

**Cecilia Nubola, Faschistinnen vor Gericht. Italiens Abrechnung mit der Vergangenheit. Aus dem Italienischen von Bettina Dürr. Mit einer Einleitung von Nicole Kramer, Berlin (De Gruyter Oldenbourg) 2019, VIII-186 S. (Transfer), ISBN 978-3-11-063921-6, EUR 29,95.**

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The subject of the punishment of fascist crimes in Italy has been only recently addressed by historians. One of the first was the German historian Hans Woller, who in 1996 published »Die Abrechnung mit dem Faschismus in Italien 1943–1948«, published in an Italian translation the following year<sup>1</sup>. Immediately after the end of the war, the trials against the most notorious and violent fascists were the subject of some publications, often with a sensationalist background, but then, for decades, total silence fell. One of the reasons was certainly the closure, or difficult access, to the judicial archives.

Since Woller's book, the subject has been dealt with numerous times, especially at a local level thanks to the opening up of archives and the greater sensitivity of Italian researchers. The influence of the German historiographic current known as »Täterforschung« has also had a certain influence, even though there are very few Italian historians who can read German.

Cecilia Nubola, a researcher at the Fondazione Bruno Kessler in Trento (and therefore one of the few scholars who is fluent in German), used an extremely interesting source, the »Grazie« collection of the Italian Ministry of Justice, available at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome. This is a collection of documents relating to applications for pardons submitted by those Fascists (men and women) who were sentenced by the special courts set up in Italy in 1944/1945. These documents are contained in dossiers (one for each case examined), in which are collected the applications for pardon by the convicts, the sentences, the police reports on the convicted person and often memos and testimonies in favour of the pardon itself submitted both by the convicts and by other witnesses. Through these documents (which are not always exhaustive), Nubola has tried to reconstruct the judicial process and the biographical events of women sentenced after the war for the crime of collaborationism.

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Woller, Die Abrechnung mit dem Faschismus in Italien, München 1996 (Quellen und Darstellungen zur Zeitgeschichte, 38); id., I conti con il fascismo. L'epurazione in Italia, 1943–1948, Bologna 1997.



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The cases examined by Nubola number around forty, drawing a collective biography of the fascist women who, in various ways, collaborated with the Germans during the civil war of 1943–1945.

The collective portrait that emerges from the study of these fascists is that of individuals between twenty and forty years old, very often fanatical fascists (but not always), and above all more brutal and radical than their own comrades. In fact, some of these women, despite being expressly forbidden by the Fascist Republic, not only wore combat uniforms, but also took part in raids, reprisals and the torture of partisans taken prisoner. One of the most disturbing cases examined by Nubola is that of Isa and Maria Carità, the adolescent daughters of Mario Carità (the commander of a semi-autonomous police department), who participated in the torture of anti-fascists, partisans or simple suspects.

Many of these women became part of the SAF (Servizio Ausiliario Femminile [Women's Auxiliary Service]), a corps made up only of women who were not allowed to carry weapons or take part in combat but had the role of supporting soldiers by working in canteens and barracks. It was one of the major »novelties« of Republican Fascism, which gave a new role to women, no longer »exemplary mothers and wives«, as the rhetoric of Fascism wanted, but bearers of an »almost« military role. Some of these women nevertheless managed to fight, wearing trousers and holding machine guns, thus demonstrating a total dedication to fascism that allowed them to break the rules.

The largest number of women sentenced after the war, however, were spies and informers. The Fascists often used women in these roles because they were considered less suspicious by the enemy, as did the partisans. This role, however, was perhaps even more dangerous than that of the soldiers. The partisans, in fact, as soon as they discovered and captured one of these spies, shot her immediately, without any regard for gender. Needless to say, the same fate befell the partisan women, who were usually sexually abused when they fell into the hands of the fascists.

There were many women who cheated for financial gain. One of these was Mrs. Rosini Vicentini, who worked in the province of Como on the Swiss border. This woman was a specialist in betraying Jews. Pretending to be in contact with smugglers, she pretended to help Jews (after having been paid very high sums of money), and then denounced them to the various Nazi and Fascist police forces active in the area.

After the war, the special courts that tried these women were either particularly lenient or harsh. In both cases, this peculiarity was due to the fact that the judges took into account the fact that the accused were women, and as such perceived as either particularly »weak« and »swayable«, or particularly »bad« and »perverse«.



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For their part, these women defended themselves either by denying everything or by trying to play down their responsibility, once again playing the »gender« card. As women, they had had no responsibility and no decision-making role.

However, like all collaborationists, the women fascists were soon released from prison. The amnesty decided by Minister Togliatti (22 June 1946), and other subsequent measures, allowed them to serve only very few years in prison. In 1954, the last three or four inmates were released.

Nubola's book is therefore an instrument that can be read in various ways: as a reconstruction of the »Referenzrahmen« of fascist women, as a history of the post-war purge, as a history of republican fascism, as a history of fascist violence, or as a history of the civil war. In any case, it is a useful book.



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