

writing of history. In the following chapter, through a comparative analysis that spans from nineteenth-century accounts of *femminicidio* to contemporary journalistic reports, Summerfield sheds light on the persistence of violence against women in everyday life in Sicily. The particularity of the local context acquires paradigmatic value, as the chapter illustrates the global reach of gender-based killings. Likewise, Pickering-Iazzi positions her analysis of the YouTube video commemorating the murder of Annalisa Durante in the Forcella neighborhood of Naples within the international context of organised crime violence, which the title of her essay identifies as an ‘industry of trauma’. From the climate of trauma, the concluding section of the book projects the readers into the trauma of climate. Here, Enrico Cesaretti and Baracco discuss documentaries and essay films that apply an ecocritical perspective to anthropogenic environmental disasters and document the spectral traces they left on local landscapes. Endorsing Reza Nagestani’s understanding of ‘the “nested” quality of trauma’ (p. 152), Cesaretti concentrates on the ghostly survival of past catastrophes within the present, while Baracco’s essay investigates the intergenerational transmission of trauma and the vicarious traumatising enabled by cinematic images. The link between landscape, history, and trauma, developed in the first part of the book, thus returns to haunt the concluding section, mirroring the recursivity proper to traumatic temporality itself.

While most of the essays speak to the volume’s central preoccupation with the intertwinement of individual and collective trauma, the theorisation of this nexus across the nine chapters might appear uneven, due to the array of scholarly perspectives and methodological approaches that the authors contribute. On the other hand, as they bring into visibility transnational and subnational communities, the collected essays propose a nuanced analysis of contemporary Italian society that problematises conventional discourses about *italianità*, advancing a fresh perspective from which to look at Italian identities in their becoming.

doi:10.1017/mit.2023.72

## ***Mussolini and the Rise of Populism: The Man Who Made Fascism***

**by Spencer Di Scala, Abingdon, Routledge, 2023, 286 pp., £104.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-032-49831-7.**

Fabio Ferrarini

University of Milan

Email: [fabio.ferrarini@unimi.it](mailto:fabio.ferrarini@unimi.it)

(Received 23 January 2024; accepted 24 January 2024)

The novelty of this book stems from its contribution to the increasing connection that is being made by analysts between Fascism and populism, an interaction which deserves further examination. With regard, in particular, to Federico Finchelstein’s recent works, it is clear that an innovative trend of studies about the link between Fascism and populism is rapidly developing, and one of the important contributions of this work is using history

(and showing the usefulness of history) to understand the current political climate. For example, in his introduction Di Scala states: ‘The current populist wave can be better defined as “rightist” populism, which is nationalistic and exploits anger at the establishment’ (p. 3).

This sentence brings us to a set of crucial considerations. Populism is emerging as the new wave of global politics in the twenty-first century, while fascism, polarising itself and antifascism in the struggle between authoritarianism (and/or dictatorship) and democracy, characterised world-wide politics in the twentieth century. At the time, fascism looked like a dynamic transnational movement embodying indigenous needs and issues. Fascism and all the various forms of authoritarianism (or dictatorship) presented themselves as efficient answers to the problems of their times. In this regard, fascism is often invoked in relation to populism. However, populism as a political strategy is an older and broader phenomenon than fascist ideology. Populist strategies seek popular resentment against the order imposed on society by a long-established ruling class (i.e. the establishment, the elite, the ruling caste), which is believed to monopolise power.

According to Di Scala, ‘This attitude exploiting people’s resentment and nationalistic feelings is a characteristic of populist authoritarian personages. We can see something similar in the policies of Donald Trump, Viktor Orbán, and Recep Erdogan ...’ (p. 156). In these terms, the author implicitly demonstrates how Italian fascism stood on a range of contradictions. For example, he shows how Mussolini’s populism emerged as an efficient combination of both leftist and rightist issues (i.e. class action and nationalism). His regime made gigantic efforts to convince Italians that the Fascist regime was ‘working for the people’, acting in the name of the people, and fighting against the ‘privileged class’ in the name of the oppressed people.

Nevertheless, Di Scala also warns readers that: ‘in conflating populism and Fascism, and consistently comparing Trump to the Duce, journalists and commentators had little idea of what Mussolini’s Fascism was, or why populism might have been similar to it’ (p. 202). In other words, many commentators had little idea of what *historical* fascism was and, above all, they showed a lack of knowledge about Mussolini and populism. For instance, Fascism in Italy never became a clearly articulated system of belief because ideas were instrumentalised for Mussolini’s populist, short-term political goals. To demonstrate this, in the first part of the book (chapters 1–11), Di Scala provides a brilliant description of the historical background that characterised Mussolini’s political career and the consolidation of his regime. The author accurately depicts Mussolini’s early life as well as his rise to power through the Red Biennium, the March on Rome and the Matteotti crisis. In addition, Di Scala identifies some crucial factors of Mussolini’s foreign policy, such as the ‘third way’, the ‘myth’ of Rome, the revisionist attitude against the Versailles treaty, imperialism, and the development of the Axis.

In the second part (chapters 12–14), the book examines some crucial concepts of the postfascist era, namely the development of neofascist movements, their participation in Italy’s political system, and the ‘insertion policy’ (a gradual process of collaboration with and inclusion in the democratic republican system). Moreover, it stresses some secondary (but still important) aspects of the neofascist galaxy, such as mysticism. Finally, it offers a very interesting analysis of Trump’s relationship with far-right groups in the wider range of a global – although heterogeneous – network, which includes the Lega Nord, Casa Pound and Fratelli d’Italia.

In practical terms, Di Scala’s work is a perceptive, unusual, and user-friendly handbook on the history of Italian fascism, as well as a helpful introduction to Italy’s modern history, particularly for sceptical but curious beginners. In this regard, the book shifts from a detailed historical analysis to a deeper political examination of today’s issues. Unfortunately, the analysis of the dichotomy fascism-populism emerges only in the last


two chapters. A deeper exploration of the populist aspects in the history of the Fascist regime would have been helpful.

*Mussolini and the Rise of Populism* deals with today's issues of democracy, governance, and equality. As the author states in the introduction: 'The possibility of a Fascist return depends on conditions and how it is confronted by the democracies' (p. 3). In this context, whether Fascism still exists or not is debatable. Certainly, today there is a lack of democracy which can facilitate the success of new far-right movements, and Di Scala's book can help to take these phenomena more seriously than before.

doi:10.1017/mit.2024.2

## **Giovani e abuso sessuale nella letteratura italiana (1902–2018)**

**by Luciano Parisi, Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, 2021, viii + 360 pp., €30.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-88-3613-114-3**

Sara Shoieb 

Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt

Email: [sara.shoieb@alsun.asu.edu.eg](mailto:sara.shoieb@alsun.asu.edu.eg)

(Received 19 January 2024; accepted 22 January 2024)

In this monographic study, by means of a meticulous comparison between literature and other disciplines, in particular psychology, law and social sciences, the author Luciano Parisi addresses in depth a difficult and indisputably very specific topic: child sexual abuse.

The book is divided into a preface, 15 chapters and an index of names. The preface explains what literature and literary criticism bring to persistent questions that arise when minors are sexually abused. Afterwards, specifically in the first chapter, Parisi identifies four main periods in the development of this thematic thread in Italian literature over the last 120 years, examining a vast range of Italian novels from the late modern era through to 2018.

The novels of Grazia Deledda, Paola Drigo, Luigi Pirandello and Mario Mariani belong to the first period (chapters 2–5), which covers the first decades of the twentieth century. Conforming to a more widespread *topos* in early twentieth-century Italian literature, these novels place at their centre the figure of a poor, lonely, uncultured, inexperienced girl, ready to become attached to an apparently courteous adult, or forced to have sexual relations with an aggressive man and then left to her fate. In this part, the author examines four novels. In *Cenere* – set in a generally fatalistic atmosphere – Deledda describes poor and isolated young women, victims of sexual abuse by men belonging to the upper classes; while in *Maria Zef*, Drigo discusses the incestuous sexual abuse suffered by a miserable girl in a context of extreme poverty, against which the protagonist ultimately rebels by murdering her rapist. In *Alla zeppa*, Pirandello narrates the allegations of paedophilia against a young priest accused of having abused the young charges of an orphanage; whereas Mariani, in his short story collection *Le adolescenti*, presents, in a