of the Roman Republic. By the time of his return to Rome in 1850 after the suppression of the Republic by French troops the popular notion of Pius the ‘good Pope’ was long dead. Matsumoto-Best points out that it was the strength of popular anti-Papal and anti-Catholic sentiment connected to the restoration of the hierarchy in 1850 that ultimately forced the British government reluctantly to abandon its policy of conciliation with Rome. With the passage of the controversial Ecclesiastical Titles Bill in 1851 which disallowed English and Irish Catholic clergy from holding territorial titles, ‘The anglo-papal relationship… returned to a more traditional pattern of mutual suspicion and frustration’ (p. 171). Even then, as Matsumoto-Best recognises, the British government continued to seek ways to counter the Irish Catholic voice in Rome, eventually establishing a joint diplomatic mission consisting of Florence and Rome late in 1851 for this purpose. What she fails to note, however, was the strong anti-Catholic sentiment underpinning the initial choice of candidate for the new post, James Hudson. ‘You have successfully combated the Black Slave Trade in bodies’, wrote Palmerston to Hudson, commenting on the latter’s recent anti-slaving exploits as Minister in Rio, ‘now we want you to combat the White Slave Trade in minds’.

Not surprisingly, *Britain and the Papacy* cannot quite disguise its PhD origins: the introduction is pure thesis, there are hundreds of footnotes, and in places there is simply too much detail – sometimes less is more. That said, this is a well-researched, readable, and interesting study which really does say something new. Matsumoto-Best may not be writing fashionable history, but it is good history nonetheless.

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**La seduzione totalitario. Guerra, modernità, violenza politica (1914–1918)**

*Angelo Ventrone*

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The almost gargantuan visibility which Italian historian Renzo De Felice managed to obtain in the Italian press for his theoretical revisions concerning the origins and nature of fascism has meant that the totalitarian character of Mussolini’s state has tended to be redimensioned, and even doubted, among a newspaper public that has been all too willing to entertain such self-reconstructive propositions. It should nevertheless be recognized that it has been from within the De Felicean school itself, most especially in the person of Emilio Gentile, that the foundation of this somewhat superficial theoretical edifice has been upturned, and the inherently totalitarian character of Italian fascism re-established (see a recent summary of his case in his ‘Totalitarismo al potere’, *Millenovecento*, No. 10, August 2003). Angelo Ventrone’s volume arguably take’s Gentile’s findings one step further, since in his otherwise vast studies the latter has never really brought the period of the Great War to bear on his approach. Taking leave of a long-standing method in Italian historiography which has posited a vital role for the First World War in generating fascism without actually analyzing this impact in any serious detail (exceptions to this being the work
of, say, Mario Isnenghi, *Il mito della grande Guerra*, Bari, Laterza, 1970, or Giovanna Procacci, *Stato e classe operaia in Italia durante la prima guerra mondiale*, Milan, Angeli, 1983), Ventrone efficiently demonstrates that a pre-existing conception of the modern totalitarian state was actually teased out in the 1914–1918 conflict and that this laid the basis for the fascist form of political power.

The documentary underpinning of Ventrone’s thesis is massive indeed, consisting mainly of primary published and unpublished sources. The former includes articles and speeches from the period under examination (and for the decade before), while the latter draws mainly from the A5G Prima Guerra Mondiale files to be found in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome. Particular reference is made to the many police reports on the *fasci interventisti* both before and after Italian intervention and to the self-appointed *comitati di resistanza* which proliferated after the Italian army had been routed at Caporetto between October and November 1917. These sources combine with secondary references, mainly in Italian but also those deriving from French- and English-speaking scholars such as Annette Becker, Jean-Jacques Becker, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and John Horne (see for example J-J. Becker *et al.* (eds), *Guerre et cultures 1914–1918*, Paris, Colin, 1994), who have identified the notion of “war culture”. By this is meant a simplified and extreme polarization between the nation and its enemies which emerged from around 1916 onwards as an expression of the “total” nature of the conflict and its brutalization. This concept forms an important pivot on which Ventrone’s overall reconstruction turns. And while his definition does not altogether conform to the one constructed by the above-mentioned scholars (it lacks the vital component represented by the sacrifice of the soldier at the front, over against which the nation-enemy dichotomy was measured), it is nonetheless one into which his primary sources can neatly dovetail.

It can be said, indeed, that the total demonization of the “enemy” lies at the heart of Ventrone’s thesis regarding the genesis and clarification of totalitarian thought in the Great War. Even though Italy did not declare war on Germany until 27 August 1916, from an early stage in the conflict interventionists of all political persuasions decried Germany as the main culprit behind the war’s outbreak and hence as the enemy *par excellence*. As Ventrone shows in his Chapter 3, an image of a totally barbarian German adversary was already buttressed in August 1914 by reports emanating from Belgium and northern France concerning German atrocities against civilians and prisoners. Germany came to represent all that was bad about the “mechanical” in “modernity”, and Germans as a whole were seen as capable of little more than the fomentation of “universal hate”. Against this monstrous killing machine and “brute matter”, the “Italian race” had to offer the best of its “humanity” and “Latin virility”, cleansing and regenerating itself in the process. But, according to radicalized Italian interventionists, a national reinvigoration issuing from the defeat of such an apocalyptic-style foe could not occur within the confines of democracy. Rather, what was required was the state’s “totalizing control” over civil society, with the latter itself understood as a “totality” of interests held together by a “pact of religious fraternity” and “loving sentiment”, made possible, amongst other things, by precisely the violent tones and terminology used to define the enemy.
In Chapter 4, Ventrone discusses how, on account of the war’s unexpected prolongation, the increasingly exasperated, demented and paranoid interventionist mentality saw the presence of the German “reincarnation of evil” in whatever observable fact on home soil did not conform to the totalizing schema. The seeping, insidious and ungraspable German enemy was capable of penetrating the economies of its victims to the point of controlling them, and of operating a massive spy ring on its prey’s territory. To counter this real and imaginary “Big Brother ante litteram” (as Ventrone suggestively calls it), the totalitarians in-the-making demanded that all Italians remain vigilant and report cases of suspected enemy spying or, consequently, any anti-patriotic sentiment expressed by their own compatriots. According to the logic of this embryonic totalitarian worldview, any and every German on Italian territory had to be considered an enemy, and from a particularly early stage in the war calls were made not only to confiscate the property of Germans but also to construct concentration camps where they could be better kept under surveillance. The author recapitulates what is here at stake: “While not even minimally reaching the levels of horror of other similar experiences in the twentieth century, the sum of these proposals plus the typology of the repressive and reclusive measures projected show, nevertheless, the extent to which the positions of [interventionists] … were radicalizing, and the degree to which many of the instruments which were to become the tragic and ordinary administration of the totalitarian regimes were being identified and anticipated” (p. 205).

However, the real and perceived external enemy had its domestic complement, a killjoy that schemed and plotted against the nation and sapped its will to resist. While this could take the form of any neutralist, from Giovanni Giolitti to the Pope, there can be little doubt, and Ventrone concurs, that when push comes to shove one is dealing with the Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI). Arguably, pages 211–255 are what this book is all about, namely, the project to spy upon, repress, seclude and, in short, physically destroy Italian socialism as a necessary measure for the more efficient preparation and prosecution of the actual and subsequent wars. This involved not only conflating the identity of the “enemy within” with its external counterpart, but also falsely ascribing to the socialists the blame for any military setback or disaster. Incessant calls were made first on Antonio Salandra (Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior from 21 March 1914 to 12 June 1916) and, subsequently, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando (Prime Minister from 30 October 1917 to 19 June 1919 and Minister of the Interior from 18 June 1916 to the latter date) to take the appropriate repressive measures against the PSI. Since, in the wake of the protracted war and ensuing disasters, these were deemed to be not forthcoming, radicalized interventionists proffered their own solution in the form of punitive squads. Ventrone brings out interesting archive documentation from late 1917 which shows how one does not need to wait for April 1919 in order to witness a fascist-type attack on the offices of the socialist daily Avanti!. On 20 December 1917 groups of youths smashed the windows of that newspaper’s printing offices in Milan and, two days later, a gang of fifty thugs hijacked an Avanti! delivery truck, beat up the driver, tied up the delivery boy, threw the newspapers into the Naviglio canal, and burned the vehicle (pp. 251–252). It can be said, therefore, that while the war did not produce a totalitarian state, and while there was nothing inevitable about fascism’s coming to power, early forms of fascist violence did in fact emerge
out of the “totalitarian seduction” within the context of the First World War. The latter provided radicalized elements of the lower middle classes with a concrete terrain on which to project their fears and fantasies into self-mobilizing myths, through which they then attempted to alter the behaviour of all Italians so that their every thought and action would unfold within the parameters of an omnipotent and omnipresent state.

Ventrone’s overall thesis is convincing and, as previously stated, is backed up by huge quantities of documentary evidence. It is nevertheless the case that these sources account for the generally unreadable nature of the volume under examination. Any scholar who has done the immense amount of reading and research to which Ventrone can proudly lay claim is naturally keen to bring the depth and broadness of this endeavour to the eye of his or her readers. But it is equally incumbent on the writer to make sure that precisely these sources do not themselves become the driving force of the work. This, unfortunately, has happened in the present volume and accounts for its acute repetitiveness and what, by virtue of a consequent ennui, becomes its excruciating duration. The four chapters have an average length of seventy pages, with the third running into ninety-three folios and the fourth into eighty-eight. The reader is literally swamped with example after example of exactly the same point of view or, at best, another (but not for that reason any more necessary) version of that view. Chapter 1, for example, is devoted to the decade or so prior to the war in which the sensation that some type of world-shaping conflagration was imminent was profuse among sectors of the petty bourgeois intelligentsia. But while, to be sure, a reminder of the politico-cultural matrix is useful as an introductory array, this clearly does not require a long treatment (forty-three pages) consisting of what are by now well-known and well documented opinions of famous writers such as Giuseppe Prezzolini, Giovanni Papini and Enrico Corradini or other like-minded “intellectuals” and activists that one may or may not have ever heard of, and the importance of whose contemporary relevance and influence is not altogether clear.

Ventrone’s first chapter lays the methodological basis for what will remain the author’s tendency to use his volume more for reasons of journalistic-type documenting and reporting than exegesis. One is also left wondering where this book stands in relation to the historiographical debate, and which other theses it seeks to engage with, support, challenge or even overturn. Rather than deal with this, the book’s introduction functions as a sort of microcosm of the much larger body of the main text and says nothing of what the author might consider the strong and weak points of the existing bibliography on Italian totalitarianism. Neither can it be fortuitous in this regard that Ventrone’s book finishes somewhat abruptly at page 281, when one might have legitimately expected that the laboriously detailed argument be summed up in a conclusion, in particular as regards the relationship between the war’s character and what emerged out of it. Following Ventrone’s exposition, one can deduce that fascist-type violence already existed within the war as the spearhead of the totalitarian project. But surely all this provides further evidence for the case that such thoughts and actions fermented in the war due to its imperialist character and the Italian ruling class’s fear and hatred of Italy’s working population and its economic and political organizations. Yet Ventrone’s overall approach leaves him never really offering a definition of the character of the war.
which proved such a fertile terrain for the totalitarian vision. In its place there stands a somewhat literary-idealistic approach to the sources, with terms such as “ideological contamination” being used to explain the increasing “confusion” between the ideas of the “left” and “right”, and dates of quoted documents chopping and changing as though there was a certain meaninglessness to what in fact was the shifting social, political and military face of the European war as manifest in Italy. Greater historical contextualization would not have done any harm to this book. Ventrone’s volume can nevertheless be listed among those other important studies mentioned above which contribute in no small way to a greater understanding of what fascism and totalitarianism are and from where they transpired.

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