, the ‘new Mediterranean order’ (Rodogno 2003). The public memory of Fascism has never enjoyed such rude health, above all within large sections of moderate, common-sense opinion. The year after the institution of the day of remembering, Sergio Luzzatto voiced the suspicion that it was the history of the Resistance that was beginning to resemble a history of the defeated (Luzzatto 2005), and a year later Giovanni De Luna published an article with the eloquent title *Resistenza: hanno vinto i revisionisti* (De Luna 2006). As a consequence of the season of right-wing governments, who had, and have, permitted revisionism to spread, it was in this period that scholars began to speak of or again to refer to, D’Orsi’s term, ‘rovescism’ (D’Orsi 2006).

While it is certainly true that the antifascist narrative over the years has lost some of its meaning because it has been shrouded in empty rhetoric, it is now the case that in the public space the sporadic violence dished out to the Fascists at the end of the war has received more attention than the systematic violence of the regime and of the Republic of Salò. Within the logic of the idea that there are no ‘division two’ deaths, the argument goes that the leaders of the RSI should be dignified with the same respect as the antifascists who fought for a free and democratic Italy. And the voice of the historians, in these crucial years, has remained largely unheard, because common sense was forged by ‘other’ voices, above all by the former historian turned journalist Giampaolo Pansa. ‘In many obituaries of Pansa it was written that one should not speak ill of the dead. But the problem with Pansa is that he spoke too well of the dead. Of the wrong ones’, as David Broder commented so tellingly at the time (Broder 2020). (Broder has recently published a book which deserves much praise, *Mussolini’s Grandchildren, Fascism in Contemporary Italy* [Pluto Press 2023], which is an acute and thoroughly researched analysis of a long-lasting and brazen rebranding of the Italian extreme right, from historical Fascism to today).

Against the ‘foibisation’ of history

This significant gap between public memory and the latest developments in historiography, which as we have seen has its origins in the extreme right, and has widely corrupted public opinion, can only have negative consequences. One paradoxical outcome of this long-term offensive aimed at conquering, *manu militari*, cultural hegemony on the historical level and in public memory, has been the ‘foibisation’ of the discourse on the Resistance (Greppi 2023a). On the occasion of the anniversary in 2023 of the massacre at the Fosse Ardeatine, when 335 innocent victims were murdered in a reprisal following a legitimate act of war by Italian partisans, in the context of a violent war willed by nazifascism, and certainly not by the Resistance, the prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, ended up maintaining that they had been assassinated ‘only because they were Italian’ (Baldissara 2023). As far as we are concerned, this is a worrying sign of what the French historian Robert Belot has defined as a ‘dangerous’, widespread, ‘process of knowledge erasure’

(Belot 2022, 24–26) which has, it goes without saying, invaded public discourse in Italy as well as elsewhere. But here the violence which has been carried out on the facts reaches an unheard-of extreme: the 335 victims were not only Italian, but they were killed above all because they were antifascists and/or Jews, whose ‘Italianness’ was removed from them in 1938. This mercenary pseudo-patriotism which corrupts Italian history is, by now, a daily phenomenon. In this case, and we will also see further evidence below, this interpretation of Meloni’s is entirely inappropriate – as it is, too, when it is applied to Fascist martyrdom, as well as to the victims of the *foibe*: this has been amply demonstrated and repeated by academics.² But when it comes to commonplaces, those who do not wish to hear will always turn a deaf ear to the facts.

The ‘fact checking’ challenge: previous examples and comparisons

Nothing, of course, comes from nothing, as Lucretius famously wrote. And that is the case too with ‘Fact Checking’. We can sketch out its editorial history clearly enough, but what lies buried underneath is better left to whosoever wishes to write about the movement in the future. In our case this subterranean dimension is quite complex, in that it has permeated our cultural encounters outside the discipline of history, but it has to an extent contributed to our use of the rhetorical device known as antiphrasis. One example, among many, is the interdisciplinary book by Luigi Manconi and Federica Resta entitled *I’m not a racist, but ... (Non sono razzista, ma. La xenofobia degli italiani e gli imprenditori politici della paura, 2017)*. Indeed this genealogy has been made clear on a number of occasions (see Greppi 2021; Sergi 2021; Greppi 2022 and 2023a).³ The new communicative approach to historical non-fiction published in Italy from the 1990s to today, frequently accompanied by titles that are deliberately provocative or problematic, has seen the appearance of volumes such as *Il mito del bravo italiano* by David Bidussa (1994 – but now out of print), a book which emphasised the long-term responsibilities of Italian society for the antisemitism which then exploded with the racial laws of 1938. Another example is Angelo Del Boca’s best selling *Italiani brava gente* (2005), whose subtitle was, it is worth recalling, *Un mito duro a morire* (a long-lasting myth). Indeed, in the majority of cases, this is precisely the issue: myths are now so firmly embedded that books such as Del Boca’s can only scratch the surface. Subsequently, between 2013 and 2022 a number of works were published, all of which were specifically designed to debunk some of the old chestnuts of twentieth-century Italian history. These started with the book with a deliberately misleading title *Il cattivo tedesco e il bravo italiano* by Filippo Focardi (2013), whose subtitle is *La rimozione delle colpe della seconda guerra mondiale*; and then, a few years later came Francesco Filippi’s *Mussolini ha fatto anche cose buone. Le idiozie che continuano a circolare sul fascismo* (2019), which was a big hit, as were the books he published subsequently (2020, 2021a and b). The following year the fact checking operation was launched, whose most debated volume is probably *E allora le foibe?* by Eric Gobetti (2021), which has been reprinted on a monthly basis ever since, as is the case with Filippi’s *Mussolini ha fatto anche cose buone*. Likewise the publisher Viella, in the summer of 2020, launched a new series, called the ‘antidote’. This was an idea of the eminent historian Fulvio Cammarano, and the series aims to ‘deconstruct and refute interpretations and narratives which lack scientific credibility, but which are now part of the public and historiographical imaginary’. Cammarano’s series publishes volumes which are ‘readable but rigorous’, and which supply an ‘antidote to the inventions, approximations and mythologies which frequently go beyond patent falsehoods to spread out-and-out examples of “fake history”’.⁴ Historians, it is clear, have decided that the time has come to take to the pitch.

These publications, both individually and collectively, attest to the growing desire by Italian historiography to intervene directly in public discourse, in a clearly defined

contemporary context characterised by high levels of urgency. Our times are, in fact, extraordinarily crowded, partly because of the influence of the media, but also because of outright falsehoods as well as ‘theses’ which have been put together, in the best case scenario, on the basis of tiny fragments extrapolated from their context. By reclaiming the importance of a properly functioning and properly documented approach, which is not reinforced by counter-truths to be waved like a club for purposes connected with identity formation, with publications such as these we are trying to restore the continuing work of historiography, and to escape from over-simplification. A confirmation of this ‘antidote’ approach is Paul Corner’s most recent book on Mussolini (2022).

A comparison

Even though it has particular characteristics and manifestations, the political use of history in Italy is not an exceptional case. If we broaden our analytical horizons we soon discover that, with the effacement of the ideological divisions of the Cold War, and with the development of new forms of communication and globalisation, the relationship of peoples and states to their past has changed throughout the world. So-called ‘official’ versions of history are widely critiqued, claims are made about the necessity of recovering a cancelled past, and the buried histories of entire communities have emerged as part of a process which involves the rediscovery of individual and collective identity via the recovery of portions of the past. At the origins of this new public interest in history, what Pierre Nora has termed ‘the world revival of memory’, there is an element of ‘democratisation’ of history ‘which for too long has been the domain of the powerful, the public authorities, the academics, [while] memory has acquired ... the prestige of a popular protest movement. It has come to look like a means of revenge for all those people who have been humiliated, offended and excluded – the History of those who have not had the right to History’. Nevertheless, the sacralisation of memory has overturned its ‘innate potential for emancipation and liberation’, turning it into a ‘form of closure ... a weapon of war’ (Nora 2013).

The post-Soviet space offers a number of examples of this phenomenon, which can lead to productive comparisons with the Italian case. Where the suppression of memory, and the kidnapping of history, was one of the essential characteristics of the communist dictatorship, so the struggle of the dissidents and the anti-Soviet resistance took on the characteristics of a fight for the truth against the ideological falsifications of official historiography (Kopeček 2013; 17–38).

The ‘rediscovered’ memory of those countries who have emerged from the Soviet yoke, in other words the reshaping of a collective ‘national’ memory denied by the prolonged abduction of truth, is strongly conditioned by the memory boom described by Nora, and so it readily lends itself to being used as a weapon, and twisted for more or less openly instrumental purposes, in order to construct narratives whose purpose is related to the political exigencies of the states, of the national communities, and their ruling classes. The war of aggression against Ukraine launched by the Russian regime on 24 February 2022 has not only confronted us with a new type of political use of history as a weapon, indeed as a weapon of war, but it has required us to turn our attention to the enormous explosive potential that the constructions of historical memory have accumulated in those regions which lie in the border areas between Russia and Western Europe.

The so called ‘settling of accounts’ with the communist past has been one of the constituent elements of the young democracies that emerged in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe after the events of 1989–1991. This process has become one of the instruments by which these new political regimes have built their own legitimacy. After a first phase characterised by attempts to move on from the old communist leadership,

accompanied by the expansion of the East towards the European Union, the already existing tendency to make a political instrument of memory has become even stronger. This process has led to the production of historiographical analyses that respond to a conception of national unity largely defined in ethnic and cultural terms. With the strengthening of anti-liberal political forces in Poland and in Hungary, what has emerged is the political will of governments, ideologically close to FdI, intent on forging a national historical memory. This memory is integral to the creation of a new patriotism, and functions within a dimension which seeks to re-educate the nation now freed from its totalitarian past. The principal tools in this operation have been the Institutes of National Memory, which emerged in the 2000s in various countries, whose chief function consists of the documentation of national memory within a tradition of dissident historiography, and within a programme that claims to remove the mystifications of official historiography (Kopeček 2013).

The obsessive use by Vladimir Putin of pseudo-historical arguments to justify a brutal military aggression, and to legitimise his own imperialist ambitions while denying Ukraine the right to exist as a sovereign and independent state, should be firmly placed in the context of a conflict whose deep roots clearly go back to the management of the processes of the dissolution of the Soviet state, and the political reorganisation of the post-Soviet space. The war in Ukraine was preceded by harsh battles on the terrain of historical memory, which were sparked by a divergent sense of the way the countries should move forward. This in turn led to diametrically opposed interpretations of Soviet history, elaborated along different national lines (Hörbelt 2017). As far as the historical tendencies in the countries of Central-Eastern Europe and in the post-Soviet area are concerned, it has not only been the process of transition from a communist dictatorship to a democracy which has been a key influence. It is also necessary to consider the importance of the liberation from Soviet dominance as an element in shaping historical narratives which are, more or less explicitly, anti-Russian. In the vast geographical area that goes from the Balkans, passing through Ukraine and Georgia, as far as the ex-Soviet satellites of Asia, we find an almost universal strategy of victimisation of the nation, oppressed by the occupation and, in the case of the countries of the former Yugoslavia, by its subalternity to the Soviet or communist state. Clearly every state frames in a different way the narration of the nation which has reconquered its own liberty from oppression, in a manner which responds to the concrete demands of political legitimisation and the mobilisation of the collective consciousness. However, there are many clear elements in common. Firstly, the elaboration of the communist past is seen as being of greater urgency than a confrontation with the past of the Nazi occupation, characterised by its complex and divisive dimensions such as collaboration and complicity in the Shoah. Secondly, there is a systematic use of the category of totalitarianism in order to consolidate the image of a clean break between the democratic present and the communist past, which is presented as an historical aberration, as a deviation from the European and national path. And thirdly, we should consider the use of the specific category of genocide extended to a broad spectrum of violent acts, persecutions and mass deportations, in order to provide an 'ethnicised' reading of the crimes of Stalin which aims to place them on almost the same level as, or indeed identical to, the Shoah, all in a general framework characterised by a tendency to simplify complex historical contexts by employing interpretative schemes which place Nazism and Communism on the same level (Benz 2013, 7–15).

There is a dual function to narratives such as this, which are based on the victim paradigm. On one level, emphasis is given to the irreversible break from the Soviet past, while on another the victimist approach helps to strengthen the sense of the sentiment of national unity through the story of shared collective suffering. Ukraine is an interesting case, because of the efforts made to diversify the national historical conscience within the

perspective of the liberation of the country from Soviet dominance. In Ukraine, historical memory has long been conditioned by two factors – Soviet propaganda and the Ukrainian diaspora. The propaganda read in a negative manner any kind of movement or demands for independence by the peoples of the USSR, and cast a veil of silence over the crimes committed in order to suffocate the aspirations of Ukrainian nationalism. Ukrainian emigration to the West, on the other hand, took possession of the perspective of its people as the victims of occupation and Soviet repression, ignoring the *de facto* integration of Ukrainians into Soviet society. Historical narratives that were diametrically opposed were able to live side-by-side until the independence of the state of Ukraine in 1991, when the conflict of memories which had been for so long on ice exploded, creating a strong polarisation between the narrative of nostalgia for the Soviet Union, which was widespread above all in the russified areas to the South and East of the Dnipro, and tied to the great narrative of Russian imperialism, and the Ukrainian patriotic narrative present in the western regions of the country, and which rediscovered the struggle for independence of the nationalist partisans after the Second World War (Georgiev 2021).

In Russia, from the very first day of his arrival in the Kremlin, Putin has demonstrated an iron will to place the interpretation of history and of public memory under state control, in order to forge a great patriotic narrative, made up of heroes, martyrs and victories, a positive narrative, in which there is no place for any critical revision of the role of the Soviet Union in the Second World War nor, more in general, for the critical elaboration of the political, social, and human legacy of the decades-long Soviet dictatorship. An obsessive state propaganda has managed to marginalise the most critical and negative aspects of the history of the Soviet Union, which dominated public memory in the first decade after the collapse of communism. In this way, Stalin's vision of the country surrounded by hostile forces, humiliated and placed under siege from the outside, menaced from within by an anti-patriotic opposition, the 'fifth column' of the West, has returned to the fore. Putin has had the dissemination of the official interpretations of national history placed under institutional control. In 2014 and in 2020 he issued presidential laws which punish the so-called crime of the 'rehabilitation of Nazism', forbidding the circulation of 'false information on the activities of the Soviet Union during the Second World War'. No truck is given to anything that disturbs the equanimity of the narrative of the victorious nation in the war. Hence, no mention can be made of the operations which took place under the Hitler-Stalin pact. Putin has also embarked on an operation to oppress all of those associations, such as the 'Memorial' human rights organisation, showing that he wishes to battle civil society for the right to shape public memory (Radziwinowicz 2021; Accordati 2021).

In this way, Putin has managed to impose an ambivalent memory on Russia, creating a narrative which presents the Russian people as a victim of the crimes of communism, but where the cult of the victims is, however, silent about those who carried out the slaughter, thus putting into the shadows the very mechanisms which made the massacres possible. In Russia, it is possible to condemn Stalin's terror while at the same time praising the statesmanlike capacities of the Georgian tyrant, who was capable of modernising the country and leading it to victory against the Nazis. Legitimising Stalin's violence as a necessary means to govern an empire, required to modernise a backward country, has led to an inversion of the paradigms of the Gorbachev era, which were inspired by the struggle for civil and democratic rights and by the objective of moving on from a culture of government-led violence, which has profound roots in the history of Russia. At the same time, with regards to foreign policy, the appropriation in a nationalist vein of Soviet history, in particular of the Day of Victory, in other words the immense sacrifice of blood which led to the defeat of Nazi Germany in the Second World War, has led to the widespread promotion of the association of Russia with the antifascist struggle, and

Ukraine with collaborationism. Both of these ideas are clearly false: it is well known, in fact, that amongst the ranks of the Red Army there were men and women from a wide variety of nations and ethnic backgrounds, among these almost seven million Ukrainians, who represented (after the Russians) the most numerous nationality, at 20 per cent; to suggest that Ukrainians and the Balts have a particular inclination towards collaboration is, therefore, a defamatory act. There is no relationship between ethnicity and collaborationism, a phenomenon which was present everywhere there was a prolonged Nazi occupation, as indeed the Italian case demonstrates. In other words, Ukrainians and Lithuanians were collaborationists to the same extent as the French, the Belgians, and the Dutch, but nobody would dream of accusing them of being out-and-out Naziphiles.

This systematic distortion of history, which also entails a high level of linguistic violence (for example, Putin's use of loaded terms such as Nazism, denazification and genocide), is part of a phenomenon which has been consistently carried forward by the Russian regime, and which might be termed historical and geopolitical 'armed revisionism'. In this vision of history, the independence of Ukraine and the collapse of the Soviet Union are historical errors which need to be corrected with war. The result is a full-blown and aggressive emphasis on tendencies, already well known to academics, which involve the instrumental twisting of historical facts, and the deliberate poisoning of the debate about history for ideological and political reasons. In the current war, what has become evident is a new, and worrying, characteristic which mixes the forgery of the past with the present, in a symbiotic dynamic that perverts history and poisons information in such a way that they form a potent, and mutually reinforcing, combination.

In our country, it is evident that many people have been receptive to the narratives produced by the Putin regime, and not just as a result of a widespread anti-American or anti-Western feeling, which is by no means the exclusive province of contemporary Italy (Le Drian 2022). It is also evident that the positive reception goes hand-in-hand with a weak understanding of the historically justified fears that condition the strategies of Poland, Estonia, Moldova and Finland, and their requests for protection from NATO. The association – if not the out-and-out and almost automatic identification – of contemporary Russia with the USSR, and the fact that the present conflict calls into question Soviet history, underlines a major, and serious, problem, which on this occasion is unique to Italy. In our country, there is a difficulty, which is widespread among intellectuals, in leaving behind the ideological trenches of the last century and, specifically, in confronting with the necessary serenity the complex historical issue of twentieth-century communism. It has not been possible to disperse the mystifying imaginary of communist mythology, which leaves behind a benevolent conception of Leninism that is obstinately placed within a history of struggles for liberty, peace, emancipation and social justice. In this way Stalinism is seen as the only guilty party, responsible for errors, horrors, degenerations and for the totalitarian nature of communism. It is certainly the case that the infantile speculations on this theme of the extreme right have not helped. As we have already mentioned, this approach is largely linked to anti-fascism and post-fascism, and asks a series of facile questions such as: so what about communism? And its hundred million victims? And why does no-one ever speak of their crimes? There is clearly no sincere desire here to seek to highlight and to understand some of the most terrible events of the twentieth century, nor indeed to commemorate the victims. Instead, this is all related to an instrumental interest, to a political strategy, which seeks to place all the crimes of radical, tyrannical and fundamentalist ideologies into one giant hecatomb, in which the crimes of Nazifascism lose their specificity and their centrality in contemporary civilisation.

The stakes are high, but the process of revision and renewed discussion of historical memory, triggered by the profound political transformations which have affected Europe after the end of the Cold War and which, in simple terms, relate to the space which should be assigned to the crimes of Stalin and to the moral and structural damage caused by ‘real socialism’ in the collective conscience of reunified Europe, is irreversible. The post-communist countries of the European Union have demanded that their own experiences and their own sensibilities be linked in a ‘European historical consciousness’. But this, entirely legitimate, request has provoked irritation in some parts of Italian society, who argue that it risks obscuring the crimes of Nazism, or indeed rehabilitating Fascism, as it makes all totalitarian regimes appear as one. These fears betray an enormous sense of unease. There is, indeed, a tendency to hide in the experiences of the Italian communist movement, making claims to its originality, to its contribution to the antifascist resistance and to its leading role in the democratic life of the nation. These were characteristics which were quite real (Colombini 2021), but they do not allow us to free ourselves from the major ambivalences which are part and parcel of that history, which is global and interconnected. If, on the one hand, there is an insistence on the positive exceptionality of Italian communism, substantially alien to the repressive regimes installed in other countries in the name of the classless society, on the other hand we cannot separate this from the idea that being or having been communists, means adhering not only to a political project but to an international community of ideals which was linked to the Soviet Union and, to an extent, with the other ‘real socialist’ experiences. These were all part of that same identity, and therefore the weight of these experiences cannot be simply denied.

And what about the foibe?

Let us now return to Italy, where it is interesting to note that all these contradictions are concentrated, sensationally, on one specific topic, which has been tackled by Eric Gobetti in the second volume of the series *E allora le foibe?* The title is a reference to a refrain which takes us back to that type of exploitation we have discussed earlier, and which has been a hobby horse in the Italian right’s quest for cultural hegemony over a number of decades.

As we have already mentioned, the topic of the *foibe* has leant itself, far more than any others, to an aggressive and radical political exploitation. On the one hand, there has been an attempt to create an institutionalised ‘official version’, a sort of ‘state truth’, which represents the whole affair in a highly simplified, partial and victimist manner; on the other hand there has been an attempt to censor or marginalise a complex ‘historical’ vision which would problematise a narrative that has a political aim.

Thus far, this would not seem to be a phenomenon which is significantly different from the political manipulations that are tackled in other volumes in the series, as well as in that historical debunking vein of publishing which can be traced back to a number of illustrious precedents, above all the work of Del Boca. But there are three aspects, in this case, which make the whole issue particularly problematic. Above all, the distance between the ‘official’ version of the events and those which have been verified in the historiography is colossal. It is not simply a matter of a partial, or simplified, interpretation of fragments extrapolated from their historical context; it is when it comes to looking at the big picture that there is no overlap between historical research and what can, in all justification, be termed political propaganda. In many pseudo-historical works that have circulated widely (for example in the various films and documentaries produced or co-produced by RAI [Knittel 2014, 170–185]),⁵ the complexity of the border area is completely ignored (it is always presented as being ‘purely Italian’). Furthermore, the earlier violence is either

reduced in scale or it is completely absent, while the number of victims of the *foibe* is grossly inflated, from less than 5,000 to tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands (Bourbaki 2019).⁶ The deaths are then falsely attributed to a strategy of ethnic cleansing, or of genocide, of which there is simply no trace in the archival documentation. Crimes of a political nature are, thus, given an ethnic dimension. This version, which has been taken on board by politics, as well as being absurdly distant from reality, is potentially subversive with respect to the democratic system, because it releases Fascism from its own historical responsibilities and places the blame on the Resistance, which is faced with constant accusations, employing the most disparate arguments. Chiara Colombini's 'Fact Checking' volume *Anche i partigiani però* ably investigates this phenomenon, which is not simply an attempt to represent an innocent and non-violent Fascism. Instead, while the Fascists are depicted as victims or heroic defenders of the Nation, the partisans, who contributed to the recovery of Italian democracy and who went on to draft the Constitution, are depicted as vulgar assassins who carried out appalling crimes (Focardi 2020; Bernardi 2019, 478–491).

This victimist and partial vision has been, quite obviously, conceived by a political minority inspired by the Fascist ideological model, with its clear genealogy: RSI-MSI-AN-FdI. But, and this is what makes it so grave, this vision has been passively taken on board by the democratic political forces, and it has become enshrined in the statutes of the state, via the approval of the Day of Remembering, commemorated on 10 February every year from 2005, after it was established in the previous year. As a consequence, both the propaganda activities and the censoring of the historical version of events are not just carried out by one single party, but by the greater part of the parliamentary forces and the media outlets that are linked to them.

Solidarity, polemics, ostracism

The potential for Gobetti's book on the *foibe* to cause a degree of disturbance was evident right from the start. The original intention was to clearly set out the reality of the facts as determined by the historiography, but this resulted in highlighting the brazen manipulations of the political forces in power in Italy. The objective of the book was, one might say, reached, but the political and media response was harsh and, at times, aggressive.

From a purely historiographical perspective the book did not offer any new interpretations, apart from a few new sources and a partially innovative approach which concentrated on the devastation of a multi-ethnic society, as well as on elements of the transnational social and ideological conflict. Since the aim of the book was to restore the debate to the historical sphere, away from the realm of propaganda, by reaffirming things which historians already knew, as well as reflecting on the social responsibilities of the historian's craft, the reaction among experts was understandably lukewarm, while still positive. Nevertheless, the objective of creating a united front of academics willing to battle against political manipulation has not been reached. In the face of threats directed at Gobetti, as well as other 'Fact Checking' authors such as Filippi, Colombini and Greppi, in places such as the province of Varese, where there is a high presence of neo-Nazis, colleagues have almost unanimously expressed substantial solidarity. But very few have gone beyond defending the author to support the arguments in the book.

The political reaction to the publication of this book was, indeed, harsh, immediate and ferocious. Even before it was published two 'reviews' came out which were solely based on its title (Fabiani 2020; Giubilei 2020). These were followed by a campaign of defamation (an out-and-out mud-slinging machine), led by politicians, organisations and parties of the extreme right, as well as the slavish media linked to them. The entire operation was designed to discredit the author, who was identified as an extremist, repeatedly defined

as a ‘communist’, a ‘would-be historian’ and ‘negationist’. This last term is particularly offensive, because it had only been used up to then for people who had denied the existence of the Shoah, an event of enormous historical import. The absurd nature of this approach is clearly evident and, indeed, the term is far more applicable to those people who manipulate the *foibe* by denying everything which happened before and after. These were clearly attacks based on prejudice, which never even engaged with the historical issues discussed in the book, or else picked out selected, decontextualised phrases, as indeed was the case with Giorgia Meloni before she became prime minister.⁷ At the same time as these political and media attacks were being carried out, an aggressive social media campaign was launched, characterised by insults, slurs and death threats (Angeleri 2021; Famà 2021). Even today, three years after the book was first published, every book presentation or public event is accompanied by media defamations, intimidations, requests for censorship,⁸ and not infrequently protests led by extreme right political forces. On numerous occasions, this has made necessary a heavy police presence to ensure that the discussions can take place. Quite frequently, however, the events have been cancelled. This situation has meant that the book has not sold as widely as it should have, and therefore that the objective of reaching the less-informed (and more easily influenced by propaganda) sector of public opinion has not been met. The extremely potent and long-lasting campaign of defamation against the book and its author has meant that it has only been possible to present it in places where there is a certain level of cultural and political awareness: independent bookshops; ANPI (the National Association of Italian Partisans) branches; institutes for historical research; and social centres. Over time, it has become increasingly difficult to use public venues (such as universities or council properties), and on occasions local authorities have withdrawn permission for fear of the inevitable polemics, and, not infrequently, as a preventive measure.

The situation has been even worse in schools, where political pressure is, as would be expected, particularly strong. Individual teachers and parents, but above all local politicians and even the deputy minister of education have, on numerous occasions, called for the cancellation of lessons that have been organised in schools. And at times these attempts had been successful. Conversely, no restrictions are placed on a biased narrative that offers a vehicle for racism and nationalism via essentially ideological conferences and the free distribution in schools of films and graphic novels produced by neofascist publishers.⁹ However, when they have gone ahead, the meetings with students have been of considerable value, and have demonstrated the interest and the desire for comparison, dialogue and understanding of themes which have been so manipulated by politics.

Certainly, the publication of this book and the impact it has had (we have now reached the tenth edition after two years), have contributed to reopening the debate, and have made possible a public discussion about historical events and the correct method of recounting them. Yet, and in contrast, the political and mediatic hegemony rooted in neofascism has been allowed to spread widely: national political leaders and local functionaries, student groups and newspapers, activists on social media and organisations of the extreme right, have worked tirelessly to discredit the book and to intimidate its author. The academic world, historian colleagues, and the democratic and antifascist front have struggled to get their voice heard. Indeed, their views have frequently been placed, in the media debate, on the same level as that of neofascist propagandists. It is almost as if the opinion of a specialist in the subject could be seen to be on the same level as that of an activist who is openly anti-democratic, according to an incomprehensible logic of *par condicio*. But what has been most deafening over the last few years has been the silence of any kind of democratic parliamentary opposition to this type of political manipulation. Quite simply, there has been no opposition able to claim any

competence in the subject, nor which has defended the serious nature of historical research, nor indeed rejected a unilateral, victimist, and nationalist vision of history.

It is the case that the political and mediatic attacks have almost all come from the Italian extreme right, whose affinities with the political powers in many countries in Central and Eastern Europe have already been underlined. But no voice from the moderate and democratic front has been raised in defence of the correctness of a historical vision which is not conditioned by ideology. Even the highest institutions of the country, including the president of the republic, have obstinately continued to repeat the 'official' version, which has already been widely denied by the historical research that lies at the heart of the book. Indeed, the spectre of a presumed negation of the *foibe* has frequently been evoked. To sum up, the results have been significant, at least insofar as showing the public the false nature of a certain type of narrative is concerned, but the awareness and, indeed, the legitimate nature of a historical and non-propagandistic narrative of the events remains, even today, confined to an elite. While this is a significant elite, it is still in a minority, and it is decidedly weak within the public and mediatic space.

In the context of the three-year memory boom corresponding to the hundredth anniversary of Fascism, this case study, of a particularly problematic and clamorous topic, demonstrates how the hypothesis that an Institute of National Memory might be created in Italy in the near future is far from being a piece of science fiction. Such an Institute, according to the model of what has happened in many of the countries of the former Soviet Union, might well promote a form of throwaway pseudo-history which fishes freely in the neofascist narrative, but also opportunistically employs forms of syncretism which for us are, currently, difficult to imagine.

The ripple effect

Perhaps with excessive optimism we can claim that – at least when it comes to other themes – this marginalisation of documented and verifiable historical discourse might be destined to change. Just as with those books which are part of the genealogy of 'Fact Checking', so the most successful and talked-about books in the series (Colombini 2021; Ippolito Armino 2021 and Franzinelli 2022) have certainly shaken up the public debate. And in general we have identified a high level of 'brand loyalty', so that each time a new volume is published, sales in the whole series pick up. As far as historical non-fiction publishing is concerned this kind of phenomenon is unheard of. Furthermore, non-fiction works have a sort of 'ripple effect', so that whether or not they propose valid arguments, they spread beyond the narrow confines of purchasers and readers.

In order to give an idea of scale, which is relevant to all the works of what the French term '*haute divulgation*' ('*alta divulgazione*' in Italian, 'accessible' in English) – a paradoxical term in many ways although it should not be (the term '*divulgazione*' in Italian is often used with negative connotations) – each 'Fact Checking' volume sells in a couple of months more copies than most Italian history books sell in their entire lifetime. They are different types of operation, of course, and our works could not exist without the fundamental research that feeds into them, (they are only rarely based on primary sources). For this reason, we believe that an alliance of professionals is required, which gives full value to the precious nature of the work carried out by individuals who do research at a highly specialised level, leading to a symbiosis with those who manage to valorise this type of research, thus raising the level of public debate.

This is not a challenge which is relevant only to our discipline, of course. Even the so-called hard sciences are running for cover. One aspect that was striking at first, but which is destined to change, is that the first books in the 'Fact Checking' series were written by authors who are not attached to universities. This situation changed with the

participation in the movement of Alice Borgna (2022) (*Tutte storie di maschi bianchi morti... [They are All Stories about Dead, White Men]*), Giusto Traina (2023) (*I Greci e i Romani ci salveranno dalla barbarie [The Greeks and the Romans will Save Us from Barbarism]*), and of Laura Schettini (forthcoming) and Tomaso Montanari (forthcoming), who in 2023/2024 will publish *L'ideologia gender è pericolosa [Gender Ideology is Dangerous]* and *Le statue non si abbattano [Statues Should Not be Destroyed]*. With the publication of further volumes the distinction between 'academics' and 'non-academics' will be further eroded, at least within the 'Fact Checking' team, so that we will have a substantial level of parity. We firmly believe that this is an important development. In terms of themes, geography and chronology, there will be significant developments. The series will tackle such themes as rights, the history of the Italian Republic, inter-religious dialogue, and will extend to other countries about which we have stereotypical views, as well as to other historical periods, in order to fill the gap currently created by the fact that, of the current ten volumes in the series, eight are dedicated to the contemporary age and only two to antiquity.

Many people who work in academia have looked favourably, or even with enthusiasm, at our operation. They have reviewed our books, and invited us to discuss them in universities or in related institutes. They have given public signs of appreciation, or they have shared information on social media, and made positive comments about what we have done in terms of debunking. As far as we know there are only a very small number of university professors who have publicly criticised our work, but we are not so naïve as to deny that the statistics might actually be a little higher.

On the move

We think it is wise and correct to declare our own position with respect to the Fact Checking movement, although we are well aware that this should not affect the way we do our work. Leaving aside the issue of the generation that we belong to, and the collective voice that has written this article, we think it is necessary to say that, while we have different political sensitivities, they are, substantially, convergent. The 'team' shares a civil commitment to defend democratic and republican institutions, and we share an idea of culture that wishes to understand history in all its complexity, devoid of preconceived short-sightedness or damaging elitism. We know that there is still a lot of 'fact checking' to be done.

One final point: debunking/historical 'fact-checking' is an approach which can have its own issues (above all preaching to the converted), but it requires contextualisation – understood in its simplest etymological terms as an awareness of context – as well as an unequivocal respect for the latest developments in historiography, and for the wide range of interpretations which are possible. Historians, let it be said, as a rule place within inverted commas, sometimes quite literally, the discourse on 'truth'. But facts, events and historical processes exist, as does the research which has studied them. And this needs to be continually at the forefront of our minds: historical knowledge is a documented and verifiable knowledge. This is a point that the medievalist Giuseppe Sergi (2021), in a discussion of 'Fact Checking', has aptly made, insisting on the rigour which must inform our actions:

The debate on the extent to which the 'truth' in history can be reached has produced countless pages, moving between the opposing extremes of a deconstructionist scepticism to a positivism which has been misunderstood even by those who practise it (almost as if this approach did not entail, from the very start, the search for the rules of history, and is therefore opposed to the illusion that the sources – even if not subjected to critical analysis – speak for themselves). The most balanced position

is that history is a form of a continually developing social science of the past, with its tools for self-correction functioning within an ever-evolving ‘approach’ to truth.

Is an editorial initiative which proposes ‘History Tested Against the Facts’ therefore unrealistic? I would say not, if we consider the chinks left open in one of the most pessimistic books to be published in recent years on the theme of knowledge – Bobby Duffy’s *The Perils of Perception: Why We’re Wrong About Nearly Everything* (2018). This public policy academic shows that incorrect perceptions can be managed, and he dedicates a whole section of his book to the subject ‘Facts are still important, and they should be verified’. Facts, exactly. And checking them is a duty.

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Notes

This article is the result of a collaboration between Gianluca Falanga, Eric Gobetti and Carlo Greppi. While we all worked together to produce a uniform whole, the authors of the individual sections are: Gobetti (‘And what about the foibe?’ and ‘Solidarity, polemics, ostracism’, with the exception of the final paragraph); Falanga (‘A comparison’; the remaining sections are the work of Greppi. Chiara Colombini, to whom the authors are most grateful, reread the text and made a series of suggestions regarding both style and substance which have significantly improved the final version.

1. D’Orsi then published an article with a similar title: ‘Il “rovescismo”, fase suprema del revisionismo’, in *Il manifesto*, 24 September 2019, on the resolution of the European Parliament ‘on the importance of European memory for the future of Europe’, 2019/2819 of 19 September 2019.
2. For a concise, clear, and balanced reconstruction, which identifies the political rather than the ethnic motives behind the violence, see *Vademecum per il Giorno del Ricordo* by the Istituto regionale per la storia della Resistenza e dell’Età contemporanea nel Friuli Venezia Giulia (2019). This text can be downloaded from: www.irsrecfvg.eu
3. See also Query. *La scienza indaga i misteri* 2023; Greppi 2023b.5. See the publisher’s presentation of the series at: <https://www.viella.it/catalogo/collana/82>
4. See the publisher’s presentation of the series at: <https://www.viella.it/catalogo/collana/82>
5. Alberto Negrin, *Il cuore nel pozzo*, Italy, 2005 (television film in two parts); Maximiliano Hernando Bruno, *Red Land (Rosso Istria)*, Italy, 2018.
6. The article refers to a brief video clip from *La Grande Storia* (episode of 10 February 2019).
7. In February 2021, the future President of the Council of Ministers unleashed another storm directed at Gobetti, by way of a photomontage which attributed to him a vulgar expression used by Silvio Berlusconi. The post, which appeared on various political social media profiles, was then taken up by a number of newspapers affiliated to Meloni’s politics, for example: <https://www.ilprimatonazionale.it/cronaca/gobetti-foibe-meloni-182892/>; <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/si-lamenta-degli-attacchi-web-poi-insulta-meloni-1924434.html>.
8. A request to prevent a book presentation was even taken to parliament by the MP Elisabetta Gardini (Malfitano 2023).
9. The film *Rosso Istria* and the graphic novel by Emanuele Merlino, *Foiba rossa. Norma Cossetto: storia di un’italiana*, illustrations by Beniamino Delvecchio, Ferrogallico, Milan, 2018, were purchased by regional administrations and distributed around many Italian schools. See, for example, the deliberation of the Giunta Regionale del Veneto, 29 January 2019, n. 85 <https://bur.regione.veneto.it/BurVServices/pubblica/DettaglioDgr.aspx?id=387557>; and the statement n. 190 of the Veneto Region, 6 February 2020 (<https://www.regione.veneto.it/article-detail?articleId=4227309>)

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Italian summary

Questo articolo illustra l'attività di un gruppo di studiosi e studiose, in reazione alla proliferazione di fake news storiche, a partire dall'esperienza della serie 'Fact Checking' di Editori Laterza. Gli autori e l'editore condividono infatti l'esigenza di restituire complessità e valore alla ricerca storica e di giocare un ruolo significativo nel dibattito pubblico sul nostro passato. In molti casi infatti la strumentalizzazione politica della storia agisce in senso autoritario e antidemocratico, diffondendo in ampi strati della società convinzioni errate e pericolose. Ed è questa deriva che l'esperienza di 'Fact Checking' vorrebbe contribuire ad arginare.

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