



## Feeling Political in Military Cemeteries: Commemoration Politics in Fascist Italy

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Rome, 28 October 2020: Italian neo-fascist groups meet, as they have done on this date for the last four years, at a chapel built by Benito Mussolini within Rome's main cemetery in order to commemorate those who gave their lives for Fascism.<sup>1</sup> Right arms outstretched, they march in procession and lay flowers in memory of the Fascist 'martyrs'. In Italy and beyond, today's far Right has inherited from interwar fascism a political strategy that uses the commemoration of the dead as a powerful source of emotions. Now, as in the early twentieth century, feelings elicited by death are seen to offer a direct route to political persuasion.

Likewise, in the 1930s, Mussolini's regime sought to utilize feelings of grief by taking control of the remembrance of fallen soldiers. In a population of roughly 35 million Italians, over half a million soldiers had died in the First World War—a significant human cost for a young and relatively unstable nation.<sup>2</sup> As those deaths touched most Italian families, the urge to remember the fallen extended across all regions and social classes. Given the scale of the casualties, remembrance had an emotional resonance, which rendered it an ideal site for the exercise of power and the transmission of political intentions. Thus, after taking charge in 1922, Italy's Fascist leaders aimed to harness the commemoration of the fallen through a range of

<sup>1</sup> Gennaro, 'Roma'; Turco, 'Luigi Gaetti'.

<sup>2</sup> Scolè, 'War Losses'.

ceremonies, memorials, and initiatives that became keystones of policy and propaganda. Notably, in 1927, Mussolini ordered that the remains of soldiers who had died fighting in the First World War should be exhumed and reburied in new ossuaries (bone depositories), which were to be built along the former frontlines in northern Italy (Fig. 8.1).

By removing hundreds of thousands of bodies to new locations, the regime aimed to manage and influence emotions associated with the memory of the fallen. The ossuaries were among a range of instruments, which were meant to encourage attitudes towards the dead that were favourable to the dictatorship—attitudes that played a key role in the distribution of power between rival institutions within the Fascist state, and in relationships formed between individuals and that state.

Given the nature of the Fascist ossuaries, the purpose of this chapter is to expose evidence of the regime's efforts to template and use emotions to political ends. The objective is not to assess the effect that those efforts had on the emotions of Italians, due to the lack of available sources and the diversity of individual reactions. Rather, the context is the institution of Italian Fascism as embodied by the state, the Party, and related bodies.



**Fig. 8.1** The ossuary of Redipuglia, Italy, Giovanni Greppi and Giannino Castiglioni (1935–1938). (Photo by Hannah Malone, 2014)

In fact, as the regime sought to mobilize Italians by means of feelings of grief, those feelings were gradually consolidated through various policies and practices that were central to the institution of Fascism, and which came to define it. Thus, the politicization of remembrance under Mussolini represents an ideal arena in which to analyse the interplay between politics and emotions in an institutional setting. To some extent, the emotions at work in interwar Italy were common to other countries involved in the First World War, although Mussolini's government sought a higher degree of state control over remembrance in comparison to interwar France and Britain.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the Italian dictatorship devised commemorative strategies that bore an influence in Hitler's Germany.<sup>4</sup> Seen from an international perspective, the Fascist ossuaries were remarkable with regard to the political use of emotions and the mobilization of an overtly political agenda.

In that respect, this chapter outlines how the Fascist authorities sought to monopolize commemoration by moving the bodies of the fallen to newly created ossuaries. It then analyses those ossuaries in order to uncover the emotions that they were meant to foster, and the political goals that they were intended to serve. In looking at the architecture of the ossuaries as a means of communication, the chapter also examines how characteristics such as space and form carried signs that were meant to shape emotions for specific political ends. With a view to understanding the ossuaries as carriers of emotional messages, the chapter explores the discourse and practices that surrounded their making and use. As such, it embodies three sources of empirical evidence: fieldwork and photographic surveys of the ossuaries in their present form; propaganda material that is textual, visual, and aural in nature such as articles, guidebooks, booklets, postcards, videos, and speeches; and official documents stored in an archive held by Italy's Ministry of Defence (Onorcaduti)—which contains a wealth of sources that had hitherto not been seen by researchers. That archive includes a range of materials such as letters, memos, public statements, architectural briefs, financial reports, drawings, and photographs. Through this assortment of sources, it has been possible to explore the ossuaries as they were imagined, designed, and built and as they exist as heritage today. All of that evidence is examined using a methodology that combines elements of emotional, political, and architectural history, and in the light of theory that addresses politics and emotions within an institutional context.

<sup>3</sup> For comparisons with France, see Chap. 7 by Karsten Lichau.

<sup>4</sup> See, among others Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*; Behrenbeck, *Kult*.

For many Italians, the First World War was a divisive and emotional experience.<sup>5</sup> Few had wanted the war and most had opposed it. The war dead, on a scale unmatched in Italian history, unleashed powerful reactions in the form, for example, of grief, sorrow, pride, anger, and resentment. After the war ended in 1918, civic initiatives created comparatively small monuments to the fallen in squares and streets across Italy in the manner of nineteenth-century commemorative traditions.<sup>6</sup> Ranging between the poles of pacifism and triumphalism, socialism and nationalism, these monuments emerged spontaneously from a widespread desire to give meaning to personal grief and the nation's losses. Whether viewed as a necessary sacrifice or as a warning against war, these early monuments expressed a diversity of views, a lack of agreement among Italians about how to remember the conflict, and the influence of different groups such as veterans, mourners, and politicians. From within that divided society, Fascism emerged in 1919 with the promise to unify the nation. Fascist squads destroyed or vandalized war monuments with a pacifist, socialist, or regretful character, and created new monuments imbued with nationalistic and victorious meanings. A disappointing peace treaty deepened divisions between those who remembered the war as a glorious triumph and others for whom the conflict had been a pointless slaughter. Compounded by economic hardship, those tensions fuelled disorder and violence within Italy's fractured society and destabilized the liberal-democratic system, helping to pave the way for the Fascist takeover.

On gaining power in 1922, the Fascist leaders imposed their own interpretation of the First World War as a national triumph and erased any surviving monuments that did not conform to a rhetoric based on victory and sacrifice. As the self-declared heirs of the Italian victory, they took charge of the commemoration of the fallen, and while claiming to protect the memory of the dead, they promoted a heroic image of war and prepared the population for future conflicts.<sup>7</sup> In the early years of Fascist rule, the authorities first adopted forms of remembrance that had emerged spontaneously from civil society, but then gradually brought the memory of the fallen under tighter political control. Notably, Italy's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, erected within the Vittoriano monument in Rome under Mussolini's socialist predecessor in 1921, was adopted by the Duce

<sup>5</sup> Dogliani, 'Constructing', 12. More broadly, see also Frevert, 'Emotions in Times of War'.

<sup>6</sup> Canal, 'Retorica della morte'; Isnenghi, *Italia in piazza*, 251–58.

<sup>7</sup> Fogu, 'Fare la storia'.

as a backdrop for speeches delivered in his new role as the nation's leader.<sup>8</sup> Although democratic, socialist, and veterans' groups had conceived of the Tomb as a shared symbol of loss that could bridge partisan divides, Fascism transformed a monument of sorrow into one of triumph and an instrument of reconciliation into a symbol of the victory of a single party. While recruiting the Unknown Soldier into Mussolini's audience, the regime converted the Tomb, which was meant as a stand-in for the bodies of the missing, into a sacred site in the 'liturgy' of Fascism, known as the 'Altar of the Fatherland'.<sup>9</sup> In short, the democratized Unknown Soldier who had neither name nor status came instead to reflect the Fascist subordination of the individual to the nation. Whereas previously, commemoration had been in the hands of veterans, mourners, civic committees, clergy, and local councils, from 1927 those groups were forbidden to erect new monuments or to arrange commemorative ceremonies without state approval. In monopolizing remembrance, the regime faced particular resistance from veterans' groups and the Church, as institutions that were gradually reduced to ancillary roles.

Italian soldiers who had died in battle were originally buried in small cemeteries or mass graves close to the battlefields. However, by the late 1920s these modest burial places were judged to be insufficient for the aims of Fascist propaganda. Hence, Mussolini had the remains of over 300,000 soldiers disinterred and reburied within thirty new ossuaries located close to former frontlines in north-eastern Italy and present-day Slovenia.<sup>10</sup> While the larger of the ossuaries accommodated up to 100,000 bodies, they were sited in, or close to, territories that had formerly belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire: that is, in areas that Italy acquired as a victor in the First World War. As markers of newly won land, the ossuaries were akin to fortresses located at Italy's new borders, although their main purpose was 'to bear witness, across the centuries, to the heroic sacrifices of our marvellous soldiers' 'who died serenely ... so Italy could be expanded'.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Gentile, *Culto*, 35–36; Brice, *Vittoriano*, 350–60.

<sup>9</sup> Wittman, *Tomb*.

<sup>10</sup> Fiore, 'Monumentalizzazione'; Bregantin, *Per non morire mai*.

<sup>11</sup> Felice Nori, progetto disegni, dettagli per la costruzione, Sezione Tecnica, Montello disegni, 18 July 1931, Archivio Commissariato delle Onoranze ai Caduti (AOCC); General Faracovi to the War Ministry, 'Richiesta approvazione del progetto', December 1930, Sezione Tecnica, Fagarè, b1, f5, AOCC. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

The campaign of reburial was run by a military commission established in 1919 to oversee funerary arrangements for Italy's fallen soldiers. Under Fascism, the Commission was headed by a succession of generals who enjoyed remarkable authority and, from 1935, responded directly to Mussolini. The centralization of power in the hands of the Commission and its close relationship to the dictator signal the extent to which its actions expressed a Fascist agenda, despite the relative degree of autonomy held by the military. The year 1935 marked a watershed in the history of the regime, the evolution of the ossuaries, Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, and a lurch towards totalitarianism. While hitherto the ossuaries had been designed by different architects and in various styles, from that year the Commission passed all projects to the architect Giovanni Greppi and the sculptor Giannino Castiglioni, who together developed an innovative format for the ossuaries that was designed to serve the communicative needs of the regime. Although the Fascist state could never achieve total control over the remembrance of the fallen, the ossuaries supported its aim to template emotional responses to the war losses.

#### FASCISM AND THE TEMPLATING OF EMOTIONS

To a greater or lesser degree, all political powers depend for their stability on the establishment of an emotional 'template', that is, a network of emotions and of norms that shape and direct those emotions. Such emotional templates can help a government to promote desirable behaviour, direct the nature of social life, and unify people behind common goals. After gaining power through undemocratic means and within a divided nation, Mussolini had a particular need to establish an emotional template through strictly controlled norms and models.<sup>12</sup> Fascism emerged as a revolutionary movement that was nominally opposed to all institutions, but which evolved into an institution focused on securing discipline and obedience. To do so, it appealed to emotions as a means of fusing the nation into a cohesive whole and binding citizens to the state. While affording legitimacy to the dictatorship, the Fascist emotional template was intended to renew the nation, its social order, and even humanity itself, essentially, by engendering a new Fascist man and woman motivated by 'positive' emotions, such as pride, discipline, and optimism. Thus, the

<sup>12</sup>Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*, 6–11; Albanese, 'Coraggio'; Pes, 'Parola di Mussolini'; Gervasi, 'Anger as Misshapen Fear'.

ossuaries belonged to a variety of propaganda practices, including speeches, rallies, parades, exhibitions, radio broadcasts, and other media that used emotions as a source of identity and a means of national integration. Through such practices, the regime sought to foster specific attitudes, while penalizing deviant reactions. Frequent references to emotions, especially tied to fear, shame, and bravery, illustrate their centrality to the construction of power.

As shown by its struggle against commemorative practices with a regretful or mournful character, the regime had difficulty maintaining control over emotions relating to the losses of the First World War, due to their intensity. Yet it was critical to manage those emotions, which might otherwise feed pacifist and anti-militarist tendencies that ran counter to Fascist ideology. At the same time, the strength of public feeling towards the war dead constituted a valuable resource for the dictatorship, an effective means of communication, and a source of concepts and images through which Fascism might be disseminated. In essence, the war losses presented a platform upon which the regime could construct emotions in order to valorize and empower its political intentions.

As an ideal site for the templating of emotions, the commemoration of the fallen as ‘martyrs’ for the fatherland became a lynchpin of Fascist propaganda.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the regime also celebrated as martyrs those who died in the nineteenth-century struggle for Italian independence, or the Risorgimento, in Italy’s colonial wars, and in the initial Fascist struggle for power. By commemorating as heroes those who had fallen before Fascism, the regime laid claim to additional sacrifices and to whatever feelings of respect and pride might be harvested from history. In politicizing emotions through commemoration, Mussolini was building on a political strategy that had been central to the emergence of the Italian state in the 1800s.<sup>14</sup> The remembrance of national heroes was used as a major tool of propaganda during the Risorgimento, and after Italy’s unification in 1861 it served as the basis for the construction of a national identity. Over time, the commemoration of the fallen was passed down from Liberal to Fascist Italy as a bedrock of Italian nationhood and a means of building consensus.

Through the ossuaries, the Fascist authorities sought to template emotional responses, which meant encouraging certain emotions while prohibiting others. Specifically, the ossuaries were intended to foster feelings

<sup>13</sup> Gentile, *Culto*, 32; Suzzi Valli, ‘Culto’.

<sup>14</sup> Riall, ‘Martyr Cults’; Malone, *Architecture*, 104–18.

of pride, triumph, heroism, self-sacrifice, and even joy and to restrict a sense of sadness, regret, or pointlessness. For the Commission responsible for the ossuaries, they were not monuments of death but of the resurrection of ‘those fallen in the service of the nation [who] are immortal’—that is, they ‘have not died, nor will they die’.<sup>15</sup> In promoting immortality over death, the ossuaries effectively negated the possibility of mourning. Thus, the Commission was adamant that the ossuaries should not have a ‘funerary character’, as this might elicit unwarranted sadness: a condition associated with pacifism and perceived to be potentially harmful or destabilizing.<sup>16</sup> In that the ossuaries were to express ‘piety, honour and national gratitude’, the Commission envisaged a new type of memorial that was heroic, audacious, and freed from melancholy.<sup>17</sup> Having condemned ‘wining and pitiful’ monuments, Mussolini praised the ossuary at Monte Grappa because ‘there was nothing funerary about it, [rather] it looked like a fortress’ (Fig. 8.2).<sup>18</sup> In effect, as a symbol of vitality and optimism, Monte Grappa was seen to look towards the future rather than to the past.

Given that, since the First World War, there had been a boom in tourism to the former battlefields and Italy’s new territories, the regime built the ossuaries as destinations for family and group trips. A wealth of propaganda promoted the sites to an Italian and international public through various media, including videos, postcards, radio broadcasts, and publications. In particular, organizations associated with the regime issued travel journals and guidebooks, which encouraged visits to the ossuaries and prescribed behaviours that were to be observed. Such publications played a pivotal role in the templating of emotions.

For Fascists, death was a life-giving force worthy of celebration. Accordingly, in 1941, the author of a book on the ossuary of Redipuglia stated that ‘one should not cry for those who died’. Nonetheless, the Fascist emotional order did not completely reject the notion of sorrow, although it demanded that grief be channelled into approved forms of expression. Writing in the midst of the Second World War, that same author exalted ‘the unsmiling mother, with dry eyes, who is capable of saying to her son: “go, and accomplish your duty thoroughly [by dying at

<sup>15</sup> Wilcox, ‘Public Ceremonies’, 197.

<sup>16</sup> Fernando Bisaccianti, ‘Relazione a corredo del progetto per l’ossario di guerra da erigersi in Casteldante di Rovereto’, draft, before Oct. 1930, Sezione Tecnica, Casteldante Rovereto, AOCG.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Adunanza della Sezione terza—30 giugno 1931’, Doc. Consiglio di Stato, Asiago, b. 1, f. ‘1931–2’, AOCG.

<sup>18</sup> Dato, *Redipuglia*, 38; Fiore, ‘Monumentalizzazione’.





**Fig. 8.2** The ossuary of Monte Grappa, Italy, Giovanni Greppi and Giannino Castiglioni (1932–1935). (Photo by Hannah Malone, 2014)

war]” but in solitude she suffers and waits’.<sup>19</sup> That shows how the pain of loss is allowed if it is conquered or interiorized. In addition, the expression of grief was deemed more acceptable in women than in men, as evidenced by the evocation of the ‘Mother, who alone knows the pain of not having seen nor touched her Son for the last time’.<sup>20</sup>

The repression of what Fascists saw as negative emotions went hand in hand with the encouragement of positive alternatives—which involved the celebration of death and war as necessary to the welfare and grandeur of the nation. It was said that visitors to an ossuary would answer a call to arms ‘because even if war is not desirable and everywhere it evokes: death, hatred, terror, destruction etc., nevertheless it [also] sounds like: love, altruism, generosity, sincerity, comradeship’.<sup>21</sup> From this perspective, ‘pain is necessary, death is necessary: they are the highest testimonies of faith’.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Fuiano, *Credo*, 196, 164.

<sup>20</sup> Gallimberti, ‘Gli ossari di guerra’.

<sup>21</sup> Fuiano, *Credo*, 136.

<sup>22</sup> Dini, *Via crucis*, quoted in Dato, *Redipuglia*, 48.

Equally, a guidebook of 1940 described the transformation of sorrow into pride on the part of visitors to an ossuary: ‘widows, mothers, [and] orphans’ unfurrow their brow with ‘conscious tranquilly’, sadness leaves their eyes, which flash with pride for the sacrificial ‘offering’ of the dead—‘a painful offering, but equal to the grandeur of its cause’.<sup>23</sup> Such standards of behaviour were intended to establish a society whose emotions adhered to templates, or approved modes of expression that might be worn as badges of honour. The suppression of sorrow applied to wars past and present, in that shortly after the opening of the ossuary at Monte Grappa in 1935, the press was forbidden from reporting on any ‘sentimental or tearful’ scenes caused by soldiers departing for Italy’s war in Ethiopia.<sup>24</sup>

### THE POLITICAL PURPOSES OF EMOTIONAL TEMPLATES

Above all, the ossuaries harnessed emotions with the aim to unite the nation behind Fascism. In that fallen soldiers were said to perform ‘the sacred duty of keeping love of the Fatherland alive among Italians’, remembrance was meant to create an ‘emotional community’ that was bound to the nation through memories loaded with emotions.<sup>25</sup> In this sense, the ossuaries acted as crucibles where the nation might be fused through common feelings. By defining Fascist identity in terms of emotions, the state was also in a position to exclude those who departed from certain emotional templates, to distinguish between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and to reward obedience and punish dissent.

At the same time, the ossuaries helped to restore the honour and dignity of a nation that had been greatly shaken by the First World War. While the conflict exposed Italy’s military, diplomatic, and political weaknesses, an unsatisfactory peace treaty fuelled a sense of resentment and the feeling that Italy had not been properly rewarded for its sacrifices—a situation encapsulated in the nationalist slogan ‘the mutilated victory’ (*la vittoria mutilata*). Equally, given that for national communities ‘shame can be a stronger bond than love’, it was crucial for Fascism to turn that sense of

<sup>23</sup> *Sui campi di battaglia: Il monte Grappa*, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 127.

<sup>25</sup> Maurice Halbwachs was the first to theorize the idea of *communautés affectives* (affective ties): *La mémoire collective*; see also Assmann, ‘Memory’, 114. For the evolution of the concept of emotional communities, see Rosenwein, ‘Worrying’; for a critique, see Pernau, ‘Feeling Communities’.

humiliation into pride.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the ossuaries were intended to suggest that the ‘Fascist government ... has been able to awaken in the soul of each Italian an awareness of their moral value and strength through a reevaluation of the victory’.<sup>27</sup>

The establishment of an emotional template through the ossuaries was also meant to mobilize Italians in support of future wars. Following Mussolini’s dictum ‘remember [the dead] and prepare [for war]’ (*ricordare e prepararsi*), commemoration went hand in hand with militarism. Traditionally, the principle of military service held little sway in Italy because many felt greater allegiance to their family, community, or village than to the state. Hence, popularizing the idea of dying for the nation was important for the Fascist regime, as it had been for previous Italian governments. This bellicose rhetoric heightened in 1935–1939, that is, during the period of Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia, the Spanish Civil War, and the outbreak of the Second World War—a period which also coincided with the construction of most of the ossuaries. In 1938, the Chief of the Italian General Staff, Pietro Badoglio, stated at the inauguration of an ossuary that to be ‘worthy’ of the fallen, all Italians ‘must be ready to follow their example’ and die for Italy.<sup>28</sup>

In order to serve those three national goals—unity, honour, and war—the ossuaries helped to place commemoration within a public and militarized sphere, which limited the span of permissible emotions.<sup>29</sup> Given their distinctly militaristic character, they helped to stifle private grief in favour of patriotism, devotion, and pride and left little room for discordant or private emotions. For the sociologist Mabel Berezin, the primary goal of Italian Fascism was to fuse individual feelings in order to form a nation driven by shared emotions.<sup>30</sup> In a speech calling Italians to arms on the eve of the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, Mussolini imagined Italy as a community with ‘a common heart, a common will, and a common decision [to go to war]’.<sup>31</sup> However unrealistic, that image of cohesion was manifested in the ossuaries and especially in those designed after the Ethiopian

<sup>26</sup> Ginzburg, ‘Shame’, 35.

<sup>27</sup> Gino Peressutti, report of 23 November 1931, quoted in full in Fiore, ‘Monumentalizzazione’, 157.

<sup>28</sup> *Il Comune di Asiago*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> More widely, see Acton, *Grief in Wartime*.

<sup>30</sup> Berezin uses the expression ‘community of feeling’: *Making the Fascist Self*, 27–30. See also Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*, 162–80.

<sup>31</sup> Mussolini, ‘Discorso della mobilitazione’, 158.

invasion. As such, they served to project the legitimacy and strength of the state, while also drawing on the individual's needs for meaning, order, and community.

Although propaganda claimed that the Fascist commemoration of the fallen could 'comfort and fortify' mourners, the question remains as to whether that commemoration constituted a welcome source of solace or a violation of private sorrow.<sup>32</sup> It is true that, to a large extent, the Fascist regime harnessed and radicalized pre-existing expressions of grief. It also adopted nationalistic monuments that were created before it took power, and built on existing funerary traditions that were rooted in patriotism and Catholicism. In any case, individuals could have chosen to accept, reject, or negotiate the emotional templates that were imposed by the regime, or to seek a path between the expression of individual feelings and the emotional templates promoted by the state. There may also have been two-way processes of feedback and adjustment. However, due to the difficulties of accessing sources that express individual reactions, and the restrictions on freedom of expression due to censorship, our knowledge of personal feelings is limited to some specific individuals. Conditions associated with Fascist repression also make it necessary to read between the lines. For instance, having won a prize to attend the inauguration of the ossuary of Pasubio in 1926, an Italian schoolgirl named Clelia Leogrande recorded the event in detail: the speeches, the mass, the choral singing, and the group photo with celebrities of the regime, including the widows of famous heroes of the First World War. Leogrande reported feeling a shared sense of pathos among the crowd.<sup>33</sup> Still, as her report was destined for publication, it is hard to judge whether the expression of approved emotions was actually genuine. Given the limitations of such sources, there is the risk of reductive conclusions based on a few, perhaps idiosyncratic, responses. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the meanings attributed to the ossuaries by the regime, rather than on their reception by individuals.

<sup>32</sup> *Sui campi di battaglia del medio e basso Isonzo*, 54.

<sup>33</sup> Leogrande, *Fiori e lacrime*, 7–8, quoted in Antonelli, *Cento anni*, 243. The ossuary at Pasubio was begun in 1920 before Mussolini's takeover and later co-opted by the regime.

## MEANS OF COMMUNICATING EMOTIONS

The Fascist emotional template was translated into concrete and recurring practices designed to promote certain emotions, and narratives favourable to the dictatorship: such as a positive view of the First World War, of Mussolini's rise to power, and of war as a noble sacrifice. In order to give meaning to the war losses in a manner that endorsed Fascist power, the ossuaries were designed as sites of communication that carried emotion-laden narratives by means of their architecture, their uses, and related discourses. As Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi has shown, emotionally charged narratives and myths were central to Fascism and its new way of doing politics.<sup>34</sup> While searching for effective modes of expression, Fascism looked to rituals and symbols developed by two institutions with a long history of emotional education: the military and the Catholic Church. Those institutions shared with Fascism a desire to attract consensus and new members, while managing the attitudes of their membership from above. Thus, in adapting established traditions to new ends, Fascism combined religious and military symbolism to imbue the ossuaries with emotional power.

Clearly, the ossuaries were as much a product of the state as of the military—as an institution with expertise in emotional management and the suppression of individualism in favour of self-sacrifice and dedication to a cause. That expertise served the main purpose of the ossuaries, which was to inculcate specific emotional responses to war and to those who died as a result of war. As a 'total institution' bound by strict rules, the military was a model for Mussolini's ambitions to gain totalitarian control over all aspects of Italian life.<sup>35</sup> As will be shown below with respect to Redipuglia, the military setting of the ossuaries left little room for personalized forms of bereavement, adjustments to the emotional template, or distinctions between the fallen.

As the Fascist authorities operated in a deeply Catholic culture, they also borrowed tools of persuasion from the Church. This was in line with a 'sacralization' of politics—a process whereby, with the decline of clerical power and the rise of nationalism from the late 1700s, politicians seconded ideological mechanisms from the clergy, and the sacred migrated from the

<sup>34</sup>Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*, 2–4.

<sup>35</sup>Frevert, *Nation in Barracks*, 3. On Fascist totalitarianism, see Scuccimarra, 'Stato totalitario'.

religious to the political sphere. To some extent, Fascism was conceived as sacralized politics, or as a political religion whose liturgy centred on the sacredness of the dead.<sup>36</sup> In that the fallen were described as martyrs, and their martyrdom as a sacrifice for the redemption of the fatherland, Fascism ‘spoke’ the language—including the emotional language—of Catholicism, which was familiar and accessible to the majority of the Italian population. Therefore, the ossuaries were designed to foster veneration for the fallen through imagery that was both political and religious. This duality was common to war cemeteries and memorials across modern Europe. However, the degree to which Fascism adopted religious symbolism was relatively specific to its conceptualization as a political religion. That proximity to Catholicism also reflected a ‘marriage of convenience’ between the Vatican and the dictatorship, which were officially allied through the Lateran Pacts in 1929.<sup>37</sup> As with Catholicism, Fascism demanded of Italians an ‘act of faith’ based on heartfelt belief, rather than reasoned logic.<sup>38</sup> However, tensions emerged as Church and state competed for control over the emotional lives of Italians—tensions which erupted, for instance, around the role of the clergy in the creation of the ossuaries.

Architecturally, the ossuaries deployed form, space, aesthetics, light, and symbolism to stimulate emotional responses.<sup>39</sup> For example, the hierarchical or axial nature of their planning served to elicit a sense of awe and respect towards the dead. Those responses could be enhanced through lighting or decoration; for instance, as an ossuary might be lit by torches to achieve ‘a sense of profound emotion that would lead to contemplation [and] remind the living of the sacrifice of the dead’.<sup>40</sup> In this sense, the ossuaries show how emotional templates are always spatially situated or expressed in space. Predominantly, they drew on ecclesiastical architecture for strategies that might induce states of devotion and faith. While the presence of chapels, altars, crucifixes, and Stations of the Cross made the

<sup>36</sup> Gentile, *Culto*, 9, 303–35. However, this concept had little bearing on the actual workings of the regime.

<sup>37</sup> Pollard, *Vatican*, 1–6.

<sup>38</sup> See Chap. 2 by Francesco Buscemi.

<sup>39</sup> On the relationship between architecture and emotions, see Großmann and Nielsen, introduction, 5–8.

<sup>40</sup> Fernando Bisaccianti, ‘Relazione a corredo del progetto per l’ossario di guerra da erigersi in Casteldante di Rovereto’, draft, before Oct. 1930, Sezione Tecnica, Casteldante Rovereto, AOCG.

ossuaries overtly Catholic, there was also a subtler sense of a transcendence through which Fascism drew power from religious ideology. For instance, the design of one ossuary was associated with ancient Rome and the greatness of the ‘Latin race’ and with the ability of monumental architecture to convey ‘the impression of a very great ideal’ that would ‘conquer and overwhelm the spirit, even of non-believers’.<sup>41</sup> Equally, scale was used to make visitors feel their ‘smallness’ in the face of the ‘Infinity and Eternity’ of the Fatherland.<sup>42</sup> In many ways, churches offered an ideal model for the ossuaries, not only as places where power is asserted but also in their capacity to induce specific emotional states associated with faith and religious zeal.<sup>43</sup> In dividing between the holy and the profane, church architecture demarcates people united by common emotions, in the same way that the ossuaries sought to define the boundaries of the nation through the celebration of its war dead.

While a fence or wall generally encloses the ‘sacred’ space of the ossuary, a monumental entrance or an avenue may regulate access to routes organized for rituals and ceremonies; for example, in the form of the exterior stepped pathways that ascend the terraces at the ossuary of Redipuglia. The fact that paths are long, wide, and steep indicates that ritual, rather than practicality, was the main concern. Ideally, paths rise upwards so as to evoke a sense of ascension. Demanding pathways require commitment of the visitor as a symbolic sacrifice to the dead, but also as a demonstration of the Fascist virtues of youth and athleticism. In some ossuaries, staircases create long taxing routes through which visitors were meant to express their faith in the nation for which lives had been lost. Landings and balconies provided spaces where visitors could pause to admire a view, as is the case at Oslavia, Rovereto, and Montello. At Pian di Salesei, the low-rise blocks of the ossuary are arranged to form a cross-shaped plan in the forecourt of a pre-existing church. Similarly, the symbolism of the Passion pervades the ossuary at Caporetto, which is located on a hill around 400 metres above the town to which it is connected by a Sacred Route (*Via Sacra*). This route is flanked by the fourteen Stations of the Cross, each marked by a small piazza where visitors could stop and pray on their ascent to the ossuary, and from which they could

<sup>41</sup>Gino Peressutti, report of 23 November 1931, quoted in full in Fiore, ‘Monumentalizzazione’, 157.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup>Kilde, *Sacred Power*, 3–11.

absorb a ‘mystical atmosphere’.<sup>44</sup> According to a guidebook of 1936, at the end of that route, and from the balcony above the ossuary, ‘one experiences a vision of mystical solemnity’.<sup>45</sup>

Choreographed and ritualized patterns of use reinforced the meanings embedded in architecture as space and form. Specifically, the ossuaries hosted rallies, funerals, ceremonies, and other ‘mobilizing practices’, which were intended to promote certain emotional states, while offsetting negative emotions of sorrow and loss.<sup>46</sup> Propagandistic films made to publicize these rituals generally show flags, marches, speeches, cheering crowds, a Catholic mass, and the presence of military, state, and clerical leaders.<sup>47</sup> Such practices illustrate how emotions might be induced through repeated bodily actions such as marching and cheering or through the use of sound and music. While their strict and martial character helped to contain mourning within the confines of Fascist ideology, their sacred symbolism recalled Christian funerary rites and a faith in resurrection that tempered sorrow and transformed mourning into an act of devotion. During a visit to Italy in 1928, an American academic observed:

It is not for nothing that Fascism is so ritualistic. The marches, salutes, yells, songs, uniforms, badges, and what not, are giving a new focus to the imagination of the Italian youth, are linking their social life to political organisations, and are filling their minds with political—I will not say ideas, but political—feelings.<sup>48</sup>

As a scholar of religion, this visitor recognized not only how emotions bound individuals to Fascist organizations, but also how the regime competed for emotional ‘capital’ with the Catholic Church: ‘Good Italian youths still go to mass and participate in religious festivities, but their sentiments, their imaginations, their moral ideals are centered elsewhere.’<sup>49</sup>

<sup>44</sup> ‘Capitolato ditta Vittorio Marchioro’, 22 August 1936, Caporetto, Atti amministrativi 1935–1939, Sezione Tecnica, AOCG.

<sup>45</sup> *Sui campi di battaglia: Il Cadore*, 249, quoted in Wilcox, ‘From Heroic Defeat’, 56.

<sup>46</sup> Scheer, ‘Are Emotions’, 209–12. With respect to Fascist Italy, see also Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*, 148–82.

<sup>47</sup> With respect to the ossuary of Monte Grappa, see Istituto Luce Cinecittà, ‘La tumulazione’; Istituto Luce Cinecittà, ‘Inaugurazione’.

<sup>48</sup> Schneider, *Making*, 222–23.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.



Drawing from Catholicism, the ossuaries were designed as sites of pilgrimage to which Italians would flock to pay homage to the dead. As destinations for organized tours modelled on Catholic pilgrimages, they were visited especially by schoolchildren, veterans, and Fascist leisure associations. For the head of the Commission, visitors must ‘pay grateful homage to the memory of the Fallen’ and ‘take from their heroic sacrifice inspiration and encouragement to love the Fatherland even more’.<sup>50</sup> Especially, adolescents were meant to travel to the sites to ‘draw on the heroic virtues of the lineage’.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, all tours to the former battlefields were meant to be ‘coordinated and disciplined’ by the Pilgrimage Committee set up by the Fascist Party.<sup>52</sup> The objective was for the battlegrounds to draw a large number of visitors while remaining sacred spaces that would be accessed with the ‘reverence’ due to an ‘altar’.<sup>53</sup> While at Redipuglia visitors climbed long staircases with religious veneration, they were meant to imagine that: ‘on every step, with every known and unknown name, our sons will bend their head and their knees murmuring a wordless prayer’ (Fig. 8.3).<sup>54</sup> This combination of movement and feeling was aimed at eliciting reverence and hope as: ‘Up this bronze staircase, built with the most beautiful sacrifice [of the dead], the living will ascend and realize that the Italian Soldier has no limits, because the final limit opens the door to the immeasurable glory of paradise.’<sup>55</sup> As in sacred spaces, such bodily rituals were intended to foster approved emotions.

Travel literature described visits to the ossuaries as ‘sad but, at the same time, a source of grateful reverence and just pride’, and envisaged that ‘all Italians would remember their heroic brothers ... and pray for them with gratitude, love, and pride’.<sup>56</sup> An early guidebook of 1929 advises visitors that if they should feel like weeping at the sight of so many tombs, they ‘should not try to repress and hide their emotions for a misplaced fear of weakness’ because their tears are a ‘sign of a deep love of the fatherland’.<sup>57</sup> Thus, although mourners might not be stopped from crying, their tears

<sup>50</sup> ‘Memoria’, 54.

<sup>51</sup> Fuiano, *Credo*, 137.

<sup>52</sup> Quote from the local Party secretary Francesco Caccese (1929), quoted in Fabi, *Redipuglia*, 15.

<sup>53</sup> Zambon, ‘Pasubio’, 400.

<sup>54</sup> *Sacrario di Redipuglia*, 3–5 in Dato, *Redipuglia*, 43.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Michelesi, ‘Dove riposano gli eroi’, 1443.

<sup>57</sup> *Sui campi di battaglia del medio e basso Isonzo*, 47.



**Fig. 8.3** The ossuary of Redipuglia, Italy, Giovanni Greppi and Giannino Castiglioni (1935–1938). (Photo by Hannah Malone, 2014)

might be commandeered in the service of national patriotism. As attitudes to grief became more radical during the Second World War, a later guidebook (1940) states that visitors to the ossuaries should express ‘not tears ... but the pride of victory’, given that ‘the glorification of the fallen demands, not sterile regrets, but virile resolutions’. It also asserts that the peak of Monte Grappa, once a battleground and now the site of an ossuary, must be seen and loved as ‘only like this, visitor, will you be worthy to enjoy the ineffable, masculine, and severe emotion of this visit’ (Fig. 8.2).<sup>58</sup> The description of emotions as ‘virile’ and ‘masculine’ points to the primacy of attitudes associated with manhood and to which women and children were also expected to aspire. That visitors were meant to leave the sites feeling ‘better [and] full of healthy resolutions’ highlights the Fascist aim to improve the ‘health’ of the national body by making Italians feel dynamic, proud, and determined.<sup>59</sup> In effect, in subverting individual feelings of sorrow, the regime sought to promote normative responses

<sup>58</sup> *Sui campi di battaglia: Il monte Grappa*, 13.

<sup>59</sup> *Sui campi di battaglia del medio e basso Isonzo*, 54.

through emotionally charged forms of public remembrance. In this sense, the ossuaries functioned to teach Italians how to feel about death at war and, consequently, how to act in future wars.<sup>60</sup>

Generally, such propaganda was intended to discipline feelings in line with the value given to specific emotions. For Mussolini, Fascism was a 'way of life' that was characterized by 'bravery', 'fearlessness, the passion for risk, [and] rejection of pacifism'.<sup>61</sup> The fallen soldier epitomized that way of life. By presenting the dead as emotional exemplars, or figures to be admired, the ossuaries and allied narratives constituted an education of the emotions. At the ossuary of Montello, inscriptions marking the tombs of those awarded the Golden Medal for military merit describe the fallen as models of appropriate emotions, that is, as courageous, loyal, disciplined, perseverant, ruthless, and willing to sacrifice their lives. For instance, one of the dead is remembered as: 'Serene, calm, and smiling in the face of danger he was always in an exposed position among his men as a shining example of tenacity and valour.'<sup>62</sup>

Thus, in presenting the behaviour of soldiers as worthy of imitation, the ossuaries instructed the audience how to conform to specific emotional templates. Primarily, the fallen were praised for a capacity to restrain their emotions in the service of common good. In general, the military must learn to conquer their feelings so that they may face death in battle and kill without hesitation or remorse. As exemplified by the courageous soldier and stoic mother, Fascism prized emotional mastery as the ability to privilege collective needs over personal desires—a skill that was as important to Fascist collectivism as it was to military discipline. Before dying in the First World War, an Italian soldier wrote to his wife:

If I should die; I would not regret it, no! I wanted to be here [at war], if I were not here, I would come, to throw myself in the fight to give greater moral value to my life. But this does not diminish the feeling that if I were to leave you alone, my heart would be, at the last instant, full of sorrow.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *Sui campi di battaglia: Il monte Grappa*, 12.

<sup>61</sup> Mussolini, 'Intransigenza assoluta', 131.

<sup>62</sup> 'Iscrizioni lapidi', Doc. Ossario del Montello, Specchio riepilogante il numero delle lettere incise sulle lapidi dei caduti, 'Nominativi', 23 April 1935, Montello, b. 1, f. 2, Sezione Tecnica, ACOG.

<sup>63</sup> Benedetti, *Lettere*, quoted in Bregantin, 'Morte in guerra', 279.

This letter, which was written before Fascism, but was published as propaganda in 1926, demonstrates how Mussolini's regime built upon older ideals of patriotic sacrifice. It also expresses the tug between familial and national loyalties, or between public and private emotions—which the regime aimed to resolve in favour of the nation. To this end, Mussolini demanded of all Italians an attitude of 'discipline ... devotion and honour'.<sup>64</sup> Under Fascism, Italian men underwent a form of mental conditioning in attitudes appropriate to a warrior: first at school, then in Fascist youth groups and leisure organizations. Similarly, the ossuaries were 'a place of education', where the dead taught the young 'how the Fatherland must be loved' and 'how to die with joy'.<sup>65</sup> War was to be the practical test of this education. In fact, during the Ethiopian war, Giuseppe Bottai, one of the architects of Fascist education policy, declared that the new Italian 'no longer becomes a soldier ... he is [by nature] a soldier'.<sup>66</sup>

The deployment of architecture, ritual, and discourse in the service of an emotional template is evidenced at Redipuglia. As the largest of the ossuaries, it accommodates the bodies of over 100,000 soldiers, of which about 60,000 were unidentified (Fig. 8.1).<sup>67</sup> While the remains of the unknown were amassed within crypts, identified bodies were placed in small niches that were set within the giant staircase designed by Greppi and Castiglioni. On those niches the names of the dead were written in black on a dark background and are nearly invisible. This, together with the homogeneity of the overall structure, means that the identities of the fallen are largely erased. Immediately evident, however, is the word *presente*, which appears 880 times in raised lettering along the faces of the ascending steps (Fig. 8.3). The word refers to the Fascist ritual of the roll call whereby the living, on hearing the names of the dead, answer *presente*.<sup>68</sup> This practice suggests that the dead are forever present in the memory of the living and are always ready to serve the nation. In addition, six tombs stand apart: the largest, which is at the front, is that of the commander, the Duke of Aosta, a cousin of the King who would later become a fervent Fascist. Behind him are his five generals. Behind them, the remains of

<sup>64</sup> Mussolini, 'Al popolo di Rimini', 74.

<sup>65</sup> *Sui campi di battaglia del medio e basso Isonzo*, 54; Zambon, 'Pasubio', 398. See also Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 127; Koonz, *Nazi Conscience*, 221–22.

<sup>66</sup> Bottai, 'Soldato fascista', quoted in Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 123.

<sup>67</sup> Dogliani, 'Redipuglia'; Fabi, *Redipuglia*; Malone, 'Redipuglia and the Dead'; Dato, *Redipuglia*.

<sup>68</sup> Suzzi Valli, 'Culto', 108; Gentile, *Culto*, 48.

ordinary soldiers are arranged in military formation, as in an army risen from the dead that is ready to march into battle under the leadership of its commanders. This image builds upon a centuries-long tradition of ghost tales in which the fallen rise from their graves, return to the battlefield, and continue the fight.<sup>69</sup> Conversely, the anti-Fascist writer Carlo Emilio Gadda noted that, after the roll call, ‘the corpse remained alone in the ground to rot ... The grim, vile echo of that “*presente*” had not yet faded, and already they [the Fascists] sat at the table, with their snouts in their maccheroni’.<sup>70</sup>

Despite the reiteration of *presente*, individual histories and memories are notably absent in the ossuary. The dead are remembered as soldiers, rather than as fathers, husbands, or sons. As a contemporary explained, the word *presente* indicates that the fallen did not ‘demobilize’ but remained in the service of the nation.<sup>71</sup> Hence, their anonymity was compatible with the Fascists’ aim to preserve a form of cultural mobilization in order to keep the nation in a state of permanent conflict and to justify acts of violence against internal and external enemies. During the First World War, loyalty to the family conflicted with that due to the army and state, and soldiers deserted to return home for the harvest or the funeral of a relative.<sup>72</sup> In contrast, at Redipuglia discipline and cohesion were secured by severing the dead from their families and permanently transforming citizens into soldiers. By locating commemoration within the institutional boundaries of the military, the ossuary also drew on its gendered code of honour and chivalry.<sup>73</sup> As such, Redipuglia was not so much a cemetery, but ‘a rally of devout sons and warriors ... of the Fatherland’.<sup>74</sup>

Italy was waging its war of conquest in Ethiopia when Redipuglia was initiated in 1935, and by the time of the ossuary’s completion in 1938, the nation was stumbling towards another global conflict. In fact, Mussolini stopped off to inaugurate Redipuglia on his way to sign the Munich agreement, which in appeasing Hitler delayed the beginning of the Second World War for nearly a year. During his visit to the region, the Duce announced the introduction of racial laws against Italian Jews, which

<sup>69</sup> Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 78–79; Todero, *Metamorfosi della memoria*, 29, 43, 101.

<sup>70</sup> Gadda, *Eros e Priapo*, 193, quoted in Gervasi, ‘Anger as Misshapen Fear’, 336.

<sup>71</sup> Fuiano, *Credo*, 137. See also Millan, ‘Veterans’ Associations’, 101.

<sup>72</sup> Wilcox, *Morale*, 121–23, 130–31; Wilcox, ‘From Heroic Defeat’, 11; Quattrocchi, ‘Montagne sacre’, 25.

<sup>73</sup> Frevert, ‘Wartime Emotions’.

<sup>74</sup> Fuiano, *Credo*, 227.

partly reflected Italy's tightening bond with Nazi Germany. The inauguration of Redipuglia was a masterclass in the use of emotions.<sup>75</sup> There were no speeches at the event because 'memories, landscapes, and the air' were thought to be more affecting. Rather than words that might appeal to the mind, the ceremony used sound, smell, and sight as sensory pathways to feeling. As reported in the newspapers, the audience heard a 'pleasant murmur' from the choir, smelt the smoke from a salvo of guns, and watched the Duce ascend the vast staircase.<sup>76</sup> One report described a hallucination whereby Mussolini appeared to grow larger as he moved away. Journalistic accounts emphasize the ease and speed with which Mussolini climbed the steep stairs, which were made for the fit and youthful bodies of the new Italians. In that this sensual and mystical experience was modelled on the Catholic mass, reports describe the ossuary as an altar, the smoking braziers as incense, and the bodies of the fallen as the Host, that is, the body of Christ, who akin to the fallen sacrificed himself for the greater good. As an Archbishop 'consecrated' the monument, his words created 'a mysterious eco between the bursts of machine guns and cannons, and the ringing of trumpets'.<sup>77</sup> Within that scenario, Mussolini is described as a model of correct emotions: 'He suddenly became gentle and serious' in the presence of the dead and addressed them, saying: 'Soldiers, you fought ... and in return, I gave you an Empire.' The dead were said to feel 'supreme happiness' as the Duce passed among them.<sup>78</sup> Given the value attributed to emotional control, Mussolini's 'frowning face' is read as 'the signs of repressed emotion'. During the ceremony, members of the military shouted *presente*, meaning that they were 'ready to be sent anywhere at [the Duce's] orders'.<sup>79</sup> Thus, as the living echoed the dead, the ossuary acted as a summons to defend Italy and expand beyond its borders.

At Redipuglia, the word *presente* ('I am here') can be thought of as an 'emotive', a term coined by William Reddy to denote a first-person expression of emotion, as in 'I am angry'—and a mechanism that individuals use to explore and alter their emotions.<sup>80</sup> In that sense, political

<sup>75</sup> 'Morti più vivi dei vivi', 1. See also Dogliani, 'Constructing', 15; Fabi, *Redipuglia*, 28–29; Dato, *Redipuglia*, 46.

<sup>76</sup> Tomaselli, 'Omaggio', 2.

<sup>77</sup> 'Morti più vivi dei vivi', 2.

<sup>78</sup> Quadrone, 'Redipuglia', 1.

<sup>79</sup> Tomaselli, 'Omaggio'.

<sup>80</sup> Reddy, *Navigation*, 125, 59.

regimes use ‘emotives’ within official ceremonies or approved art, with the aim to influence and intensify emotions and to encourage individuals to bring their emotions in line with a norm. As tools of emotional management, such ‘emotives’ also direct communities towards common goals and, in the case of Redipuglia, towards the celebration of victory and the pursuit of future wars. In that emotives are instrumental, *presente* was intended to shape grief in accordance with a template that was centred on pious gratitude and heroic pride. Essentially, the term was a blueprint for the collective moulding of emotions. As the dead answered the roll call in unison, the ossuaries became part of Italy’s ‘battle cry’.<sup>81</sup> That is not to suggest that the emotional template promoted by Fascism could achieve hegemony any more than the regime could gain complete control over the nation. In that various emotional communities survived within the Fascist state, the undifferentiated mass of the fallen symbolized a homogenous nation as a desired reality, or the unrealisable ideal of a unified body politic.

With respect to the military cemeteries built by other nations that fought in the First World War, the Italian ossuaries share commonalities, such as the orderly arrangement of the dead in serried ranks. However, they also embody characteristics that were specific to Italy and its status as a dictatorship. Whereas democratic countries such as Britain, France, and the US embraced the symbolism of the individual grave, Italy was distinctive in the preference shown for the monolithic and collective format of the ossuary.<sup>82</sup> As an Italian tradition, the ossuary was ideally suited to express the Fascist ideal that subordinated the individual to the nation. By contrast, the cemeteries of democratic states were generally designed to accommodate not only feelings of national pride but also private grief. While it is common for military cemeteries to minimize differences between the fallen, within the Fascist ossuaries, that homogeneity was elitist rather than egalitarian, as evidenced at Redipuglia in the separation of the commanders from the lower ranks. Given the affinities between the regimes of Mussolini and Hitler, it is also significant that Germany adopted the Fascist ossuaries as a model for the *Totenburgen*, or ‘fortresses of the dead’, which were created from the early 1930s to accommodate German soldiers who fell in Central Europe and the Balkans.

In 1945, Fascism fell, but the ossuaries remained. Stripped of some, but by no means all, of their Fascist symbols, they began a new life as sites of

<sup>81</sup> *Il Comune di Asiago*, 10.

<sup>82</sup> Prost, ‘Cimetières militaires’.

Republican Italy. As there was little appetite for grandiose or triumphal monuments, the dead of the Second World War were commemorated through smaller, varied, and civic initiatives that spoke of loss and which carried echoes of the period immediately after the First World War. Whereas the war dead continued to be seen as martyrs and exemplars, emphasis shifted after 1945 from feelings of pride and joy to expressions of sorrow and regret. In the absence of sources that might shed light on individual reactions, this shift suggests that Fascism was unable to bring a deep or lasting change to the way Italians felt about the war dead.

Although some of the ossuaries have been largely forgotten, others continue to accommodate state and military ceremonies. Having lost their original function as Fascist propaganda, they retain an emotional charge due to their associations with death, nationhood, and history, which make them a valuable political resource. Redipuglia was reinterpreted as a monument to peace and democracy, which demonstrates the flexibility of architecture as a receptacle for different feelings and associations. Still, in the midst of struggles to form a new government in April 2018, it was politically expedient for Matteo Salvini, leader of the far-Right party *La Lega* and soon to be Deputy Prime Minister, to visit Redipuglia with ‘a prayer for the young men who fell ... to defend the borders [of Italy] and the future of their children’.<sup>83</sup> Thus, in today’s Republic the ossuaries continue to be used politically for their capacity to elicit feelings of pride, respect, and belonging.

## CONCLUSION

Under Fascism, the state sought to monopolize the commemoration of fallen soldiers in order to influence how Italians felt about war, the nation, and its dead. Whereas, in the periods immediately before and after Fascism, the fallen were accommodated in small-scale and eclectic sites, Mussolini’s regime constructed large and monumental ossuaries for the dead. Although the extent of government control was new, the means of that control were not, as evidenced by the fact that the new ossuaries deployed strategies of emotional templating that had long been used by the military and the Catholic Church. Those strategies supported the Fascist emotional template, which aimed to transform the national character through feelings of pride, belonging, bravery, and self-abnegation, while also hindering the

<sup>83</sup> Salvini, Facebook post.



expression of grief, shame, and regret. The adoption of older traditions helped the regime to template emotions, but it also undermined the extent to which Fascism was able to forge new emotional attitudes. As an experiment in the politicization of grief, the ossuaries drew on Italian traditions and developed in parallel with respect to the cemeteries of other nations, with the exception of Germany. The priority given to the emotional needs of the nation over those of the individual set the Italian ossuaries apart from the burial sites of democratic states.

Above all, the ossuaries show how the Fascist dictatorship aimed to shape the experience and expression of emotions to support political ends. This meant hampering specific emotional responses while encouraging others. This process of emotional templating was intended to bind Italians to the state, prepare the population for war, and promote certain norms and behaviours. To this end, the ossuaries carried emotionally charged narratives through their architecture. They accommodated rituals and structured visits that were backed by the national distribution of visual, textual, and other media of propaganda. Through these various means of communication, the ossuaries were meant to make Italians feel themselves as Fascists and to forge a nation of disciplined soldiers and willing childbearers. That Italian neo-fascists continue to celebrate those who died in the name of Mussolini shows the enduring political power of emotions prompted by death.

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