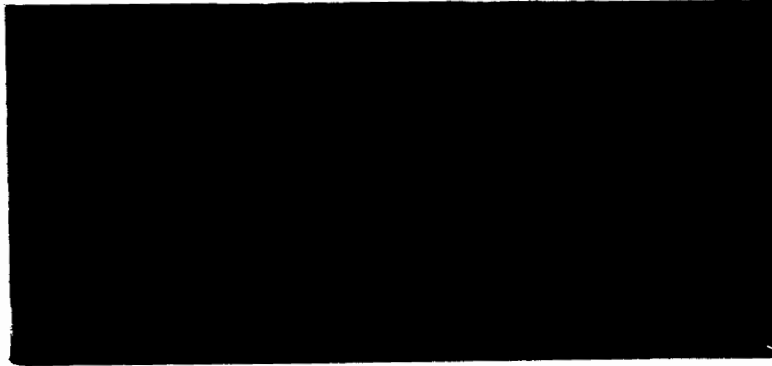




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Moral Relativism and the Rise of the  
New Italian Right"

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"THE DEAD ARE EQUAL:" HISTORY MAKING, MORAL RELATIVISM AND  
THE RISE OF THE NEW ITALIAN RIGHT

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Berezin, "Dead Are Equal," 2

On April 6, 1994, at 11:45 in the evening, the RAI, the Italian state broadcasting system, aired Combat Film. The film editors responsible for this seven part television documentary used unedited film footage shot by American photographers who had followed the Fifth Army between 1943 and 1945 to create scenarios of Italy at war. The April 6th broadcast, which was repeated the following evening at an earlier hour, consisted of highlights from the seven hour series. The American cameramen were military recruits from Hollywood and the footage is professional and intensely realistic. Many of Combat Film's flashing images are familiar--soldiers landing on the beaches, tanks rolling through the center of Italian cities, welcoming crowds, acts of kindness and charity. Some of its images are grim--the relatives of the victims of Nazi violence, soldiers fighting in the snow, the faces of a starving populace. Combat Film's most memorable images are grotesque--scenes of Mussolini's dead body, his autopsy, the execution of fascist spies.

Combat Film was broadcast two weeks after a "post-fascist" party became part of a legally constituted Italian governing coalition and three weeks before the forty ninth anniversary of the American "Liberation" of Italy from the Germans. Viewers stormed the RAI with telephone calls protesting its airing. The broadcast ignited a debate in the national press on ethics and the historical meaning of the Resistance, and transformed the moribund April 25th

"Liberation Day" holiday into a day of national mobilization in support of democracy.

On "Liberation Day" 1994, post-fascists and re-constructed communists appropriated public space to debate the meaning of fascism--old and new. On April 25, 300,000 persons led by a coalition of parties that had lost the March elections marched to Piazza del Duomo in Milan. They labelled the march as a non-partisan effort to dramatize commitment to "pride in democracy," and their marching slogan was "Don't you dare [Non ci provate]." <sup>2</sup> In Rome, Gianfranco Fini leader of the re-constructed post-fascist party attended a Mass in the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli to celebrate a "feast of reconciliation" and "national pacification." Standing on the steps of the Church, Fini proclaimed, "We think of the future, enough of the fences and hatreds of the past." <sup>3</sup> If the piazza is the secular space of Italian political life, the Church is the sacred space of Italian civic and cultural life. Fini exploited this widely perceived distinction to create an image of post-fascists at prayer juxtaposed against an image of post-communists and others marching against the results of a legally constituted election.

Why did Combat Film trigger this wave of popular protest and intellectual outrage? The airing of Combat Film

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<sup>2</sup> Mino Fuccillo, "La Storia siamo noi," La Repubblica (Rome) 26 April 1994, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Paolo Boccacci, "Fini, una messa per dimenticare," La Repubblica (Rome) 26 April 1994, 5.

coupled with the electoral success of "post-fascism" seemed to give historical fascism a new legitimacy. Combat Film spoke to concealed (disguised might be more appropriate) fissures in a national understanding of the Italian past that the success of Gianfranco Fini's "post-fascist" party had brought into bold relief. The paper that follows examines the multiple narratives of Combat Film to map out the contours of the recent Italian debate over memory, history and politics and its relation to the current resurgence of the Italian right. I conclude by speculating to what extent the Italian case enables us to raise broader questions about the relationship between national history making, political memory, and political outcomes.

#### Foundation Myths and Political Rupture

The March 1994 Italian elections marked the end of the First Republic--the set of political arrangements put into place by the 1948 Constitution constructed after the fall of the fascist regime. The fall of the First Republic is commonly attributed to tangentopoli--the series of political scandals which shook Italian government from its highest to its lowest levels. Tangentopoli included crimes that ranged from petty payoffs to Mafia conspiracies to criminal accusations against highly placed government ministers. For example, Giulio Andreotti the long time Christian Democratic prime minister and leading figure in Italian politics in the years between 1948 and 1994 was charged with consorting with

the Mafia.<sup>4</sup> What was extraordinary about the end of the First Republic was the swiftness and completeness of its demise. Tangentopoli as the explanation for its fall has two limitations: first, it cannot account for the complete rejection of the previous system that occurred; and second, it does not account for the overwhelming turn to the right in Italian politics. Tangentopoli was a necessary but not sufficient condition for the collapse of the First Republic. A series of long term structural and sectoral changes, acknowledged but not factored into explanations, combined to atrophy the social and cultural arrangements that were the glue of the old system. Among these changes were: the changing nature of the public sphere that incorporated television into political communication; the Americanization of consumption; and the change in Italian family structure fueled to some extent by the large scale entry of women into the labor force.

The "myth" of the Resistance was the ideological underpinning of the First Republic.<sup>5</sup> The trope of good and

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<sup>4</sup> For summaries, see Michele Salvati, "The Crisis of Government in Italy," New Left Review (September/October 1995): 76-95 and Donald Sassoon, "Tangentopoli or the Democratization of Corruption: Considerations on the End of Italy's First Republic," Journal of Modern Italian Studies 1 (1) (1995): 124-143.

<sup>5</sup> See Niccolo Zapponi, "Fascism in Italian Historiography, 1986-93: A Fading National Identity," Journal of Contemporary History, 29 (1994): 547-568; Simone Neri Serneri, "Italian Resistance," Contemporary European History 4 (1995): 367-81; Massimo Legnami, "Resistenza e democrazia: Cinquant'anni di storia d'Italia," Italia Contemporanea 198 (March 1995): 5-17; and Romolo Gobbi, Romolo, Il Mito della resistenza (Milan: Rizzoli, 1992).

evil which served as the leit motif of the Resistance story was a particularly compelling political narrative in a political system based upon personalized and clientalistic politics.<sup>6</sup> The fact that the Resistance as "myth" has entered the popular Italian vocabulary suggests how far it had gone towards crumbling--even before the cataclysmic events of March 1994. The elements of the Resistance narrative were simple. The Resistance "saved" Italy (from whom is left ambiguous) and prepared the way for democratic re-construction. Italian resistance fighters, consisting of members of the Communist party, old elements of the Popolari party, monarchists and assorted civilians engaged in armed underground activity to aid the Allies in fighting the German Nazi enemy. The fiction of unity among the diverse groups was essential for post-war reconstruction.

The Resistance story narrated a solid Italian front against a German enemy, and from its inception failed to incorporate Italian complicity in the war. Italians and Germans had fought side by side against the Allies until Mussolini's government fell in 1943. Resistance fighters represented a small proportion of the Italian population (not more than 300,000 members) and were an ideologically diverse group with widely divergent interests--i.e., the uneasy wedding of what would later become Christian Democrats and Italian Communists. The Communists provided

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<sup>6</sup> See for example, Joseph La Palombara, Democracy: Italian Style (New Haven: Yale, 1987); and Robert D. Putnam, Making Democracy Work (Princeton: Princeton, 1992).



necessary man and woman power to the Resistance but they were more than a slight inconvenience when the new post-liberation government was in formation.

The fiction of unity among these ideologically diverse groups was the fault line of the Resistance story that even popular culture sought to disguise. Roberto Rossellini's Roma: Citta Aperta [Open City] filmed in Rome while Allied troops were still on Italian soil provides a prominent example. This classic of neo-realism told the story of working class Romans who participated in the Resistance against the Nazi enemy. The priest and the Communist partisan join together to fight for the cause. Their relation to the mother figure, who is conveniently killed by the Nazis, as confessor and lover unites these ideologically disparate men. Family, church and state, represented by the "mother," the priest and the "enemy" would be the pillars of the post-war Italian republic. Open City is a more complex work than this brief discussion can capture. Replete with symbolism, the final image of the orphaned child, his mother, his priest, his future father--all killed by the Nazis, gazing alone at the city of Rome from atop a hill suggests a new beginning for him and a new beginning for Italy devoid of the evils of the recent past. Italian fascists are noticeably absent from Open City. The enemy is German and Italian complicity in the war is absent.

The absence of Italian fascists was not unique to Open City. It was one of several fissures in the Resistance

story from its inception. If Mussolini had chosen to ally himself with Britain, instead of Germany which he could have done until the late 1930s, the outcome might have been entirely different and there may have been no Resistance "story" to tell.<sup>7</sup> Anti-fascism was implicit, rather than explicit, in the Resistance story, in part, because it was difficult to address the issue of consent to the regime during the twenties and thirties when the regime required that anyone who wanted to hold a state job or practice a profession enlist in the fascist party.<sup>8</sup> The First Republic's foundation myth was shaky from its inception because it was based upon the war years. Looking too closely at the twenty years of the regime would compromise the unification that it sought to achieve.

In the 1950s, Communism became the principal threat to Italian political stability and the locus of re-constructing the Resistance narrative. Conflict between communists and Catholics, Italian Communist Party and Christian Democrats, dominated Italian political life in the years between 1948 and 1989. Until the Berlin Wall fell, fear of Communism and the necessity of maintaining the Atlantic alliance lay continually beneath the surface of Italian public discourse ready to erupt at any turn of political events--or in the

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<sup>7</sup> See Denis Mack Smith, Mussolini (London: Granada, 1981), 228-285.

<sup>8</sup> See Mabel Berezin, "Created Constituencies: The Italian Middle Classes and Fascism," in Splintered Classes, ed. Rudy Koshar (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1990), particularly 151-156.

Italian case change of governing coalition.<sup>9</sup> Communism as a "threat" was beginning to wane long before the Berlin Wall fell.

That fascism was evil was an unexamined "political fact" in the minds of the Italian populace which Christian Democrats and Communists exploited to keep themselves in power and to challenge competing political parties. When it was convenient, Communists and Catholics "remembered" who had fought in the Resistance. The electoral triumph of Gianfranco Fini's Movimento Sociale, Italiana (MSI), re-named the National Alliance in January 1995, a party with direct links to the National Fascist Party called into public scrutiny over forty years of unexamined moral assumptions about the nature of historical fascism. The MSI, a legal political party since the end of the war, had never played a large role in the government, yet it maintained a steady 8 to 6 percent of the national vote.<sup>10</sup> Fascism was the unmentioned "other" of Italian politics and culture, and even historians avoided it as a topic until the 1960s when a new generation of Italian historians emerged who had not taken part in the regime.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The Italian Communist Party fell into crisis in 1989 and was re-constructed in 1991 as the Democratic Party of the Left [PDS]. There were over 45 governing coalitions in Italy in the years between 1948 and 1994.

<sup>10</sup> Piero Ignazi, Postfascisti? Dal Movimento sociale italiano ad Alleanza nazionale (Bologna: Mulino, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> See Renzo De Felice's summary in Interpretations of Fascism, trans. Brenda Huff Everett (Cambridge: Harvard, 1977), 159-173. De Felice was one of the leading figures in

However, it was not Italian historiography which gave Gianfranco Fini the confidence to declare in public that Mussolini was the greatest Italian statesman of the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup>

The normalization of fascism in Italy began in subtle ways in the 1980s in the sphere of mass popular culture. For example, in 1981, the RAI produced a made for television movie on the life of Antonio Gramsci and one on Anna Kulisicicoff. By 1984, the RAI aired the Taviani brothers' The Night of San Lorenzo a popular revision of the Resistance which constructed it as a civil war.<sup>13</sup> In 1986, the RAI aired the European co-production The Duce and I and Claretta. These films focused on the love life of Mussolini and portrayed him as a man for whom the burden of leadership was secondary to the trials of juggling a demanding peasant wife--the mother of his children--and his adoring paramours--such as Margheritta Sarfatti and Claretta Petacci. The latest of this genre appeared in 1993. Entitled Young Mussolini, the film began with Mussolini's brief tenure as a

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the re-construction of fascism in the 1960s. His last volume in his multi-volume life of Mussolini which will appear in the Spring of 1996, anticipated in Rosso e Nero (Milan: Baldini and Castoldi, 1995) brings his re-writing of fascism to new heights.

<sup>12</sup> Fini's statement set off a wave of outcries in the national presses of state's that were less equivocal than Italy in their evaluations of the European fascist and Nazi past. See, Carlo Pizzati, "Fini fa l'elogio di Mussolini: allarme sui giornali stranieri," La Repubblica (Rome), April 3, 1994, 4.

<sup>13</sup> This film was marketed in the United States as The Night of the Shooting Stars.

rural schoolmaster. Within the first fifteen minutes of the film, Mussolini has seduced the married daughter of the Mayor and is expelled from his post. The romantic encounter with a married woman is the first of a number of similar scenes in the six hour drama which ends in the early 1920s as Mussolini is about to take over the Italian state. The film inextricably linked political leadership and sexuality and offered moral judgment on neither.

In 1984, a large public exhibit held in the Roman Coliseum, entitled "The Italian Economy Between the Two Wars 1919-1939" wrote fascism entirely out of Italian history and depicted Italy as a consumer paradise. Rinascente department store and Fiat replaced Black Shirts as the most salient images of the period.<sup>14</sup> World War II had no greater import than as a temporary interruption of Italy's ongoing march towards market modernity.

Claudio Pavone's Una Guerra Civile [A Civil War] published in 1991 re-opened the intellectual debate on the Resistance and cast a long look back on the twenty years of the regime.<sup>15</sup> Pavone a historian and former resistance fighter argued that the resistance was not unified but was comprised of three wars--civil, patriotic and class. In the ten years that had elapsed between the RAI's celebration of Antonio Gramsci and the publication of Pavone's book,

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<sup>14</sup> L'Economia Italiana tra le due guerre 1919-1939 (Rome: Ufficio Studi e Programmazione Economica, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> Claudio Pavone, Una guerra civile (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991).

popular culture and historical discourse had attenuated the power of the founding "myth" of the First Republic. By the spring of 1994, the Italian public was prepared for Combat Film--and for Fini. The ambiguous past became part of a kaleidoscope present.

#### The Multiple Narratives of Combat Film

Combat Film had one of the largest viewing audiences that the RAI had ever recorded. On April 6, 2.3 million persons, a 39 per cent audience share, tuned in to watch it. The April 7 airing garnered 19 per cent of the available viewing audience. What did the Italian public see that April night and why did it generate such extreme reactions? The following section describes the images of Combat Film; and examines the narrative re-construction of these images--first in the television commentary, and second, in the press.<sup>16</sup>

#### The Images

Rhetorical claims for the "neutrality" of the image dominate the opening segments of the broadcast. After opening shots of American soldiers marching and women waving accompanied by 1940s jazz, the camera cuts to a television

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<sup>16</sup> I spent three days at the RAI archives in Rome watching videotapes of the show and excerpts of the entire Combat Film series. I also interviewed the director's assistant. In addition, I viewed news program broadcast of commentary from prominent intellectuals although they tended to simply repeat what was in the newspapers and did not add to my analysis. The press accounts are taken from my systematic reading of La Repubblica (Rome); La Stampa (Turin); L'Unita (Rome); and Il Secolo (Rome) for April and May 1994.

studio where journalist Vittorio Zucconi the moderator summarizes the intentions of the program. He says that the more that the producers looked at the film's "images," the more that they realized that they could not provide commentary because "history" eludes "rosy glasses." This premise was itself a fiction. The commentary of Roberto Olla and Leonardo Valente the film editors, as well as that of Zucconi, continually interrupted the flow of the broadcast. Zucconi argued that the images were particularly strong because they were "not of Bosnia" or other foreign places but rather, "This is how we were and how we never hope to be again." From the beginning, the use of the "we" implicated the entire Italian population--making the war and fascism--an inescapable part of Italian history. Valente interrupted at that point and said that the Italian populace must view the unedited American combat film, finally declassified after remaining for years in the Pentagon archives, as part of a journey of national self discovery. He invoked Benedetto Croce's belief that history must not be hidden, and noted that the films underscore the "shame of war" and that the "strong images" were vehicles of historical memory and meaning.

In the spirit of ideological pluralism that dominated the broadcast, Zucconi invited Giani Accame, the former editor of Il Secolo, the MSI newspaper, Tina Anselmi, a former partisan and socialist deputy and Piero Fassino a member of the L'Unita editorial staff--the former communist

party's daily newspaper. Accame and Anselmi are in their late sixties and had participated in the Resistance and the war as youth; Fassino was born after the war. Zucconi frequently queried this tribe of "knowledgeable elders." A chorus of youth, university students who studied history and political science at the University of Turin and members of the next Italian political generation, were present to react to the comments of the trio of elders.

The "images" of Combat Film were more potent than the chorus of commentary that frequently and annoyingly interrupted them. There were six images, visual vignettes, that ran in ten to fifteen minute segments. The first set focused upon the exhibition of the dead bodies of Benito Mussolini and his lover, Claretta Petacci, in the Piazzale Loreto in Milan. The "facts" of Mussolini's death remain under debate. What is generally known is that partisan headquarters in Milan demanded his execution. Mussolini had decided to flee from Italy into Switzerland. He was caught disguised in a German military uniform in northern Italy and shot on sight by the partisans who found him. His lover, Claretta Petacci, was given amnesty but she chose to die with him and she too was shot. A small core of high ranking members of the fascist party who had remained faithful until the end fled with Mussolini and they too were shot.<sup>17</sup> The

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<sup>17</sup> One has to remember that Mussolini's regime fell in 1943 when the Grand Council voted him out of office and the King asked Marshall Badoglio to form a new government. What is frequently overlooked in post-war narrative is that Mussolini's regime was legally constituted in 1922, the King



partisans took the bodies to Milan and hung them by their heels in the Piazzale Loreto.

These "facts" are well known and there are many photographs of Mussolini hanging by his heels. The American army film goes further. Shot by a soldier who was walking around the city on the day that the partisans brought the bodies to Milan, this segment displays uncontrolled masses of persons filling the piazza and fire fighters trying to contain the growing crowd. Before the bodies were hung, they were literally "dumped" in a heap on the ground and the crowds were uncontrollable as individuals kicked Mussolini's corpse in the head and spat on the body of Petacci. The long standing and well known anecdotal testimony to these events pales before the visual image of the sheer force of public hatred and the desecration of the bodies.

The next scene shifts to the train station in Milan where the bodies were taken the day after the public hanging. The camera lingers on the bodies of Mussolini and Petacci and focuses on the name tag on Mussolini's neck. The bodies are strewn on the ground and someone picks them up and makes them sit against a wall. Petacci is propped against Mussolini and they look like two lovers who have fallen asleep against each other while travelling. Petacci's face is bloodied, yet it looks essentially

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asked him to take over the Italian state, and legally dismantled in 1943. Mussolini was in 1945 the head of the Nazi puppet government of Salò and had lost any power that he had in Italy. He did however still have loyal supporters.

tranquil. Mussolini's blood caked face is distorted beyond recognition. His head is grotesquely swollen from the kicks that he has received; his left eye and his nose are gone. The camera shoots the head full front, moves to Petacci where it lingers and returns to Mussolini. Liturgical music plays in the background.

The camera returns to the Piazzale Loreto and we again see the bodies dumped in the central square with the crowds kicking Mussolini. The image is one of sheer brutality. We watch the partisans hoist the bodies as they are hung by the heels. Mussolini's arms are outstretched in an inversion of what had been a common pose; Petacci's skirt has fallen over her head.

The next vignette shows the relatives of the victims of the massacre of the Fosse Adreatine. The Fosse was a cave on the outskirts of Rome. In retaliation, for the partisans' murder of German soldiers, the Germans rounded up 335 Italian citizens--some were partisans, some were simply randomly chosen--tortured them until they were half dead and then transported them to the ditch which they barricaded with dynamite. The Nazis ignited the explosives and left the victims to suffocate and die. Relatives did not know for certain who the Germans had rounded up and eleven victims remained unidentified. The Allied film shows the families of the victims coming to the ditch to identify the bodies. A priest recites Mass outside the tomb where the

victims were buried alive. Wives and mothers weep. Raw suffering dominates the screen images.

Shots of Mount Vesuvius erupting outside of Naples in 1944 replace the man-made ugliness and brutality of the first two scenes with a scene of natural disaster. American soldiers help in cleaning the volcano ravaged working class neighborhoods of Naples. Neopolitans parade through the streets with a statue of the Madonna with lire and American dollars stuck to it. Superstition melds with poverty, religion and hope.

In the next scene, American military police execute three fascist spies who were caught behind allied lines gathering intelligence for the Germans. The vignette is entitled "execution of the spies"--the designation "fascist" is missing and the lack of specification becomes a focal point of later debate. The execution of the three young men before the American firing squad, while not as grotesque as the opening shots of Mussolini's body, conveys its own horror. In each sequence, the priest comes to administer the last rites of the Roman Catholic Church. The camera zooms in on the faces of the young men as they stare at the firing squad. They are shot, the American army doctor with his stethoscope makes sure that they are dead and then their bodies are placed in simple wooden coffins. The second execution is particularly compelling as the camera lingers on the face of the spy as he smokes his last cigarette and

refuses the last rites. The look of discomfort and terror in his eyes is unnerving.

The scene switches to General Mark Wayne Clark preparing his soldiers to bomb Rome. Military maps and pointers and American aircraft hitting their Roman targets replace execution squads. Shots of the fall of Rome on June 5, 1944 follow the scenes of aerial bombing. Rome is under siege. Snipers are firing shots and people are running in all directions. Scenes of street fighting are followed by shots of the triumphant American entry into Rome and soldiers marching into the Vatican. Crowds march down the streets carrying signs and make shift flags with the slogan, "Long live the pope, God and Italy." There are numerous shots of Italian women giving visibly warm embraces to the American soldiers. In contrast to the mob in the Piazzale Loreto, the crowd looks unmistakably happy.

A taped speech by the current American Ambassador to Italy interrupts the flow of images at this point. He reminds Italians that in two months President Clinton will be in Italy and underscores the importance of historical memory to maintaining the trans-Atlantic alliance. The Congress of Bari is the subject of the next scene. The National Committee of Liberation met at Bari to chart out the remainder of the war. In addition, key figures such as Benedetto Croce and Palmiero Tagliatti, the head of the Italian Communist Party who had returned to Italy after eighteen years of exile in the Soviet Union met to plan the

post-war Italian republic. It was during this Congress that the Italian Communist Party staked out its position in the future Italian government.

The last scene is entitled, "Hunger at Lucca," and shows the Allied soldiers giving food to the starving populace. The final part of this takes place in an orphanage on Christmas Eve where American soldiers are feeding and playing with the abandoned children who are smiling gratefully at American largesse. The images which flash by at the end as the credits play are strikingly upbeat and concentrate on the American soldiers and Italian women and children greeting them. The soldiers dole out cigarettes and receive kisses from Italian women. Upbeat 1940s style music plays, and a male voice sings about "the men who came from across the sea and spoke another language." The final image is of a framed photograph of Mussolini from the 1920s lying on a pile of rubbish.

#### The Chorus

After a scene appeared, the camera would cut back to the studio where Zucconi queried the three guests as well as the university students about the film that they had just viewed. The controversial features of the program emerged in these dialogues. Enzo Biagi, a journalist for La Repubblica commented on the first set of images of the bodies of Mussolini and Petacci. After acknowledging the horror of the images, he sentimentalized Petacci whom he described as a woman who had "lost her head" to Mussolini

and then had to suffer the approbation of other Italian women as they spit on her corpse. Issues of gender and sexuality first raised here are as dominant as the polemics on politics which structure much of the television discussion.

In the first round of questions put to the three senior commentators, the theme of morality and politics that will dominate discussion of Combat Film emerges. Zucconi asks for comments on the horrible images. Accame, the editor from Il Secolo states that "the dead are all equal"--the statement that commentators in the press found most offensive and which structured public criticism of the film. Accame claims that the horror of the images deny that one side can be vindicated at the expense of the other. He says that in 1945 he was a sixteen year old who "believed in the greatness of Italy" and did not want the war to end without personally contributing.

Tina Anselmi, the ex-partisan, tepidly comments that the "dead were all equal" because every one raised during the 1920s and 1930s in Italy were products of fascist education--no matter what their political commitments. Fassino, born after the war of a communist and partisan family, attacks the idea that the "dead are all equal." He argues, "It is true that the dead are all equal but the reasons for which they died are different." It is that "difference" that the broadcast, and by extension the right, is trying to obfuscate and therein lies the deception

contained within the images. Zucconi persists and asks whether the kicking of the bodies of Mussolini and Petacchi are not a "black mark" against the republic. Fassino insists that these are images of Italy at extremes--taken from the last days of the war.

The next set of questions revolve around the weeping mothers of the Fosse Adreatine. Zucconi asks Anselmi if it is the women, such as Petacchi and the mothers of the Adreatine, who always end up suffering for the deeds of men. Anselmi gives a pro-forma reply that women are now in a position to be actors and not victims of history. A heated debate emerges between Accame and Fassino on tolerance and violence. Accame insists that the "Punic wars are over" and Fassino insists that to contextualize the violence of the Fosse Adreatine one has to understand how Italy arrived at the war. At this point, Zucconi involves the students when he asks two young women to comment on the images that have just been seen. The students' replies generate controversy about the ethical neutrality and historical ignorance of the new generation.

One student says that she simply wishes to put the past behind her and she does not wish to continue the war and the resistance story which she views as part of the old battles between Communists and Christian Democrats that undergird the First Republic. The second student's reply personalizes politics and refuses to make moral judgements. Zucconi asks this student whether she considers herself a part of the

Italy of Giorgio Accame and Tina Anselmi. She responds with conviction and emotion: "We are all part of that Italy, I am a daughter of that Italy--this was a page of our history--a person is neither all good nor all bad, Mussolini did good things and he did bad things and our history should not be part of our politics!" The young woman's statement suggests why the right has a large following among Italian youth and why university branches of the National Alliance are particularly active.

The next heated commentary revolves around the execution of the three spies. The directors claim that they are nameless. When Accame is asked who they are, he says that they are "heroes of the Italian Social Republic" and that contrary to what the directors say they are not nameless. He gives their names and brief biographies. They ranged in age between 19 and 22 years. One was a student at a liceo in Milano and one was a "worker." The student wrote a last letter in which he cried, "Long live fascism, long live Europe!" Fassino breaks in at this point in anger and says that these executions are de-contextualized images. In April 1944 when the executions took place, Italy was still at war and the young fascists were in violation of the rules of war. They were not "heroes." As "spies," caught behind enemy lines, execution was mandatory. Although Fassino admits that it is ghastly to look at persons on their way to death, he emphasizes that first, "thousands of youth on both



sides were tortured and murdered" and second, "we have to understand what they did to arrive at that point."

The Congress of Bari was an early symbolic attempt to publicize the unity of the Resistance. It generated another verbal skirmish. Marshall Badoglio who headed the Congress had taken over the reigns of government from Mussolini in 1943. He was a key figure at the congress. Zucconi asked one of the university students if she knew who Badoglio was. When she confessed ignorance, all of the commentators became upset that the student did not know what they considered a fundamental feature of First Republic history. One student answered back in anger that Italian youth were not ignorant of history but they were tired of politicized history. At that point the film editor, Roberto Olla broke in and said, "what we have all forgotten is "the hunger"--the hunger that no one forgets and that was the "great responsibility of the war" that brought this "hunger" to the Italian people. The scene then shifts to Lucca and the orphans of war eating the American rations. When the camera returns to the studio, Zucconi abruptly bids good night and tells the university students, "You can grow strong without knowing who Badoglio was, but you must know our history!"

#### Re-Narrating Combat Film in the Public Sphere

The airing of Combat Film set off a wave of public outrage. Persons protesting the "images" bombarded the RAI's telephone lines. But there was also a sense of moral outrage at the subject matter. Combat Film as a viewing

experience was gripping and revolting. In many ways, it never came to terms with its central issue--the horror of war and the chaos of a collapsing regime. The multiple public narratives around Combat Film did not approach any of these issues. The left/center press, La Repubblica, La Stampa and L'Unita had remarkably similar objections and reactions. The central objection was that the "images" could speak for themselves which was interpreted as a right wing strategy to create a de-contextualized history. The statements that generated intellectual outrage were: Accame's claim that "The dead are all equal" and his declaration that the young spies were "heroes", and the young woman student's failure to identify Badoglio. The images that created outrage were: the bodies of Mussolini and Petacci; the execution scene; and the portrayal of the Congress of Bari as the founding event of the Committee of National Liberation. A sub-theme was focused on the abundance of images that depicted Italian women warmly embracing American soldiers.

On April 7th, the day after the first transmission, La Repubblica's front page headlines read, "Strong polemics and protests after the transmission of Combat Film," and "Fascism and the Resistance are the same according to the RAI." Mario Pirani's editorial declared the broadcast to consist of "documents of great effect but no ethical political reflection, an insupportable purified 'marmalade' that absolved everyone and no one." In Repubblica's

interview with a history professor, he explicitly states that the raw images are at stake:

. . . documents of extraordinary interest were treated in an infamous manner. Without any philosophical interpretation, without any historical mediation. Thrown at the public to sustain emotion, not reason. In front of the dead whether they were republicans, or anti-fascists-- thrown around natural scenes of suffering, this is something quite different than historical judgement. The values in the name of which some died were quite different from the values of the others: but the film did not make these distinctions and elided these differences."

The producers weighed in with the response that they were not historians and that they were pleased with the work that they had done.

By the 8th of April, Repubblica's headlines read, "The Resistance Betrayed" and showed a picture of the Pope who was commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the holocaust with Rabbi Toaff. In the Vatican, there was a concert and prayer service "not to forget." Norberto Bobbio, the political theorist declared that "History has already decided" despite the fact that it is "currently fashionable in Italy to repudiate both communism and fascism."

Discussing the youth who were executed, Bobbio says, "They were not spies. They were not heroes. They were victims." The intellectual historian, Eugenio Garin described Combat Film as history "without instructions for use" and complained against the moral "levelling" that it suggested.

In response to Combat Film, Il Manifesto, another Communist daily, launched a call to turn April 25th, "Liberation Day," into a celebration of democracy and

Ochetto, head of the re-constructed communists, the Democratic Party of the Left agreed to organize the demonstration. Alessandra Mussolini, Il Duce's granddaughter and member of the Italian parliament attacked Il Manifesto's call to organization. She accused the PDS of wanting to re-open old wounds and of political reaction, "The dead are equal. The PRI did not kill Italians at Salo or flee in German dress. The observer of the television transmission displays crass ignorance." Referring to the April 25th celebration, she described it as "A great meeting among those who want to celebrate the present and the future without forgetting the past." In support of Mussolini, Gianfranco Fini publicly argued that "Anti-fascism served the old communist party."

The headlines of La Stampa the liberal Torinese daily summarized the reactions of L'Unita and Il Manifesto, "The Left: The Program rehabilitated Mussolini and the Republic of Salo." The front page pictures the bodies of Mussolini and Petacci with the caption, "The Funereal Specter." The article which accompanies the picture questions Mussolini's judgment in entering the war on the side of Germany and notes that a serious statesman would not have thought Hitler an "avatar of Light." It argues that Mussolini's body "emanates the greatest energy of the Dead," and that this "energy" is deceptive and seductive as it may lure the uneducated public into feelings of sympathy and finally moral neutrality. An article on the inside pages of La

Stampa complained that the execution of the spies aroused sympathy without explaining that the "fascists and Germans" also executed partisans and that the "fascists were crueler than the Germans." The article concludes that it is "necessary to speak of torture, burned villages, of war." Since these were American Army films, it is highly unlikely that they would have had footage of fascist executions.

L'Unita, the other Communist daily, also devoted its front page to Combat Film. Headlines read, "Fascism and the Resistance Seem Equal to the RAI." The article underscores the political implications of the program by charging it as "pointing to a tomorrow without factions." On the inside pages, the stories read, "Combat Film, Polemics Explode and Nazi-Fascist spies become 'Italian heroes.'" In contrast to the other newspaper accounts, L'Unita picks up on the American "colonization" of Italy by addressing the issue of "fraternization" between the American soldiers and the Italian women. One article notes that the American soldiers are characterized by their "grand passion for Italian women." Another article points to a studio voice over during the scenes of soldiers and women embracing that says, "In military language, they call this fraternization. We call it something else." In the same mode referring to the scene in Lucca where American soldiers distribute food to starving peasants, L'Unita recounts the following:

Voice in studio: 'And it was so much [food] that they [the Americans] requested sexual favors.'  
Accame: 'They reduced Italy to Saigon.' Anselmi:  
'It was Mussolini that reduced the country to

this.' Accame: 'Who thinks great thoughts makes great errors, it is small men who make Tangentopoli.' And no one cares for the millions of dead at the hands of fascism and Nazism, that no one cites.

This commentary highlights the anti-Americanism of the old Italian left. It also underscores the manner in which the past is becoming entangled in the present. Fascists made war but not the petty political scandals which the First Republic produced.

The issue of death and the reasons for the deaths pervades all the commentary. L'Unita published an interview with Claudio Pavone that provides a balanced narrative of why and how Combat Film is objectionable. Pavone argues that the program portrayed as "objective history" the suggested "equivalence" between "fascists and anti-fascists" and that it the program never once mentioned that the "allies won a war over barbarous Nazis and fascists that restored liberty to nations." Pavone makes the point that one can ascribe moral seriousness to Italian fascists without absolving them of responsibility for the war:

To see a cadaver is always moving, but it is necessary to distinguish the reasons for the deaths. In reality, there were those who fought for liberty, for tolerance, against violence . . . and those instead who fought for the slavery of their own people at the hands of the internal Nazi dictatorship. There is no doubt that there were probably also fascists in good faith, but this is another story.

Pavone's comments separate the period of the regime, the Ventennio, from the period of German occupation. The deaths were the product of the war--and that separation is crucial

to an evaluation of, not only historical Italian fascism, but its current variety in Fini's National Alliance. Confusing the two leaves one fairly powerless against present dangers. He also points to the fact that the student audience was handpicked to represent ethical neutrality, "qualunquismo," and did not represent the variety of political opinion which currently exists in Italy.

In contrast to the left/center press, Il Secolo, the National Alliance daily gave very little editorial space to Combat Film. On April 7th, the day after the first broadcast, it ran a small summary article entitled, "Combat Censored?" The April 8th edition, gave more coverage to the show. One author argues that the horror of the images challenged the purity of the Resistance and showed that the foundation myths of First Republic were morally questionable. He argues that these images sent the Italian left into a state of "rancor" and "resentment" at the resurgent Italian right, and, echoing the comments of Alessandra Mussolini and Gianfranco Fini, the author argues that "Without forgetting, nothing may be constructed; we can only prepare for new horrors."

Another article proclaims, "After 'Combat Film' a day of PDS ire." The article accuses the PDS of suppressing information, contributing to the distribution of a false Italian history, rallying the intellectual establishment to keep alive a vision of the Italian past that the new

generation had clearly rejected. The general thrust of this article is to accuse the left of hypocrisy in the service of promoting its own political agenda. The quote from Gianni Baget Bossi summarizes not only this charge but also points to the malleability of anti-fascism in the political arena, "From 1960, anti-fascism became a myth of power. The anti-fascism of Aldo Moro was an ideological operation of the powerful. That which they [the Left] admires is instead the anti-fascism of Sturzo [founder of the Popular Party, later Christian Democrats] that was current from 1919 to 1945."

The last installment on Combat Film in Il Secolo appears on April 9th. There is a cartoon of Ochetto, head of the PDS, on his knees shining the shoes of a United States soldier, whose face is buried behind a newspaper entitled, U. S. Army. Over the soldier's head, a caption reads Combat Film, and Ochetto asks, "Do you recognize yourself? Telephone the toll free number 161 211 211." This last is a reference to the frequent voice over in the broadcast which asked the public to call if they saw anyone that they knew in the film. An editorial under the cartoon argues that it is time to end the "demonization" of fascism and to "send into retirement the professionals of division and anti-fascism."

An editorial essay on the "future" strikes a blow at the twenty years between 1974 and 1994. Addressing the Italian students, "You are not anti-fascist? But what did they teach you at school?" The response levels a blow at



the reputedly Communist inspired Italian education system. In the seventies and eighties, students learned Karl Marx and Bob Dylan at the expense of Dante; read Sartre instead of Plato, Nietzsche, and Kant: "adored" Guernica and not EUR; and, worst of all, were subjected to "feminists" who instructed young women to use yogurt as contraception.

Historical Memory and Political Outcome

In the year and a half that has passed since the First Republic fell and Combat Film was aired, Fini's National Alliance has made enormous political gains. The government headed by Silvio Berlusconi which was formalized in May 1994 and which gave several ministries to the National Alliance fell in less than a year. Since that time, the creation of a viable government has eluded the capacities of Italy's key political actors.<sup>18</sup> Umberto Bossi's Lombard League, the first major challenge to First Republic political arrangements, has drifted to the margins of Italian politics. Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia is still a viable player, but "there is no there there." The Italian Left has drifted closer to the center in recent months. In general, Italian politics, at least on the surface, has the look of having reached the "end of ideology."

How did Italy's construction of its past figure in the re-construction of its future? Within modern European history, the memory of the Nazi and fascist period has occupied an ever increasing group of scholars, as well as

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<sup>18</sup> Elections will probably be held at the end of April.

public political discourse. Debates over the meaning of the Holocaust in Germany and the Vichy period in France have been the general focus of this research.<sup>19</sup>

The Italian relation to its fascist past differs from France and Germany in ways that suggest explanations of the relatively quiescent public response to "post-fascism" and permit nuanced accounts of the relation of memory to political outcomes. In Germany and France, the object of memory is somewhat more fixed, the Holocaust and collaboration, and tied to questions of national identity and history.<sup>20</sup> As this paper has suggested, the Italian conception of fascism is itself an object of contestation and the nationalist project in Italy has been weak in contrast to France and Germany.<sup>21</sup>

Debates about the memory of Italian fascism were never debates about national identity and history. Rather, they were debates in response to specific political actions such

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<sup>19</sup> On Germany see for example, Saul Friedlander, Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution," (Cambridge: Harvard, 1992); Alf Ludtke, "'Coming to Terms with the Past': Illusions of Remembering, Ways of Forgetting Nazism in West Germany," Journal of Modern History 65 (1993): 542-572; Charles S. Maier, The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity (Cambridge: Harvard, 1988); on France, see Henry Rousso, The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944 (Cambridge: Harvard, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> Peter Baldwin, "The Historikerstreit in Context," Reworking the Past (Boston: Beacon, 1990), 3-37.

<sup>21</sup> Franco Gaeta, Il Nazionalismo Italiano (Rome: Laterza, 1981); and Adrian Lyttelton, "The National Question in Italy," in The National Question in Europe in Historical Context, edited by Mikulas Teich and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1993), 63-105.

as the forming of the new republic in the post-war period. In 1945, the debate concerned the role that Italian Communists would play in the post-war re-construction of the government. A central feature of that debate was whether the Resistance was a period of civil war between fascists and communists or an armed struggle which united all Italians in the fight against the Nazi enemy.<sup>22</sup> The Christian Democrats favored the civil war argument in the immediate post-war period because it served to keep the Communists out of government.<sup>23</sup> In 1994, post-fascists returned to the Christian Democratic argument to legitimate their position in the new government. In short, the battle over the memory of fascism in Italy has a history and it is a history tied to party politics.

The general analytic point that the Italian confrontation with its past suggests is the following: in nation-states with weak national identities and multiple and competing political parties, memory becomes a tool of constituency formation. Parties, not states, make political memories. The malleability of memory increases in direct relation to the number of competing political parties and in inverse relation to the strength of the national identity project. Given my formulation, one would expect to find

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<sup>22</sup> Gobbi, Il Mito and Pavone, Guerra Civile.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Ginsborg, A History of Contemporary Italy (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 39-120; David I. Kertzer, Comrades and Christians (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1980), 105-130; Guido Quazza, Resistenza e storia d'Italia: problemi e ipotesi di ricerca (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976).

fractionated identities and unstable memories in former Eastern bloc countries and southern Europe, and the reverse in countries with successful nation/state projects such as France and Germany.

The period of the 1980s are central to the Italian story when the narrative construction of historical fascism moved from the political sphere of state and party to the market sphere of mass media and popular culture. In the 1980s, both Italian political parties and the state lost control of the memory of fascism. As the memory of historical fascism moved from the realm of official political discourse at the state and party level to the sphere of popular culture both in mass media and local celebration, fascism as political ideology began to appear morally neutral and the more neutral it appeared, the more possible it became for an entity such as "post-fascism" to emerge. The void in the 1980s that the market sphere claimed was re-claimed by a political party in the 1990s-- only this time it was new fascist party with a legally sanctioned position within an Italian governing coalition.

The images of Combat Film spoke volumes that neither the left nor right acknowledged. The distorted swollen head of Mussolini who could have stood for a military trial as would have been customary spoke to Italy's uneasy encounter with modernity. It evoked brigands, bandits, Mafia, the vendetta--cultural images of lawlessness not tied to any political ideology or period. The "dead" were not "equal."

Berezin, "Dead Are Equal," 35

The desecrated body of the leader spoke to the "politics of the personal" which has plagued Italy from the Renaissance and it is that from which Italy must overcome if it is to construct the new democratic future which all its parties claim.

