Fall 2014 Undergraduate course

Violence and memory in contemporary Italy

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Acts of violence, against individuals or groups of people, have played an important part in the collective memory of Italy after Fascism. However, they have also been open to conflicting interpretations. Was the execution of Mussolini and Clara Petacci and the public desecration of their corpses in Milan in 1945 an act of legitimate retribution for the sufferings inflicted by the Fascist regime and its alliance with Nazi Germany or an act that displaced Italians’ collective guilt over acquiescence? Were the bullets and bombs of the “anni di piombo” from 1969 to 1980 assaults on the fabric of a democratic society or symptoms of a malfunctioning political system and civil society? Did the collective mourning of mafia victims in the 1990s allow attention to be turned away from collusion between politicians and organized crime? Why are some massacres well known and publicly commemorated and others largely removed from collective memory? This course takes five cases where violence has given rise to these kinds of controversy and debate over historical memory.

Through close examination of materials in different media and class discussions students will learn to examine sources critically and will gain an in-depth understanding of some fundamental themes in postwar Italian history and key controversies in modern Italian society.

Materials for study include photographs, documentary and fiction films, testimonies and written narratives. Knowledge of Italian is an asset but not a prerequisite for the course and most of the material will be available in English translation or with subtitles. The course includes some graphic images and depictions of violence.

Course outline

- Weeks 1-3: Introductory. Fascism and anti-fascism (Milan and Rome 1944-45)
- Weeks 4-6: Occupation and Nazi massacres (Rome and Montesole, 1943-44)
- Weeks 7-9: Colonial Africa (Cyreniaca 1931, Addis Ababa 1937)
- Weeks 13-14: Mafia (Capaci and Palermo 1992)
- Week 15: Conclusions. Presentation of final projects

Select bibliography/filmography

Fascist Legacy (dir. Ken Kirby, UK, 1989)
Foot, John, *Italy’s Divided Memory*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009
Giorni di gloria (dir. Mario Serandrei and others, Italy, 1945)
La menzogna di Marzabotto (dir. Carlo di Carlo, Italy, 1961)
Lion of the Desert (dir. Moustafa Akkad, Libya/USA, 1981)
Roma città aperta (Rome Open City) (dir. Roberto Rossellini, Italy, 1945)
Tota, Anna Lisa, La città ferita, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003