

THE LIMITS OF NATIONAL MEMORY: ANTI-FASCISM, THE HOLOCAUST AND THE FOSSE ARDEATINE MEMORIAL IN 1990s ITALY

ABSTRACT

This article uses the memorial to the 1944 Fosse Ardeatine massacre in Rome as a case study that demonstrates how the symbolic function of memorials can alter over time. Focusing on the changing meanings of the monument in a post-Cold War context, it examines how, during the 1990s, the memorial was transformed from a central, national symbol of the Italian anti-fascist Resistance to one which evoked the Holocaust. It argues that this shift in meaning recast the monument – and the massacre itself – as a site and an event at the margins of national history and memory.

Keywords: Italian anti-fascism; Italian fascism; Holocaust; Fosse Ardeatine massacre; Rome; Priebke, Erich; memorials

HOW DO THE SYMBOLIC MEANINGS and functions of memorials change over time as representations of the national past change? With this question in mind, this paper examines the history of the memorial to the Fosse Ardeatine massacre, a massacre of 335 Italians by Nazi SS in Rome in March 1944. The memorial, constructed in 1949, has remained physically unchanged over time, but its public representation and symbolic function have altered significantly. The monument initially served to inscribe a simplified narrative of the Resistance onto the complex memory of the massacre: it presented the victims of the massacre as “martyrs” of the Resistance and of the nation as a whole, veiling their diverse political, religious and class backgrounds. The memorial nationalised the memory of the massacre, evoking, through the deaths of a diverse range of victims, the unity of the nation in resistance to fascism. Its function as a symbol of national unity, well entrenched during the Cold War, faltered in the 1990s, and in particular during the first trial of former SS captain Erich Priebke in Rome in 1996. During this period, the monument took on a renewed political significance, but its traditional association with anti-fascism was eclipsed by a new set of narratives that focused on its relation to the Holocaust. In this new narrative framework, the memorial no longer represented the victims as a unified group, symbolic of the unity of the nation as a whole; rather, by focusing on the particular ethnic identities of one individual group of victims, this new narrative divested the memorial of much of its significance to Italian *national* memory. This article will argue that this shift resulted from the

confluence of several factors: the growing centrality of the Holocaust in Italian and European public discourse, the re-evaluation of the legacies and achievements of anti-fascism in the wake of the collapse of the Cold War, and the growth of support for a political Right that favoured “reconciliation” between fascist and anti-fascist sympathisers through the selective forgetting of war crimes. The ways in which these changes affected public perceptions and use of the Fosse Ardeatine memorial make the monument a fruitful case study, one which illustrates the extent to which broad reconsiderations of the wartime past can have a direct impact upon war memorials.

The Fosse Ardeatine massacre

On 23 March 1944, seven months into the Nazi occupation of Rome, a bomb planted by partisans of the communist GAP (Gruppi di Azione Patriottica) exploded in the central Roman street of via Rasella, killing 32 members of the Bolzen regiment of the German army. Less than 24 hours later, in retaliation, Nazi SS took 335 men and boys to the Ardeatine quarry on the southern outskirts of the city, forced the victims into a cave-like mineshaft, and shot each one in the back of the neck before blowing up the roof of the cave to conceal the bodies. The incident, known as the Fosse Ardeatine massacre, is the best known of the dozens of civilian massacres perpetrated by Nazi and fascist forces in Italy during the period from 8 September 1943 to the war’s end.

Those murdered at the Fosse Ardeatine were a remarkably diverse group. Although none of the victims was in any way responsible for the via Rasella bombing, the majority were affiliated with partisan units or banned political parties. They ranged in age from 14 to 75, and represented a cross-section of working- and middle-class Roman society: among the victims were farmers, civil servants, actors, street vendors, university professors, members of the armed forces and the *carabinieri*, and a wide variety of other manual and liberal professions.¹ Most of the victims were taken from prisons and detention centres around Rome, where many were under police investigation (by either German or Italian police, or both) for political or partisan activity. Seventy-five had been imprisoned simply because they were Jewish. Ten were arrested on or near via Rasella, having had the misfortune to be in the area when the bomb exploded. The victims thus also represented a wide range of those persecuted under fascism and during the Nazi occupation: partisans (especially communists and members of *Bandiera Rossa* and the *Partito d’Azione*), members of banned political parties, Jews, and bystanders who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Because of the diversity of the victims, the massacre as a remembered event assumed a different meaning and symbolic timbre for different groups, and the site of the massacre developed into a *lieu de mémoire* that represented a range of experiences of suffering: partisan and military, official and subversive, Jewish and Catholic, communal, Roman and national. At the same time, the very fact that the victims represented such a range of political beliefs, religious

backgrounds and class groupings allowed the massacre and its site to take on a broad national significance: it was a fitting symbol of the entire nation's suffering under fascism and the occupation, and was recognised as such by postwar leaders before the war had even ended. Well before the official monument to the massacre was constructed in 1949, the site had become a locus of mourning for the entire city: in the months following the liberation of Rome in June 1944, an estimated 7,000 people visited the Fosse Ardeatine every Sunday, using free buses provided by the municipal administration.²

While the Fosse Ardeatine had thus developed into a potent site of shared grief for victims' relatives and for the city of Rome itself before the erection of the monument, the monument gave the site its national significance. Because the victims of the Fosse Ardeatine massacre represented such a varied cross-section of the population as a whole, post-Liberation administrators saw the site as ideal for a memorial that would stress national unity at a moment when the postwar state was concerned with re-establishing a sense of collective belonging to a nation reborn. Although the impetus for the construction of a monument originally came from the victims' families, a delegation of whom approached the Bonomi government in the summer of 1944, the suggestion meshed well with the government's own need to promote national unity and stress the importance of the Resistance as the foundation of the post-fascist state. The government approved a national architectural competition for the monument's design on 15 January 1945, and appointed the members of a selection committee.

From the beginning, the government envisioned the monument as a site of national symbolic significance: the memorial was to be a "new Altare della Patria, which will record for posterity the war of the *Risorgimento italiano*", drawing a link between the pre-World War I Altare della Patria monument (which houses the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier) and the Fosse Ardeatine, and suggesting that the massacre, as a symbol of the Resistance, was part of a second *Risorgimento*, a second act of national unification and liberation.³ At an official level, the monument was thus imagined as a national memorial to a war of liberation, one in which the victims were represented as martyrs "who fell for the Nation and for Freedom". The memorial was to reflect unity above all else. It took three years for the families of the victims and the government-appointed memorial committee to reach an agreement on the structure of the monument, but eventually a design was agreed upon: the dead would be buried in individual tombs on a site directly outside the cave, and an immense concrete slab, the *pietra tombale*, would create a low ceiling over the tombs, suggesting a common grave. The reinforced cave was to remain open as part of the monument. Once this design had been approved by the majority of the victims' families, construction began, and the memorial was officially inaugurated on 24 March 1949, the fifth anniversary of the massacre.⁴

The monument's form reflected its intended function as a symbol of national unity in several ways. Upon entering the cave, visitors to the site could read an inscription by the Christian Democrat (DC) politician Umberto Tupini (who

was Minister of Public Works in the early postwar period, and who was actively involved in the creation of the memorial):

We were massacred in this place because we fought against domestic tyranny for freedom and against a foreign invader for the independence of the Nation. We dreamed of a free, just, democratic Italy. Our sacrifice and our blood are the progenitors [of that nation] and a reminder for the generations to come.

Under the *pietra tombale*, visitors found 336 tombs: an extra tomb was added to symbolise all those who died fighting for the Resistance. The Fosse Ardeatine memorial thus had a dual symbolic function: it celebrated the Resistance as the moral foundation of the postwar Republic, and it unified the victims as martyrs to the Resistance: the *pietra tombale* enclosed the victims in a single grave, the extra tomb created a symbolic link between those who died at the Fosse Ardeatine and those who died fighting for the Resistance *in toto*, and Tupini's inscription suggested that all 335 victims had been members of the Resistance (which they had not) and that their deaths had been a result of their partisan activity (which had not been the case). The memorial thus, as Michela Ponzani has observed, "eliminated the individuality of the victims and nationalized their diverse political, cultural and religious experiences in a *unicum* symbol of national unity."⁵ Through the memorial, the dead of the Fosse Ardeatine became part of an official narrative of heroic mass resistance to fascism and Nazi occupation, and the very existence of the memorial inscribed the event itself onto national memory.

In stressing the unity of the victims in death, narrating the massacre as part of the Resistance, and employing the language of martyrdom and sacrifice, the memorial demanded certain selective acts of forgetting. The fact that some of the murdered men were randomly picked off the street was nowhere visible in the monument, and only rarely mentioned in the annual commemorative ceremony that took place at the monument on 24 March. The Jewish origins of roughly one-fifth of the dead were marginal to both the monument and the ceremony. On maps of the Fosse Ardeatine dating from the early postwar period, the site of the monument was marked with a large cross and labelled *sacrario*, a word with strong Catholic overtones. The commemorative ceremony traditionally centred on a Catholic mass; although a rabbi always recited the Kaddish as well, this was a minor element of the ceremony. The nationalisation of the memorial may have neutralised difference and projected a surface-level unity, but the site remained in some ways a "divided space", in the words of Alessandro Portelli: divisions were visible between the (mostly) male site administration and the (mostly) female mourners; between the Christian Democrats who always gave official speeches at the commemoration, and the communists and socialists in the audience; between Jews, Catholics and atheists; and between the public need to enshrine the dead as martyrs to the nation, and the private need of families to mourn at the graves of their loved ones.⁶

If the diversity of the victims made the site a symbolically potent *lieu de mémoire*, it was only through the suppression and selective forgetting or ignoring of this diversity that the monument became a truly national symbol. As time went by, the imposition of this unifying narrative drained the site of much of its emotional significance. After the DC invited the Socialists to join them in a series of coalition governments from the early 1960s onwards, official narratives that situated the Resistance as the moral foundation of the postwar state became increasingly a focus of official commemorative rituals – and these rituals became increasingly stale and predictable.⁷ The public use of the Fosse Ardeatine site for the articulation of anti-fascist narratives of the Resistance (or what is sometimes referred to as the anti-fascist paradigm) remained largely unchanged and unchallenged until the 1990s, when the value of the anti-fascist paradigm itself was broadly disputed. While the memorial itself has remained unchanged since its construction, the public understanding of its meaning and symbolic function changed significantly during the political crisis of the early 1990s and the shift to the Right which followed.

The 1990s: the anti-fascist paradigm challenged

As we have seen, the Fosse Ardeatine memorial was constructed as a national monument which placed the March 1944 massacre within the broader history of the Resistance. The monument, as an official construction, became a platform for the articulation of anti-fascist narratives. These narratives played a prominent role in Italian political culture in the Cold War period: by acting as a bridge between the two pillars of Italian Cold War politics, the DC and the Communist Party, Resistance narratives played a fundamental role in promoting national unity.⁸ The dominant political parties of the postwar era used their historic links to the Resistance to bolster their legitimacy, and official sponsorship of anti-fascist narratives – the myth of mass resistance to fascism and the notion that anti-fascism was the moral bedrock of the Republic – consolidated this process. The monument itself was both a reflection of the importance of these narratives in the postwar period, and a concrete contribution to the development of such narratives. What would happen to the monument, however, when these narratives no longer had unquestioned political support?

The legacies of both fascism and anti-fascism became the focus of sustained public scrutiny after the end of the Cold War. The postwar hegemony of the DC had been built in large part on the party's self-styled function as a bulwark against communism; when this rationale evaporated, the postwar state structure lost its legitimacy. Following the *Tangentopoli* corruption scandals of the early 1990s,⁹ the DC disintegrated, as did almost every other political party with historical links to the Resistance. With the collapse and transformation of these parties, anti-fascism lost much of its power as a unifying political myth. The political Right moved into the vacuum created by the collapse of the postwar parties, and the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI) made enormous electoral

gains. In 1994 the MSI entered the national government as part of Silvio Berlusconi's centre-right coalition, marking the first time in postwar Europe that a party which openly traced its roots to wartime fascism had come to power.

Supporters of the newly-powerful political Right were often hostile to anti-fascist narratives, seeing anti-fascism as inextricably sullied by the corruption and *partitocrazia* of the Cold War. Many endorsed the declaration of a Second Republic, and challenged the idea that anti-fascism could provide a unifying political discourse, suggesting instead that Italy's contemporary problems could be blamed on the failure of anti-fascist narratives to nurture a strong national identity. The collapse of the postwar political system was seen by conservatives and moderates alike as a sign of Italy's instability, and many on the Right decried the weakness of national identity in the wake of the political crisis of the early 1990s; some even questioned the value of the national project itself.¹⁰ Many of those who questioned the legitimacy of the Resistance endorsed the notion that fascism and anti-fascism should be placed on an equal moral plane. Those who supported this idea of moral parity expressed it in terms of national "reconciliation" or "pacification", political buzzwords much in vogue in 1990s Italy. Advocates of "reconciliation" argued that for the sake of national unity in the present, old divides between fascists and anti-fascists should be put aside, and the violence of the war era should be forgotten. In the uncertain political climate of the 1990s, this notion of "reconciliation" found ample support not only on the Right, but among many moderates as well, and even amongst a handful of prominent advocates on the Left.¹¹

In this political environment in which the value of official anti-fascism was challenged publicly by a strengthened Right, the Fosse Ardeatine memorial – designed to reflect official anti-fascist narratives – faced a re-evaluation. The lukewarm ceremonies marking the 50th anniversary of the massacre illustrate this growing hesitation with regards to the official use of the monument. A comparison with earlier ceremonies is revealing here: in 1984, for the 40th anniversary of the massacre, a four-day commemorative celebration was organised by regional, provincial and municipal governments, in conjunction with the association for victims' families (ANFIM), several organisations representing former partisans, and the Roman Jewish Community. The commemorations involved two concerts, a ceremony at the memorial with a long list of official speakers, a conference, and a "popular demonstration".¹² In 1994, for the 50th anniversary, the commemoration held at the monument was a comparatively simple affair, one which did not differ greatly from the now-stale annual ritual that had altered little in decades. Beyond a memorial concert that ANFIM organised in conjunction with the mayor's office, there were no special events planned, and official organisational input was minimal. In the uncertain climate of 1994, only weeks before the election that would bring Berlusconi's coalition to power, the pomp that had accompanied the 40th anniversary commemoration was clearly out of place. The monument and its accompanying commemoration were in need of a new interpretive framework as official anti-fascism lost its bearings. The moment

for the development of this interpretive shift came two years later, during the first trial of former SS captain Erich Priebke in Rome in the summer of 1996.

The Priebke trial: rethinking the Fosse Ardeatine for the era of “reconciliation”

The meaning and function of the Fosse Ardeatine memorial did not, of course, remain static throughout the Cold War period; I have chosen to examine the events surrounding the Priebke trial not because they mark an exclusive moment of change for the monument, but because they illustrate a particularly revealing one. The three trials of former SS captain Erich Priebke revived both local and national interest in the Fosse Ardeatine after decades of fading public attention, and the trials themselves became part of the collective memory of the massacre. The first trial in particular provoked heated public debate when the three ruling magistrates found Priebke “guilty but not punishable” for his role in the massacre. The court ruled that while Priebke had acted with cruelty and premeditation, aggravating and extenuating circumstances balanced out so that he could only be sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment, a verdict that fell under the statute of limitations. When the verdict was announced on the evening of 1 August 1996, rioting broke out at the military tribunal where the trial was held, and public anger was not quelled until Priebke was re-arrested. He was later re-tried but again given the same sentence; it was only after the case passed to an appeals court in 1998 that Priebke was denied recourse to extenuating circumstances and given a sentence of life imprisonment (to which the statute of limitations does not apply in Italy).¹³

Priebke was not the sole person responsible for the massacre – many members of the SS had been present and participated, including members of the Italian SS – nor was he even the first to be tried for his role in it (his commanding officer, Herbert Kappler, was given a life sentence in 1948 for orchestrating the massacre, but escaped from a Roman prison hospital in 1977). In the prevailing political climate, however, with mounting demands for a “reconciliation” that would put wartime grievances aside, Priebke’s trial became the subject of a charged debate. Commentators were deeply divided over the usefulness of the trial, with a handful of prominent conservative journalists and editorialists vocally arguing for Priebke’s release. These divisive arguments ensured that the proceedings remained controversial, and garnered a high level of media attention.

Yet one of the most noteworthy aspects of trial reportage – although few commented on it at the time – was the media’s focus on Jewish responses to the trial. After each turn in the proceedings, the national press solicited the comments and reactions not from the victims’ families in general, but specifically from the relatives of Jewish victims. With conservative thinkers advocating Priebke’s release and arguing that the crimes of World War II would best be forgiven and forgotten, the press seized upon Rome’s small Jewish community and depicted it as a group that refused to forget. As Alessandro Portelli has observed,

the relatives of the victims found it impossible to “forget”; the [Jewish] community felt that it could not afford to let its guard down. For the media, this attitude became another pretext to represent the memory of the Fosse Ardeatine and the Priebke trial as the private business of the Jews. When the Fosse Ardeatine was being represented as everybody’s monument, in the 1950s, the Jews were perceived as a partial, embarrassing presence; now, they seemed to be the only ones concerned.¹⁴

As the press devoted more and more attention to Jewish responses to the Priebke trial, the communal memory of the massacre as a part of the genocide took on a public aspect that it had never had before. Jewish people who had lost relatives at the Fosse Ardeatine almost invariably also lost loved ones to deportation and extermination camps. For the relatives of the seventy-five Jewish victims of the massacre, the deaths at the Fosse Ardeatine were not an isolated incident: they were inexorably linked to the fascist racial laws of 1938, to the massive roundup in Rome’s former ghetto on 16 October 1943, to deportations, to Auschwitz, and to the Holocaust as a whole. As a result of the media’s attention, memories long confined to a small and relatively closed community entered the public arena. The more the national press scrutinised the attitudes and responses of the Jewish community towards the Priebke trial, the more the memory of the massacre itself was represented as the exclusive preserve of the Jewish community, who saw the event – quite naturally – as part of the genocide as a whole.

Jewish community leaders were troubled by this media attention. Claudio Fano, whose father had died in the massacre and who was then president of the Roman Jewish Community, expressed his confusion over this unwanted attention:

The Fosse Ardeatine was a problem for everyone: among the victims there were not only Jews but Catholics, people from every social class and of every age. I can’t understand why the problem tends to be presented as one that is only Jewish.¹⁵

The Roman Jewish Community Council affirmed in a public statement that the massacre represented an offence against all Italians, and the president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, Tullia Zevi, made similar statements throughout the course of the trial. Community leaders recognised that, by presenting the massacre as a predominantly Jewish concern, the burden of maintaining and nourishing the memory of the massacre was being displaced from a larger collective onto the small Jewish community. They feared that this would make the Jewish community the target of anti-Semitic violence, and in a general sense, they worried that presenting the massacre as a Nazi aggression against Jews suggested it was part of a broader external conflict for which Italians held no direct responsibility.

The representation of the massacre as a part of the Holocaust began to affect public and official understanding of the memorial itself. The verdict of “guilty but not punishable” in the Priebke trial provoked an explosion of emotion among victims’ relatives and their supporters. On the evening of 1 August

1996, after the verdict had been announced, victims' families began an emotional pilgrimage to the Fosse Ardeatine, accompanied by a wave of prominent politicians and thousands of Roman residents. Official interpretations of the site's meaning, however, had changed dramatically. Premier Romano Prodi, who went directly to the monument following the verdict, gave a speech in which he linked the massacre to the Holocaust and added that "the Holocaust will never fall under that statute of limitations".¹⁶ The vocabulary of martyrdom and sacrifice for the Resistance, which had for so long shaped official discourse at the memorial, had disappeared. As a stream of politicians and representatives of the state passed between the streets of the former ghetto and the Fosse Ardeatine in the wake of the verdict, the monument assumed a new position within the symbolic geography of the city: gone was the link between the Altare della Patria and the Fosse Ardeatine memorial, and in its place was a connection to the former ghetto.

This official repositioning of the massacre within the broader history of the Holocaust spread beyond Rome in the wake of the Priebke verdict. At a demonstration in Milan the following day, official representatives spoke of the Fosse Ardeatine as a place at which "the word Holocaust found its full significance". In the midst of this interpretive shift, representatives of the Jewish community seemed to be alone in reminding Italians that the massacre was a matter of national concern. Tullia Zevi, speaking at the monument following the verdict, stated that she was there "to bear witness to a tragedy that is not only Jewish, but everyone's" – but her comments found little echo at the official level.¹⁷

Why did this happen? Why, during the course of the Priebke trial, did the Fosse Ardeatine massacre come to be seen as a moment of Jewish suffering? Why did journalists seek the opinions of residents of the former ghetto, ignoring the anger and frustration of non-Jewish victims' relatives? Why did official representatives recast the memorial as a monument to an episode of the Holocaust? Among the most important reasons for this interpretive shift was the strength of the culture of "reconciliation". At a moment when the legacy of the Resistance and its importance for contemporary Italy was openly under attack, it was less politically volatile to relate the massacre to the Holocaust than it was to position it within the broader history of the Resistance. In 1996, paying public homage to the Resistance had become less politically tenable. But if the dead of the Fosse Ardeatine could not be unified under the banner of the Resistance, the suggestion that they represented a cohesive group began to unravel. This made it far more difficult to place their deaths within an easily-digestible memorial narrative.

Moreover, the very notion of a reconciliation between fascists and anti-fascists was predicated on the idea that the crimes of the war should be put aside and forgotten for the sake of national unity in the present. The act of remembering and demanding justice was thus an obstacle to the process. However, where the memory of war crimes could be portrayed as "Jewish" rather than "Italian" (a dichotomy which assumed that these categories were mutually exclusive),

remembrance itself became the preserve of a group assumed to be external to the body of the nation, and the threat to national unity was circumvented. Where conscious, selective forgetting was portrayed as an act of forgiveness required for the sake of national unity, remembering became a stubborn act contrary to the national good. By positing a divide between Jewish and non-Jewish Italians, and by suggesting that Jewish Italians alone desired justice for the massacre, the very process of remembering the massacre was de-nationalised, marginalised, and presented as an unhealthy by-product of an inability to forgive.

In addition, by 1996 the Holocaust had assumed a central place in European public discourse surrounding the war and its memory.¹⁸ It thus existed as an available frame of reference, a trans-national, monumental event that could be called upon to ascribe meaning to the Fosse Ardeatine massacre. In this context, the monument itself took on a new public aspect as a *lieu de mémoire* of the Holocaust. This re-interpretation, however, moved the monument and the event it commemorated to the margins of *national* history and memory. As Jewish community leaders worried, the re-casting of the massacre as part of the genocide, and the reworking of the monument as a Holocaust memorial, separated (non-Jewish) Italians from responsibility for the work of maintaining the memory of the Fosse Ardeatine.

It is difficult to gauge the reception of this re-envisioning of the memorial. To what extent did public understanding of the memorial and the massacre change in the wake of the Priebke trial? The monument itself has remained physically unchanged since 1949. It is still the site of an annual commemorative ritual with a strong official presence. It is a place where Roman schoolchildren are regularly taken on class trips, and it continues to be a site of enormous importance to the victims' relatives, both Jewish and non-Jewish alike. However, as the national media and official discourse recast the memorial as the site of Jewish suffering during the Priebke trial, broader public understanding of the massacre changed to a discernible degree. Alessandro Portelli, in researching his masterful work of oral history on the massacre (*The Order has been Carried Out*) in the period following the Priebke trial, asked several classes of high school students what they knew about the history of the massacre. Many of them situated the massacre within the history of the Holocaust: the event became "a massacre done by the Nazis toward the Jewish citizens", or a vaguely-recalled incident inseparable from the string of images and words often associated with the Holocaust in popular culture: "Fosse Ardeatine – I don't have much memory. Yes, I did study it in school: the deportation and then the concentration camps, the ovens, *Schindler's List* . . ." One student memorably remarked that the Fosse Ardeatine was a concentration camp built by the Germans for the Jews, but what confused him was that "there were also some Italians".¹⁹ For these students, the Fosse Ardeatine had become part of the world of the concentration camps. The massacre and its memorial no longer evoked national unity, and indeed the history of the event seemed increasingly removed from national history.

Conclusion

The history of the Fosse Ardeatine memorial reveals much about changing public perceptions of the national past in post-Cold War Italy. It illustrates the complex ways in which shifting representations of the past can affect the symbolic function of a memorial monument, even when the monument itself remains unchanged. As a case study, it addresses the extent to which memorials have fluid meanings that are re-created and re-imagined over time – even fifty years after the events they commemorate.

As an example of this fluid relationship between memorial and meaning, the Fosse Ardeatine monument raises pertinent questions that have implications beyond the specific case of Italy. As the Holocaust becomes increasingly central to the memory and commemoration of World War II in Europe, what are the implications of this shift? What is the relationship between the growth of public interest in the Holocaust, and the fading of Resistance mythologies in the wake of the collapse of communism? And, most importantly, to what extent is this memorial interest in the genocide used to circumvent and obfuscate questions of national responsibility for the crimes of the war? In the case of the Fosse Ardeatine, many of those who spoke of the massacre as an episode of the genocide may have done so with the best of intentions, but there can be no doubt that this interpretive shift took place amidst the growth of a popular historical revisionism that stressed selective forgetting. As we have seen, this process was deeply worrying to the relatives of the Fosse Ardeatine's victims (Jewish and non-Jewish alike), as they witnessed public "memory" of the massacre dancing further and further away from historical fact.

Since the early 1990s, there has been a flurry of memorial activity relating to the Holocaust, with new monuments being built and old monuments being amended. Memorials and plaques that commemorated Jewish victims as martyrs who had died for the nation, never mentioning their Jewish origins, were once common; many of these were re-worded in the 1990s, and this change is laudable and welcome after fifty years of the near invisibility of the Holocaust in the memorial landscape of many Western European nations. However, the Fosse Ardeatine memorial reminds us that where a *lieu de mémoire* that was once a national responsibility comes to be seen as a locus primarily of Jewish concern, there is reason to be alert and critical. In this sense, this case study has wide-ranging implications that reach far beyond the domestic context of Italy in the 1990s.

REBECCA CLIFFORD

*Worcester College
University of Oxford
OXFORD OX1 2HB
United Kingdom*

NOTES

¹ For a complete list of the 335 victims that includes such biographical information, see A. Ascarelli, *Le Fosse Ardeatine* (Rome, 1984).

² A. Portelli, *The Order has been Carried Out: History, Memory and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (New York, 2003), pp. 204–9.

³ M. Ponzani, “Il mito del secondo Risorgimento nazionale. Retorica e legittimità della Resistenza nel linguaggio politico istituzionale: il caso delle Fosse Ardeatine”, *Annali della Fondazione Luigi Einaudi* 37 (2003), 199–258 (p. 208). The quotation is taken from an early legislative decree on the institutionalisation of the Ardeatine site. The Altare della Patria, also known as the Vittoriano or the Vittorio Emanuele II monument, was designed in 1895 to honour the unification of the country and was inaugurated in 1911, but was not completed until 1925. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was added after World War I.

⁴ On the role of the victims’ families and their representative organisations in the construction of the memorial, see F. R. Castelli, “Un monumento diventato simbolo”, *Capitolium* 21 (2002), 75–81.

⁵ See Ponzani, “Il mito del secondo Risorgimento nazionale”, p. 208.

⁶ See Portelli, *The Order has been Carried Out*, p. 240.

⁷ On the institutionalisation in this period of commemorative rituals dedicated to the Resistance, see M. Ridolfi, *Le feste nazionali* (Bologna, 2003), pp. 218–23.

⁸ S. N. Sernerì, “A Past to be Thrown Away? Politics and History in the Italian Resistance”, *Contemporary European History* 4:3 (1995), 368–9.

⁹ *Tangentopoli* (“Bribesville”) was the name given to the extensive system of political corruption exposed by the *Mani pulite* (“Clean hands”) judicial investigations of the early 1990s. These investigations precipitated the collapse of many of Italy’s leading postwar political parties, including Democrazia Cristiana and the Partito Socialista Italiano.

¹⁰ Silvana Patriarca gives a useful synthesis of this phenomenon; see S. Patriarca, “Italian Neopatriotism: Debating National Identity in the 1990s”, *Modern Italy* 6:1 (2001), 21–34. The idea that anti-fascism had failed to provide a unifying foundation for the postwar republic was popularised by Ernesto Galli della Loggia’s controversial 1996 work *La morte della patria*.

¹¹ S. Lupo, “Antifascismo, anticomunismo e anti-antifascismo nell’Italia repubblicana”, in: *Antifascismo e identità europea*, ed. A. De Bernardi & P. Ferrari (Rome, 2004), pp. 367–8.

¹² ANFIM archives (not catalogued), “Ceremonie in Roma per il 40° anniversario dell’eccidio alle Fosse Ardeatine”, brochure prepared jointly by the Lazio regional government, the government of the Provincia di Roma, and the Roman City Council.

¹³ On the Priebke trial, see C. Dal Maso (ed.), *Processo Priebke: Le testimonianze, il memoriale* (Rome, 1996). While Priebke was only one of a number of SS officers who took part in the massacre, the prosecution demonstrated that he was responsible for preparing the final list of the victims, and could thus be held responsible for the murder of the “extra five”. Following the via Rasella bombing, Hitler himself ordered that ten Italian hostages be killed for every member of the German army who had died in the bombing. The bomb killed thirty-two soldiers, so an initial list of 320 hostages was drawn up; when a thirty-third soldier later died in hospital, Kappler added an extra ten names to the list of his own accord. An extra five names were apparently added by Priebke accidentally, in his haste to compile the final list. The very notion of an “extra five” was controversial, as it suggested that the other 330 victims had been killed legitimately. On this point, see J. Foot, “Via Rasella, 1944: Memory, Truth, and History”, *The Historical Journal* 43:4 (2000), 1173–81 (p. 1180).

¹⁴ Portelli, *The Order has been Carried Out*, p. 256.

¹⁵ *Il Gazzettino*, 18 April 1996.

¹⁶ *La Stampa*, 2 August 1996.

¹⁷ See, respectively, *Corriere della Sera*, 3 August 1996 and *Il Messaggero*, 2 August 1996.

¹⁸ On the growing centrality of the Holocaust in Europe after 1989, see the epilogue of Tony Judt’s excellent *Postwar* (London, 2005).

¹⁹ Portelli, *The Order has been Carried Out*, pp. 287–8. (The translations from the Italian are Portelli’s own.)