



'The Way We Were': Everyday Life in Fascist Italy and Lessons of *Alltagsgeschichte*

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Abstract

This article shows the benefits to be drawn by applying to Fascist Italy an approach that has emerged within the German literature on Nazism within the field of *Alltagsgeschichte* or the history of everyday life. That approach has the potential to counter a nostalgic, rose-tinted and depoliticized view of life under Fascism, which has arisen in Italian public discourse since the crisis of anti-Fascism in the 1990s. Through a series of vignettes, the authors illustrate how 'ordinary' Italians encountered the Fascist state within the spaces of daily life.

Keywords

everyday life, Fascism, Italy

In July 2011, the Italian broadcaster RAI3 aired *Cartoline dal Ventennio* [*Postcards from the Fascist Era*], an episode of the popular history series *La Grande Storia*. The programme opens with familiar scenes, accompanied by an ominous soundtrack: the March on Rome, the oceanic crowds under the Duce's balcony, Hitler and Mussolini walking together, bombs falling on Italian cities. The narrator then announces that 'all this' – seemingly alluding to the political history of Italian Fascism – 'has been analysed in its every aspect, from every point of view'.¹ The tone shifts as the popular 1939 song

¹ RAI3, *La Grande Storia: Cartoline dal Ventennio* (2011). Available at: <https://www.raisplay.it/video/2011/07/Cartoline-dal-Ventennio—La-Grande-Storia-853a5f30-a7f6-442e-89b0-3c3e42d32406.html> (accessed 16 September 2015).

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‘Mille lire al mese’ [‘A Thousand Lire a Month’] begins to play, and images of dictatorship and war are replaced by footage of smiling children and beach holidays. Unlike other documentaries on the Fascist period, the narrator explains,

Tonight ... we will recount another history ... the small, everyday history of those long twenty years: the dreams, the hopes, the illusions, the struggles, the habits, in sum the life of Italians in those years. Work, family, school, but also holidays, sport, fashion and recreation. We will leaf through the album of a different Italy, far from officialdom, from the images of the regime, and recounted through the testimony of those who lived in that Italy.

Cartoline del Ventennio – and the books upon which it was based, including Gian Franco Venè’s *Mille lire al mese* (1988), Giordano Bruno Guerri’s *Fascisti* (1995) and Romano Bracalini’s *Otto milioni di biciclette* (2007) – exemplify a genre often described as *come eravamo* or ‘the way we were’: the nostalgic, even saccharine, evocation of a shared national experience, crafted from reminiscences, old newsreels and family photographs.² Bracalini, for example, sought to

recreate the atmosphere, the climate, the feelings, even the sounds and smells ... of that Italy which now appears so remote and unrecognizable to us. ... How did one travel, and how much did it cost? Is it true that trains were more punctual and faster than those of today? Is it true that Fascism invented mass tourism with its ‘people’s trains’, summer colonies and the Topolino [the original Fiat 500]? How did one eat? How did one have fun, what did the radio play, what did newspapers write? How much did a state employee earn, and how much did bread cost? How much was the *lira* worth?³

Mussolini’s Italy thus appears both foreign and familiar. On the one hand, it is located firmly in the past: a distant regime in herky-jerky black and white, filled with salutes and uniforms that to a contemporary audience may appear more comical than sinister. On the other, it seems a prefiguration of the present, with ordinary people – including, implicitly, the viewers’ own relatives – living recognizably modern lives. Indeed, the Fascist period as a whole is presented in these popular works as an era of affluence and opportunity. It witnessed the emergence of a new middle class; the advent of radio, cinema and other mass media; the arrival of domestic appliances, automobiles and other conveniences; the adoption of new hairstyles, fashions and diets; and new recreational opportunities for adults and children alike, provided by the regime’s after-work and youth organizations. A new horizon of expectation had opened for the ‘average Italian’, as expressed in the bourgeois fantasies of ‘Mille lire al mese’: ‘a modest job

² Tiziana Ferrero-Regis, ‘From Cinecittà to the Small Screen’, in Frank Burke, ed., *A Companion to Italian Cinema* (London 2017), 295. See also Andrea Mammone and Giuseppe A. Veltri, ‘La memoria daltonica del fascismo’, *Il Ponte*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (2007), 89–97; and Claudio Fogu, ‘Italiani brava gente: The Legacy of Fascist Historical Culture on Italian Politics of Memory’, in Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner and Claudio Fogu, eds, *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham, NC 2006), 147–76.

³ Romano Bracalini, *Otto milioni di biciclette: la vita degli italiani nel Ventennio* (Milan 2007), 8.

... a house in the suburbs ... a simple, sweet little wife'.⁴ According to Guerri, 'in Fascist Italy, one didn't live badly especially compared to "before"'.⁵

Equally typical of these works is their tendency to cast Italians as apolitical subjects of a totalitarian regime. Even though Guerri rejected the image of the populace as 'an inert mass', he also maintained that 'given the impossibility of having a truly active political role, the people passed slowly through different attitudes and states of mind, even if these had little to no influence on the choices of a regime that, as they used to say, would "carry on regardless"'.⁶ Fascism, in other words, was something that *happened to* Italians, to which they passively *responded*, not something in which they actively participated. The regime's policies – whether beneficial or harmful – were handed down by distant, impersonal forces, leaving ordinary people to obey, adapt and persevere. Children dutifully memorized the Duce's maxims; autarchy forced housewives to be creative in their use of food scraps and old clothes. The only genuine 'Fascists' were a small minority of fanatical Blackshirts, not the millions who joined the party out of 'familial necessity'.⁷ Otherwise, most Italians were 'ordinary' people pursuing 'normal' existences, and politics rarely intruded into their daily lives.

Following on from this vision of a Fascist Italy with few real Fascists, evocations of 'the way we were' tend to rest on a 'colour-blind' conception of the *Ventennio* that minimizes ideology, skirts uncomfortable facts and refrains from critical assessments.⁸ Their authors, typically journalists of a conservative bent rather than academic historians, frame daily life under Mussolini as a world apart, a private sphere insulated from politics; correspondingly, anyone challenging this portrait is 'politicizing' innocent nostalgia and happy childhood memories. Guerri, for example, denounces 'fifty years of anti-Fascist rhetoric', which 'makes it almost impossible to understand what Fascism really was and why it exerted such influence over Italians. We must thus make a retrospective effort to see those years through the mentality of the time, in order to judge them more fairly and reasonably'.⁹ Bracalini asserts that 'it was necessary for me to discard all pre-conceptions, and especially the idea of knowing how it would all end up, in order to judge with the necessary serenity every aspect of daily life, as it was in reality and not as it should have been, as partisan historians sometimes claim'.¹⁰ An 'objective'

⁴ 'un modesto impiego ... una casettina in periferia ... una mogliettina semplice e carina'.

⁵ Giordano Bruno Guerri, *Fascisti. Gli italiani di Mussolini: il regime degli italiani* (Milan 1995), 182.

⁶ Giordano Bruno Guerri, 'Vita politica e sociale', in *Gli anni Trenta: arte e cultura in Italia* (Milan 1982), 19.

⁷ The initials PNF – for Partito Nazionale Fascista – were often jokingly interpreted as '*per necessità familiare*' – 'for familial necessity'.

⁸ On critiques of such 'apolitical' mediatic representations, see Guido Crainz, 'I programmi televisivi sul fascismo e la Resistenza', in Enzo Collotti, ed., *Fascismo e antifascismo. Rimozioni, revisioni, negazioni* (Rome 2000), 463–92; and Nicola Tranfaglia, 'Fascismo e mass media: dall'intervista di De Felice agli sceneggiati televisivi', *Passato e Presente*, Vol. 3 (1983), 135–48. One finds a similar 'humanizing' or 'indulgent' tendency in popular biographical treatments of Mussolini and other Fascist leaders; see, for example, Stephen Gundle, 'The Aftermath of the Mussolini Cult: History, Nostalgia and Popular Culture', in Stephen Gundle, Christopher Duggan, and Giuliana Pieri, eds, *The Cult of the Duce: Mussolini and the Italians* (Manchester 2013), 241–56.

⁹ Guerri, *Fascisti*, 3.

¹⁰ Bracalini, *Otto milioni di biciclette*, 8.

reconstruction, drawing on the memories of ‘those who were really there’, is posited as an antidote to ‘biased’ critiques, invariably coming from the anti-Fascist left.

Despite such pretensions to neo-Rankean objectivity – *Fascismus wie er eigentlich gewesen ist* – these gauzy portraits rest on a number of problematic and partial assumptions. Some are methodological: an overreliance on personal anecdotes, especially from the generation born in the 1920s, that reinforce a nostalgic, child’s-eye view of life under Mussolini; a similar dependence on the newsreels and photographs of Istituto Luce, as though the regime’s visual propaganda arm offered an unfiltered representation of reality; defining the *italiano medio* as a middle-class urbanite, thereby depicting the population as uniform and homogenous, to the exclusion (for example) of religious and linguistic minorities. The narratives are selective in their periodization, omitting the unpleasantness of the years preceding the *Ventennio* (political terror and the capitulation of the Italian state) as well as the horrors of the Second World War.¹¹ The definitive experience of Italians under Mussolini, in other words, occurred during the stable ‘Years of Consensus’ between the late Twenties and mid-Thirties. Fascism’s conquest of power, embrace of racism, wars of aggression and catastrophic defeat are treated as exceptional bookends or the result of German influence, rather than as integral to the regime’s trajectory. This same selectivity is also evident in the delineation of the ‘ordinary’ from the ‘political’. The uniforms and camping trips of the Opera Nazionale Balilla are recalled enthusiastically by interviewees, but their indoctrinating purpose is overlooked; the artificial bouillon cube Italdado is another font of nostalgia, but the events that led to its invention – the illegal invasion of Ethiopia, which precipitated international sanctions and food shortages – are mentioned only in passing. ‘Modernizing’ initiatives like the reclamation of the Pontine Marshes and industrial investment are hailed, but their impact on real people, the motives behind them (above all, preparation for war) and their actual results remain unacknowledged.¹² Historicization, it seems, does not extend to understanding causes, contexts or outcomes. The result ends up being the opposite: in the words of Guido Crainz, ‘a “private [realm]”, stripped of history [and] placed in the spotlight, while history and its dramas recede into the shadows’.¹³

In this way, mediatic representations of daily life have often served as a means of humanizing and trivializing the Fascist era, which in turn feeds both self-exculpatory narratives – Italians as ‘good people’ who bore no responsibility for misdeeds – and ongoing efforts to valorize many aspects of Mussolini’s regime.¹⁴ While these claims circulated in neo-Fascist circles for decades, they gained new public prominence with the political

¹¹ *Cartoline del Ventennio*, for example, ends with Mussolini’s declaration of war in June 1940, at which point, the narrator concludes, ‘the spell was already broken’.

¹² Similar criticisms were made of a 1984 exhibition on ‘The Italian Economy between the Wars, 1919–1939’; see Guido Crainz, ‘Il fascismo al Colosseo’, *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1985), 127–35; Tim Mason, ‘Il fascismo “Made in Italy”’. *Mostra sull’economia tra le due guerre*, *Italia Contemporanea*, Vol. 158 (1985), 5–32.

¹³ Crainz, ‘I programmi televisivi sul fascismo e la Resistenza’, 469.

¹⁴ See for example Angelo Del Boca, *Italiani, brava gente? Un mito duro a morire* (Vicenza 2005); Filippo Focardi and Lutz Klinkhammer, ‘The Question of Fascist Italy’s War Crimes: The Construction of a Self-Acquitting Myth (1943–1948)’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2004), 330–48.

upheavals of the 1990s as new voices on the right – including Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia and the 'post-Fascist' Alleanza Nazionale – challenged the anti-Fascist foundations of the Italian Republic.¹⁵ Today, it has become an article of faith for many Italians that 'Mussolini also did some good things' [*Mussolini ha fatto anche delle cose buone*]. As Antonio Tajani, then the President of the European Parliament, recently asserted, 'Mussolini built roads, bridges, buildings, sporting facilities, he reclaimed many parts of our Italy, the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction. When one gives a historical judgment, one must be objective'.¹⁶ Such voices posit a moral balance sheet, in which material improvements in Italians' lives are weighed against regrettable missteps: infrastructure projects and pension schemes versus the antisemitic Racial Laws and the Axis alliance.¹⁷ Everyday life under Fascism functions not only as politically and morally neutral terrain, but as a site of beneficial (and beneficent) modernization.

Scholarly histories of Italian society under Mussolini have provided more variegated and complex assessments. For decades, the terms of inquiry have largely been framed in relation to the work of Renzo De Felice, and in particular by his argument that, at its height, the Fascist regime commanded a popular *consenso* (translatable as both *consent* and *consensus*), deriving from a transaction in which the average Italian's 'private life was rarely touched [by the regime], and not in a heavy-handed way, while the advantages, both real or presumed, that [it] conferred outweighed the disadvantages'.¹⁸ Subsequent scholarship has elaborated and complicated this thesis.¹⁹ Many historians have foregrounded mechanisms of courting consensus, of 'going to the people' with institutions like the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro (OND, the after-work organization), the Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB, for youth) and the Massaie Rurali (for rural housewives).²⁰ This entailed not only obtaining popular support, but (in the words of

¹⁵ On memory politics since the 1990s, see, for example, Andrea Mammone, 'A Daily Revision of the Past: Fascism, Anti-Fascism, and Memory in Contemporary Italy', *Modern Italy*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2006), 211–26; Roberto Chiarini, *25 aprile: la competizione politica sulla memoria* (Venice 2005); Sergio Luzzatto, *La crisi dell'antifascismo* (Turin 2004).

¹⁶ *La Repubblica* (2019) 'E Antonio Tajani elogia Benito Mussolini: "Ha fatto cose positive"'. Available at: https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2019/03/13/news/centrodestra_antonio_tajani_mussolini_ha_fatto_anche_cose_buone_-221479884 (accessed 1 December 2020).

¹⁷ For a debunking of many of these claims, see Francesco Filippi, *Mussolini ha fatto anche cose buone: le idiozie che continuano a circolare sul fascismo* (Turin 2019). On the revisionist 'balance sheet' see Joshua Arthurs, 'The Anatomy of Controversy, from Charlottesville to Rome', *Modern Italy*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2019), 123–38.

¹⁸ Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il duce. Gli anni del consenso 1929–1936* (Turin 1996), 3, 1, 55.

¹⁹ For an insightful dissection of debates over consent and consensus, see Roberta Pergher and Giulia Albanese, 'Historians, Fascism, and Italian Society: Mapping the Limits of Consent', in Giulia Albanese and Roberta Pergher, eds, *In the Society of Fascists: Acclamation, Acquiescence, and Agency in Mussolini's Italy* (New York 2012), 1–28.

²⁰ See for example Victoria de Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge 1981); Tracy H. Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight: Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Italy 1922–1943* (Chapel Hill, NC 1985); Perry Willson, *Peasant Women and Politics in Fascist Italy: The Massaie Rurali* (London 2002). A valuable attempt to gauge 'popular opinion' – from the vantage point of the regime – is Simona Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani sotto il regime 1929–1943* (Rome 1991).

Patrizia Dogliani) ‘a unitary, authoritarian project of transforming society, mentalities, gender roles, tasks assigned to generations and to individuals, even in the private sphere. ... policies created to remake society and create “new” Italians, and the genuine consensus obtained by such projects’.²¹ Demographic campaigns, land reclamation schemes and – most dramatically – warfare were all instruments for the refashioning of hearts, minds and bodies in Fascism’s image. This focus on the regime’s ‘totalitarian’ aspirations has been extended to the cultural sphere, with emphases on the role of political ritual, spectacle and symbols in the construction of the new *homo fascistus*.²²

This work contributed tremendously to our understanding of the Fascist vision for Italy, and the regime’s efforts to actualize it through a combination of incentives, indoctrination and coercion. For the most part, however, these studies persist in representing Italians themselves – in a manner not dissimilar from *Cartoline del Ventennio* – as passive recipients of the regime’s projects, rather than historical actors or participants in a system. There are, of course, important exceptions to this characterization, such as the ethnographically-informed work of Luisa Passerini and Alessandro Portelli, and related studies of working-class communities that emphasize enduring cultures of ‘*sovversivismo*’ and resistance (often to establish genealogies for the organized anti-Fascist Resistance of 1943–45).²³ Recent Anglophone scholarship has also begun to shift the focus from top-down ‘totalitarian’ analyses to the lived experience and subjective response of ordinary people.²⁴

Even with these developments, critical histories of everyday life under Mussolini – ones that interrogate and problematize the prosperous, pacific and apolitical representations promoted in *Cartoline del Ventennio* and elsewhere – remain at a relatively nascent stage. To further this endeavour, we propose looking to German historiography of the Third Reich, where *Alltagsgeschichte* – literally, the history of everyday life – has maintained a robust presence for decades. When it first emerged in the 1980s, *Alltagsgeschichte* presented a challenge both to traditional political history, preoccupied with the actions of NSDAP leaders and the role of Nazi ideology, and to social-scientific approaches that explained Nazism and its crimes using the tools of modernization theory (the thesis, by now well-worn, of Germany’s *Sonderweg* or ‘special path’ of historical development).

²¹ Patrizia Dogliani, *Il fascismo degli italiani: una storia sociale* (Turin 2014), 12.

²² Emilio Gentile, *Il culto del littorio. La sacralizzazione della politica nell’Italia fascista* (Rome 1993) and Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy* (Berkeley, CA 1997) remain foundational in this regard.

²³ See, for example, Luisa Passerini, *Torino operaia e fascismo: una storia orale* (Rome 1984); Alessandro Portelli, *L’ordine è già stato eseguito: Roma, le Fosse Ardeatine, la memoria* (Rome 1999); Giovanni De Luna, *Donne in oggetto. L’antifascismo nella società italiana 1922–1939* (Turin 1995); Guido Quazza, *Resistenza e storia d’Italia: problemi e ipotesi di ricerca* (Milan 1976); Gianpasquale Santomassimo, ‘Antifascismo popolare’, *Italia Contemporanea*, Vol. 140 (1980), 39–69.

²⁴ These include Joshua Arthurs, Michael R. Ebner, and Kate Ferris, eds, *The Politics of Everyday Life in Fascist Italy: Outside the State?* (New York 2017); Kate Ferris, *Everyday Life in Fascist Venice, 1929–40* (New York 2012); Paul Corner, *The Fascist Party and Popular Opinion in Mussolini’s Italy* (New York 2012); Christopher Duggan, *Fascist Voices: An Intimate History of Mussolini’s Italy* (New York 2012); Michael R. Ebner, *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini’s Italy* (New York 2011).

Instead, it centred the experiences of

ordinary people (*kleine Leute*) [T]heir world of work and nonwork [H]ousing and homelessness, clothing and nakedness, eating habits and hunger, people's loves and hates, their quarrels and cooperation, memories, anxieties, hopes for the future.... [A]ttention is focused not just on the deeds (and misdeeds) and pageantry of the great, the masters of church and state. Rather, central to the thrust of everyday historical analysis is the life and survival of those who have remained largely anonymous in history – the 'nameless' multitudes in their workaday trials and tribulations ...²⁵

This reconstruction of everyday life was not simply a nostalgic evocation of sights, sounds and smells. Rather, practitioners of *Alltagsgeschichte* like Martin Broszat, Alf Lüdke and Detlev Peukert emphasized the agency and subjectivity of ordinary Germans: their strategies of compliance, negotiation, refusal (*Resistenz*) and self-assertion (*Eigensinn*) in the face of Nazi coordination (*Gleichschaltung*); their capacity to interpret and make meaning of the regime's ideological overtures; and the ways in which their daily routines and behaviours were both shaped – and, reciprocally, informed – by the practices of the totalitarian state. Far from being insulated from politics, everyday life was a critical arena in which Germans variously contributed to, accepted, avoided and/or resisted the project of constructing the new 'People's Community' (*Volksgemeinschaft*).²⁶

From the outset, the turn towards everyday history was not without its critics.²⁷ To historians favouring structuralist interpretations, *Alltagsgeschichte* appeared 'untheoretical' or even 'antitheoretical', in that it privileged the 'sympathetic' reconstruction of quotidian mundanities over the macroscopic economic, political and social forces that defined Germans' experiences under the Third Reich.²⁸ More profoundly, this question of 'sympathy' also prompted charges of moral relativism. In his celebrated 'historicization' debate with Broszat – itself an outgrowth of the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s – Saul Friedländer warned that foregrounding 'the noncriminal, nonideological, and nonpolitical aspects of the epoch ... and the ordinariness of many aspects of the Third Reich' would undercut the exceptionality of the Nazi era and erode the 'overall moral quarantine' to

²⁵ Alf Lüdtkke, 'Introduction: What Is the History of Everyday Life and Who Are Its Practitioners?', in Alf Lüdtkke, ed., *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton, NJ 1995), 3–4.

²⁶ See, for example, Andrew Stuart Bergerson, *Ordinary Germans in Extraordinary Times: The Nazi Revolution in Hildesheim* (Bloomington, IN 2004); and Detlev J. K. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*, Richard Deveson, trans. (New Haven, CT 1989).

²⁷ Useful overviews of the *Alltagsgeschichte* debates of the late 1980s, published more or less contemporaneously, include Carola Lipp, 'Writing History as Political Culture: Social History Versus "Alltagsgeschichte": A German Debate', *Storia della Storiografia*, Vol. 17 (1990), 66–99; Martin Jay, 'Songs of Experience: Reflections on the Debate over *Alltagsgeschichte*', *Salmagundi*, Vol. 81 (1989), 29–41; Geoff Eley, 'Labor History, Social History, "Alltagsgeschichte": Experience, Culture, and the Politics of the Everyday – a New Direction for German Social History?', *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (1989), 297–343; Mary Nolan, 'The Historikerstreit and Social History', *New German Critique*, Vol. 44 (1988), 51–80.

²⁸ Jürgen Kocka, 'Theory and Social History: Recent Developments in West Germany', *Social Research*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (1980), 445–6.

which Hitler's regime had been banished in German memory.²⁹ Emphasizing the agency – including the capacity for resistance – of ordinary people minimized the criminal and repressive character of the Nazi state; likewise, reconstructing their private subjectivities presented a slippery slope towards the uncritical acceptance of self-justifying narratives or even empathy with the agents of atrocity.³⁰ Reconstructing everyday life under Hitler, in sum, opened the door to relativization and even apologia.

In many respects, then, German critics of *Alltagsgeschichte* seem to have anticipated the problems posed by 'the way we were' narratives like those evident in the Italian context. Its German proponents, on the other hand, have argued that far from whitewashing or banalizing, the history of everyday life permits a more rigorous 'concretization' for moral assessments of the Nazi past.³¹ Exploring the ambiguities of identification shed new light on German toleration of, acquiescence to, or participation in, the crimes of their regime; this more variegated picture proved more 'morally useful' than the 'strait-jacket of the notion that the Nazi Regime was simply the all-encompassing rule of force', and rendered 'more comprehensible why such large segments of a civilized nation succumbed mistakenly – and to such a massive degree – to National Socialism and Hitler'.³² Indeed, the very concept of normality was instrumentalized by the Nazi authorities to ensure compliance and cooperation, by encouraging citizens to police their own communities and sanction 'subversive' or 'disruptive' behaviour.³³ Rather than conflating the 'normal' with normalization, or imagining it as an 'enclave of benign normalcy untouched by the events outside its borders', historians should understand it as profoundly politicized and 'contested terrain'.³⁴

In what follows, we explore those everyday practices, activities and spaces indicated as apolitical by the likes of *Cartoline del Ventennio*: 'work, family, school, ... holidays, sport, fashion and recreation. To do so we heed Lüdtke's enjoinder to pay attention to both 'contexts and miniatures'.³⁵ Examining 'individual situations – and the ambivalences and multiple meanings in those situations', linking these stories and assembling them into an analytical 'collage' or 'mosaic' of 'miniatures' is not conceived as an attempt to construct a comprehensive 'total history' from its smallest components or use micro-stories as building blocks to see the bigger (and by implication better)

²⁹ Saul Friedländer, 'Some Reflections on the Historicization of National Socialism', in Baldwin, ed., *Reworking the Past*, 96.

³⁰ According to critics, the emblematic example of this tendency was Andreas Hillgruber, who called for historians to 'identify' with the outlook of German soldiers on the Eastern Front, who believed themselves to be fighting a defensive war against Soviet barbarism; see for example Nolan, 'The Historikerstreit and Social History', 66.

³¹ Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer, 'A Controversy about the Historicization of National Socialism', *New German Critique*, Vol. 44 (1988), 100.

³² Martin Broszat, 'A Plea for the Historicization of National Socialism', in Peter Baldwin, ed., *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historians' Debate* (Boston, MA 1990), 78, 87; Broszat and Friedländer, 'A Controversy about the Historicization of National Socialism', 99.

³³ See especially Bergerson, *Ordinary Germans in Extraordinary Times*.

³⁴ Jay, 'Songs of Experience', 35.

³⁵ Lüdtke, 'Introduction' 20.

picture. Rather, the critical value of an *Alltagsgeschichte*-type ‘collage of miniatures’ rests in its ability to lay out some of the messiness, multiplicities, inconsistencies and ‘density of life situations’ and, by extension, of historical processes, by illuminating the ‘refractions, secondary tones and undertones, hidden motifs and results’ that bring into relief ‘societal “patchwork” structures’ and the structures and relations of power, in this case between, across and within the Fascist dictatorship and Italians’ lived experience.³⁶

Through our analytical frame of ‘contexts and miniatures’, we argue that the actions, behaviours and relationships enacted and formed in the spaces and practices highlighted by *Cartoline del Ventennio* were not ‘far from officialdom, from the images of the regime’.³⁷ On the contrary, the ‘everyday’ was supremely political in the Italian Fascist dictatorship as it was – and is – in other times and places, dictatorial and otherwise. The very arenas, institutions and practices singled out by the documentary as archetypically removed from politics such as workplaces and schools, leisure and consumer activities, family relationships and domestic spaces were actually crucial settings and frames in and through which Italians encountered the Fascist regime, and in and through which political relations between individuals, groups and the state – what have been called the ‘microphysics of power’ – were effectively constituted and played out.³⁸ In part, this politicized everyday resulted from the regime’s own intrusions and its intent to rule Italians totally, by extending its presence into daily work, school, recreation and domestic life.³⁹ More importantly, though, the everyday was – to invert *Cartoline del Ventennio*’s phrase – *close* to officialdom in Fascist Italy (as elsewhere) because the spaces, practices and occasions inhabited, enacted and experienced in day-to-day life were precisely those in which ‘ordinary’ people and the state most often came into contact with one another. Using the very categories identified by *Cartoline del Ventennio* as ‘far from officialdom’, the remainder of this article will seek to demonstrate not only how the everyday was a crucial site of encounter between individual Italians and the dictatorship, but also that the everyday is therefore a critically important arena in which political relations are effected. The everyday was no benign backdrop to dictatorship; rather, it was precisely where the dictatorship was put into practice. Everyday political relations were real and important relations and articulations of power that made up the ‘actually-existing’ dictatorship and could work to secure – or, potentially, undermine – the dictatorship.

In the first place, the Fascist regime intentionally and actively made its presence felt in Italians’ ‘work, family, school, ... holidays, sport, fashion and recreation’.⁴⁰

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20–1.

³⁷ RAI3, *La Grande Storia: Cartoline dal Ventennio* (2011).

³⁸ Philipp Sarasin, quoted in Paul Steege et al., ‘The History of Everyday Life: A Second Chapter’, *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 80, No. 2 (2008), 361.

³⁹ Christopher Duggan’s important book *Fascist Voices* details the reach of the regime into Italians’ everyday worlds. Christopher Duggan *Fascist Voices. An Intimate History of Mussolini’s Italy* (London 2013).

⁴⁰ It is, of course, also the case that contemporary non-dictatorial governments intervened, imposing particular ideals and values through policy and rhetoric, in all of these areas of everyday life – for example, through policies recognizing ‘the family as a building block of state power’ or seeking to counter the Hollywood-led cultural onslaught of foreign films and the practices and mores they purveyed, with protectionist subsidies to preserve

The dictatorship entered workplaces through multiple routes: from the creation of corporatist syndicates to the requirement to hold a PNF membership card in order to access many types of work, to the threat of withdrawing work permits and syndicate cards – and therefore employment – in order to deter people from speaking out against the regime, ordinary Italians' access to and conduct at work was thoroughly politicized and policed.⁴¹ Jobs and *raccomandazioni* [personal recommendations] could be gifted or transacted by *federali* and other local political bosses.⁴² In schools, teachers taught Fascist songs, incorporated nuggets of Fascist doctrine or key regime events in lessons, and secondary school teachers were required to swear an oath of allegiance to the state. Nor were families and their domestic spaces free of regime interference: ONMI, the national state agency for maternity and infancy, enacted interventions intended to court Italian parents' support, incentivize particular behaviours (including procreating large families) and to discipline, even usurp, parents. Health visitors [*visitatrici fasciste*] entered homes to inspect (predominantly working-class) parenting and domesticity and to advise on infant health.⁴³ Just as PNF membership was required to access certain jobs, membership of the *Opera Nazionale Balilla*, the regime's organization for children, until 1937 (when membership became compulsory), was either required or strongly advised for children to access educational scholarships, prizes and bursaries, and university places.⁴⁴

As for 'holidays, sport, fashion and recreation', from 1925, the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*, first under the aegis of the regime's corporatist system and then under the PNF, replaced or subsumed recreational societies and activities organized by civil society and provided – free or at low cost – leisure facilities and activities, from skiing and tennis to cinema and amateur dramatics for its just under 4 million members (by 1939).⁴⁵ Even leisure practices that did not take place under the OND's direction were not detached from 'politics': in bars, the Duce's speeches were transmitted on radios – which for most – unlike in Nazi Germany – were financially out of reach as domestic accoutrements – and regime proclamation posters, along with Mussolini's portrait, often adorned the walls;⁴⁶ cinemas aired Istituto Luce newsreels before the main transmission, which, increasingly through the 1930s, were products of the state-sponsored

domestic film industries. See, for example, Hester Barron and Claudia Siebrecht, 'Introduction: Raising the Nation' in Hester Barron and Claudia Siebrecht, eds, *Parenting and the State in Britain and Europe, c. 1870–195* (London 2017), 2; Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA 2005), 284–335.

⁴¹ Paul Corner, 'Everyday Fascism in the 1930s: Centre and Periphery in the Decline of Mussolini's Dictatorship', *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2006), 213.

⁴² R. J. B. Bosworth, 'Per necessità famigliare: Hypocrisy and Corruption in Fascist Italy', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (2000), 357–87.

⁴³ Kate Ferris, 'Parents, Children and the Fascist State: The Production and Reception of Children's Magazines in 1930s Italy', in Barron and Siebrecht, eds, *Parenting and the State in Britain and Europe*, 186.

⁴⁴ Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight*, 95–6.

⁴⁵ de Grazia, *The Culture of Consent*, 229.

⁴⁶ Kate Ferris, 'Everyday Spaces: Bars, Alcohol and the Spatial Framing of Everyday Political Practice and Interaction in Fascist Italy', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (2022), 136–59.

film studio, Cinecittà; dance halls and the music for dancing that was the mainstay of the national radio broadcaster EIAR [*Ente Italiana per le Audizioni Radiofoniche*] were subject to political scrutiny, especially from the second half of the 1930s when the regime's anti-League of Nations rhetoric and the broader escalation of its racist imperial project prompted EIAR to desist programming 'music in a Negro character' and 'dance music with choruses sung in English', and to dismiss from their jobs non-Italian and Jewish Italian musicians.⁴⁷ Forms of domestic tourism which many Italians were able to experience for the first time occurred under the aegis of the OND's 'popular trains' programme or the EOA (*Ente Opera Assistenziale*, the regime's welfare organization) network of holiday camps for children.⁴⁸ Whilst such provisions undoubtedly were meant to – and did – fulfil the regime's intentions to entice Italians' support for, or at least acquiescence in, Fascism by marking the regime as improving their welfare and material wellbeing, they were simultaneously vehicles for increasing regime surveillance and social control over the population. The children's holiday camps, for example, provided both (usually working-class) children with the opportunity to experience the fresh air of a seaside or mountain location, and regime officials with the opportunity to drill and indoctrinate the children through military-type exercises and the recitation of Mussolini's aphorisms, away from their parents.⁴⁹ In this vein, the 'new' recreational and consumer activities and objects that did indeed become increasingly available to the 'average Italian' during the *Ventennio*, were not (only) the expression of an 'apolitical' aspirational modern way of living but were key conduits for the implementation, and negotiation, of dictatorial ideology, policy and practice.

These sites and dimensions of everyday life presented in *Cartoline del Ventennio* were also the venues, institutions and practices in and during which direct confrontational encounters of a political nature between individual Italians and the dictatorship took place and, therefore, took shape. The records of the public security police, tasked with prosecuting so-called political crime, document the investigation of individual or small groups of Italians for the political crimes of 'subversion'. Using the approach taken by *Alltagsgeschichte* pioneers to build a 'collage of miniatures' from the multiple individual stories, or 'miniatures', contained within the police files, we see the predominance of everyday venues in these moments of political encounter. To be clear, these records document activities that were specifically anti-regime and encounters between the state and individuals who were suspected of holding – and in many instances evidently did hold – 'subversive' views. What they illustrate is how everyday work, domestic and leisure spaces and practices were used by individual Italians and identified by the regime as occasions and venues for political sociability and conduct; these were quotidian spaces in which

⁴⁷ Jacopo Tomatis, *Storia culturale della canzone italiana* (Milan 2019), 34; Anna Harwell Celenza, *Jazz Italian Style: From its Origins in New Orleans to Fascist Italy and Sinatra* (Cambridge 2017), 110–18; Anna Tonelli, *E ballando ballando. La storia d'Italia a passi di danza (1815-1996)* (Milan 1998), 212; Kate Ferris, 'Dancing through Dictatorship: Everyday Practices and Affective Experiences of Social Dancing in Fascist Italy', in Klaus Nathaus and James Nott, eds, *Worlds of Social Dancing: Practices, Transfers and Infrastructures between the World Wars* (Manchester 2022).

⁴⁸ de Grazia, *The Culture of Consent*, 180–1.

⁴⁹ Ferris, 'Parents, Children and the Fascist State', 187–8.

Italians directly confronted the dictatorship, no matter how politically active they were or considered themselves to be. An examination of 367 such episodes which took place across Italy between 1924 and 1941⁵⁰ reveals investigations of suspected low-level political crime ranging from organized clandestine political meetings (predominantly up to the mid-1920s) to small-scale criticisms of government policy, swearing and insults directed at Mussolini and other *gerarchi*, the telling of rude jokes and singing of political songs, often under the influence of alcohol, which took place in locations as varied as bars, streets and squares, shops, homes, workplaces, and even – in isolated cases – at local OND centres. Taking account for a moment only those cases (123 in total) investigated in the northern industrial province of Bergamo, for example, the majority of incidents investigated as political crimes between those years took place in *esercizi pubblici*, that is bars, restaurants and other spaces in which alcohol was purchased and consumed on the premises (55), followed by public streets and squares (45, many of these involving the prior consumption of alcohol), with a lower incidence in homes (4), Fascist civic spaces such as the local OND or fascio headquarters (2) and workplaces (9).⁵¹

Across the peninsula, workspaces were frequently venues for illicit political activity. In Rome, for example in December 1923, a barber's shop was investigated for hosting 'meetings hostile to the current government', described by the regime informer who had infiltrated the meeting as 'a veritable den of anti-nationals'.⁵² This was not only a feature of the early years of Fascist rule, before the consolidation of the dictatorship from 1925–1926. In 1932, still in Rome, the three bosses and office manager of a glass-making firm were accused of speaking 'words inciting revolution and others expressing hatred of the Duce', carrying out 'anti-Fascist propaganda' among the workers and using 'opportune occasions' to fire the 'workers of Fascist sentiment'. In a reversal of the oft-cited tactic of Italians opposed to the regime to stay silent and voice criticisms of the regime only within the confines of the home, if at all, regime-supporting workers at this glassmaking firm avowedly felt compelled 'to have to keep quiet or lie, even to the authorities, about goings-on inside the glassmakers, as has apparently happened in the past'.⁵³

⁵⁰ These 367 episodes are recorded in the files of the Public Security Directorate [Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza] of the Interior Ministry, held at the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome. In total, 85 files from 50 different provinces across Italy and its colonies in Libya and East Africa were surveyed. Files were selected primarily in order to maximize the geographical and chronological range of the survey, with the exception of the provinces of Bergamo and Lecce for which the full run of files held for each province was surveyed.

⁵¹ Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome (ACS), Ministero dell'Interno (MI) Direzione Generale di Politica Sicurezza (DGPS) Affari Generali e Riservati (AGR) 1924 b.58 Bergamo; 1927 b.135 Bergamo; 1932 Sez.1a, b.3 Bergamo; 1935 b.3 Bergamo; 1937 b.3 Bergamo; 1939 b.8 Bergamo; 1940 b. 11b Bergamo; 1941 b.7 Bergamo. Twelve of the investigations conducted in Bergamo in these years did not specify the location of the suspected offence.

⁵² ACS MI DGPS AGR 1924 b.60 Roma.

⁵³ ACS MI DGPS AGR 1932 sez.1a, b.16 Roma. Subsequent investigation found no evidence of the company managers' anti-regime stances, nor of written incitements to revolution and/or against the Duce, although it was discovered that the previous year an anonymously written statement praising Lenin had been found in the work premises; the writer was never identified. It was also discovered that during the preceding year, over 200

As with the Roman glassworks, factories and manufacturing sites were the most frequently recorded workplace location for investigating potentially ‘subversive’ political behaviour, in line with the supposition that the urban, industrialized working class furnished the greatest threat in terms of regime opposition.⁵⁴ Politically-suspect comportment in factory settings took different forms, for example, from worker declarations of socialist principles and denunciation of Fascist policy, to listening to ‘enemy’ transmissions on the factory radio, to workplace jokes and banter gone (politically) wrong, as in the 1935 case of Milanese mechanic Pietro de Bernardi who, egged on by his workmate Carlo Cermusoni, drew two hammer and sickles in chalk on a column.⁵⁵ That Bernardi, a PNF member, immediately erased the offending communist emblem at the direction of another worker, attributing his actions to ‘a moment of madness’ and Cermusoni’s ‘in jest’, did not stop the incident – highly reminiscent of Alf Lüttke’s descriptions of workplace *eigensinnig* behaviours – being investigated at the highest level; the investigative report bears the stamp denoting ‘orders taken from His Excellency the Head of Government’ and, fortunately for Bernardi and Cermusoni, in Mussolini’s own hand, a benign ‘it’s fine [*sta bene*]’.⁵⁶

More unusual occasions and venues played host to suspect interactions and modes of comportment of a political nature, including weddings, funerals, prisons, and even public toilets. However, a key space for political encounters with the dictatorship was the home. Whilst homes figured relatively infrequently in the public security files, it must be remembered that those files record only those political altercations that went noted, denounced, and investigated by the Fascist authorities: we might speculate that private homes hosted and facilitated politically ‘subversive’ discussions, actions and practices more often than is indicated by the recorded incidents. Nevertheless, even the incidents that were somehow noted and therefore investigated demonstrate the range of political behaviours that could be enacted in the home. Importantly, it is in domestic spaces that evidence of women’s everyday political activity most readily emerges in the public security police files. As in the case of Sofia Sammarchi, a midwife from Bologna (with a previous conviction for ‘procuring’ abortion, criminalized by the regime), women were often involved in hosting gatherings of anti-Fascists in their homes; in July 1935 it was alleged that ‘antifascism was concocted, or at least Fascism was criticized, at Sammarchi’s place’.⁵⁷ Whilst the final outcome of that investigation was not recorded in the police files, a serious punishment of five years in *confino* [internal exile] was meted out on Matilde Casazza in 1937, mother of a 14-year-old girl and the

workers had been let go due to scarcity of work but no evidence was uncovered to suggest that ‘criteria of a political nature’ had been used in the dismissal process. The investigation recommended that additional surveillance of the firm be carried out.

⁵⁴ Tobias Abse, ‘Fascism and Working Class: Workers under Italian Fascism’, in Aristotle Kallis, ed., *The Fascism Reader* (London 2003), 391–8.

⁵⁵ ACS MI DGPS AGR 1935 b.7 Varese; 1941 b.7 Bengasi; 1935 b.5 Milano.

⁵⁶ On *Eigensinn*, see Thomas Lindenberger, ‘Eigen-Sinn, Domination and No Resistance’, *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 3, No. 8 (2015). Available at: http://docupedia.de/zg/Lindenberger_eigensinn_v1_en_2015 (accessed 2 January 2021); ACS MI DGPS AGR 1935 b.5 Milano.

⁵⁷ ACS MI DGPS AGR 1935 b.3 Bologna.

widow of a late Communist party member. Casazza was initially investigated for harbouring domestic material objects with communist symbolism at home but the police inquiry soon escalated to accuse her of hosting and consorting with known communists, again in her home.

When the police initially raided Casazza's home and found 'a red silk banner edged with black fringing and yellow-gold embroidery at the corners, 1.7 m high and wide, with the slogan "Workers of the world, unite" embroidered in black cotton at the centre, rediscovered hidden and sewn into a small quilt secreted between mattresses' alongside 'an old print depicting a soldier leaving for the war, accompanied by his mother who was exhorting him not to open fire against the enemy, as his brothers, a cut of red fabric around a metre in length and width and a roll of red paper, rediscovered in a chest of drawers in the bedroom', they did not find Casazza or her daughter there. They had left Novara in late July/early August, first to go to Casazza's home village where she found work in a cotton mill and then to Milan, where she was working in domestic service when she was arrested on the 12th of September. By then, the investigation had taken a more serious turn when it was discovered that Casazza was 'often visited' by a musician from Fara d'Adda and between mid-May and the end of June 'welcomed almost daily in her home the profiled communist Massimo Brunasso Cassinin'. One of the most striking aspects of this case is the conflation of political and intimate relations within the domestic setting. There was speculation that Brunasso 'hooked up with Casazza for, if you like, intimate relations, but it is not improbable that relations between the two were principally of a political nature'. Casazza's status as a widow, and specifically as the widow of a known PCI member, facilitated this elision between suspected illicit political and sexual activity; however, displaying truly breathtaking misogyny, the police investigators concluded, 'it must be remembered that Casazza has already surpassed forty years of age, is a woman with absolutely no physical attractiveness, who dresses simply, and only common political faith could connect her to Brunassi [sic]'. For her part Casazza revealed nothing, admitting only that the flag must have belonged to her deceased husband and that she had once been visited by a person unknown to her, for which she was rewarded with five years of internal exile.⁵⁸

As the public security files demonstrate, the regime recognized the activities and spaces of daily life as (also) political activities and spaces because it looked for, expected to find – and often did find – evidence of potentially 'subversive' political behaviour, interactions and relations within them. However, what an everyday life history approach intends to show is not only that these were activities and spaces in which 'ordinary' Italians identified and encountered the dictatorship and its politics, but also that these were themselves crucial practices and spaces in which that dictatorship and its politics were actually constituted. To illustrate this, we might take the examples of neighbourhood and family relations. Interactions and relationships were crucial conduits for individual political self-fashioning and expression. Of course, particular neighbourhoods took on particular reputations in terms of the politics of their inhabitants, such as the

⁵⁸ ACS MI DGPS AGR 1937 b.7 Novara.

area around Campo Santa Margherita in Venice, labelled the ‘Bolshevik quarter’ by one Fascist *squadrista* and known to many of its early twentieth-century residents as the ‘Republic of Santa Margherita’.⁵⁹ Such reputations were based on the class profile of local inhabitants and often on the presence of particular institutions such as *Case del Popolo* (Houses of the People; left-wing political/social centres), political party headquarters and workspaces like factories that employed large numbers of local inhabitants. Beyond this, the playing out of intimate relations between family members and neighbours who inhabited the same or adjacent dwellings, and the everyday practices and interactions enacted in these spaces, are where we see the fashioning of intimate political assertions and relations that may have been small in scale and reach but effectively constitute the ‘microphysics of power’ that *Alltagsgeschichte*-influenced historians recognize as critical components of what politics actually were – and are.

The case of Via San Leonardo and its surrounding neighbourhood, known in the early twentieth century as Campetto, in Bologna, described in exquisite detail in the memoir of Laura Faggioli (b. 1930) exemplifies how these local, domestic spaces and the relations, interactions and practices conducted therein were constitutive of the dictatorship, contributing to its making – and potential unmaking.⁶⁰ The *quartiere* of Campetto (now San Vitale) was, ‘one of the most disreputable neighbourhoods of the city’.⁶¹ Within the community, the Faggioli family were in the unusual and somewhat tricky position of being regime supporters (Laura’s father was ‘a Fascist of the first hour) when ‘everyone on the street was communist’.⁶² Regime politics and neighbourly politics were intertwined in the interactions between the Faggiolis and the families who shared the same courtyard. Perennial disputes over the use of communal space and noise were also opportunities for political altercation. Laura, for example, recalled how the noise generated during the childhood games she played in the courtyard with her siblings provoked the ire of ‘the communist fireman and his wife’ who lived at number 24 with windows looking out over the courtyard and were both ‘always quiet’ as well as ‘sworn enemies’ of Laura’s father. On one particular occasion, following a rowdy escapade involving a cat stuck in the courtyard tree, an argument escalated from Laura giving cheek to the fireman’s wife when she asked them to ‘knock it off making so much racket because my husband has just worked night-shift and wants to sleep’ to a full-blown argument between the four adults in which political affiliation was used as a slur, and understood as such, and the threat of denunciation deployed as a means to win the argument:

⁵⁹ Raffaele A. Vicentini, *Il movimento fascista veneto attraverso il diario di uno Squadrista* (Venice 1935), 113; Giovanni Sbordone, *Nella Repubblica di Santa Margherita. Storia di un campo veneziano nel primo Novecento* (Portogruaro 2003), 28, 153–66.

⁶⁰ Archivio Diaristico Nazionale, Pieve Santo Stefano (ADN), Laura Faggioli, ‘Ricordi di Via S. Leonardo e dintorni’ MP/98.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 6.

After [the arrival of the fireman in aid of his wife], entered in scene first my mother and then my father, and then the script was always the same.

Dad with wide, scowling eyes that would have single-handedly scared away several rabbits, shouted: 'you are a peasant who came down with the flood'.

And this was the apogee of insults for my father; the fact that he himself was born in Monzuno [a village south of Bologna] didn't bother him one little bit.

'You're nothing but an ugly Fascist', screamed in return the fireman, shirtless and in braces, with his overcrowded fat face, you could tell he was about to have a stroke.

And it seemed like what he said really was an insult because my father, his voice hardened, retorted:

'And you are a communist and thank God that I'm too nice and don't denounce you'.

And after that added as a sort of revenge:

'Bastard of a gravedigger'

And with the triumphant air of having the last laugh, he took cover indoors, the victor.⁶³

The family's reputation as Fascist, 'that is, scum' (Laura and her siblings were tainted by relational association as 'children of the Fascist') was compounded by their neighbours' perceptions of the family's socio-economic status. Laura reports that 'however we [the family] had another fault [besides being Fascist], that of being, us the grandchildren and my father the son of the owners of no. 22', the building restored by Laura's grandparent in which she resided with three generations of her family. As such, and because her 'lazy' taxi-driver father 'had a car and a garage', the family were 'considered the lords of the street, alongside the Azzegli family, but whilst the Azzeglis perhaps really were, our only luxury consisted in having indoor toilets in all the apartments in no. 22, whilst the other houses in San Leonardo had communal ones.'⁶⁴ On an intimate scale, in the courtyard between no. 22 and 24 Via San Leonardo, and its immediate environs, power relations were played out informed by the interplay of political affiliation and perceived association with the regime in addition to perceived socio-economic privilege. The Faggiolis were the 'lords of the street' because they had running water, an inside toilet that spared them the 'smell of pee' that pervaded the courtyards of the street with outside toilets, and a car in the garage, as well as because of Laura's father's proximity to the regime, as a Fascist 'of the first hour' in a neighbourhood in which 'everyone ... was

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 6–7.

communist'. Thus, whilst both Faggioli and his neighbour could trade political appellations – Fascist and communist – as insults in a discussion arising from the question of what constituted acceptable social conduct within a shared domestic space like the courtyard, it was Faggioli, the Fascist, who was able to bring to bear the threat of denunciation in order to win an archetypally neighbourly dispute.

Of course, relations between neighbours could also be deployed in efforts to protect individuals from the regime. This was the case in the small mountain community of Fleres and Colle Isarco located in the Dolomites, near the Austrian border, an area 'redeemed' to Italy following the Great War. When, in February 1935, a group of soldiers from the 6th Alpine regiment denounced the two teenage sons of a family in whose barn they had taken shelter for having expressed admiration for Hitler and disparaged Mussolini, the inhabitants of the community sought to close ranks in support of the youngsters. As part of the minority German-speaking population of Südtirol/Alto-Adige among whom the Fascist authorities were conducting an often coercive assimilation campaign, the combination of pro-Hitlerian and anti-Mussolinian sentiment was understood as a coded anti-Italian stance. Despite investigations in Fleres valley and Colle Isarco, 'no-one is able to testify against the family members especially where it concerned their political conduct'.⁶⁵ Even the local 'managers of Fascist organizations', the commanding officer's report lamented, were not willing to corroborate the investigators' suspicions that the teenagers were 'report[ing] conversations heard in or outside the home by people who harbour sentiments hostile to us [i.e., anti-Italian]'. Remaining convinced of their suspicions, the public security authorities imposed the (significant) punishment of *confino* [internal exile] on the elder brother, 19-year-old Siegfried/Sigfrido Holzer. A clue to the motive for the apparent closing of ranks by the local community in this case can be seen in a local (German-language) newspaper report published a few months later which archly observed that the soldiers denounced the brothers 'as a sign of gratitude for that farmer's hospitality', the implication being that the soldiers had, with their denunciation of the political conversation engaged in that night, failed to respect the deeply-rooted code of hospitality that afforded them overnight respite from difficult weather conditions in the outbuildings and homes of local inhabitants.⁶⁶

Interactions within families, between spouses and between parents and children, and thus at an even more intimate scale than the neighbourly and community interactions already discussed, were similarly crucial relations that mediated the implementation and lived experience of dictatorship. The family was understood by the regime as the 'basic cell of the State, the Nation and the people', a unit that in accordance with Mussolini's statement of totalitarian intent could not be left 'outside the state'.⁶⁷ At the same time, it was recognized that the family's value to the state lay precisely in its capacity to shift between outward- and inward-facing functions, as a simultaneously public and private entity. In both the cases mentioned above, dynamics within the

⁶⁵ ACS MI DGPS AGR 1935 b.9 Offese al Duce Bolzano.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Augusto Turati, 1928, cited in R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy: Life under the Dictatorship* (London 2006), 245.

family also played into negotiations of proximity and distance to the dictatorship. In the case of the Holzer family, the mother of Siegfried/Sigfrido and his younger brother, Ottone, intervened on behalf of the younger son, 'seek[ing] to explain her fourteen-year-old son Ottone's talkativeness, ascribing it to his very young age and therefore to his absolute lack of deliberation'.⁶⁸ Whilst the commanding officer dismissed her intervention as 'a justification after the act which intends to excuse him from the disciplinary measures they now fear', its message had some impact: the 'very young age' of Ottone was cited as the reason for which the investigating officers 'release[d him] with a caution to his father'.⁶⁹ In Bologna, the marital relationship between Laura Faggioli's mother and father was the conduit through which her 'Fascist of the first hour' father's political views were formed and his regime-allegiance performed. Laura's father, who according to her had been too 'lazy' to participate in the march on Rome, also refused to attend Fascist meetings [*adunate*]; in his stead 'my mother went, and then reported back when she returned home'.⁷⁰ This filtering of Fascist doctrine and performance through his wife in turn was the cause of domestic arguments:

It almost always ended in a fight, because my father invariably found idiotic the things said in those meetings and naturally the idiot became my mother who clearly got the wrong end of the stick.

To which she replied: 'Then next time, pick up the daily grind and go yourself since you understand everything'.

And peace was over for the rest of the day.⁷¹

Family was, according to Luisa Passerini following Horkheimer, 'a key site and agent' in processes of mediation, because of its 'persistent ambiguity in relation to power'.⁷² As Passerini demonstrated through interviews with working-class Turinese, individuals (often women) acted as mediators between other members of their family or circle, and local representatives of the Fascist state. Everyday fascism comprised 'a world of mediations' between the subjects and enforcers or representatives of Fascist authority which 'allow[ed] the latter's domination to be simultaneously accepted and modified'.⁷³

Mediators – people whose position of limited authority or privilege or whose function entailed some ambiguity in their relationship with authority – formed a bridge for negotiation and compromise between Fascist subjects and representatives of the dictatorship in

⁶⁸ ACS MI DGPS AGR 1935 b9 Offese al Duce Bolzano.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Faggioli, 'Ricordi di Via S. Leonardo e dintorni', 3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷² Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class*, R. Lumley and J. Bloomfield, trans (Cambridge 1987), 139. See also: Paul Ginsborg, *Family Politics: Domestic Life, Devastation and Survival 1900–1950* (New Haven, CT 2014).

⁷³ *Ibid.*

their everyday encounters. In the case of Ottone Holzer's mother the 'compromise' was intended to achieve distance for her son from the regime – to spare him from punishment – whilst Laura's mother's intercessions, attending PNF meetings on her husband's behalf and relaying regime news and policy to him, seem intended to maintain her family member's close connection to the regime. The result of these mediations could either be greater or lesser contact and compromise with the state, but they almost always were guided by the intention to derive personal benefit for oneself or one's family.

A final miniature, from the village of Medicina, near Bologna, points to both the complex interplay of personal relations (in this case between child, mother and father, and between pupil and teacher) that could be brought to bear to induce particular behaviours with respect to the regime and the ambivalent results of these. Lina Cattani, born in 1925 into a sharecropper farming family, recounted the occasion in 1933 when her third-year primary school teacher 'set us all to attention' during a lesson to announce that all pupils should attend the local *Casa del Fascio* the following Sunday at 10am, because

[s]ome high ups [*autorità*] were to arrive from Bologna and we were all invited to be present, accompanied by our parents, as they were going to make a speech in front of us all which was very important and at the end of this speech, they would distribute a focaccia loaf to each of us in honour of our presence. [...]

Once home I explained to my parents what I'd heard at school from my teacher. First of all, I made them explain what a focaccia was as I'd never heard this word. (A pastry, they told me.) I straight away started drooling. As for accompanying me, the reply was no, we are not interested, we just have to work. This reply troubled me a bit, not knowing any more about the reason for it.

During the week, the teacher repeated several times that it was important and that we should not miss it. (At home the reply didn't change.) My father said no and no it was.

In the end I convinced my mother to accompany me.

When Sunday arrived, having walked several kilometres to get to the Casa del Fascio, we went into a room that was packed full between children and parents. (A huge satisfaction for them.) Almost all of us standing, we listened to this so very important speech.

But for those children the only important thing was the focaccia, we just anxiously awaited the end. (The end arrived.) On the table in front of the high-ups I saw a beautiful tray full of focaccia loaves. One of them (bosses), wearing an elegant uniform, lifted several up in the air with his hand, so that everyone could see.

It made our eyes shine, perhaps the moment had arrived: but what happened?

What happened was that this boss said to us, with these words that I still recall perfectly:

Children, these are the focaccia loaves and they are not for you. We will offer them to the poor.

We all asked ourselves but where are these poor?

We didn't see a single one, a huge let-down for those poor children. I saw a few tears spout.

My focaccia was definitely eaten by my teacher, who was sitting there, very comfortable, next to these suits who were thought so intelligent as to explain the thread of life to us. They, along with the teachers, were capable of deceiving so many innocent children.

There was nothing but to retrace those kilometres and return home with head held high.

...

I don't know how they [the teachers] saw it but for us, along with our parents, it was a great disrespect remembered a lifetime.

The most intelligent one in this story was without doubt my father who absolutely did not believe the lies and who said he needed no explanation.⁷⁴

Here the invoking of the teacher-pupil relationship to place pressure on children and their parents to attend the Fascist big-wigs' speech, the invoking of the affective relations between child and one parent – in the face of opposition by the other parent – and the (empty) promise of material reward in a poor farming community may have achieved outward compliance such that the *Casa del Fascio* was 'packed full'. At the same time, it irreparably distanced Lina and her parents from both the political and educational authorities. Ultimately, 'actually-existing' Italian families were for the most part neither the idealized building-blocks of Fascist policy and values that the regime imagined and expected nor secure units of apoliticism, 'oppositional familism' or even resistance.⁷⁵ Family ties and their interrelations with external individuals and groups including teachers and neighbours were invoked as (mediatory) tools with which to better navigate individuals' experiences of, and relationships to, the dictatorship, whether that was intended to or resulted in keeping the regime at a distance, bringing it closer, or in some respects both.

Historians of Italian Fascism stand to gain much from adopting the perspectives of *Alltagsgeschichte*. The Third Reich and Mussolini's Italy were, of course, two very different places, and drawing methodological inspiration from German historiography need

⁷⁴ ADN MP/14, Lina Cattani, 'Il furto delle mie mucche - Racconti di dolci e amari frammenti di vita vissuta nella prima metà del '900', story 18, 'La focaccia' n.p.

⁷⁵ Victoria de Grazia discussed the idea of 'oppositional familism' by which she intended family units that were 'unresponsive, if not resistant, to appeals on behalf of the fatherland' in *How Fascism Ruled Women, 1922–1945* (Berkeley, CA 1992), 82.

not entail a relativization of the two regimes' natures or crimes. Nevertheless, the everyday does provide a useful heuristic with which to interrogate and compare how these two regimes functioned: the ways in which the Nazi and Fascist authorities attempted to insert themselves into their citizens' lives, and the successes and limits that these efforts encountered; the choices that these projects forced upon ordinary people, who in turn enacted a new political and social order through interactions, assertions, practices and relations of their own; and, finally, the ways in which the lived experience of dictatorship has been retrospectively reconstructed and represented. Abdicating the quotidian to antiquarians and popularizers risks reproducing the very same veneer of 'normality' that these dictatorships tried to cultivate; centring it as an object of critical interrogation helps to undermine nostalgic, trivializing narratives and deepen our understanding of 'the way Fascism really was'.

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