Three important anniversaries were marked in Italy in the years 1911, 1932 and 1961. In 1911 and in 1961 the fiftieth and hundredth anniversaries of Italian unity were celebrated, while in 1932 the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Giuseppe Garibaldi was commemorated. The scope of these three celebrations allows us to discern important shifts in the public memory of the Risorgimento, and to consider contre-jour a number of key vectors in the history of modern Italy.

The choice of these three dates is further justified if one bears in mind the fact that the national anniversaries of 1911, 1932 and 1961 occurred within very different political and institutional frameworks, which pertain to the «three states» of united Italy, namely, the democracy of the liberal epoch, the Fascist dictatorship and, finally, the parliamentary republic born out of the referendum of 2 June 1946.1

In each of these turning-points in national history, a comparison with the Risorgimento has been a fundamental part of the political struggle, and indeed of historiographical reflection.2 Hence the possibility of regarding the major anniversaries as spaces within which the multiple components of the public memory of the Risorgimento attained a point of maximal tension and visibility. Indeed, the fifty years that separate 1911 from 1961 serve to describe the rise and fall of the Risorgimento myths and of their relationship with the idea of the nation.3 In the course of that half century Italy had lived through the most disturbing episodes in its young history since its recent unification. The Great War, Fascism, the Second World War, the Resistance and the civil war, the democracy of the post-war repub-

lic, economic reconstruction and industrialisation together brought about a profound transformation in Italian society, having major repercussions for its relationship to the past and the forms used to commemorate it.

The propaganda dimension is of course part and parcel of the public use of history, and cannot therefore be considered the exclusive prerogative of authoritarian regimes. Nonetheless, it would be reductive to consider only the instrumental uses to which the memory of the Risorgimento has been put. The sheer frequency and intensity, of references to the Risorgimento and its mise-en-scène in public space betokens something far more profound, involving the intertwining of political strategy and symbolic practice. In short, we are concerned here with the procedures employed by the national state and by specific political cultures to define themselves, and with the ways in which the politics of memory, legitimisation strategies, languages of political communication and commemorative machineries have served as channels liable to persuade and to penetrate society.

1. 1911: A Plural Jubilee?

«Today Italy studies and scrutinises itself, its origins and its traditions, its history and its victories, its defeats, sorrows and hopes, and its rapt attention betokens preparedness and fervour alike». This was how the official review published to mark the opening of the Italian expositions presented the 1911 celebrations. After fifty years of unity, Italy came to the «jubilee of the fatherland» with, all in all, a positive balance sheet. Admittedly, the problems facing the nation were still grave; the divisions and imbalances between the various regions had not been rectified. In parliament, in the daily newspapers and in periodicals such as La Voce there was no shortage of orators or journalists eager to denounce backwardness and corruption, especially in the South. But for many observers, at home or abroad, Italy seemed overall to be a state whose liberal institutions had been gradually consolidated, and which had experienced a significant process of growth. In these self-same years (the Giolittian period) the economy was undergoing a noteworthy phase of expansion, while new historical actors (the Italian Socialist Party, the Catholic movement, the new nationalism) were making their entrance on the political stage.

8. Numerous comments by foreign correspondents and statesmen are reported in Le Esposizioni di Roma e di Torino, the official review cited above (note 7).
The liberal ruling classes hoped that the celebrations would reflect pride in victories, demonstrate the progress already made, and evoke a Risorgimento tradition that might serve as a common storehouse of national values. There was nothing straightforward about such an undertaking, for the memory of the Risorgimento, since the years immediately following 1861, had been at the centre of a bitter conflict, which had found its most natural expression in the sphere of public rituals, monuments and commemorative performances. While the liberal institutions of the new state were used to fashion an anodyne, conciliatory image of the Risorgimento, especially in the 1880s, countervailing efforts were also made to promote a politics of memory that gave a voice to the «other» Italies. Republicans and socialists could not recognise themselves in the official version of the myth of the Risorgimento and promoted alternative interpretations and rituals. Intransigent Catholics, for their part, openly accused the patriotic movement and the unitary state of being the product of Masonic and anti-clerical intrigues, held to blame for having torn apart the religious unity formerly guaranteed by the leadership of the Church of Rome.

The symbolic occupation of urban spaces was one of the most striking manifestations of the impulse to commemorate that was shared by all those active on the cultural and political stage. Monuments, the renaming of city streets and squares, historical museums, civic celebrations, patriotic calendars all functioned as sites of memory and devices promoting a nascent patriotic literacy, which complemented the work done through schools and the army, the two traditional pillars of civil pedagogy. This ambitious undertaking hinged upon the exaltation of the monarchy, which was cast as custodian of the victories of the Risorgimento and as interpreter of the wishes of the nation. The figure of the king (at first Vittorio Emanuele II, then his son Umberto) thus stood at the heart of a densely woven mythological discourse, which was designed to exploit the image of the national-popular monarchy, legitimised by the plebiscites of 1859–60. Francesco Crispi, the Mazzinian and Garibaldian ex-republican who had rallied to the monarchy, was the most assiduous advocate of the need to «Italianise» the Savoyard monar-
chy, so as to facilitate the encounter with the democratic tradition of the Risorgimento from which he himself came. Owing to his «infallible sense of the power of myths to sway» an audience,¹⁴ Crispi knew how to fashion a patriotic pantheon in which all of the so-called «great makers» of the Risorgimento (the king, Garibaldi, Cavour, Mazzini) were given a place, each having played their part as fathers of the nation.¹⁵

The 1911 celebrations were therefore the culmination of a long commemorative journey. The image of the monarchy as a symbolic pillar of the nation was most in evidence on 4 June, the national festival of the «Statuto» (Constitution). On that day the monument to Vittorio Emanuele II (the Vittoriano) was at long last inaugurated, after a complex gestation, begun just after the king’s death (1878).¹⁶

Along with the celebration of the monarchy and the conciliatory representation of the Risorgimento, another striking aspect of the fiftieth anniversary was the territorial «segmentation» of the celebrations. According to Catherine Brice, two fundamental factors lay behind the decision to avoid a centralised commemoration on the French model and to restrict politics (Parliament, the government) to a subordinate role. On the one hand the government had grasped that the fiftieth anniversary would be celebrated in a national context of profound political divisions and of marked social imbalances; on the other, it had understood that «too centralised» a celebration would not have involved the country at large and would have exacerbated «divisions rather than attenuating them».¹⁷ From this perspective, the great number of scattered, essentially local initiatives, mounted by communal administrations and cultural associations, could be seen as an original attempt to adapt the anniversary to the prevailing circumstances.

The official expositions were staged in Turin and in Rome, with a supplement to the main programme in Florence. In this way the three capitals of the kingdom were remembered, and tribute was paid to their specific roles in building the new Italy.¹⁸ Thus, the international exposition of industry and of labour marked out Turin as the city of progress and of economic development.¹⁹ Secondly, the exhibition of Italian portraiture and the international floral exhibition recalled the beauty and the cultural splendours of Florence. Finally, the various exhibitions in Rome (international fine art, regional and ethnographic, archaeological, the arts in a his-

¹⁵ On this particular aspect of the figure of Crispi, Levra, Fare gli italiani; C. Duggan, Francesco Crispi, 1818–1901; from nation to nationalism, Oxford 2002.
¹⁹ Touring Club Italiano, Torino Esposizione 1911, Turin 1911.

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torical perspective, the Risorgimento) exalted the role played by the historical and cultural capital in drawing the different Italic peoples into its orbit.

The regional and ethnographic exhibition in Rome was probably the most obvious attempt to bring on to the stage the «little fatherlands», adopting a cultural model already tried and tested by a number of prominent Italian cities. Through its folkloric and popular traditions, the Italy of the communes bore witness to its quintessentially plural nature. Municipal and regional specificities ceased to be feared obstacles and were transformed instead into precious resources for laying the foundations of the unitary identity of the nation.

A comprehensive assessment of what was achieved would, however, require more searching inquiries into the question of reception. The mobilisation of the press, of public opinion, of the political and associational worlds was indubitably on a large scale. But more nuanced data could be obtained by shifting our attention to local realities and to sources allowing us to measure the impact of the actual ceremonies. I have in mind here school archives, autobiographical texts (diaries, correspondences, memoirs) and other documents of particular interest, already in part studied, such as accounts written by workers and artisans after a visit to the expositions.

On the official plane, the fiftieth anniversary revived the conciliatory interpretation of the Risorgimento. In reality, this interpretation, though frequently to be found in school text-books and in the iconography of the period, failed to mask persisting tensions affecting the public memory of the Risorgimento. The Catholics, despite the coming to an end of the most acute phase of the clash with the liberal state, could not accept a jubilee centred upon the secular sacralisation of the fatherland. They therefore had no compunction in denouncing the celebrations as the ill-starred outcome of the marriage between secular liberalism and the anticlericalism of the Freemasons, who each year without fail re-enacted 20 September, the anniversary of the breach of Porta Pia and a civic celebration from 1895 onwards.

In the socialist and republican camps, as had already occurred at the centenaries of the birth of Mazzini (1905) and of Garibaldi (1907), separate celebrations were promoted and a Risorgimento at odds with the official version was vaunted. Even as the people of Rome were taking part in the inauguration of the Vittoriano,
a procession organised by the Republican Party made its way to the Garibaldi monument in the Janiculum, where, under the ideal protection of the Hero, republicans reaffirmed their allegiance to their own universe of symbols and values, and denounced the monopolical purloining of the Risorgimento. The socialists, for their part, though they judged the Risorgimento and national unity to be positive factors in the construction of the bourgeois state, denounced the «betrayal» of hopes for social renewal or for any solution to the many problems still burdening the popular masses. The socialist newspaper *Avanti* was prepared to invoke «two fiftieth anniversaries» and to stress the persisting gulf between «legal» and «real» Italy: the enduring state of wretchedness and social degradation prevented the proletarian masses from feeling themselves to be participants in the life of the nation and therefore from identifying with Risorgimento mythologies.  

The secular rites of the «religion of the fatherland» celebrated in 1911 should thus be seen against a somewhat turbulent backdrop. In order to evaluate the efficacy of the myths of the Risorgimento, we also need to bear in mind the fact that they were functioning in a larger context now quite distinct from that of the Humbertian epoch. The extent of the changes under way became all too obvious in September 1911, when Italy declared war on Turkey, setting in train military operations for the conquest of Libya. The fiftieth anniversary celebrations’ final curtain was coming down just as the propaganda campaign in support of a new wave of colonisation was intensified. On that occasion references to the Risorgimento were highly aggressive in tone, and with the advent, in 1910, of the Italian Nationalist Association (the ANI), there was no mistaking the growing weight of the new imperialist nationalism. The first serious cracks in the nation–liberty dyad, which had been a constant feature of Risorgimento discourse and had permeated patriotic pedagogy in the period after Unification, were now beginning to show.

The myth of imperial Rome and the Giobertian and Mazzinian themes of «primacy» and of «mission», decoupled from their original context, were used to justify the historical «necessity» of Italian colonialism. Trial by war was invoked as an opportunity to redeem the military defeats of the nineteenth century (Lissa, Custozza, Adowa), a crushing burden upon the spirit of the nation and thus a syndrome to be cast off at any cost. In this perspective, the Risorgimento and national unity became spring-boards for guaranteeing Italy – the «great Proletarian», as the poet Giovanni Pascoli dubbed her – her rightful place in the ranks of the great European powers.  

In the years between the Libyan War and the end of the Great War, the myths of the Risorgimento were thus at the heart of a public discourse finely balanced...
between nineteenth-century tradition and more recent concerns, featuring a commingling of languages, images and representations which, beneath an apparent fixity in concepts and discursive morphology, in reality alluded to a profoundly different set of meanings.

2. 1932: Fascism, the Risorgimento and the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Death of Garibaldi

Unfettered competition between conflicting memories was blotted out in 1925, when Fascism, having survived the crisis precipitated by the murder of the Socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti, set about turning Italy into a dictatorship. With the opposition outlawed, the leaders of the anti-Fascist parties imprisoned or forced into exile, and the media and the various channels of political education under state control, the use of history became a monopoly of the regime.

The relationship with the past played a key role in the construction of the totalitarian state, which for these purposes could rely on the support of influential intellectuals, among them the philosopher Giovanni Gentile and historian Gioacchino Volpe. The historical and symbolic legitimisation of Fascism was effected through the appropriation of the most important episodes and figures of the Risorgimento by means of an exaggeratedly nationalistic interpretation. A new calendar was invoked in order to scan the diverse stages of national history and to delineate the «Fascist» profile of the nation. Once the regime had subsumed the traditional patriotic cults and declared itself to be, in opposition to the parliamentary «drifting» of liberal «Italietta», the rightful heir of the Risorgimento, it set about the «fascification» of Italians, bombarding them with its own values, principles and guiding vision.

So far as anniversaries are concerned, one of the most interesting moments regarding the Risorgimento is 1932, the year in which the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Garibaldi was celebrated. The regime sponsored a range of different initiatives, among them the publication of his collected works, the inauguration of the monument to Anita, the Hero’s wife (who had died in the summer of 1849), and a major exhibition, in Rome, of Garibaldian relics and documents.

The aim was to enlist the most popular figures from the Risorgimento in the Fascist cause, so as to assert continuity between the red shirts and the black shirts,
under the banner of heroism and in the guise of the patriotic volunteer. The undertaking was none too easy, nor could success be taken for granted, given the range of different positions that drew upon Garibaldi’s memory.\footnote{31} The Garibaldian family had itself soon split between the supporters of «Garibaldian fascism»\footnote{32} and those who, in joining the ranks of anti-Fascism, endeavoured rather to preserve the democratic and libertarian kernel of the tradition.\footnote{33} Like others before them, the Fascists sought to exploit the Janus-faced nature of Garibaldi, at once a revolutionary and a man of order. The regime could thus tailor the classical image of the «disciplined revolutionary», as Agostino Depretis had called the Hero shortly after his death, to fit the framework of the totalitarian state. Praise could then be heaped upon the choices made by Garibaldi at various crucial turning-points (the meeting with Vittorio Emanuele II at Teano in 1860; the «I obey» uttered in 1866), and upon his acceptance of the Savoyard monarchy as guarantor of the unitary conquests. Yet at the same time, to the radical milieux of young Fascists who swore by the myth of the Fascist Revolution, Garibaldi was first and foremost a fighter who had issued from the people, a man who had believed in an Italy liberated from clerical influences and embarked upon a genuine national revolution.\footnote{34}

The conflict over memories and interpretations of the Risorgimento did not disappear altogether under the Fascist regime, as we have seen. Though ideas could not circulate freely, a \textit{sui generis} dialectic re-emerged within the eclectic culture of Fascism. Indeed, this same eclecticism, in whose formation various strands from the political cultures of the early twentieth century had combined, was evident in approaches adopted towards the Risorgimento and the contemporary uses to which it might be put.\footnote{35} There was no avoiding the relationship with the Risorgimento and with Garibaldi, for obvious reasons. But the Fascists at the same time felt the need to go beyond that tradition. In other words, the regime sought to proclaim itself to be a social and political experiment of a new type, capable of providing answers to the problems posed by the World War. It is therefore not surprising that the regime was less preoccupied with the Risorgimento than with incorporating the Great War into its own ideological universe.

In the same year in which the Garibaldian fiftieth anniversary was commemorated, Fascism indulged in bombastic celebrations of its own anniversary. Indeed, the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome provided an opportunity to draw up a


\footnotesize{32} E. Garibaldi, \textit{Fascismo garibaldino}, Rome 1928.

\footnotesize{33} E. Cecchinato, «“Fascismo garibaldino” e garibaldinismo antifascista. La camicia rossa tra le due guerre», in: \textit{Memoria e Ricerca} \textbf{17} (2009), 32, 113–136.

\footnotesize{34} M. Isnenghi, \textit{Garibaldi fu ferito. Il mito, le favole}, Rome 2010.

balance-sheet of the first decade in government and to exaggerate the meaning of the rupture that the Great War and Fascism had introduced into Italian history. The Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, inaugurated on 28 October 1932 and visited during the two years in which it was open by nearly four million persons, was the most striking expression, in terms of culture, politics and the media, of Fascism’s concern to cultivate its own self-image.\(^{36}\) The chronology of the exhibition focussed on the years 1914–1922, with the clear aim of establishing a genealogical connection between the Interventionist spirit, the «people of the trenches», combatentismo and the advent of Fascism or, in other words, between the glorious deeds of 1915–18 and the Fascists who fell in 1920–22, each and every one of whom was elevated to the status of «martyr» of the fatherland and counterposed against the anti-nationalist plots of the «defeatist» parties and milieux.\(^{37}\) Within the celebratory framework established by the regime, the First World War anniversaries, namely 24 May (the Intervention of 1915) and 4 November (Victory in 1918), were incorporated into the Fascist calendar, alongside such important days as 28 October (the anniversary of the March on Rome, in 1922) and 21 April (the legendary birth of Rome, in 753 BCE, a date standing in for May Day, a celebration deemed «subversive» and therefore banned).

The anniversary speeches delivered by Mussolini in various Italian cities in 1932 were designed to exalt war as the «matrix» of the new, Fascist Italy. Indeed, to judge by images preserved in the Luce archives, the Mussolini who harangues the crowds when recalling the March on Rome is markedly different from the one who had participated in the ceremony held to inaugurate the monument to Anita Garibaldi. The content of the speeches and the meaning of the words change, but so too do tone, gesture and gaze. In the presence of the royal family, the Garibaldian occasion is celebrated by a Mussolini who is ceremonious, humble almost, and whose carefully weighted sentences were designed to exalt Garibaldi’s Italian-ness, the monarchy and the continuity between red shirts and Fascist black shirts. A few months later, in a different kind of context, Mussolini’s self-control yields to his characteristic oratory and range of gestures: his speeches recover their improvisatory character and the Duce’s direct relationship with the crowd leads him to burden his words with ideologically more trenchant meanings. At Ancona, in November 1932, Mussolini thus asserted that Fascist Italians should have no cause to regret the men and ideas of the nineteenth century. The true history of Italy, he said, had begun in 1915, «the fatal year in the history of humanity», since only in


«radiant May», issuing in Intervention, had the masses at last irrupted into history, thus inaugurating a new phase in national life. Fascism derived force and legitimacy through having made the spiritual inheritance of the war its own, thereby integrating the masses into the national state.\textsuperscript{38}

If we reflect upon the Garibaldian and the Fascist exhibitions, celebrations of the fiftieth and the tenth anniversaries respectively, we discover that the relationship with the nineteenth century and with the more immediate past took the form of a battle-ground between the different souls of Fascist culture, which were using commemoration to advance their own particular interpretations and representations of national history.\textsuperscript{39} This preoccupation would characterise the debate within Fascist culture until the final years of the regime. Nonetheless, despite all the effort lavished upon the 1932 celebrations, the dominant line, from the mid-1930s on, was always that of emphasising continuity with the glories of the past. The myth of Rome and that of the Risorgimento were again intensively hyped in propaganda campaigns between 1935 and 1943, when Fascist Italy was continuously at war on several different fronts. Military mobilisation required the backing of the past, especially when history furnished examples of military prowess, heroism and battles through which one could exalt the unrelenting bellicosity of the national character and thereby sustain contemporary myths of potency.

As the European «new order» was being constructed, Italy sought to carve out once again a hegemony in the Mediterranean. The project was doomed to fail at an early stage, as we know, swept away by military defeats. But the image of the «Mediterranean Risorgimento» – that is to say, the claim that the unity of Italy would only mean something if it were to lead towards a policy of expansion and military might – remained current up until the summer of 1943 and the imminent fall of the Fascist regime, and of Mussolini himself.

\textbf{3. The Public Memory of the Risorgimento from the Birth of the Republic to Italia ’61}

The Italy that emerged from the Second World War and from a bloody civil war, fought from 8 September 1943 by the partisans of the Resistance and the Fascists of the Italian Social Republic, was a country having yet again to face up to the process of remaking Italians. After Fascist totalitarian pedagogy, it was now a question of embarking upon an education in the values of democratic and republican citizenship. Risorgimento mythology, which during the months of the civil war had been at the centre of a hotly contested symbolic battle between the two camps,\textsuperscript{40}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{39} C. Fogu, \textit{The Historic Imaginary, Politics and History in Fascist Italy}, Toronto-Buffalo-London 2003.
\bibitem{40} C. Pavone, \textit{Una guerra civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza}, Turin 1991.
\end{thebibliography}
was put to a broad range of new uses by the parties of the newly founded Italian Republic, which had emerged victorious from the referendum of 2 June 1946. The Risorgimento and the Resistance, the latter cast as the «second Risorgimento», were the principal channels of legitimisation for the Republic and of the bid to consolidate a choral consensus around the new democratic institutions. But after the first attempts made by the governments of national unity, the route turned out to be littered with obstacles. In 1947, with the outbreak of the cold war, and the intensification of the ideological conflict, relations between the various anti-Fascist political forces became more rigid, and this inflexibility was reflected in their approaches towards national history. The great mass parties (Christian Democracy, the Italian Communist Party, the Italian Socialist Party) were faced with the delicate task of having to steer a course between patriotic imperatives and models with a universalist or at any rate supranational frame of reference (the Catholic Church, the Soviet Union).

This became all too plain in 1948, a crucial year for post-war Europe. The centenary of «the Springtime of the Peoples», and of the first war of Italian independence, coincided with the new Republic’s first elections, which were held on 18 April. In the election campaign references to the Risorgimento were very much to the fore, in speeches and above all in the iconography. After the outright victory of Christian Democracy, which put Italy firmly in the Western camp, the Risorgimento acquired a number of new connotations in the sphere of public memory. During the darkest years of the cold war, the memory of the Resistance became highly contentious, the object of bitter disputes and even of separate demonstrations. By contrast, the Risorgimento could still be a source of reassurance, despite the fact that it was clear now to many observers that the nineteenth century, being ever more disconnected from the new social and political reality of post-war Italy, was less and less able to serve as a source of moral values.

Celebrations, anniversaries and civic festivals (and among those recently approved mention might be made of 25 April and 2 June, which marked Liberation and the birth of the Republic respectively) were staged within a ritual framework that had been profoundly altered by the traumas of total war. More especially, studies of changes in the cult of the fallen have brought out «major shifts in collective values and, in particular, in the themes of war, heroism and honour». Yet even on this terrain «such shifts were neither immediate nor capable of wholly elimi-
nating ancient and deep-rooted symbolic stratifications and linguistic incrustations».

The process should therefore be regarded as a gradual one, divided up into a number of different stages. Historiographical discussion was dominated by new themes and research methods relating to the study of the nineteenth century, and after the publication of Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* (1948–1951) the theoretical debate regarding the intrinsic characteristics of Italian history was more prominent than ever before. The Risorgimento continued to occupy an important place in public discourse too, from school text-books to the cinema, and from official commemorations to historical museums. The Trieste question, resolved only in 1954 with the definitive return of the city to Italy, served to keep the search-lights trained upon themes dear to nineteenth-century patriots and to those in whose memory the Great War stood as the last war of the Risorgimento.

Only with the centenary of Italian unity do we encounter a turning-point in the domain of public memory of the Risorgimento. In 1961 Italy was in the midst of the so-called «boom», the most momentous socio-economic transformation in its history. The combined effects of industrial modernisation, the explosion of consumerism, internal migration, the irreversible dissolution of the traditional Italian peasantry, the radical initiatives undertaken by Pope John XXIII at the Vatican Councils, and the emergence of youth culture served in the span of a few short years to bring about a thoroughgoing anthropological transformation in Italy. This intense phase of change in the cultural, social and economic fabric precipitated a set of equally important shifts in the symbolic and ritual system upon which republican Italy stood, inscribed in the forms assumed by the relationship with the past and in the characteristic features of public memory, and bearing witness to the distance travelled since the celebrations held in 1911 to mark the nation’s first fifty years.

Organisationally the decision was taken, after some soul-searching, to make Turin the focus of the official celebrations. Given the success of the 1911 expositions, it seemed appropriate to model «Italia ‘61» upon them. A major historical exhibition was mounted at Palazzo Carignano, the home of the Museo Nazionale del Risorgimento, and an ideal site from which to narrate in visual terms the stages by which Italy had achieved independence, liberty and unity. The Exhibition of the


Regions, for its part, confirmed the importance of local traditions in realising Italy’s essentially plural identity. Finally, the Exhibition of International Labour was supposed to catapult visitors into a direct dialogue with modernity. Turin thus became a site evoking the link between past and present. Homage to the Savoyard monarchy and the first capital combined with a reference to the city which, spurred on by its industries (primarily FIAT), symbolised Italy’s economic take-off. The Palace of Labour, designed by Pier Luigi Nervi to be the hall for the international exhibition, epitomised, as much in architectural terms as anything else, Turin’s avant-garde role as the standard-bearer of modernity.

The manner in which the principal party in government, the Christian Democrats, handled the anniversary had profound implications for the interpretation of the Risorgimento and the history of Italy. Along with the recognition of the historical reality of unitary state, now at last shared by the whole of the Italian political class, the most striking feature was the «retrospective catholicisation» of the process of national unification. In the words of Amintore Fanfani, president of the Council of Ministers, the Risorgimento had been revised in the light of the central role played by Christian Democracy in republican Italy. The party was now cast as the executive arm of divine providence, under whose infallible guidance the goal of reconciling patriotism and religion would be achieved.

Pope John XXIII himself spoke of an anniversary lived by all with «one and the same sense of gratitude towards the Providence of the Lord». After having invoked Pius IX, «beneficent star and luminous sign, inviting us to witness the triumph of the magnificent ideal», the Pope pointed to the period after 1861 as a preparation «for the victorious and pacific pages of the Lateran pacts. The Reconciliation of 1929 had at last laid the foundations for the final celebration of the true and perfect unity of race, language and religion, which had been the aspiration of the best Italians.»

A further reference to the Pope and to the Catholic Church featured in the televised speech given by Fanfani on 4 November, the anniversary of victory in the Great War. The President of the Republic, Giovanni Gronchi, had marked the official closure of the centenary by going to the altar of the fatherland in order to pay homage to the unknown soldier. The rite celebrated at the altar of the fatherland and the one staged in the Vatican together served, according to Fanfani «to demonstrate how enduring was the achievement of our fathers in giving to Italy, in the context of an uninterrupted Christian tradition, a unity of life sustained by democratic liberties».

50 Gentile, La Grande Italia, 392.
52 La celebrazione del primo centenario dell’Unità d’Italia, 95–96.
This bid to reinterpret the Risorgimento was contested on the Left, and seen as proof of a shift from «royal conquest» to «papal conquest». Indeed, the mass - sive Catholic involvement in the celebrations, which was moreover broader and more diverse than the official record suggests, was evidence of profound changes having occurred in Italian cultural and political life, especially by comparison with the secular sacralisation of the fatherland that had characterised the jubilee of 1911.

Particular emphasis was laid upon the comparison with 1911, especially in the accounts given by secular commentators. All agreed that «Italia ‘61» had proved a resounding success. Over six million visitors made their way to Turin in the exhibitions’ opening months. The mass media (press, cinema, radio, television) sought to bring back to life the principal events of the Risorgimento and to stimulate the interest of Italians by using the languages and techniques of modern mass communication. For example, Roberto Rossellini shot Viva l’Italia, a film about Garibaldi and the Thousand, while schools offered many trips as prizes, taking thousands of students to see the displays in Turin. The official iconography of «Italia ‘61» revived the classical vision of a conciliatory Risorgimento, classifying each of the main protagonists by means of the icon that best summarised his function. Thus, Cavour had been «the weaver», Mazzini «the apostle of a free and democratic Italy», Garibaldi «the sword of Liberty», while for Vittorio Emanuele II recourse was had to the more neutral formula of «first King of Italy».

Yet, if we dig deeper, we find few signs of any heartfelt adherence to the Risorgimento values that exhibitions, displays, books and shows were meant to be transmitting to contemporary Italians. For example, the historian Rosario Romeo noted as much in an overview of the centenary, published in the official volume issued in 1961 to mark the celebrations. Romeo reminded his readers how radically different the «moral atmosphere» serving as a backdrop to 1911 had been, referring in particular to the attitude of the ruling classes and of the institutions. During the fiftieth anniversary there had been a «broad, conscious involvement of national sentiment», and above all «a close correspondence, perceptible in the symbols, institutions and ideals, between a grateful, trusting Italy, intent upon celebrating the achievements of its first half century, and the historical tradition to which it was referring», a tradition experienced as «a living ideal and moral reality, closely tied to the ethico-political consciousness of the country». By contrast, the public manifestations of the centenary, impressive though they were, had not been...
able to mask «a sense of detachment, not only on the part of the masses, but also on that of the educated and ruling classes». There was now «a degree of weariness at the deliberate attempts to reconnect contemporary Italian reality to past reality, which is nonetheless still the only centre around which the country can rally, as a sign of its union».56

«Italia ’61» thus seemed to be at one and the same time the crowning moment and the twilight of celebrations of the myth of the Risorgimento. Through its modernisation Italy was entering an epoch requiring languages, symbols and commemorative practices ever further removed from the traditional framework of the patriotic and national myths.

4. Towards Italy 2011

Though in 1961 Romeo still judged the Risorgimento to be the sole sign of union upon which Italy could call, in those very same years a new unifying myth, better suited to interpreting the changes under way in society, came to light. It cannot be by chance that as the Risorgimento suffered a decline the Resistance once again loomed large in the sphere of public and national memory. After its difficult and controversial debut as one of the central pillars of republican democracy in the darkest years of the Cold War, circumstances at the beginning of the 1960s favoured a relaunch of the memory of the Resistance, seen now in a unitary guise. The failure of the attempt to shift the political centre of gravity to the Right (the so-called «Tambroni episode»), and the need to adjust policy to fit the extraordinary changes under way in Italian society, led in 1962 to the advent of the first Centre-Left governments. In this new context the anti-Fascist paradigm became a source of values to which cultural and political forces ranging across the entire constitutional spectrum could all refer, and furthermore it helped to satisfy the widely felt desire of younger generations to learn about the history of anti-Fascism and of the Resistance. In 1965, the twentieth anniversary witnessed the first large-scale attempt to mount a public celebration of the choral vision of the liberation struggle. The image of a «tricolour» Resistance retained its allure up until the 1970s, and had a far from negligible role in erecting a barrier against the Terroristic emergency. On the other hand, this notion was challenged on various occasions by milieux within the radical Left, who denounced what to them was a bid to empty the partisan struggle of its revolutionary content. In their view the unitary image foisted upon that struggle represented just one more chapter in a narrative of the Resistance «betrayed».57

A significant re-emergence of the Risorgimento within the circuits of public memory may be dated to the beginning of the 1990s. The grave crisis of the Italian political system prompted a renewed interest in themes linked to the nation or the fatherland, and to processes of cultural and political nationalisation. The Risorgimento, seen as a foundational event for the unitary state, was thus once again at the heart of a wide-ranging debate. But the discrepancy between the fruitful consequences for historical research, which has entered a period rich in scholarly studies, and the shortcomings evident in the public uses of history has grown ever more glaring. The crisis suffered by the paradigms upon which the legitimisation of the «republic of the parties» (first and foremost, anti-Fascism and the Resistance) was founded, has in turn sucked the Risorgimento into the political controversy, with its historiography at times being subjected to wayward and blatantly instrumental uses.

The most prominent agencies involved in the political and media offensive against the Risorgimento have been, on the one hand, the Lega Nord (Northern League), and on the other, milieux within Catholic integralism grouped around the «Communion and Liberation movement», to which in more recent times one might add the neo-Bourbon «Southernist» front. The Northern League has several times aired the theme of secession, deploying for this purpose unscrupulous reinterpretations of history and coarse, intolerant tirades against the tricolour flag and Mameli’s Hymn, while at the same time promoting utterly fantastical initiatives (for example, the proposal to introduce dialect into schools) and rituals (the annual demonstration at the sources of the Po) designed to bolster communitarian sentiment around the symbols of an imaginary «nazione Padana».

Catholic radicalism has, by contrast, been more involved in the promotion of popular history. Books, articles and exhibitions have from time to time reassessed the anti-French insurgencies erupting at the end of the eighteenth century, beatified the pontificate of Pius IX, denigrated the secular nature of the Risorgimento and demonised figures such as Mazzini or Garibaldi. The Risorgimento and the forging of Italian unity have thus been depicted as thoroughly shady, corrupt undertakings, a sort of Tangentopoli ante litteram run by Freemasons and an incubator of all the divisions that have plagued the subsequent history of

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Italy. The Risorgimento thus conceived is essentially held responsible for having stifled the religious and Catholic soul of the peninsula, for having propelled the population down the path to secularism, and for having thus lacerated the social fabric. In the pages of a national newspaper, a journalist alluding to Carlo Pisacane’s expedition of 1857 went so far as to speak of a «crime novel» and to insinuate that the Risorgimento in its entirety was a venture some of whose aspects were not only «illegal but violent, terroristic and even criminal in the strict sense of the term». Hence the readiness of such commentators to call for a «purification of [nineteenth-century] memory», which would serve, in their judgement, to bring about a genuine national reconciliation and to restore to Italy an authentic sense of its own identity. The intention here is in fact to use the Risorgimento to strike a blow against that large part of the Catholic world which has made secularity and autonomy from the religious power into a precondition of political commitment, and which has thereby arrived at analytically acute reflections upon national history.

Admittedly, it is as well to specify that we are not concerned here with majority positions. Yet it would be just as mistaken to underestimate the phenomenon, as if it were not to some degree a reflection of undercurrents discernible within the national mood. A large historical pseudo-literature and a great number of internet sites serve to broadcast the trope of the «Risorgimento lie», to quote the title of a manifesto-pamphlet exemplifying the tendency to view the Risorgimento with rancour and contempt and to convert history into a tribunal.

The 2011 anniversary thus comes at an extremely delicate moment in the history of Italy, a country in the grip of a transition which has already dragged on for almost twenty years and which has profound cultural and political implications. It is too early to draw up a balance-sheet. Yet I have already been impressed by one feature of the current anniversary, namely the discrepancy between the low official profile of the celebrations (there is no major event to rival the exhibitions mounted in 1911 and in 1961) and the notable liveliness of initiatives launched in the country at large. Communal administrations, local associations, schools and cultural institutions have promoted a mobilisation that has proved to be in large part spontaneous and arising from below. It strikes me that the countless attacks on the Risorgimento and on the unitary state have overstepped the mark, and that the

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65 Amongst recent works, see F. Traniello, Religione cattolica e Stato nazionale. Dal Risorgimento al secondo dopoguerra, Bologna 2007, which contains numerous insights.
67 G. De Luna, La Repubblica del dolore. Le memorie di un’Italia divisa, Milan 2011.
unseemly and often coarse manner in which they were mounted has had the opposite effect to what was intended, prompting a widely felt desire for historical knowledge and at the same time a reaction against blatant manipulations of the nation’s historical memory.

Translated from Italian by Martin Thom.
Les anniversaires et l’usage publique du Risorgimento au XXe siècle en Italie


Massimo Baioni
Università di Siena
Dipartimento di Scienze storico-sociali, filosofiche e della formazione
Viale Luigi Cittadini 33
I-52100 Arezzo
e-mail: maxbaioni@libero.it

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