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The “Betrayed Resistance” in Valentino Orsini’s *Corbari* (1970) and Bernardo Bertolucci’s *1900* (1976)

Dominic Gavin

The connections between Italian film and history have been the object of renewed attention in recent years. A number of studies have provided re-readings of Italian cinema, especially from the perspective of public memory. Charting the interrelations of cinema, the public use of history, and historiography, these studies include reevaluations of the cinema of the Resistance, the war film, the Holocaust and the Fascist dictatorship.¹ The ongoing debates over Resistance memory in particular—the “never-ending liberation,” in the words of one historian—have provided a motive for reconsidering popular cultural productions as vehicles of collective perceptions of the past.² If Italian film studies came relatively late to the issues of cinema and public memory, this approach has now become mainstream.³

In this essay, I am concerned with films on the Resistance during the 1970s. These belong to a wider grouping of contemporary cinematic productions that deal with the Fascist dictatorship and antifascism. These films raise a series of critical questions. How did the general film field contribute to the wider processing of historical memory, and how did it relate to political violence in Italy?⁴ To what extent did the work of Italian filmmakers participate in the “new discourse” of international cinema in the 1970s concerning the treatment of Nazism and the occupation,⁵ or to what extent were filmmakers engaged in reaffirming populist myths, in accordance with the antifascist spirit of the times?⁶ Can Italian cinema depicting Fascism and the Resistance be said to “revision history,”⁷ anticipating trends in other fields, such as historiography, or does cinema instead follow tendencies in the spheres of politics and popular

¹ To cite only book-length studies, Giuseppe Ghigi, *La memoria inquieta: cinema e Resistenza* (Venice: Cafoscarina, 2009); Philip Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Sara Pesce, *Memoria e immaginario: la seconda guerra mondiale nel cinema italiano* (Genova: Le Mani, 2008); Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Shadow of Auschwitz* (London: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Giacomo Lichtner, *Film and the Shoah in France and Italy* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008); Emiliano Perra, *Conflicts of Memory: The Reception of Holocaust Films and TV Programmes in Italy, 1945 to the Present* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010); Maurizio Zinni, *Fascisti di celluloido: la memoria del ventennio nel cinema italiano (1945-2000)* (Venice: Marsilio, 2010); and Giacomo Lichtner, *Fascism in Italian Cinema since 1945: The Politics and Aesthetics of Memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

² D. W. Ellwood, “The Never-Ending Liberation,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10, no. 4 (2005).

³ Comparison could be made with France, where the role of cinema as a “vector of public memory” was taken up by historian Henry Rousso in the 1980s. Many subsequent studies have built on his work. Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1991) (first edition 1987).

⁴ Many suggestive comments in this direction are contained in Christian Uva, *Schermi di piombo: il terrorismo nel cinema italiano* (Catanzaro: Rubettino, 2007).

⁵ Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* (London: Harper and Row, 1984). On the problematic representation of Fascism in Italian cinema of the 1970s, see David Forgacs, “Days of Sodom: The Fascism-Perversion Equation in Films of the 1960s and 1970s,” in *Italian Fascism: History, Memory and Representation*, ed. R. J. B. Bosworth and Patrizia Dogliani (London: Macmillan, 1999).

⁶ Carlo Ginzburg comments on the “flowering of idyllic accounts” in the populist histories of the 1970s, in which “old zhdanovism” was combined with “much older Catholicism.” Carlo Ginzburg, introduction to *Cultura popolare nell’Europa moderna* by Peter Burke (Milan: Mondadori, 1980), iv.

⁷ Robert Rosenstone, ed. *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

culture?⁸ How does the development of memory of the Resistance during the 1970s coincide with, or rather postpone, a reckoning with the legacy of Fascism?⁹

These questions are not easy to answer. One response is to focus on the issue of the “betrayed Resistance,” which animated many debates in the 1970s. The radical-left critique of the lost opportunities of the Resistance and the supposed failure of the parties of the left to act on the opportunities offered by the partisan movement in the wake of Fascism’s defeat in 1945 was one of the ongoing controversies of the day.¹⁰ And yet there has been no sustained attempt to relate these debates to the cinema of the period. Valentino Orsini’s *Corbari* (1970) and Bernardo Bertolucci’s *1900* (*Novecento*, 1976) are the two 1970s films that most explicitly address the sense of unfulfilled promise that many on the left continued to associate with the partisan war, long after its conclusion.

Corbari is the Resistance film most influenced by the radical politics of 1968 and after. Narrating the adventures of a band of partisans, Orsini’s film reflects on the motives of the left wing of the Resistance and depicts conflicts within the movement over the ultimate objectives of the struggle. Bertolucci’s 1976 film is a work of much broader historical scope. *1900* recounts the struggles of peasant socialism in the region of Emilia, moving from the early years of the twentieth century up to the conclusion of the Second World War. In the framing sequences set in 1945, *1900* intervenes in current polemics over the legacy of the Resistance.¹¹ I will preface my discussion of these two films with comments on the cinematic depiction of the Resistance in the 1970s and the political contexts that underlay its representation.

The 1970s would surely be a key period in any discussion of Resistance memory and cinema. The decade is well known as a period when issues of historical memory intersected with present-day politics, most notably in the discourses of Fascism and antifascism. These are also the years in which political filmmaking reached its apogee, in what is known as the *cinema d’impegno* or “engaged” cinema. The 1970s were the last flourishing period for the Italian film industry too.¹² The decline of the industry’s economic fortunes in the final years of the decade coincided with the decline of the left-wing counter-culture and the fortunes of the principal

⁸ A criticism of Giovanni De Luna’s discussion of Italian historical films in *L’occhio e l’orecchio dello storico: le fonti audiovisive nella ricerca e nella didattica della storia* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1993) is that it tends to read films as ancillary to previously established understandings in historiography, overlooking cinema’s anticipatory potential with respect to other forums of public memory.

⁹ To quote Lichtner on the divisive terms in which Italian memory debates often take place: “Has the left-right contraposition prevented a thorough examination of the nation’s history and memory, and has it thus become a shared alibi to avoid any discussion of the darkest pages of Italy’s history?” Lichtner, *Fascism in Italian Cinema Since 1945*, 20.

¹⁰ For a documentary treatment of the theme of the “betrayed Resistance,” see Renato Ferraro’s *Marzo ’43 – luglio ’48* (1971); and for Ferraro’s comments on his film, see the interview in *Memoria, mito, storia: la parola ai registi, 37 interviste*, ed. Alessandro Amaducci, et al. (Tortona: Regione Piemonte, 1994), 121–28.

¹¹ This context has been noted, but not taken up at length, in writings on *1900*. See Andrea Rapini, “Dai ‘teddy boys’ ai ‘Cinesi’: antifascismo e giovani generazioni,” in *La Resistenza contesa: memoria e rappresentazione dell’antifascismo nei manifesti politici degli anni Settanta*, ed. Diego Melegari and Ilaria La Fata (Milan: Punto Rosso, 2004), 40; and Peter Bondanella, *A History of Italian Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 443. One indication of the polemical context that informs Bertolucci’s film is its references to Luchino Visconti’s *Senso* (1954) and *Il gattopardo* (*The Leopard*, 1963), through the casting of Alida Valli and Burt Lancaster. *Senso* and *Il gattopardo* had depicted the Risorgimento as a *rivoluzione mancata*, in the Gramscian phrase, an incomplete or “failed” revolution. By the 1970s, it was the Resistance, rather than the Risorgimento, that was being criticized as a *rivoluzione mancata* by groups to the left of the Communist Party, of which Bertolucci was a member.

¹² Bruno Torri, “Industria, mercato, politica,” in *Il cinema del riflusso: film e cineasti italiani degli anni ’70*, ed. Lino Micciché (Venice: Marsilio, 1997).

opposition party, the *Partito comunista italiano* (PCI), at the polls. After a season in which producers were willing to invest significant sums of money in expensive historical reconstructions with international casts, Italian cinema's share of the international and national markets rapidly shrank.

The climate of the 1980s was no longer congenial to the politically motivated cinema of the preceding years. In the midst of the "second economic miracle" of the early 1980s, the public was more inclined to look to the future with optimism rather than back to the legacies of Fascism and antifascism. A sign of these broad cultural shifts is the fact that only one film on the Resistance was made for cinematic distribution in the 1980s, the Taviani brothers' *La notte di San Lorenzo* (*The Night of Shooting Stars*, 1982). In this case, the Tavianis had difficulty finding a producer willing to invest in the project.¹³ A fabulist work, *La notte di San Lorenzo* has a retrospective tone, which suggests that its battle between partisans and Fascists belongs to a distant era. The spectator is left with the impression that the struggles of 1943-1945 have entered the sphere of historical memory, at a remove from present-day concerns.

In contrast, the cinema of the Resistance in the 1970s communicates the charged atmosphere of the times. These films echo political and historiographical currents of a "decade when [...] the future of Italy seemed to be being decided through interpretation of the past."¹⁴ Productions on Fascism and antifascism (most of which belong to the first half of the decade) reflect the collective desire to interrogate the national past in the wake of the student protests of the late 1960s and the civic tensions of the following years. The emphases and approaches of filmmakers varied. One of these trends took up the critique of official antifascism characteristic of the student protests. *I sette fratelli Cervi* (*The Seven Cervi Brothers*, Gianni Puccini, 1968), *Corbari* and *Libera, amore mio* (*Libera, My Love*, Mauro Bolognini, 1975) echo the anti-establishment positions of the new left. Invoking a workerist perspective, these films point to the inflated claims of the official Resistance myth to provide a moment of rupture in Italian history and argue instead that victory over Fascism in 1945 did not correspond to radical change in the social order, at least from the point of view of the working classes.¹⁵

Incorporating the politics of the new left into the narrative of the partisan war was one way of breathing new life into the Resistance myth. The positive analogy between the young partisans of 1943-1945 and the youthful protestors of 1968 in the films of Puccini and Orsini offered an opportunity to connect past and present struggles. Such analogies, though, contained an element of projection, reflecting a desire to inscribe the Resistance in a form of continuity with the social protests of postwar Italy, thus denying the evidence of rupture between the generations and the

¹³ See the Taviani brothers, quoted in *Il cinema italiano d'oggi, 1970-1984: raccontato dai suoi protagonisti*, ed. Franca Faldini and Goffredo Fofi (Milan: Mondadori, 1984), 543.

¹⁴ R. J. B. Bosworth, *The Italian Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (London: Headline, 1998), 155.

¹⁵ The political currency of the struggles of 1943-1945 to the late 1960s is suggested by a sequence in the middle of Puccini's film. After the replacement of Mussolini by Marshall Badoglio as leader of the Italian war effort in 1943, the radio message is broadcast in which Badoglio affirms that "the war continues and Italy remains faithful to its word ... whoever disturbs public order will be inexorably punished." The suggestion that the end of one oppressive regime is only the beginning of another is dramatized in the action that follows, when the peace protests of the 28th of July in Reggio Emilia are met with brutal repression by the Italian armed forces. Here in emblematic miniature is the proposal that apparent regime change (from Mussolini to Badoglio in 1943, but implicitly from dictatorship to postwar democracy) does little to alter the dominant position of the forces of reaction in society. This sequence in *I sette fratelli Cervi* would also have recalled the police repression in Reggio Emilia in 1960. On the updated politics of *I sette fratelli Cervi*, see Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance*, 101. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Italian are my own.

manifest gap between the political cultures of the old and new left.¹⁶ Indirectly, these films manifest an awareness of the risk of datedness in their self-conscious aspects, as when the Resistance becomes the vehicle of reflection on contemporary political debates. At times, the effect borders on anachronism, when characters in a historical setting directly address issues that animated the post-1968 political scene. Films such as *I sette fratelli Cervi* display a tension between the desire for historical testimony and the need for contemporaneity, as critics of the time noted.¹⁷

The potential datedness of the Resistance myth had been a longstanding preoccupation for many on the left. In 1970, Bertolucci gave dramatic expression to these concerns in his *Strategia del ragno* (*The Spider's Strategy*, 1970). Set concurrent with its making, Bertolucci's film portrays a small town in the north of Italy where the dominant memory of antifascism has driven out alternative interpretations of the past. *Strategia del ragno* subtly shows how a falsified, "official history" of antifascism has deprived this community of its authentic past, or pasts, leaving it a ghost town cut off from the modern world. *Strategia del ragno*'s concern with the petrification of Resistance memory is implicitly shared by other 1970s' films that self-consciously update the themes and iconography of the partisan war, in the hope that these cinematic histories will speak to the present day. Bertolucci's film reminds us that this Resistance cinema had to struggle with the risks of "embalming" historical memory, the weight of sanctification and ritual commemoration,¹⁸ while filmmakers were also clearly concerned that the Resistance legacy would seem obsolescent in the eyes of the postwar generations, the children of (relative) prosperity who had come of age amidst the cosmopolitan culture of the boom years.¹⁹

Putting aside such fears, other directors proposed a return to the partisan struggle according to a model of commemorative fidelity. Carlo Lizzani's *Mussolini: ultimo atto* (*The Last Four Days*, 1973) narrates the partisan war as a historical chronicle. It portrays a series of events that

¹⁶ Paola Ghione, "Il '68 e la Resistenza," in *La Resistenza tra storia e memoria*, ed. Nicola Gallerano (Milan: Mursia, 1999). The inter-generational analogy between the young in the time of the partisan conflict and 1970s youth is reprised in Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (*Salò or the 120 days of Sodom*, 1975). Clearly though, given Pasolini's pessimistic views on contemporary Italy, the film suggests that the Resistance legacy has not been fulfilled in a society where consumerism and cultural amnesia (typified by the developments of youth culture) dominate. For Pasolini's commentary on consumerism, youth culture and *Salò*, see for example Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Il sesso come metafora del potere," in *Pier Paolo Pasolini: per il cinema*, ed. Walter Siti and Franco Zabagli (Milan: Mondadori, 2001, vol. II).

¹⁷ The impression that Puccini's film was an effort "out of season" was noted by Tullio Kezich in a contemporary review: "It isn't unusual by now to find critical or ironic comments in the conversations of the youth against the generation of the Resistance, guilty of not having been able to prolong the revolutionary impulse after the cessation of the armed struggle. Today's protestors evidently prefer the combative literature of "Che" Guevara to a modest book like *My Seven Children* by Alcide Cervi ... [P]erhaps this is in response to the taste for the exotic and of adventure which the reading of Salgari used to provide, but this is also certainly because the links between individual action and the problems of the world are more obvious in Latin America than in an Emilia that has since become pacified." Tullio Kezich, "I 7 fratelli Cervi," *Bianco e nero* 5, no. 5 (1968): 131. On the risk of anachronism for Puccini's film, see also Adelfio Ferrero, "Il mestiere del critico," *Cinema Nuovo* 193 (1968): 214, reproduced in Gianfranco Casadio, *La guerra al cinema: i film di guerra nel cinema italiano dal 1944 al 1996*, vol. 2: *Dalla seconda guerra mondiale alla Resistenza* (Ravenna: Longo, 1998), 218-219; and Pietro Pintus, *Storia e film: trent'anni di cinema italiano (1945-1975)* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1980), 91-92.

¹⁸ For a contemporary discussion that deals with the theme of commemoration as imbalsamation, see Guido Quazza, "La Resistenza celebrata," *Rivista di storia contemporanea* 4, no. 1 (1975): 1-10.

¹⁹ Luchino Visconti's *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* (*Sandra*, 1965) is another film that reflects on the difficult transmission of antifascist memory across the generations and a precedent for Bertolucci's *Strategia del ragno*.

lead up to Mussolini's capture and execution. Giuliano Montaldo's *L'Agnese va a morire* (*And Agnes Chose to Die*, 1976) is a largely faithful adaptation of the novel of the same title by Renata Viganò, first published in 1949. Montaldo's film replies to current polemics over the "betrayed Resistance," although in this case the discourse of betrayal applies to officers of the British army who allow members of a partisan band to be massacred. By implication, it is the Allies rather than the leadership of the Resistance who are responsible for the "betrayal" of Resistance ideals in postwar society. Montaldo's film thus draws on the historical polemics that animated the extra-parliamentary left, while switching the target of critique from the PCI to the Allies. *Mussolini: ultimo atto* and *L'Agnese va a morire* both reflect the vicinity of their directors to the PCI in their "conservative" reading of the partisan war, portraying the Resistance as a war of liberation brought to a successful conclusion in 1945.

Films dealing with the Resistance were not of course limited to the political options outlined above. The Resistance is the object of nostalgia in the dramatic comedy of Ettore Scola, *C'eravamo tanto amati* (*We All Loved Each Other So Much*, 1974). Scola's film develops the familiar theme of lost occasions in Italian politics via the life stories of three ex-partisans. Their chance meeting decades after the end of the war becomes the occasion for a reflection on the ideals they fought for in 1945 and the course of postwar history. In *Rappresaglia* (*Massacre in Rome*, 1973), director George Pan Cosmatos takes an episode from the Roman Resistance as the material of a political thriller. Historical inaccuracies and criticisms of partisan actions in *Rappresaglia* seem to reflect a desire to reach an international audience rather than a willingness to engage in Italian polemics.²⁰

The cinematic depiction of the Resistance was complicated by the context of the "years of lead," the terrorist emergencies of the 1970s. The simmering civil war between extremists of left and right in the 1970s raised the question of analogies to the fighting between Italians in 1943-1945.²¹ The shadow of terrorism hangs over Orsini's 1980 television film, *Uomini e no* (*Men or Not Men*), which marked his return to the subject of the Resistance after *Corbari*. The tone of epic adventure that marked the same director's 1970 work is definitively suspended in the 1980 film. The somber account of a solitary underground operative in Milan, *Uomini e no* occupies a polar position with respect to earlier portrayals of the partisan war as a movement of "all the people." A study in existential malaise, the protagonist of Orsini's film plots assassination rather than popular revolt. *Uomini e no* is notable for its inclusion of scenes of mass shootings of civilian hostages in reprisal for partisan activity. The same scenario had featured centrally in *Rappresaglia*, but in the Italian director's film the overtones of present-day politics (coming after climactic events such as the killing of Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades in 1978) are all too clear.

The tacit analogy between the activity of the antifascist hero in wartime Milan and the urban guerrillas of 1970s Italy provides an unsettling subtext for the 1980 film, whose atmosphere is decidedly "leaden." As Giovanni De Luna has observed, Orsini's *Uomini e no* reflects its times in its portrait of the antifascist struggle: this is a film that self-consciously takes refuge in the private, in the portrait of an isolated member of the Resistance and his interior dilemmas. It speaks of "men, rather than parties," marking the winding-down of a season of political

²⁰ On the interpretation of the via Rasella bombing in *Rappresaglia*, see Joachim Staron, *Fosse Ardeatine e Marzabotto: storia e memoria di due stragi tedesche* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2007), 286-87.

²¹ As director Guido Chiesa has observed, "There has always been the 'good' violence of the Resistance and the 'bad' violence of the terrorists." Guido Chiesa quoted in Uva, *Schermi di piombo*, 259. Lina Wertmüller's *Film d'amore e anarchia* (*Love and Anarchy*, 1973)—set in the 1930s—provides a cautionary tale of antifascist violence in the story of a failed assassination attempt against Mussolini.

militancy in the name of antifascism. Both the antifascist and his Fascist opponent in *Uomini e no* appear “tired of being too good (the *gappista* N2) or too evil (the Fascist Black Dog). It is as if for the Fascists and the antifascists the war was only a job, an ugly, repetitive work of death. What motivated those on each side, the film does not say. The ‘fever’ of political activism of the preceding decade has dissipated and the film of Valentino Orsini presents itself as a direct product of that political conjuncture.”²²

Myths of the Resistance

The challenges faced by the Italian state in the 1970s meant that public Resistance memory was elaborated in highly contemporary terms. The Resistance was frequently invoked by institutional actors as a means of shoring up the state’s legitimacy. This involved underscoring the common ties that united the parties of historical antifascism engaged in the Resistance. In an atmosphere of political turbulence, part of the relevance of the Resistance to civic discourse lay in the model of solidarity it provided. Parliamentary factions could unite in recollection of the period of antifascist unity during the partisan struggle and the immediate postwar years. Antifascism in this institutional context involved an affirmation of the achievements of the democratic republic “born of the Resistance.” “Memories” of the Resistance provided a legitimating narrative for the Christian Democrats (DC) and the PCI in this period of proposed governmental collaboration between the two leading political parties, known on the left as the “historic compromise.”²³

At the same time, the Resistance provided an identity model for radicals who selectively interpreted the partisan struggle according to their own goals. The Resistance was “relived, rethought and reinterpreted” by a young generation of left-wing activists, who viewed the partisan war as a typology for militant politics in the present.²⁴ This was the attitude encapsulated in popular slogans such as “now and always, the Resistance” (“*ora e sempre, Resistenza*”). Groups to the left of the PCI proposed to return to the roots of antifascist militancy, conceived in terms of workerist solidarity: these extra-parliamentary groups were “inclined to spontaneity rather than organization,” to power “from below” rather than in its official designation.²⁵ This contestatory antifascism was inclined to read Italian postwar history in terms of shortcomings and even betrayals of radical promise. The thesis of the “betrayed Resistance” contained strong mythical overtones, not least in the assumption that the popular will had been frustrated by the compromises of the left-wing leadership rather than a variety of historical conditions. In the words of Gianpasquale Santomassimo, in this phase of public memory “[t]here develops—or perhaps strengthens—a mythic vision of our history, which regards not only Fascism but the struggle of liberation and the history of the Republic itself [...] In fact the debate concentrates on the responsibilities of a lost revolutionary occasion or, less often, of a radical renovation whose existence is taken for granted.”²⁶

²² Objecting to this vision of the antifascist struggle, De Luna adds that “the war was not a new Manzonian plague.” De Luna, *L’occhio e l’orecchio dello storico*, 94.

²³ On the project of the “historic compromise,” see Patrick McCarthy, *The Crisis of the Italian State: From the Origins of the Cold War to the Fall of Berlusconi* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 103–22. On the readings of history by the PCI in connection to the historical compromise, see Leonardo Paggi, “Una Repubblica senza pantheon: la politica e la memoria dell’antifascismo (1945–1978),” in *Le memorie della Repubblica*, ed. Leonardo Paggi (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1999), 261–65.

²⁴ Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance*, 113.

²⁵ Ghione, “Il ‘68 e la Resistenza,” 141.

²⁶ Gianpasquale Santomassimo, *Antifascismo e dintorni* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2004), 293.

Paradoxically then, the Resistance achieved its greatest sway in Italian public life as a highly contested legacy, as a potentially unifying narrative at the official level and at the same time a forum for the critique of institutional politics. In this high season of antifascist militancy, the annual commemoration of the 25th of April (Liberation Day), which served as a symbolic date for the founding of the republic, was for some an occasion for criticism of society's ills, for others a rallying point to affirm what had nevertheless been accomplished in the postwar democracy. Commenting on the political symbolism of this commemoration, Cristina Cenci writes that the affirmative memory of the Resistance on the 25th of April involved:

the *mise-en-scène* of the cohesion of the social body through reference to the primal sacrifice [of the partisan] and the fascist as the internal foreigner. By contrast, the counter-narrative of the “betrayed Resistance” provided “a vehicle to imagine a pure, originary social bond, not contaminated by difference and structure.” As a site of conflicting interpretations of national identity, the 25th of April was at the same time “an official festival and festival of opposition, a memory of continuity and a project for the future,” in turn accused of being conflictual or of reducing itself to pure commemoration.²⁷

These conflicts illustrate the double nature of the Italian Resistance myth, its role as an official history, aligned with the institutions “born of the Resistance,” on the one hand, and its status as a figure of oppositional politics, on the other. The tension between these two models or modes of Resistance memory informs the films of Orsini and Bertolucci. Much of the interest of these two films, and the motive for the present discussion, lies in the fact that they do not simply elaborate a hegemonic account of the Resistance according to the left-wing politics of their directors. Rather, they reflect conflicting narratives of the Resistance, alternative interpretations of Italian history that are reproduced within the films themselves.²⁸

It is interesting to view Orsini's less well-known work alongside *1900*, a film that has received extensive critical appreciation in Italian and English. To be sure, the two directors had followed quite different trajectories. Orsini's previous career had included documentary work and fiction films with the Taviani brothers, before he turned to independent direction with *I dannati della terra* (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1969), a reflection on African post-colonialism. Bertolucci's international career is well-known, and his reputation as the director of *Il conformista* (*The Conformist*, 1970) and *Ultimo tango a Parigi* (*Last Tango in Paris*, 1972) helped secure funding for *1900*, reputed to be the most expensive Italian film then ever made. One common factor that links these films is how they both draw on the conventions of mainstream cinema and Hollywood spectacle. *Corbari* resembles an action film, while *1900* employs Hollywood-style spectacle and a cast of international stars to give an epic quality to its narrative. At the time, this was far from an automatic choice for directors of the left. By engaging with the conventions of mainstream cinema, these directors were pursuing a third way between the norms of the commercial market and the alternative models of “engaged” or militant cinema upheld by the left-wing critical establishment of the day. The desire to avoid the niche of militant

²⁷ Cristina Cenci, “Rituale e memoria: le celebrazioni del 25 aprile,” in *Le memorie della Repubblica*, 374.

²⁸ In this context, it is useful to recall a remark of Pietro Scoppola that it is more appropriate to speak of “myths of the Resistance” than of myth in the singular, to avoid implying any dominant, hegemonic account. Pietro Scoppola, *25 aprile: liberazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), 9. Along similar lines, see Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance*, 192.

cinema is particularly evident in the case of Bertolucci, whose use of Hollywood finance and genre references in *Il conformista* reflected a decision to move beyond the model of his former mentor, Jean-Luc Godard. Both *Il conformista* and *1900* would be criticized by left-wing critics for whom militant cinema meant consciousness-raising rather than indulging in Hollywood-style extravaganzas.²⁹ In this connection, we can see *Corbari* and *1900* as self-conscious efforts to combine Marxist politics with the formats of genre cinema in the attempt to reach a broad audience.

The adoption of popular cinematic conventions in both films reflects these directors' desire to transmit their reading of history to a younger generation with little or no memory of the war years (generational politics are central to both *Corbari* and *1900*). Orsini, born in 1927, had taken part in the Resistance and later joined the Communist Party. Bertolucci, born in 1941, was too young to remember the war himself, but kept his distance from the currents of protest that emerged in the late 1960s. As he often explained, his decision to join the PCI in 1968 matured in the wake of the protests of that year, in opposition to what he perceived as the excesses of the student movements. Detached by age and politics from the radical interpretations of the Resistance that were currently on the far left, both of these filmmakers looked back to the partisan war with something like nostalgia for the revolution, rather than straightforward sympathy for the radical cause.³⁰

Another common factor in these films is the reading of history in terms of class politics, a point that deserves some elaboration. As mentioned above, by the 1970s the Resistance was frequently invoked as a model for present-day militancy by groups to the left of the Communist Party. For *Lotta continua* and other groups outside the party system, the Resistance provided a model of *antifascismo di classe*, as opposed to the *antifascismo tricolore* through which the political establishment sought to legitimate itself.³¹ The significance of the Resistance as a movement whose primary goals had been accomplished in 1945 was diminished by this analysis. The partisan war was read within the context of a long and ongoing history of struggles against oppression that stretched back through liberal and Fascist Italy and continued up to the present day (as in *1900*). In the words of Pietro Scoppola:

There is a return to underlining the fact that the struggle of liberation had not signaled a profound rupture in Italian history on the terrain of economic power and the State apparatus: the same people who had guided the economy or the administrative apparatus during fascism came back to direct them, in many cases, after its defeat; laws and rules that were emanated by fascism still disciplined the life of the country.³²

²⁹ On the responses of the *engagé* critics to *Il conformista* at the time of its release, see Franco Prono, *Bernardo Bertolucci: Il conformista* (Turin: Lindau, 1998), 15-24 and 119-131. For an example of a review that criticizes *1900* as part of a wider tendency towards temporal regression in the international cinema of the 1970s, see Giandomenico Curi, "Il rifiuto di capire un presente difficile nel cinema degli anni 70," *Il quotidiano dei lavoratori*, September 2, 1976, 6.

³⁰ One sign of this nostalgia is the self-conscious evocation of socialist realism in both films—manifest in the allegorical typecasting of characters—and thanks to which, as Sara Pesce writes of *Corbari*, shows that history has already become myth or cliché. Pesce, *Memoria e immaginario*, 191.

³¹ The terms are those of Luigi Ganapini in his "Antifascismo tricolore e antifascismo di classe," *Problemi del socialismo* 7 (1986): 98-105.

³² Scoppola, 25 aprile, 18-19. Debates over the "continuity of the state" between the Fascist and post-Fascist eras would be taken up in the field of historiography as historians reconsidered the outcomes of the Resistance in light of the questions posed by the student movement and the successive groups of the extra-parliamentary left. See the

The class emphasis in interpretations of the Resistance meant that, by the 1970s, it was Fascism rather than Nazism that was perceived as the principal opponent in the partisan struggle. This shift is reflected in films such as *Corbari* and *1900*, which focus on Italian Fascism rather than the German invader as the enemy of the partisans (with the brief exception of some early scenes of *Corbari*, the Germans are absent from these films). This represents a departure from the predominant tendency of the Italian war film up to this point, which had previously depicted the struggle against the foreign invader as the central goal of the Resistance. *Corbari* in particular is explicit in portraying the Resistance as a “class war,” in contrast to the model of the “patriotic war,” which had prevailed in postwar commemoration and is exemplified by a film such as Roberto Rossellini’s *Roma, città aperta* (*Rome, Open City*, 1945).³³ Indeed, Rossellini’s depiction of the Resistance as a fraternal alliance between Catholics and communists epitomizes what the younger generation of radicals were reacting against in the late 1960s and 1970s in their critiques of state-sponsored Resistance memory.³⁴

Discussing these two films together provides an opportunity to reflect on the significance of the liberation for the Italian left in the 1970s. After the critiques of the official Resistance myth by the new left and the emergence of neofascist terrorism in 1969, the depiction of the Resistance as a dividing line in Italian history became harder to maintain.³⁵ The films of Orsini and Bertolucci acknowledge that victory over Fascism in 1945 did not lead to the alteration of the dominant class system in postwar Italy. Both *Corbari* and *1900* respond to the challenge posed to Resistance memory by the issue of continuities between the Fascist and republican regimes. The question of how perceived continuities between the Fascist and post-Fascist state complicated the affirmation of the Resistance as an identity model for the left in the 1970s is a point to which I will return in my conclusion.

***Corbari*: the partisan as class warrior**

A heavily fictionalized account of the activities of a local hero of the Resistance in Romagna, *Corbari* deals centrally with the theme of the “red” Resistance, recalling the aspirations for radical social change within the left wing of the partisan movement.³⁶ Although earlier films on the Resistance had acknowledged the class aspect of the partisan movement, *Corbari* goes

essay by Claudio Pavone, “La continuità dello Stato: istituzioni e uomini,” in Claudio Pavone, *Alle origini della Repubblica: scritti su fascismo, antifascismo e continuità dello Stato* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1995), 70-159 (first edition 1974).

³³ My use of the terms “patriotic war” and “class war” with reference to the motives of the Resistance is borrowed from Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile: saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991).

³⁴ Rossellini’s *Anno uno* (*Year One*, 1974) could be viewed as a complementary film to that of Bertolucci, as it recounts postwar history from a DC perspective, focusing on the role of Alcide De Gasperi as prime minister—thus providing an alternate “justification” of the republic born of the Resistance and the generation of the political fathers. On *Anno uno*, see Ghigi, *La memoria inquieta*, 206-8.

³⁵ On the Piazza Fontana bombing and its impact, see John Foot, *Italy’s Divided Memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 183-195.

³⁶ For contemporary reviews, see Casadio, *La guerra al cinema*, vol. 2, 219-20. For more recent discussions of *Corbari*, see De Luna, *L’occhio e l’orecchio dello storico*, 77 and 80-83; Pesce, *Memoria e immaginario*, 191-94; Ghigi, *La memoria inquieta*, 23 and 167-74; and Zinni, *Fascisti di celluloido*, 184-88.

further in its depiction of the partisan as class warrior.³⁷ The film achieved commercial success and a degree of critical acclaim for its ability to combine a popular narrative of the partisan war with a debate over its motives and outcomes.³⁸ In the words of its director, the film was intended to be a “popular ballad,” an attempt to “tell the story of the Resistance to the young public in an adventurous and non-celebratory way.”³⁹ Combining left-wing politics with the formulae of an action film, *Corbari* has an affinity with the politicized spaghetti westerns of the period, a connection that is reinforced by the casting of Giuliano Gemma as the eponymous hero after his success in this genre.⁴⁰

The film covers the years 1943-1944, when German troops along with the soldiers of the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* (RSI) are in control of the north of Italy. The young Corbari is a solitary hero who goes on the run after killing a Fascist. At first he is reluctant to become the leader of any group, but he soon finds himself at the head of a partisan band. Unsatisfied with isolated strikes against the enemy, Corbari plans to oust the Fascists from a local township and occupy the area with his band, setting up an autonomous partisan republic.⁴¹

The first part of the film leads to the attempt to create a new political reality in the liberated township: the viewer understands that this partisan republic is meant to anticipate the society of postwar Italy. The partisans and working-class inhabitants of the district undertake an experiment in popular democracy in which the land is reorganized and divided among the peasantry. At this stage, the film introduces the representative figure that articulates an opposed vision of the Resistance, the partisan commander Ulyanov. Ulyanov represents the communist-led Resistance movement and arrives in order to set up an agreement with the independent partisan band. Through the confrontation between these figures, Orsini’s film highlights some of its central themes, such as the opposition between community and hierarchy, or spontaneity versus gradualism and compromise. Corbari’s partisan band and the miniature republic are “microcosms of direct democracy,” in contrast to the vertical process of decision-making favored by Ulyanov.⁴² Corbari embodies the revolutionary impetus within the partisan struggle, pushing ahead towards the immediate realization of radical social projects, whereas Ulyanov (as the name implies) is a member of the old school. The figure of the young partisan, with shades of Che Guevara and the influence of Maoism, is set off paradigmatically against the cautious communist who insists on patience, on following the party line, discussing issues behind closed doors, and presenting a united front before their followers.

³⁷ Beyond the mere inclusion of communist figures in a historical setting, these films could include *Il terrorista* (*The Terrorist*, Gianfranco De Bosio, 1963) and *I sette fratelli Cervi*.

³⁸ For some appreciative comments on Orsini’s film, see also Lino Micciché, *Cinema italiano degli anni '70* (Venice: Marsilio, 1980), 77-79. Micciché mentions that the film made 800 million lire at the box office. Micciché, *Cinema italiano*, 256.

³⁹ Valentino Orsini quoted in Eleonora Fiorini, “Valentino Orsini, il cinema come gesto vitale,” *Cinema Studio* 15 (1994): 82.

⁴⁰ Orsini also cites *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967) as one of his points of reference. Valentino Orsini, “Il mio cinema esagerato,” *Cinema Studio* 15 (1994): 105. It is worth noting that themes related to Fascism, the war, and the Resistance return to Italian cinema after the early 1960s in the spaghetti westerns in the second half of the decade. On the left-wing Italian westerns, see Uva, *Schermi di piombo*, 16-17; and Austin Fisher, *Radical Frontiers in the Spaghetti Westerns: Violence and Popular Italian Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

⁴¹ The popularity of the topic of the partisan republics in the media of the 1960s and 1970s is noted by Alberto Farassino, “Mediologia della Resistenza: radio e televisione,” in *La Resistenza italiana nei programmi della Rai*, ed. Guido Crainz, Alberto Farassino, Enzo Forcella, and Nicola Gallerano (Rome: DEMA, 1996), 100; and Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance*, 95.

⁴² Guido Quazza, *Resistenza e storia d’Italia: problemi e ipotesi di ricerca* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976), 241-252.

The audience is assumed to share the protagonist's ironic indifference to the claim that "the Resistance ... the Resistance is our second Risorgimento," voiced by an intellectual partisan. Through the person of Corbari, the film addresses those to the left of the PCI, the sector of protestors and radicals of this generation who were wary of falling into the "traps of history,"⁴³ including the paths previously taken by the established political parties.⁴⁴ The leitmotif of betrayal, as well as the clash between the two partisan leaders, points directly to the current theme of the lost occasions of the Resistance.⁴⁵ The depiction of the partisan as class warrior opposed to the restraining impulses of the PCI leadership has an obvious resonance for the audience of the early 1970s, evoking the postwar suppression of memory of the "red" Resistance by the Communist Party itself. The decision to make a film about a maverick Robin Hood-type partisan, known for his independent activism, was not calculated to appeal to representatives of the Communist Party, and *Corbari* was criticized by senior PCI members as a misleading depiction of the Resistance.⁴⁶ Still, this is not a didactic piece, but more a drama of competing ideas. Part of the film's interest lies in the fact that it avoids endorsing any of the positions held by its leading figures. One of these partisan leaders possesses youthful glamour at the expense of pragmatism, while the other possesses pragmatism without revolutionary optimism. *Corbari* deals with the "two souls of our struggle," as the narrator Casadei puts it, a partisan who finds himself drawn alternately to the models of partisan identity represented by Corbari and Ulyanov.⁴⁷

The implied critique of Corbari's impatient radicalism is carried through in the second half of the film. As it turns out, Corbari's noble impulses are misguided, and the town is soon recaptured by the troops of the RSI, who kill and execute the majority of his band. A symbolic eye wound in the course of the fighting underlines the hero's flawed perception of the struggle in course, his idealistic misconception of the Resistance. With equally evident symbolism, this wound will be treated by Ulyanov, the figurative restorer of sight, though we note that Corbari's wound stays with him for the rest of the film. We are shown that Corbari's failures are brought on by his own impetuous actions, rather than "betrayal" by the communist leadership.

Thus Orsini's film takes up the radical theme of the "betrayed revolution" in order to suggest that this was, rather, an impossible revolution, leaving implied some of the circumstances that determined the limited outcomes of the partisan struggle. Paradoxically, *Corbari* reimagines the Resistance in radical terms, but with a vein of nostalgia for impossible outcomes. We are led to sympathize with a flawed hero, someone who is unable to realize that "the Resistance was only a war of liberation, not a revolution" (Orsini).⁴⁸ These tensions reflect, in part, the biography of the director, previously an anarchist who converted to communism during the Resistance and who described the 1970 film as reproducing the frustrating awareness

⁴³ The expression is that of Pintus, writing of post-1968 cinema. Pintus, *Storia e film*, 93.

⁴⁴ Peppino Ortoleva notes that the film was not well received by activists on the far left. Peppino Ortoleva, "Cinema politico e uso politico del cinema," in *Storia del cinema italiano, 1970-1976*, vol. 12, ed. Flavio De Bernardinis (Venice: Marsilio, 2008), 155-56.

⁴⁵ Suspicions of betrayal recur throughout the film, for example through fear of spies. The theme is established at the opening, when Corbari kills a friend who proves to be a Fascist—explaining his actions with the words: "Sometimes friendship confuses."

⁴⁶ Casadei also sounds like a prescient reader of Giorgio Bocca's best-selling 1967 history of the partisan war, from which this phrase may be drawn. Valentino Orsini, "Valentino Orsini," *Memoria, mito, storia*, 235.

⁴⁷ With reference to the communist Garibaldi brigades, Bocca writes of the "two souls of the party or the antinomy between the leadership and the base," divided between the motives of the war of national liberation and those of class struggle. Giorgio Bocca, *Storia dell'Italia partigiana* (Milan: Mondadori, 1995), 89-90.

⁴⁸ Valentino Orsini quoted in Fiorini, "Valentino Orsini, il cinema come gesto vitale," 82.

he had at the war's conclusion that "nothing would change."⁴⁹ The divergent interpretations of the Resistance in *Corbari* turn out to be those of utopian ideals versus pragmatic necessities. As the portrait of a flawed idealist, *Corbari* recalls works by the Taviani brothers from the 1960s and 1970s. In particular, we are reminded of this director's previous collaboration with the Taviani brothers in *Un uomo da bruciare* (*A Man for Burning*, 1962). The central character in *Un uomo da bruciare*, the trade unionist Salvatore, is another dreamer of radical social projects touched by delusions of grandeur and a precedent for Orsini's depiction of Corbari.⁵⁰

Through its critically detached portrait of partisan heroism, the 1970 film displays the simultaneous tendencies towards critique and reappropriation of the Resistance legend that was characteristic of this period. Despite a latent intellectual pessimism regarding the outcomes of the Resistance, *Corbari* remains an adventure story that invites us to identify with a hero actively engaged against the enemy. A notable feature of this film is the fact that the partisan band is opposed to the forces of Italian Fascism, in contrast to many earlier depictions of the Resistance as a struggle against the Germans. The interpretation of the Resistance as class war has a corollary in the identification of the Italian Fascists as the key opponent (the film opens and closes with acts of cruelty committed by members of the RSI) together with the vested interests that they support.

Orsini identifies Fascism here along standard Marxist lines as the armed guard of the reactionary bourgeoisie. As with the composition of the partisan band, so the members of the group that meet to plan the destruction of the partisan republic are depicted as representative types.⁵¹ This cross-section of colluding social interests includes an agrarian landlord, a newspaper journalist, an industrialist, and a leader of the Fascist brigades. The dialogue emphasizes the continuity between the early years of agrarian Fascism in the 1920s and the period of the RSI: "Strikes, sabotage [...] by now these saboteurs appear from all sides." "Fascism, antifascism, politics [...] But here there is a crime against property!" "Since I financed the first fascist squads, their essential task was to defend my property. This is why we sent Fascism to power [...] is property not the basis and strength of every society?" As in other left-wing depictions of Fascism in Italian cinema, Fascism is not so much an autonomous phenomenon as an appendage to other interests, the instrument of capital or the puppet of the Germans. The film's appeal to a contemporary left-wing audience is reiterated in the second half of the film as Corbari, together with his partner Ines, hunts down the members of this capitalist cabal one by one.⁵² De Luna recalls the applause that at the time of the film's release greeted the sight of the industrialist's corpse hanging upside down from the factory gates with the sign attached, "I lived exploiting the workers, then came Corbari."⁵³

⁴⁹ Orsini, "Valentino Orsini," *Memoria, mito, storia*, 235.

⁵⁰ Casadio, *La guerra al cinema*, 216.

⁵¹ De Luna observes that "[i]n the partisan band the first to enter is Casadei, a student; then follows a thief of the sub-proletariat, Michele, and two peasants, Carlo and Danilo; and, finally, Ines, a student of medicine, daughter of a bourgeois intellectual. This is the social bloc of antifascism. And power? The four individuals killed by Corbari are the director of a newspaper, an agrarian landowner, an industrialist, and the leader of the Fascist militia. The exemplification may seem reductive, but it is in any case extremely efficient." De Luna, *L'occhio e l'orecchio dello storico*, 36.

⁵² The film thus combines two mythical figures of the Resistance in the story of Corbari, the partisan in the mountains and the underground operative or *gappista* in the city.

⁵³ De Luna, *L'occhio e l'orecchio dello storico*, 77. The allusion to the exhibition of the corpse of Mussolini at Piazzale Loreto is transparent.

Corbari ends with the capture and hanging of the remnants of the partisan band and the public exhibition of their bodies in the town of Forlì, a detail that corresponds to the historical record. The new myth of partisan martyrdom in *Corbari* can be described as a significant shift in the cinematic iconography of the partisan war. If the patriotic martyr (as portrayed in *Roma, città aperta*) symbolizes a temporary defeat compensated by the future victory of the cause, then these class warriors are members of the losing side, part of a revolutionary cause that failed. Winners and losers in the Second World War have exchanged roles, echoing shifts in perspective that had matured in the new left in the course of the 1960s.⁵⁴ These fallen heroes symbolize a defeated cause, indicating that “Fascism” or the powers it supported have won, or at any rate persisted in the postwar republic. The ending is ambivalent about the significance of these partisans’ deaths: it may be that they represent an unfulfilled revolutionary promise or it may be that they died for the wrong idea, if “the just cause was another one.”⁵⁵

Part of the interest of Orsini’s *Corbari* lies in its engagement with the Resistance myth in contemporary terms, and the 1970 film repropose the history of the partisan war with a vigor that is missing from cinematic depictions in the following years. In this third phase of films on the Resistance, after the second half of the 1940s and the early 1960s, the theme of the partisan war did not acquire great popularity. To reprise a question of Pierre Sorlin, it seems worth asking why the Resistance did not provide the material of a popular genre in this period, given its relevance to the current political climate.⁵⁶ One explanation suggests itself in the expansive category of antifascism, in which the Resistance was one paradigmatic episode. In the course of the 1970s, films made for cinema and television dealt with a great variety of subjects connected to Fascism and antifascism, in both fiction and documentary form. On television these topics included the origins of the dictatorship in the early 1920s, the experience of military prisoners during the war, Nazi massacres on Italian soil, as well as the commemoration of episodes of antifascism and the Resistance.⁵⁷ This variety distinguishes the cinematic production of the 1970s from the historical films of the early 1960s, which typically focused on the period of 1943-1945 and whose narratives pointed optimistically towards the liberation. The treatment of Fascism and antifascism in cinema and on television in these years is characterized by a heterogeneity of issues and approaches, rather than the kind of thematic unity that one associates with a genre cinema.⁵⁸ Another motive for the relative scarcity of interest may have been the very contemporary terms on which Fascism and antifascism were debated in the first half of the 1970s. The historical film was not necessarily the most appropriate forum for considering issues of power politics and activism in the present day. The continued suspicion of monumental rhetoric regarding the Resistance surely also played its part.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Rapini, *Antifascismo e cittadinanza*, 79.

⁵⁵ A phrase from Fabrizio De André’s song *Morire per le idee* (“To die for ideas”), released in 1974.

⁵⁶ Pierre Sorlin, *European Cinemas, European Societies, 1939-1990* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 70-80. Sorlin poses the question on a European scale.

⁵⁷ On the variety of television programming in connection to Fascism and the Resistance in this period, see Nicola Gallerano, “I programmi,” 71-76.

⁵⁸ A useful comparison can be made with the French cinema of the 1970s dealing with the experience of German occupation and the Vichy government, often discussed as a mode or distinct cycle of films. Rouso, *The Vichy Syndrome*, 127-31.

⁵⁹ Domenico Rizzo notes the preference of teachers and students in the 1970s for literary texts that avoided epic or exalted tones in their portrait of the Resistance. Domenico Rizzo, “La Resistenza nei manuali di storia per le scuole medie superiori (1960-1971),” *La Resistenza tra storia e memoria*, 96-97.

The 1970 film also contains scenes that suggest a further difficulty for filmmakers intent on proposing the Resistance to contemporary audiences. For Pesce, writing on the evolution of the Italian war film in these years:

The violence of terrorism that crosses the 1970s finds an outlet and a nobilitation in the films of the Resistance. [...] In this phase, in fact, the theme of armed conflict at the cinema performs a diverse function from that in previous periods. The war films [...] channel the impulse towards violence within a clear ethical dimension, which contrasts heroes and villains. More than in any other epoch, the war genre, rather than becoming the site of historical re-evocation, tends to catalyze [...] the widespread violence of Italian society.⁶⁰

The contrast between the “clear ethical dimension” of the Resistance film and the more immediate, “widespread violence in contemporary society” surely rendered the depiction of the Resistance as a popular epic more difficult to realize than in the past. A striking feature of Orsini’s film is the way in which it deals confidently with images of partisan violence that would, in the near future, bear an obvious resemblance to the actions of left-wing terrorist groups. *Corbari* depicts aspects of the left-wing partisan struggle that lend themselves only too well to presentist interpretation in the context of the 1970s, such as the attacks carried out not only against uniformed Germans and Fascists but against high-ranking members of the bourgeoisie, such as journalists and industrialists, duly executed as class enemies.⁶¹ Anticipating the times, the film reminds the latter-day viewer that terrorist groups of the left, such as the Red Brigades, would draw on the model of the partisan movement for their own organizational practice and ideological justification, putting the interpretation of the “betrayed revolution” into practice in their updating of the partisan struggle as class warfare.⁶² The radical memory of the Resistance was also most easily associated with violence. Not coincidentally, the communist strategy of the “historical compromise” with the DC in the 1970s interpreted antifascism in more constructive and pacific terms, looking back to the period of government collaboration in 1945-1947 rather than to the insurrectionary moment of the Resistance and the liberation.⁶³

Thus the proposal to speak to the present—one of the more notable features of *Corbari*—would be missing in films on the Resistance by directors who were members of or aligned with the PCI, such as Lizzani or Montaldo. Rather than an effort at updating the struggles of 1943-1945, Lizzani’s *Mussolini: ultimo atto* or Montaldo’s *L’Agnese va a morire* display a memorial tone, avoiding the suggestion that their positive characters provide a typology for political activism in the present day. In their own way, these two films celebrate the “good war” of the Italian Resistance, fought against the undisputable enemy (Mussolini and the leading Fascist party cadres in the first case, the German invader in the second). Neither film contains internal references to the debated status of antifascism and the Resistance in the 1970s, the kind of juxtaposition of antifascisms that features centrally in *I sette fratelli Cervi* or *Corbari*. On the contrary, the partisan Walter Audisio (Franco Nero) in *Mussolini: ultimo atto*, who executes

⁶⁰ Pesce, *Memoria e immaginario*, 194.

⁶¹ Ghigi comments on the contemporary resonance of the film’s punitive violence in *La memoria inquieta*, 170.

⁶² Andrea Rapini, *Antifascismo e cittadinanza: giovani, identità e memorie nell’Italia repubblicana* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2005), 187-93; and Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance*, 118-23.

⁶³ Paggi, “Una repubblica senza pantheon,” 261.

Mussolini, is a faithful interpreter of the orders transmitted to him by the Resistance leadership.⁶⁴ Viewed alongside these earlier films, it seems that Lizzani's and Montaldo's historical films propose to be just that: depictions of episodes from an insurrectionary movement that was brought to a close in 1945.

1900: the trial of the *Padrone*

The internal dialogue between antifascisms reappears in *1900*. Bertolucci's film signals its awareness of the limited gains of the Resistance from its opening moments. It begins on the date that symbolizes the end of the partisan struggle, the 25th of April, the "day of Liberation, 1945." Onscreen, we see a young partisan returning home:

The war is finished, the Germans have been defeated, nothing leads us to anticipate an imminent tragedy. Instead, a Fascist suddenly emerges from some bushes and cuts the young man down with a machine-gun. Metaphorically Bertolucci declares that the Resistance is not over, that it has not led to the social redemption dreamed of by the people, who still have to struggle.⁶⁵

The 1976 film begins by acknowledging that the Resistance was not a victorious act of closure, as the patriotic myth would have it. By opening with the untimely death of a partisan, *1900* places an interrogative over the achievements of the partisan struggle, raising the question of whether the cause that he died for has not also been defeated in postwar Italy. Thus, while Bertolucci's film ultimately works towards an affirmation of the outcome of the war of liberation, it also responds to the sense of lost occasions that many in the 1970s identified in the cause of the Resistance.

With *1900*, Bertolucci proposed to narrate a history of class struggle with epic overtones.⁶⁶ The events take place in "red" Emilia, a regional stronghold of the early socialist movement and, in postwar Italy, of the Communist Party. Early on, we see how class tensions in the countryside lead to the advent of rural socialism, as the peasants band together to join the socialist league or *Lega*. The agrarian landowners respond at first with increasingly harsh legal measures and then, by the 1920s, with the recruitment of the Fascist movement in order to repress the peasantry. The story of popular resilience culminates in 1945 when the peasants arrest the landowner Alfredo and the Fascist Attila at gunpoint. This dramatic sequence of events is actually where the onscreen story begins, before moving back in time to the beginning of the

⁶⁴ The fact that Franco Nero starred in several of Sergio Corbucci's anti-colonial spaghetti westerns makes for interesting comparison with the use of Gemma's star persona in *Corbari*.

⁶⁵ Maria Ferragatta and Orazio Paggi, "Dal cinema resistenziale al cinema resistente: miti e poetiche filmiche dal dopoguerra a oggi," *l'impegno* 23, no. 2, <http://www.storia900bivc.it/pagine/editoria/ferragattapaggi203.html>.

⁶⁶ Bertolucci's brother Giuseppe Bertolucci and Franco ("Kim") Arcalli contributed to the script of *1900*. For details on the production, distribution, and censorship difficulties of this film, see Robert Philip Kolker, *Bernardo Bertolucci* (London: BFI, 1985), 68-75. On the film's reading of Italian history, I have found useful Joël Magny, "Dimension politique de l'oeuvre de Bernardo Bertolucci de *Prima della Rivoluzione* à *Novecento*," *Études Cinématographiques* 122, no. 26 (1979): 68-75; Giorgio Bocca, "Bertolucci, per favore rispetta la storia..." in *Spari nel buio: la letteratura contro il cinema italiano: settant'anni di stroncature memorabili*, ed. Gian Piero Brunetta (Venice: Marsilio, 1994); Christopher Wagstaff, "Bertolucci: An Italian Intellectual of the 1970s Looks at Italy's Fascist Past," in *Reconstructing the Past: Representations of the Fascist Era in Post-War European Culture*, ed. Graham Bartram, Maurice Slawinski and David Steel (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996), 202-7; and Bosworth, *The Italian Dictatorship*, 166-67.

century. The fact that *1900* opens and closes on the day of Liberation underscores the weight of expectations that its positive protagonists attach to this moment. In the film's symbolic reading of history, the 25th of April is the spring of liberation after the long winter of Fascism, when the peasants can look forward to the realization of popular justice.⁶⁷

The 1976 film has often been criticized for its simplifications of the historical record. In the words of one commentator, *1900* offers a "classically naive exposition of the 'Myths of the Resistance and Anti-Fascism.'"⁶⁸ The decision to narrate Italian history in a faux-naïf populist idiom is one of its surprising features. *1900* resembles a politically correct reading of the class struggle that favors the PCI, rather than an attempt to investigate postwar constructions of memory. The film makes use of allegorical or representative types in order to narrate its history. The three principal characters represent different social groups: Olmo (played by Gérard Depardieu) is the charismatic spokesman of the peasant community, Alfredo Berlinghieri (played by Robert De Niro) is the landowner or *padrone*, and Attila (Donald Sutherland) is the local Fascist and a foreman in the hire of Alfredo.⁶⁹ Over the course of five hours and twenty minutes, we are never in doubt about where our sympathies are supposed to lie. The positive characters are always exemplary, and the negative characters likewise incline to stereotype. The Manichean opposition between virtuous working-class heroes and their decadent class enemies offers little opportunity for "critical memory" to exert itself.⁷⁰

These qualities are all the more surprising given that the same director had previously introduced ambiguity to the themes of Fascism and antifascism in Italian cinema in *Strategia del ragno* and *Il conformista*. The political and psychological complexities of these earlier films are excised from *1900*, which resembles instead the myth of the Italian "good war" that the earlier films had called into question. *1900* resurrects some tendencies that would have seemed dated by the 1970s, both stylistically and politically. Stylistically, the film is self-conscious in the recuperation of dated cinematic formats, evoking for example memories of socialist realism and neorealism in the depiction of the peasantry.⁷¹ By incorporating these genres into his film, Bertolucci turns back the clock on the critiques of postwar populism in the arts that had been circulating since the 1960s.⁷² Politically, the film is deliberately backward-looking in its recuperation of the myth of the Resistance as the "choral event of all the people," united against the oppressor. The portrait of a united peasant *popolo* suggests not only a simplification of Italian history but an evasion of the complexities of present-day politics. The choral relationship of the

⁶⁷ The trope of the spring of antifascist victory after the winter of Fascism had been employed in several earlier films, including Rossellini's *Roma, città aperta*. Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* (1973) may also be a model for the film's seasonal structure.

⁶⁸ R. J. B. Bosworth, "Bernardo Bertolucci, *1900* and the Myth of Fascism," *European History Quarterly* 19 (Jan. 1989): 40.

⁶⁹ Besides reminding us of an earlier march on Rome, the name Attila is one of the film's Verdian "*richiami*" or refrains. In *Strategia del ragno*, the music of Verdi's *Attila* had been used as a motivistic accompaniment to Athos Senior, the antifascist father figure, in the setting of the 1930s.

⁷⁰ Maurizio Ridolfi comments on the celebration of the 25th of April in Emilia Romagna in the 1970s in terms of lack of critical memory. Maurizio Ridolfi, *Le feste nazionali* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2003), 226-27.

⁷¹ If the film recalls the work of any postwar director, it is Giuseppe De Santis' combination of "American" spectacular values with neorealist themes in *Riso amaro* (*Bitter Rice*, 1949), or in combination with socialist realism in *Non c'è pace fra gli ulivi* (*No Peace Under the Olive Tree*, 1950). The spectator of *1900* may well miss the complexities of Alberto Lattuada's portrait of the class struggle in Emilia Romagna at the turn of the century in *Il mulino del Po* (*The Mill on the Po*, 1949).

⁷² I am thinking of such works as Alberto Asor Rosa's influential *Scrittori e popolo: il populismo nella letteratura italiana contemporanea* (Rome: Savelli, 1979): the first edition was 1965.

peasants to Olmo, their leader figure, is presented as if the challenges to political and social hierarchy in the late 1960s had never happened. These patient rural laborers are a world apart from the young agitators of the 1970s, and their trust in Olmo represents the positive role of the PCI in guiding the working masses.

This is a film in which the antifascist message is proclaimed with vigor, and its party patriotism (given Bertolucci's membership of the PCI), if unorthodox, is never in doubt. Discussion of the film in terms of its simplified class politics reinforces the perception that it suffers from a lack of ambiguity in its treatment of historical themes. The film, however, does display ambivalence in the effort to justify the course of postwar history. *1900* attempts to reconcile two conflicting narratives about the liberation. One is the optimistic narrative that celebrates the victory over Fascism in 1945 and posits the liberation as a dividing line in Italian history. The end of Fascism is dramatized in *1900* via the capture and execution of Attila by the peasants.⁷³ With the defeat of their most brutal enemy, the peasants celebrate the 25th of April as an authentic *festa*. Read in this light, the politics of *1900* are centrist, emphasizing the positive transition from Fascism to the postwar political order. With the departure of Attila, the political stage is left open to Olmo and Alfredo, whose relationship points to the "historic compromise" between the PCI and the DC in the mid-1970s: a reading validated by the director and that would not have escaped a contemporary audience.⁷⁴

At the same time, the liberation features in *1900* as one episode in a long and ongoing history of class struggle, not a victory for the working classes. The defeat of Fascism does not coincide with the victory of socialism, as the peasants had hoped. The status of the Resistance as a moment of renewal in Italian history is qualified by this narrative of class conflict, which points instead to continuities between liberal, Fascist and republican regimes. A surprising coda deals with the implications of this reading of history. The action moves forward to the times of the film's making, thirty years after the end of the Second World War. We see Olmo and Alfredo still battling out their differences as old men, symbolizing the opposition of the workers and the bourgeoisie. The class struggle is apparently inscribed in the long duration of Italian history, a conflict for which the film cannot provide closure.

1900 addresses the implicit defeat, or postponed realization, of the ideals of the Resistance in postwar Italy through the popular trial of Alfredo. The trial sequence follows on from the execution of Attila by the peasants, a parallelism which raises the question why one class enemy can be defeated while the other survives and escapes justice. Alfredo in this context represents not only the historical collaboration between Fascism and the bourgeoisie, but also the postwar political leadership of the DC. Through his survival, the film raises the issue of continuity in the political structures of the state. Alfredo is this film's Marcello Clerici, the protagonist of *Il conformista*: the bourgeois fellow-traveller of Fascism, whose survival after 1945 points to the enduring elements of a reactionary class structure, disguised by the transformative events of the Second World War, the fall of a dictatorship, the Resistance and the creation of a republic.

Through this trial, the film imagines the possibility of an altered social order, tokened by the elimination of the *padrone*, a fantasy for which the filmmaker provides the choreography. The trial takes place as a piece of popular theatre in which the moral authority of the subaltern

⁷³ The sequence of the flight and capture of Attila and his wife Regina is meant to recall the capture of Mussolini and Clara Petacci by partisans as they headed towards the Swiss border.

⁷⁴ In the director's words, "The relationship between Olmo and Alfredo is above all a relationship of necessity, a necessity which is also the illustration of the historic compromise." See Bernardo Bertolucci quoted in Enzo Ungari, *Scene madri di Bernardo Bertolucci* (Milan: Ubulibri, 1987), 132.

community can be publicly demonstrated. Bertolucci has cited the influence of images of the Chinese cultural revolution on the trial sequence. The director remarks that the peasants in the film “put the boss on trial just as though they were in China. [...] I saw a few photographs of the Chinese trials and that’s all I needed; I saw that they always had a table and that they pointed their fingers.”⁷⁵ The trial is inaugurated by Olmo, who calls the peasants together. The film provides one of its most memorable images when the peasants unfurl a gigantic patchwork banner composed of the red flags that they have kept hidden underground for twenty years. The banner represents their desire to take possession of the land they work on, and with it, the film declares, at least symbolically, a peasants’ republic. As they hoist “the largest red flag ever seen on cinema screens” above their heads to provide a tent for all the community, Olmo stands as witness to the individual peasants who come forward to accuse Alfredo of the injustices undergone in his service.⁷⁶

The courtyard of the Emilian farm has become a symbolic space where the allegorical nature of the action is foregrounded. There is a notable tension between the presentation of spontaneity and the high degree of choreography in this symbolic ensemble. “Spontaneity” is provided by the peasant subjects who are both participatory actors in, and spectators of, the unfolding drama. The recitation of their grievances is punctuated by bursts of popular music played by musicians, whose presence reminds us that this trial is also a *festa*, that of the 25th of April. “Spontaneity” though is modified by the ritual quality of the proceedings, just as the peasants who address Alfredo never risk acquiring too much individuality before returning to the choral body of spectators from which they emerged. As a self-conscious piece of theatre, the sequence envisions the possibility of popular justice vis-à-vis the *padrone*, while the artificiality of the scene assures us that the risk of violence is minimal. The choreography of Bertolucci is equivalent to the stage-managing of the trial by Olmo, whose calls to order will prevail against the potential excesses of spontaneity.

Given the accusations laid against him, Alfredo is a discredited figure with no viable responses, a situation which “necessitates” Olmo’s intervention. The sequence limits itself to illustrating the nudity of the king, with Olmo declaring the *padrone* to be *morto* without bloodshed, a fiction that he imposes on the peasant community and the film’s spectators. The paternalistic connotations of Bertolucci’s popular hero, set off against the other less individualized peasants, become more emphatic in this scene.⁷⁷ The community of peasants are

⁷⁵ Bernardo Bertolucci quoted in Dan Georgakas and Lenny Rubenstein, ed., *Art, Politics, Cinema: The Cineaste Interviews* (London: Pluto, 1985), 146. Leaving aside the ingenuous nature of these comments, by 1976 (the year in which the Chinese Cultural Revolution was formally concluded) the attempt to breathe new life into the Resistance myth with Maoist references would have looked dated.

⁷⁶ Gian Piero Brunetta, *Guida alla storia del cinema italiano, 1905-2003* (Turin: Einaudi, 2003), 220. Comments of Ersilia Alessandrone Perona on the symbolism of the red flag in 1970s Italy provide a useful contextualisation for Bertolucci’s film. On the one hand, Perona contrasts the insurrectionary symbolism of the red flag for the Red Brigades, and on the other hand, the desire of the parties of the left to maintain control of this key symbol of the workers’ movement. The red flag exhumed from the earth by the peasants in 1900 is cited by Perona as an example of this second tendency, which directs us to the heritage of the workers’ movement in contrast to the insurrectionary perspectives of the far left. Ersilia Alessandrone Perona, “La bandiera rossa,” in *I luoghi della memoria: simboli e miti dell’Italia unita*, ed. Mario Isnenghi (Rome: Laterza, 1996), 314-15.

⁷⁷ The point becomes more evident by comparison with Miklós Jancsó’s *Red Psalm* (*Még kér a nép*, 1972), a film to which the concluding scenes of 1900 are indebted. The rhythmic camerawork, the question of the significance of revolutionary violence, the mixture of festivity and symbolic violence, the use of folk music with an awareness of its historical and political significance, and the “resurrection” of previously deceased characters are among the features that align these two films. Nonetheless, as Graham Petrie writes, in Jancsó’s film it is clear “that there is no one

being led by the hand away from the social transformation they are willing to enact, even before the arrival of the representatives of the CLN, the Committee for National Liberation, which will bring the dream of the peasant utopia to a close. The threat of death to the *padrone* is ward off not through reasoned political argument but through sleight of hand. As Olmo explains to the aggrieved peasants, “The landowner is dead. But Alfredo Berlinghieri is alive, and we must not kill him.” “But why?” asks a woman. “This way he is living proof that the landowner is dead,” one of the bystanders says helpfully. The multiple accusations of the peasants against Alfredo also suggest that his case will not be fatally judged. When an old laborer comes forward to protest that he lost two fingers working for Alfredo’s family, we know that the revolution will not take place on his account. The peasants and their grievances are meant to inspire sympathy in the spectator, rather than anger. The essentially pacific culture of the Emilian peasantry assures us in advance that the landowner will not suffer the consequences of his actions.⁷⁸

An alternative history or *uchronia* is briefly disclosed in the trial sequence, before the course of events is steered away from a more radical path.⁷⁹ Fantasies of justice and retribution are acted out explicitly *as* fantasy, in a sort of working-through of frustrations on the left regarding the postwar political settlement. The film affirms the moral superiority of its victimized collective, only to detach us from the scene’s more radical implications. Some of the film’s difficulties of closure are due to its attempt to reconcile radical critique with moderation, in accordance with the course of history. It is the role of the peasant leader to balance these distinct tendencies, first declaring the trial open and then drawing it to a peremptory close. Olmo’s presence serves to render charismatic positions that, to leftist critics of the PCI, looked like unglamorous adaptation to the status quo. As Franco Fortini ironically remarked of the communist heroics of Francesco Maselli’s *Il sospetto* (*The Suspect*, 1975), the film suggests that the PCI has its own un-compromised, charismatic role models: with such party patriotism on display, “there is no need for extra-parliamentary heroes.”⁸⁰ If the irresolute finale of *1900* conveys any message, it may be that the Resistance is always red, but not revolutionary.⁸¹

The film’s defensive stance towards the legacy of the Resistance is also manifest in the following sequences. The camera cuts to the exterior of the farmyard, and we see a group of trucks approaching. These newcomers turn out to be representatives of the CLN, and at first they are greeted joyously by the peasants. Some of the new arrivals return the peasants’ greeting with

privileged spokesman or spokeswoman for the peasants, and that their strength lies not in charismatic leadership, but in their unity and collective will.” Nor is Jancsó’s community of peasants a monolithic block, rather the film dramatizes the interactions between oppressed and oppressive groups, as Petrie also observes. Graham Petrie, *Red Psalm: Még kér a nép* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1998), 35.

⁷⁸ Efforts at putting a good gloss on the project of the historical compromise are also manifest in the trial sequence when a group of peasants unfamiliar with socialism arrive “from the mountains” (the reference, a local one, is to the more Catholic culture of the peasantry of the Apennines). These would be the future DC voters, spoken of on the left in this period as a *popolo* better than the political class that represented it.

⁷⁹ For a pertinent discussion of *uchronia*, or alternatively imagined histories, in relation to militant communist memory in the 1970s, see the chapter, “Uchronic Dreams: Working-Class Memory and Possible Worlds,” in Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Amherst: State University of New York Press, 1991), 99-116.

⁸⁰ Franco Fortini, “Una medaglia per meriti patriottici (di partito),” *L’Espresso*, March 9, 1975, 48.

⁸¹ A sequence that was planned but not filmed involved tearing the Italian flag into strips and keeping only the red portion as a banner, thus literalizing the slogan “the Resistance is red but not tricolor,” associated with the extra-parliamentary left. Again, this is an instance of the film working to counter or exclude more radical interpretations of history from groups to the left of the PCI. The detail is mentioned by Giuseppe Bertolucci in Faldini and Fofi, *Il cinema italiano d’oggi*, 147.

the communist salute. Other trucks though carry members of the royal *Carabinieri* and display the flag of the house of Savoy. The symbols of the revolutionary party are compromised by association with the symbols of the forces of reaction. This scene in *1900* recalls a similar moment in *Il conformista*. Towards the end of the 1970 film, we see a crowd of young antifascists parade past the Teatro di Marcello brandishing red flags together with the flag of the house of Savoy. Singing communist anthems, this crowd does not appear to be striding towards the revolution since they march under the flag of the Italian royal family, recently the sponsor of Mussolini. These parallel scenes point to the widespread perception by the 1970s that the cause of the Resistance had been compromised by inter-party alliances, resulting in an official rather than an authentic antifascism as the basis of postwar political identity.

In the courtyard, a voice from a loudspeaker recites the names of the parties that compose the leadership of the Resistance (which includes the PCI and the DC) and announces that all weapons must be surrendered. This is a harsh blow to the unbelieving peasants. Their weapons are symbols of the potency of the red Resistance and are now to be handed over for the sake of political “normality.” Utopian aspirations are curtailed in the name of realpolitik, and once again, it is Olmo who leads the way, taking a rifle and shooting it up into the air before throwing it onto one of the trucks. Traditionally the act of a defeated army, the consignment of the arms also signifies in the Italian case the limited influence of the Resistance movement on the structures and political life of the postwar republic.

Thus the Resistance is recalled in *1900* as the symbol of a “never-fulfilled past.”⁸² This involves something more than nostalgia, though, bearing in mind the moment in which the film is made. In the mid-1970s, the message that the good partisans are those who depose their weapons invites further comment. Given the associations that have been made between the arms of the partisans and those of left-wing terrorist groups such as the Red Brigades, the sequence of the deposition of the arms in *1900* looks like a commentary on political violence during the “years of lead.”⁸³ In this period, the message that the Resistance does not provide a model for acts of violence against the bourgeoisie needs to be reaffirmed, the better to protect its legacy.⁸⁴ The centrist politics of the film are manifest in the emphasis on the end of armed conflict in 1945, as well as the distinction between class enemies. Against the tendency of the radical left to speak of “fascism in a white shirt” as the adversary in postwar Italy, *1900* distinguishes between historical periods and the treatment reserved for Attila and Alfredo. The threat of violence is carried through in the case of Attila, the adversary whose reign comes to an end in 1945, but not against Alfredo, who symbolically presides over postwar Italy.

We might think of the execution of Attila as an instance of discretion in the depiction of political violence, channeling (in a way that resembles scapegoating) the threat of violence away

⁸² Claudio Fogu and Wulf Kansteiner, “The Politics of Memory and the Poetics of History,” in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, ed. Richard Ned Lubow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu (London: Duke University Press, 2006), 302.

⁸³ Alberto Franceschini, Pier Vittorio Buffa, and Franco Giustolisi, *Mara Renato e io: storia dei fondatori delle BR* (Milan: Mondadori, 1988), 3-11. Anecdotal, see also the comments of Valerio Morucci on *1900* reported in Uva, *Schermi di piombo*, 180.

⁸⁴ As Cooke writes, “With the violence of the 1970s, the idea of the Italy born from the Resistance was one weapon, among many, of the State’s fight against terrorism.” Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance*, 192. Some of the connections between terrorism and the legacy of the Resistance are taken up again in Bertolucci’s 1981 film, *Tragedia di un uomo ridicolo* (*Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man*), which the director has often referred to as the third part of *1900*. On Bertolucci’s 1981 film in the context of cinema and terrorism, see Alan O’Leary, *Tragedia all’italiana: Italian Cinema and Italian Terrorisms, 1970-2010* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), 128-37.

from one class enemy onto the other. Attila's punishment is a case where no room is left for ambiguity. His sadistic cruelty is amply demonstrated as he preys on and kills members of all social groups. Before he is shot, Attila deliriously recites the names of his murder victims, leaving no doubt about the justice of his execution. The fact that his victims include both peasants and bourgeois illustrates the ecumenical politics of *1900*: Fascism is a menace to all classes of society.⁸⁵

Alfredo's case is more ambiguous. For much of the film, he has been the sponsor of Fascism. In the setting of the 1920s, it is Alfredo's father who proposes that the landowning class contribute money to the Blackshirts, paving the way for dictatorship. Yet *1900* departs from the expected Marxist reading of Fascism as the white guard of the bourgeoisie by continually highlighting Attila's autonomy of action, deflecting blame away from the *padrone*. Attila is portrayed not as the instrument of his employer but as a type of usurper, a Macbeth-in-waiting. Thus he reasons, "Everybody, rich and poor, landowners and peasants, will have to pay in money, land, cheese, blood, everything."

Given that much of the negative commentary on the legacy of the Resistance involves connections between the movement of 1943-1945 and left-wing terrorism in the 1970s and after, it is interesting to view Bertolucci's film as a commentary on these same connections.⁸⁶ In the context of the mid-1970s, the contested significance of antifascism helps to account for the defensive tone of *1900*. The caution of *1900* with respect to antifascist violence invites comparison with the frank depiction of partisan violence in *Corbari*. Seen today, the depiction of the partisan as urban guerilla in *Corbari* is unsettling in its anticipation of terrorist actions in the years to come. Six years later, *1900* is evasive on the subject of partisan violence, which is never actually shown (even the execution of Attila takes place off screen). In comparison to *Corbari*, the 1976 film is wary of the iconography of the Resistance in arms, despite its celebration of the Resistance's achievements.

Conclusion

In my discussion, I have emphasized the ways in which competing narratives of the Resistance shape the cinematic histories that we see onscreen. Both *Corbari* and *1900* respond to the critiques of state-sponsored Resistance memory coming from the extra-parliamentary left, without sharing the radicalism of these movements. The two films coincide in the unhappy responses they met with from the higher ranks of the PCI. Bertolucci has recounted how the scene of Alfredo's indictment met with a scandalized reaction from Giancarlo Pajetta. The party, Pajetta protested, had never put the *padrone* on trial in 1945. Bertolucci recalls his angry reply: "You didn't have the strength to do it in 1945, and you don't even have enough strength to put up with this trial thirty years later."⁸⁷ If the depiction of popular justice meted out to the bosses

⁸⁵ Bearing in mind that "*Uccidere un fascista non è un reato*" ("It is not a crime to kill a Fascist") was a popular slogan in these years, the filmmakers are cautious in their depiction of popular justice against Attila, which is not depicted as vengeful or cinematically spectacular. This caution can also be seen in the depiction of the young boy Leonida, who early on in the film says to a partisan, "I want to kill too." *1900* avoids the depiction of class warfare as revenge that excited the viewers of *Corbari*, as referenced by De Luna. In passing, Attila's portrayal by a non-Italian actor could also be seen as an effort to de-realize the violence associated with this figure, including that of his execution.

⁸⁶ See for example the series of best-selling books by Giampaolo Pansa, such as *Il sangue dei vinti* (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 2003) and *La grande bugia* (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 2006).

⁸⁷ Bernardo Bertolucci in Ungari, *Scene madri di Bernardo Bertolucci*, 131-32.

was too radical for the leading party of the opposition, the extra-parliamentary press was unimpressed by 1900's centrist politics and message of acceptance of the historic compromise.⁸⁸ It is worth highlighting the paradoxical quality of this reception, namely the film's inability to impress representatives of either the old or the new left. The same film was alternately considered too radical or too compromised with the system by these opposing groups. These contradictory responses suggest the extent to which the politics of 1900 are in fact ambivalent, in the attempt to steer a course between two opposing versions of Italian history.

This situation is revealing for what it tells us about how to read Italian political cinema in the 1970s. This was a period in which the PCI, the major party of the left, was attempting to build bridges with its traditional enemy, the DC. Rather than acting as a party of the opposition, the PCI was extending its antifascist credit to the morally sullied DC. This left the role of intransigent opposition to the assorted groups that emerged to the left of the PCI in the late 1960s and after. What, in this situation, was the role of an "oppositional" filmmaker aligned with the Communist Party? Other directors found themselves in the paradoxical position of being simultaneously too "right" and too "left" for many of their contemporaries. Similar considerations to those above could be extended to the work of Maselli, Elio Petri, Francesco Rosi, and the Taviani brothers in the post-1968 period. These directors were members of or aligned with the PCI, but responded to the impatient critiques of the status quo associated with the extra-parliamentary left.⁸⁹ This context serves as a reminder of the limits of auteurist perspectives on filmmakers when criticism focuses on these directors' "vision" or presumed politics at the expense of highlighting the contradictory circumstances that shaped the production and reception of their works.

A broad question posed by cinematic depictions of the Resistance is that of progress in Italian history. As the above discussion illustrates, films on the Resistance are not only about a historical period, but are also reflections on the course of postwar society and the hopes for political change in the present day. The conception of the Resistance as a force for renewal in contemporary society was clearly central to the historical discourse of the PCI, as well as that of the radical left in the 1970s, for all their differences in interpretation. The identification of the Resistance with the forces of historical progress is also characteristic of the language of the DC in these years. To cite a speech of Aldo Moro from 1975:

Our antifascism is not only [...] a fact of conscience, the result of historical reflection; it is an essential component of our political intuition, destined to stabilize the boundary between that which constitutes novelty and progress and that which means, on the social and political terrain, conservation and reaction.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ See for example the reviews from *Lotta continua* and *Re Nudo*, "Novecento: arriva sui grandi schermi il compromesso storico" and "Di Kolossale c'è solo la noia ovvero invito a non buttare via i quattrini per vedere Novecento e Barry Lyndon," reproduced in Steve Della Casa and Paolo Manera, *Sbatti Bellocchio in sesta pagina: il cinema dei giornali della sinistra extraparlamentare 1968-1976* (Rome: Donzelli, 2012), 22-25 and 202-07. See also the articles by Alemanno, "Via ai compromessi col vento di 'Novecento,'" *Quotidiano dei lavoratori*, August 31, 1976, 3; and Curi, "Il rifiuto di capire un presente difficile nel cinema degli anni 70," *Quotidiano dei lavoratori*, September 2, 1976, 6.

⁸⁹ Similarly, the tendency to speak of a *cinema d'impegno* or civic cinema in the 1970s potentially obscures the fact that what is commonly designated as "political cinema" was, for a significant constituency on the left, insufficiently political. On this point, see Michele Guerra, "Impegni improrogabili: le forme "politiche" del cinema italiano degli anni settanta," in *Anni '70, l'arte dell'impegno: i nuovi orizzonti culturali, ideologici e sociali nell'arte italiana*, ed. Cristina Casero and Elena Di Raddo (Milan: Silvana, 2009).

⁹⁰ Aldo Moro quoted in Santomassimo, *Antifascismo e dintorni*, 300.

In this schema, the historical forces of Fascism and antifascism have become synonymous with the theme of Italy's difficult modernity, with Fascism coming to symbolize opposition to enlightened change.⁹¹ Bearing this in mind, we can say that Orsini's and Bertolucci's films recount history from a left-wing or progressive point of view, but struggle with the representation of history as progress. In this, we might find a common point with other representations of Fascism and antifascism in these years. Left-wing directors returned to the period of the dictatorship and the Resistance in the 1970s with a variety of intentions, but a recurrent feature was the fear of an impasse for the antifascist cause, a situation without progress. The fear of stasis, or the depiction of a stalled condition, links films such as Orsini's *Corbari*, Bertolucci's *Strategia del ragno*, *Il conformista*, and *1900*, Marco Leto's *La villeggiatura* (*Black Holiday*, 1973), Scola's *C'eravamo tanto amati*, Maselli's *Il sospetto*, and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (*Salò or the 120 days of Sodom*, 1975), among others. These films feature plots that are broadly unresolved or circular, situations of impasse and the absence of protagonists capable of positive agency.⁹²

The representation of Fascism and antifascism in the cinema of the 1970s coincides with a crisis of political vocabulary in a decade that saw the "definitive crisis of antifascism as the synthetic metaphor" of society's democratic development.⁹³ A key concern in these films is the question of change and evolution in Italian history. The motif of stasis suggests that films depicting Fascism and the Resistance are reflections of Italy's "blocked democracy," the political stalemate resulting from the exclusion of communists from government and the maintenance of a single political class at the helm of the country until the end of the Cold War. Whether we think of the depiction of history as tableaux in Bertolucci's *1900* or the unresolved agency of antifascist protagonists in the films of Orsini, Leto, Maselli, and others, the historical film in these years appears to be particularly conditioned by the fear of a lack of change in the present. The above-mentioned films imply the contrast between the hopes for change associated with antifascism and the Resistance and the stasis of a political order that is opposed to these prospects. In many cases, the dictatorship comes to represent a political order that perpetuates rather than renews itself in the postwar world,⁹⁴ converting the period of Fascism into a metaphor for the stalled political situation of Italy in the 1970s.⁹⁵

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⁹² For a discussion of circular narratives as characteristic of much Italian cinema, see Carlo Celli, *National Identity in Global Cinema: How Movies Explain the World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 83-98.

⁹³ Paggi, "Una repubblica senza pantheon," 253.

⁹⁴ This is the explicit thesis of Leto's *La villeggiatura*.

⁹⁵ I am adapting a comment of Pavone, who observes that the theme of "continuities" between the dictatorship and the Republic in the 1970s became distorted to a "synonym of general immobilism" in postwar politics and a negation of the original contribution of antifascism and the Resistance to the republican institutions. Pavone, *Alle origini della Repubblica*, 160.

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