

Andrea Di Michele, Filippo Focardi (ed.), Rethinking Fascism. The Italian and German Dictatorships, Berlin, Boston (De Gruyter Oldenbourg) 2022, 341 p. (Studies in Early Modern and Contemporary European History, 4), ISBN 978-3-11-076645-5, EUR 92,95.

rezensiert von | compte rendu rédigé par
Dario Pasquini, Rom

The volume includes an introduction by the editors as well as fifteen essays (one of which by Di Michele himself) assembled under six sections: »Fascism and Nazism in a transnational key«; »*Volksgemeinschaft* and the relationship between Italian society and Fascism«; »Hitler and Mussolini«; »Violence«; »Stone Fascism [i.e. Fascist architecture] after the war« and »The New Right and Fascism«, this last section being particularly topical after the victory of the coalition led by post-Fascist party Fratelli d'Italia at Italy's recent general elections.

Partly made up of the proceedings of a conference held in 2018 at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, the book offers updated and effective overviews of the studies on the two major Fascist dictatorships, with relevant, thoughtful comments, covering a time span that goes from the post-First World War period to the present years.

The most original contribution is perhaps the one by Roberta Pergher, that focuses on Italian Fascism in transnational historiography. Her judgement is somewhat pessimistic, as she argues that the »new interest in transfers has not fundamentally changed our understanding of fascism [as an international phenomenon]« and that, actually, it had even »slightly distorted our picture, foregrounding ideological coherence and cultural exchange while the non-ideological elements [...] have taken more of a back seat« (p. 44–45). Equally interesting are Pergher's concluding remarks on the use of the »fascist label« for »events or groups in the present«. If, on the one hand, she finds more than reasonable to be »parsimonious in our use of the term«, on the other hand she convincingly claims that »to require, for example, that movements or situations cross the threshold of war and genocide before we use the label [fascism] would be to demand a rigid standard that no fascist movement in the past met at every stage of its existence« (p. 57–58).

In the same section, Arnd Bauerkämper, despite the title of his essay hinting at the transnational context of German historiography on Nazism, reflects above all on traditional interpretations of Nazism, noting that »historiography of National Socialism has largely reflected trends in historiography rather than promoted them« (p. 14) and that »in the early 1990s research on



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l'Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

fascism [as an international phenomenon] appeared to be out of touch with mainstream historiography and in shambles« (p. 26). However, in more recent years, according to Bauerkämper, Italian and German historians have opposed through innovative research those »efforts [...] to overstate differences between Italian Fascism and Nazism« that he attributes to scholars such as Denis Mack Smith and Renzo De Felice (p. 27). These new studies »accentuated basic similarities« between the two regimes, for instance with regard to »expansionism, racism, and mass atrocities«, at the same time confirming »basic differences« such as »the mass murder of Jews and other minorities« in the case of Nazism (p. 28).

Paul Corner, who in his essay focuses on an aspect that he has been investigating deeply in recent years, i.e. the question of »consensus« in Italian Fascism, seems to share Bauerkämper's point about a new emphasis on similarities between Fascism and Nazism¹. He maintains that exactly going »beyond consensus« can crucially contribute to »a ›repositioning‹ of Italian Fascism with respect to other totalitarian regimes« (p. 73), since viewing »any kind of ›consensus‹ for the regime« as »formed within the overall context of heavy and generalized coercion« makes Italian Fascism »look much more like the other totalitarian regimes« (p. 78).

In conclusion, the volume provides us with a useful ›companion‹ to recent literature on the two major Fascist dictatorships, and on the respective political movements, with five forays into the post-Second-World-War context, namely the essays by Paolo Nicoloso on Fascist architecture in republican Italy, by Di Michele on Fascist monuments in Bolzano, by Roger Griffin on the relevance of the concept »Fascism« in recent times, by Marzia Ponso on the German right-wing populism and by Matteo Albanese on the two Italian far-right formations Forza Nuova and CasaPound Italia.

After reading it, my overall sensation is that much research is still to be done, not only, as one could expect, in the case of Fascism (Corner notes that »there is still no comprehensive social history of the Fascist period«, p. 81) or in the comparison between the two regimes, but even in the case of Nazism itself, whose historiography seems to some observers »so multi-faceted that no individual scholar [would be able] to oversee it« (p. 13).

To pick two fields of studies which I am familiar with: with regard to *Erinnerungskulturen* of the two dictatorships, if it is true that studies on Italy are still very far behind those realized on Germany, comparative research on the topic started only some years ago².

¹ See for example Paul Corner, *The Fascist Party and popular opinion in Mussolini's Italy*, Oxford 2012.

² On German *Erinnerungskulturen* of Nazism see, for example, the pioneer studies: Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik. Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit*, Munich 1996 (Veröffentlichung des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte); Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory. The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys*, New Haven, CT 1997; Helmut Dubiel,



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l'Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

In addition, no broad study on emotions in Fascist Italy or in Nazi Germany has been written so far, despite the crucial role that different feelings such as fear of police repression or affection towards the *Duce* or the *Führer* seem to have played in those contexts³. In his paragraph about »Fascist Violence«, Amedeo Osti Guerrazzi notes that in Italy, after the end of the First World War, »the movement, and then the Fascist Party, succeeded in giving an organization, a structure, an ideology, a purpose to thousands of ex-combatants (and many teenagers) *angry* [my emphasis] at the outcome of the conflict and convinced that they had been deprived of the fruits of victory« (p. 164). As the author of a forthcoming book on the political role that anger played in Italian LGBT activism in the 1970s, I would be particularly interested in getting to know more about the origins, the development, the consequences, as well as the possible subsequent transfer abroad, and transformation on the domestic level of that collective anger from the early post-war period⁴.

Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte: Die nationalsozialistische Herrschaft in den Debatten des Deutschen Bundestages, Munich 1999. On Italy see for example: Pier Giorgio Zunino, *La Repubblica e il suo passato. Il fascismo dopo il fascismo, il comunismo, la democrazia: le origini dell'Italia contemporanea*, Bologna 2003 (Collezione di testi e studi: storiografia); Filippo Focardi, *La guerra della memoria. La Resistenza nel dibattito politico italiano dal 1945 a oggi*, Rome 2005 (Storia e società); Luca La Rovere, *L'eredità del fascismo. Gli intellettuali, i giovani e la transizione al postfascismo 1943–1948*, Turin 2008 (Nuova cultura). Comparative studies are: Dario Pasquini, *Ansia di purezza. Il fascismo e il nazismo nella stampa satirica italiana e tedesca (1943–1963)*, Rome 2014 (I libri di Viella, 174); Marcel vom Lehn, *Westdeutsche und Italienische Historiker als Intellektuelle? Ihr Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Faschismus in den Massenmedien (1943/45–1960)*, Göttingen 2012 (Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft, 206).

³ On emotions in Nazi Germany see, for example, Alexandra Przyrembel, *Emotions and National Socialism*, in: Shelley Baranowski, Armin Nolzen, Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann (ed.), *A Companion to Nazi Germany*, Oxford 2018 (Wiley Blackwell companions to world history); and relevant essays in Thomas Kehoe, Michael Pickering (ed.), *Fear in the German-Speaking World, 1600–2000*, London 2020 (History of Emotions). On Fascist Italy see the relevant essays in Penelope Morris, Francesco Ricatti, Mark Seymour (ed.), *Politica ed emozioni nella storia d'Italia dal 1848 ad oggi*, Rome 2012 (I libri di Viella, 134).

⁴ Dario Pasquini, »Una rabbia felice«. *Politica ed emozioni nella prima stampa LGBT italiana (1969–1979)*, Varazze 2022 (forthcoming). See also Dario Pasquini, »This Will Be the Love of the Future«: Italian LGBT People and Their Emotions in Letters from the Fuori! and Massimo Consoli Archives, 1970–1984, in: *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 29/1 (2020), p. 51–78, DOI: [10.7560/JHS29103](https://doi.org/10.7560/JHS29103). On anger: Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Anger: The Conflicted History of an Emotion*, New Haven 2020 (Vices and Virtues).



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen
Historischen Institut Paris |
publiée par l'Institut historique
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)