

Abstracts

Heidemarie Uhl

The Transformation of “Austrian memory” in the remembrance culture of the Second Republic

Since the end of the 1980s, we can observe the shattering of “post-war myths” (Tony Judt) in Austria, as occurred in other European countries. More precisely, this meant the undermining of the victim theory that had determined the official conception of history since 1945. Again in common with other European countries, the Holocaust has likewise become a focus of society’s memory in Austria; this new culture of memory finds visible expression in the building of holocaust memorials, such as that in Vienna’s city centre (on Judenplatz) in 2000. The aim of this article is to analyse the process of social and cultural negotiation regarding representations of historical memory in post-1945 Austria, by looking at manifestations of commemoration culture in Vienna and the federal provinces.

Filippo Focardi

The historical memory of fascism and the ‘demon’ of analogy

As recent public opinion polls have revealed, there is in Italian public opinion a widely diffused memory of fascism that has been sanitised in a number of respects. In other words, the fascist regime is portrayed as a well-meaning, paternalistic dictatorship, which was the advocate of a rhetorical, overambitious – but not violent – nationalism. The author argues that this verdict has its basis in the habit of evaluating fascism by reference to nazism, which is considered to be the perfect example of totalitarian crime. Fascism is thus compared to nazism ‘by default’. This form of analogy, which is so dominant in Italy, can be traced back to the memory of fascism that was formed in the post-war period. After 1945, anti-fascist culture was concerned to deflect onto nazism and the Germans the main force of international condemnation, in order to avoid the risk of defeated Italy being landed with a punitive peace settlement. At the same time, post-fascist culture counterposed fascism to the more threatening nazism, with the result that the analogy employed becomes something of a ‘demon’: it produces a highly misleading image of Mussolini’s regime, which is not seen as despicable, but as possessing certain merits and as

having achieved a broad popular consensus. The historian Renzo De Felice has played a fundamental role in promoting the comparison with nazism in his interpretation of Italian fascism. This continues to provide the measure for the Italian public's judgement on the fascist era, which is permeated by an ever more marked tendency towards the 'de-fascistification of fascism', whereby the regime's violent and totalitarian character is denied. In particular, this trend has appeared in greater evidence in recent years, after the entry into government of the centre-right coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi, attracting the vigilant attention of public opinion in many European countries.

Andrea Di Michele

The identity factory: fascism and the Italians of South Tyrol (Alto Adige) between self-representation, cultural memory and the public use of history

In South Tyrol (Alto Adige), the fascist era remains the period of history that provokes the greatest amount of public debate and political clashes, as well as attracting the largest amount of attention in the mass media. Taking this as a starting point, the author's concern is to focus on 'public discourse' surrounding the fascist epoch. In particular, he analyzes a significant, and clearly circumscribed phenomenon, namely that of recently produced commemorative works and examples of popular history devoted to the Italian community in South Tyrol during the most important phases of Italian settlement in the region, above all the fascist decades. These works lean towards writing the history of Italians in South Tyrol with the declared aim of contributing to their sense of rootedness in the territory and the growth of their identity as an ethnic group. This contribution demonstrates how the pressing motivations behind these works are extraneous to historical analysis and methodology, with the inevitable result that they provide distorted and incomplete pictures of the past, and rely on simplification and decontextualised representation of the period under investigation.

Brigitte Foppa

Literary memory: writings on the 'Option' of 1939 in South Tyrol

During the 'option' of 1939, all South Tyrolean families had to decide whether to adopt German citizenship and emigrate to the Third Reich, or

to retain their Italian citizenship and remain under the Fascist regime. This traumatic event has left many traces in works of literature, which are always in close interaction with the meanings that the theme assumed in society at any particular point in time. The twenty-six – very different – works of literature under examination here include short stories, novels, dramatic works and autobiographies. These indicate not just how literature functioned as a mirror of contemporary social discourse, but also that it could provide a reference point for society and create a starting-point for new developments in public discussion of the past.