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Displacing displacement: narratives for a haunting history

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ABSTRACT

In this article, building on recent theories of displacement, I propose a definition of post-displacement as a 'displacement of displacement', or the displacement of already displaced histories. The analysis focuses on the ethnographic case of Latina, an Italian city built in 1932 by the Fascist regime. Given its controversial past that cannot be celebrated, Latina is presented here as a displaced city, whose history cannot serve as a *locus* for place-making, meaning-making, and future-making. I analyse how the selective re-elaboration of the city's history by Latina's inhabitants and local public officials displaces an already displaced history. Through a momentary silencing of Fascism and renewed connections to national history, these narratives allow for the past to be spoken about and remembered, while also fostering a sense of the self in place. Nonetheless, Fascism cannot be completely erased and remains a haunting absent presence. This article thus offers a reflection on (post-)displacement and on the presence and absence of Fascism in contemporary Italy.

RIASSUNTO

In questo articolo, basandomi su recenti teorie del 'displacement' (spaesamento), propongo una definizione di 'post-displacement' (post-spaesamento) come 'disorientamento dello spaesamento', o il disorientamento di storie già spaesate. L'analisi si focalizza sul caso etnografico di Latina, una città italiana costruita nel 1932 dal regime Fascista. Dato il suo passato controverso che non può essere celebrato, Latina è presentata qui come una città spaesata, la cui storia non può fungere da *locus* per la produzione di luoghi, significati e futuri. Analizzo come la rielaborazione selettiva della storia della città fatta dagli abitanti di Latina e da ufficiali pubblici disorienta una storia già spaesata. Celandolo momentaneamente il Fascismo e rinnovando i legami con la storia nazionale, queste narrative lasciano che il passato possa essere discusso e ricordato, mentre al tempo stesso coltivano il senso del sé nel luogo. Nonostante ciò, il Fascismo non può essere completamente cancellato e rimane un'opprimente assenza presente. Questo articolo offre quindi una riflessione sul (post)spaesamento e sulla presenza e l'assenza del Fascismo nell'Italia contemporanea.

KEYWORDS Fascism; Italy; post-displacement; sense of place; controversial past; absence

PAROLE CHIAVE Fascismo; Italia; post-spaesamento; senso del luogo; passato controverso; assenza

Introduction

On the 18 December 2015, the city of Latina, built by the Fascist regime in 1932 and located in central Italy, celebrated the 83rd anniversary of its foundation. Every year, the city council organizes a series of events, which combine solemn celebrations in the presence of authorities and public entertainment in Latina's streets and cultural venues. One of the events planned during the celebrations of 2015 was the unveiling of a mural painting titled *The Fighter* [*Il Combattente*]. The event had been advertised on local social media and newspapers and, curious to see the artistic work, I walked into the cramped venue. The mural painting was located at the end of a spiral staircase; I could not quite make it to the crowded second floor. While I was engaged in a balancing act on the steps, squished by the crowds, the mural painting was finally unveiled. In the foreground there is an ordinary man, wearing simple beige and dark green clothing and a military helmet, standing in a field of wheat. He holds a rifle in his right hand and a shovel in his left. He is slightly turned, so that the shovel is in a higher position than the rifle and receives more light. In the background, on the right, are the *Tre Cime di Lavaredo* (lit. 'three peaks of Lavaredo', three distinctive mountain peaks located in northeast Italy, in the Dolomite range – a famous site for the memory of WWI as the front line between Italy and Austria-Hungary ran through them) and stylized depictions of *chevaux de frise*.¹ On the left, there is the City Hall of the city of Latina, cultivated fields, the Thyrrhenian sea, and the Cape *Circeo*, an iconic natural site located near the city. The mural painting thus creates a visual, imaginative, and temporal connection, embodied by *The Fighter* in the foreground, between WWI (symbolized by the war imagery and the *Cime di Lavaredo*) and the city.

In this article, I explore how the displacement that emerges from the city's past is itself displaced in contemporary Latina. As in the case of the mural painting just described, historical narratives are re-elaborated in order to overcome their controversial, haunting, and fragmented existence, and to renew a sense of the self in place. Given its association with Fascism, Latina's peculiar history cannot be fully commemorated and celebrated, contributing to the city's condition of displacement and to Latina's inhabitants' struggle to cultivate a sense of place. Here, I consider how displacement is inherent in the city's teleology and I explore how people in Latina respond to it through re-elaborations of historical narratives. I focus on two ethnographic instances: events that took place during the commemoration for the foundation of the city and one of my interlocutor's memories of her farmhouse, built by the Fascist regime. In both cases, re-elaborations of historical narratives displaced an already displaced history; thus, post-displacement is presented here as an attempt to 'displace the condition of displacement'.

Latina: the displaced city

Displacement is here understood as an existential condition, expressed as a multifaceted material, temporal, spatial, and political lived experience of a place's changes and ruptures. It entails profound disruptions in the connections to place that give one's own existence continuity and coherence, provoking a spatial and temporal disorientation and a loss of meaning (Ramsay and Askland 2020; Askland 2018; 2020; Vigh and Bjarnesen 2016). Displacement is inherent in the city's very foundation. Latina was erected by the Fascist regime with the name of Littoria² on reclaimed marshland, in a territory known as the *Agro Pontino* (Pontine Ager). Fascist propaganda established a belligerent rhetoric: the project of land reclamation (called the *bonifica*) was construed as an act of war against an untameable wilderness (Falasca-Zamponi 1997, 153). The construction of Latina (and other 'New Towns'³) over the reclaimed plain was the final conquering act, the victory of civilization and modernity over nature (Gruppuso 2018). Fascist propaganda erased the memory of the territory before its arrival, of its displaced populations, of its thriving economies (Strangio 2008), and of its natural ecosystem (Gruppuso 2018). As these projects gained popularity nationally and internationally (Mariani 1976), a capillary propaganda campaign celebrated the 'New Towns' and the *bonifica* as flagships of the government's public interventions. Built as an emblem of Fascist ideology, Latina was inscribed with the regime's presence and power and was proclaimed a model Fascist New Town (Ghirardo 2003), referred to as '*la perla del Duce*' [the Duce's pearl] (Mangullo 2015, 21). Fases, inscriptions, and the very shape of buildings were a constant, visible reminder of the undeniable tie between the city and the Fascist regime. With the fall of the regime, Latina was again displaced. Its name was changed in 1945 and in the immediate post-war years it underwent the partial eradication of controversial symbols, a process that occurred in urban contexts all over Italy (Benton 1999): fasces or parts of them were chiselled away and topographies were changed to reflect a break with the past (Bevilacqua 1996), a cartographic rewriting of history. Fascism was (and still is to some extent) embedded within the very fabric of the urban and social city, within its very existence. Even though the city underwent important transformations after the fall of the regime, they did not (and could not) remove Fascism entirely from the city's past and from its urban fabric.

Both the *bonifica* and the end of Fascism heavily altered the environment and ruptured the very teleology of place: first in its state of marshland, and then in the trajectory of a city whose purpose was directly connected to the Fascist regime in its potentiality to become the 'ideal Fascist city'. Both events had profound temporal implications. The *bonifica* and the foundation of the city can, in fact, be seen as the performance of a *genesis* (Gruppuso 2018),

which projected the newly built city towards a futural temporal orientation. In his speech on the 18 December 1932, during the city's inauguration, Mussolini proclaimed: "But we are fascists, and thus more than looking at the past we always strive toward the future" (Comune di Latina [n.d.](#)). The fall of Fascism, on the other hand, can be seen as a break with the past which, however, did not signify the city's re-birth. Rather, Latina has been left ever since in an awkward limbo. These changes were brought on Latina's territory and its inhabitants by national and international political pressures (i.e., the Fascist regime's policies and the events of WWII). Latina's displacement is thus the result of altered structures of power that take different forms and emerge at intersecting local, national, and international scales (Siu [2007](#)), it is a disempowering condition (Askland [2020](#); Askland and Bunn [2018](#); Ramsay and Askland [2020](#)). My interlocutors felt the disruption in their inability to tell, celebrate, and exploit the generative power of the city's history, especially as *locus* for meaning-making (Knight and Stewart [2016](#)) and future-making (Bryant and Knight [2019](#)), and for fostering a narrative of place and of the self in place. Latina's temporal fragmentation was confronted both in personal biographies – through the affective excess exuded by familiar and intimate places which, however, are also the product of controversial histories (cf. Navaro-Yashin [2012](#)) – as well as during local public commemorations, where history was re-elaborated so that it could be performed as part of a national historical narrative, exceeding thus local temporal and political boundaries. This produced a 'sense of broken time' (Askland [2018](#), 233) as the city was experienced through the complexity of non-linear and disruptive temporalities, which were expressed as a difficulty or unwillingness to speak about the city's past or the city in its entirety. I witnessed this often during my fieldwork, as I was frequently caught in silences, shrugs, and dead-end conversations abruptly truncated, which revealed how difficult it was for my interlocutors to deal with the city's past and its inevitability, to come to terms with Latina's existence and with the questions that everyday life in the city constantly raised, with rippling effects. This is something that I, too, have experienced first-hand, as I was born and grew up in Latina. To some extent, conversations in the field were influenced by this, as my interlocutors knew that I knew and, therefore, there was no need to engage in lengthy and awkward explanations about the past. It also, however, produced a space for acknowledging, without the need for words, the shared embodied knowledge of the discomfort Latina's temporal and material existence produced. As 'we always find ourselves in places' (Casey [1996](#), 17), my interlocutors were never 'without a place'; their feelings of displacement emerged in the everyday encounters with a dissonant city which, nonetheless, was still a core element in their lives and memories. Displacement can occur in conditions of immobility (Askland [2018](#); [2020](#); Ramsay and Askland [2020](#); Siu [2007](#); Vigh and Bjarnesen [2016](#)), where it is necessary to consider 'the sensibilities and

manoeuvres of those simultaneously grounded and displaced' (Siu 2007, 331).

The experience of fragmented time is exacerbated by the temporal, political, and affective *place* of Fascism in contemporary Italy. The Italian Constitution was drafted according to the anti-Fascist values of the *Resistenza*⁴ (Mammone 2006) after the 1946 referendum that proclaimed the Italian Republic. Anti-Fascism became, therefore, a unifying narrative for the nation after the difficult years of Fascist rule and of the *Resistenza* and for establishing a national historical narrative (Pezzino 2002). The *Resistenza* was thus seen as a 'second *Risorgimento*',⁵ with the aim of preserving the integrity of a national historical narrative in which Fascism emerged as a dissonant rupture (Pezzino 2002). However, the transition from the Fascist regime to the Republic was not as stark (Ventresca 2006). The country's failed *epurazione* (Ginsborg 1990, 92), the expulsion of former members of the Fascist Party from public offices, and the incomplete process of a national re-elaboration of the past (Pezzino 2002), have contributed to the shifting meanings of Fascism and its legacies, both within communities and for Italy's national identity (Mammone 2006). This has brought repercussions in institutional and public settings, sparking heated debates over the country's legislation (Heywood 2019; Arthurs 2019). Fascism, moreover, takes multiple forms and meanings as it is complexly encountered, contested, remembered, and elaborated by people in their everyday lives (Mammone 2006; Portelli 2003). These re-elaborations are often multi-layered and traverse legal, social, and political spheres, often provoking deep fractures within communities, as personal and collective experiences are intricately shared and contested (De Nardi 2016). People's experience of Fascism and its legacies in Latina emerges at the intersection between collective pasts and changing perceptions about them, individuals' private memories, and local re-elaboration of national historical narratives (cf. Serenelli 2013; De Nardi 2015, 2016; Heywood 2021). Latina's case is particularly telling of Fascism's indeterminate status in post-war Italy. In fact, commemorations of the city's foundation have been taking place since 1951 on the very day that the regime inaugurated the city,⁶ celebrating one of its most significant public works and allowing for momentary local re-elaborations of history.

During my fieldwork, the past was always a demanding conversation topic and many preferred to avoid it altogether. Those engaging in conversations about the past, myself included, had to navigate constantly the discomfort that inevitably ensued. The past was often perceived to be a highly politically charged issue and everyone, regardless of their declared or undeclared political affiliation, navigated the tension between commemorating the past and silencing its problematic existence. Often, conversations about the past, or more generally about the city, were pre-empted by persistent clarifications that whatever was being said was 'a-political', in an attempt to

foster a shared sense of place, to find a common ground beyond presumed political differences. Once, I asked an acquaintance, very broadly, what she thought of the city (careful not to mention the past) and she swiftly replied that she was not interested in politics, ending our conversation. If on one side Latina's inhabitants struggled to engage in conversations about the city's past and the discomfort it evoked, on the other, they found ways to act upon it, to which I now turn.

Remembering the *bonifica*

In its ruptures, history in Latina was hyper-present and hyper-absent and narratives were often used to elaborate the past in multiple ways. This occurred also with the *bonifica*, an event that was seen as generative of the city but that was equally embedded in the regime's wider policies and ideology. Through the lens of post-displacement and ethnographic data, I inquire into the ways narratives about the *bonifica*, and their silences, became acts (Pipyrrou 2016a, 131, see also 2016b; Buck and Pipyrrou 2014; Pipyrrou 2014; Knight and Stewart 2016), which, by silencing Fascism's pivotal role and re-elaborating the city's contentious past (enduring as history, memory, and materiality) as part of a national historical narrative, created a space for 'displacing displacement'.

The *bonifica* is still remembered and celebrated publicly in Latina, it is commemorated together with the *bonificatori* (the pioneers) who worked for it and the first settlers (the *coloni*)⁷ who were the first to populate the city. Ciammaruconi's (2009) historical analysis traces the ways in which public officials in post-war Latina established 'rites of civic memory' that focused overwhelmingly on *bonificatori*'s work and sacrifice, while obliterating the memory of the Fascist past. To this day, streets and squares still bear the individual names of *bonificatori* or are dedicated more generally to the *bonificatori* as a collective whole (such as the central square called *Piazzale dei Bonificatori*). On 18 December, the mayor of the city and other authorities celebrate the foundation of the city by laying a wreath in front of a monument commemorating the fallen pioneers of the *Bonifica* (*Monumento ai caduti della Bonifica*, this is also known more generally as the monument to the *Bonificatore*). The monument, located in Latina's *Piazza del Quadrato* (a squared *piazza* built on the site of Latina's first settlement, *Villaggio del Quadrato*)⁸, consists of a fountain surmounted by a statue. The statue depicts a man engaged in strenuous physical work as he pulls a manhole cover to regulate the water flow, symbolizing the effort to free the territory from the marshlands (Polselli 2012, 128). An inscription states: 'To the *Bonificatori* who donated their lives for the redemption of the land and of men.' On both sides of the fountain there are spade's blades leaning in a circle, recalling the imagery also used in the mural painting. In both

representations, the main element is that of an ordinary but heroic man, of his sacrifice and hard work (epitomized by the spade) necessary for the success of the *bonifica* and, ultimately, Latina's creation. The *Piazzale dei Bonificatori* thus, is not just an evocative and emblematic place for commemorations (cf. Ciammaruconi 2009, 646), it embodies spatially and materially the very foundation of the city. The commemorations become a performance of Latina as a place, they become acts of place-making. During my fieldwork, as part of celebrations, the prefectorial Commissioner,⁹ in the presence of other authorities, school children, and the city's musical band, laid a laurel wreath in front of the statue and gave a speech. He stated that:

The monument to the *Bonificatore* reminds us that the memory and the roots of the city of Latina are strongly tied to the history of this territory. A history made not only of work and sacrifice but also of hope and success. A strenuous history, written by *latinensi*, whom in over 80 years have demonstrated the capacity to overcome the most difficult situations: from environmental ones, tied to the marshy nature of a territory they transformed into a fertile and productive land, to the social ones, characterised by the necessity to integrate different cultures and ethnicities, through the construction of a common sense of identity and citizenship. ... These are the fundamental values of the *latinense* community. (Roberta Sottoriva 2015; Spagnolo 2015)

In his speech, the Commissioner referred to Latina's history of migrations. The city was, in fact, populated through a series of internal migrations, the first of which was regulated by the regime to populate the *Agro Pontino's* New Towns (Mariani 1976). The majority of *coloni* came from North-Eastern Italian regions. The second migratory wave, from the South, took place in the 1950s–60s, when Latina was included in the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno*¹⁰ (lit. 'Fund for the Midday', a governmental program of financial support for industrial development dedicated to Southern Italian regions; see Mangullo 2015). When the second migration occurred, *coloni* had only been in Latina for, at most, a couple of decades (Cotesta 1989). Latina became, and still is to this day, a meeting place for people who had very different histories, dialects, and customs and who maintained strong connections to their places of origin. The city's social heterogeneity and its contested past both contribute to the fragmentation Latina's inhabitants experience in their efforts to cultivate a sense of place (Miltiadis 2020).

During the event, the city's band played a well-known patriotic song (*The Song of the Piave*), written at the end of WWI (Saudino 2007). The celebrations continued with the unveiling of the mural painting¹¹ that opens this article, located in the *Casa del Combattente* (the Fighter's House, a building of Fascist heritage). The painting, as reported by a local newspaper, was dedicated to 'the sacrifice of many soldiers involved in that terrible tragedy [WWI], those who survived and who conquered another land [the marshland], fighting over nature and reclaiming it. Their hard work, carried out with great sacrifice

and often paid with their own lives, has given to our community fertile lands to cultivate and a city where to live' (Comunicato Stampa 2015). The painting and the celebrations created a strong sequentiality between WWI and the event of the *bonifica*, placing the *bonifica* within a wider and linear historical narrative. They also did not mention explicitly the Fascist regime, despite the profound constitutive relation that connects the *bonifica* to the *ventennio*.¹²

Fascism, through these performances and representations, remains a hovering presence, largely hidden or silenced, but never fully absent, never fully present, and never forgotten. A similar articulation of the past occurred when Angela¹³ told me about her *podere*. *Poderi* were the farmhouses built by the regime after the *bonifica* to house the *coloni*. Today, some are still standing, some have been heavily renovated, others have been demolished; they linger as material and memory traces of the city's past and of its teleology, in the way the regime had imagined and planned for the *Agro Pontino* to be. I met Angela in her home in 2016, where she told me about her family's life as *coloni*. She was born in the *podere* in 1948, just after the war, and had very fond memories of the house. The *podere* was eventually sold and demolished to make place for taller, more modern, and more profitable buildings. As she was retracing the *podere*'s fate, she told me of how heartbroken she had been when her childhood home was destroyed, she told me that she cried a lot because she believed the demolition had been unnecessary. The *podere* was the affective *locus* for important events in her life and for memories of her childhood, of her family, and of meeting her future husband. She did mention the regime, maybe once or twice, but only in passing. Her narrative was much more focused on the *podere* as a fundamental element of her life and on her affective attachment to it as her home. She even took out some photos to show me how much land surrounded the *podere*. We retraced its perimeter by using contemporary landmarks that we were both familiar with. In our conversation, these multiple temporalities became all part of Angela's life, of her memories, experiences, and emotions, which were the leading narrative that tied all the different elements together.

Displacing an already displaced history

In both the Commissioner's speech and in the materiality of the square and the mural painting, the *bonifica* is articulated in connection with the virtues of contemporary and past *latinensi* as a whole. A clear connection is made between the events of WWI, the *bonifica*, and the city of Latina, locating the *bonifica* within a broader narrative of national sacrifice, struggle, and heroism. The painting and the music played by the band also contextualize Latina's history within a national historical narrative, by evoking visually and acoustically a crucial event in the history of the nation, which predates the *bonifica*

itself. Embodied by the man holding both the rifle and the spade, the city's past is thus presented as a history of heroism and temporal linearity. Angela, on the other hand, talks of the *podere* in relation to her personal biography, representing it first and foremost as her home, a place that exudes an atmosphere of positive affects and familiarity. By detaching the *podere* from the historical events that created it and by highlighting the personal history of a home now lost, that was once the *locus* of affection, Angela creates, through her narrative, a space for the *podere* to exist *a priori* of the political context for its creation. In these three narratives the city's history becomes momentarily malleable, and Fascism emerges as an absent presence. Fascism's silencing occurs despite the fact that both the *bonifica* and the *poderi* exist because of the regime and its history, its ideology, and its policies; they are its direct products and, it could be argued, some of its most celebrated ones (Mariani 1976). By selectively reframing the city's history, my interlocutors and local public officials in Latina used their agency to displace an already displaced history. In doing so, they navigated multiple positionalities, as they came to terms with a contested past and national renditions of it; they thus engaged in an affective re-elaboration of displacement (Demetriou 2018). If the condition of displacement is one of disempowerment, my interlocutors engaged in a renewed ownership of the city's historical narratives. In doing so, they also re-established their relation to place and to time as they restored a sense of place, whether through memories of one's own home, or by evoking the imagery of 'fertile lands' and of their city.

Latina's post-displacement emerges thus in three ways: as a process of coming to terms with past events that still have repercussions today; as a response to the city's displacement through actions and reactions to that displacement, to negotiate its presence and effects; and as agency and the power to address, act upon, and change (even if momentarily) the condition of displacement, to engage in a 'displacement of displacement' that seeks to re-establish the self in place.

A condition of post-displacement was created through the indeterminacy imposed on people and places, which endured in the urban fabric, through the monumentality of statues and the everyday materiality of the home. The ambiguity of Fascism's absent presence in Latina was a ghostly presence – an ambivalent and unstable 'figure of unfinished disposal' (Degen and Hetherington 2001, 5) – which haunted Latina's existence and future. Through these narratives, this ambiguity turned into a *fantasma* – a momentary suspension, a 'reflexive moment' that allows the imagination to compress and expand multiple expressions of place, time, memory, and materiality (Piprou 2015, 149). This precarious zone of selective re-elaboration, silencing, and re-telling allowed for the momentary creation of transient and indeterminate spatial, temporal, material, and political conditions for Latina's existence. Latina's history could not be entirely erased, as

this would have meant to negate the city's very existence (by leaving it without *any* history, a troublesome *dictum*). On the other hand, it was equally not possible to 'celebrate' it, as, among other reasons, it would have meant to transgress the linearity and values of national history and be forbidden existence as part of the nation. Fascism, in these instances, was not forgotten. People in Latina engaged in a momentary renewed ownership of the city's history because a more thorough and comprehensive re-evaluation of the controversial past is a much more complex process that far exceeds the city, as it involves the entire nation. The mural's representation, the commemorations, and the memories of one's home were, thus, narratives for meaning-making as well as for opening up to the potentiality and possibility of a future and of future-making (Bryant and Knight 2019), which would otherwise have been a defeated potentiality to begin with.

Conclusion

In its displaced condition, Latina emerges as a 'discontinuous space' (Ballinger 2003, 8). The ethnography shows how narratives grasp this discontinuity and overcome it. These re-elaborations are attempts at displacing an already profoundly displaced existence. Silence, or partial silence, becomes thus 'a form of communication' (Pipyrrou 2016b, 56). These attempts, however, remain an incomplete process and the condition of displacement is often renewed. This is because, despite these attempts, Fascism cannot be entirely removed from the city's history (cf. Carter and Martin 2019), it remains embedded in Latina's everyday life, in the history, memory, and materiality of the city and of the nation. If on one side the ethnography has presented ways in which Fascism is locally re-elaborated and dealt with, on the other it has shown how these experiences cannot be decontextualized from broader national discourses. Focusing on the displacement that occurred with the fall of the Fascist regime offers a reflection on Fascism's presence in contemporary Italy and it contributes to the understanding of (post-)displacement as a recurring theme in the history and the making of post-war Italy, in determining who belongs and who does not to the nation, and inquiring into what histories remain excluded, silenced, hidden, forgotten, or neglected (see e.g., Fiore 2017; Ballinger 2020; Pipyrrou 2016b, 2020) vis-à-vis the histories that become normativized as part of a national historical narrative and its paradigms of belonging. As shown by this and the other articles in this Special Issue, writing about displacement means writing in conversation with all these other histories, that have shaped and continue shaping the contemporary nation, its meanings and performances.

Understanding ethnographically Fascism's absent presence in contemporary Italy through the lens of displacement shows how it is experienced locally and dealt with in everyday life. Latina's case opens up important questions

regarding the malleability of history and how the meanings of Fascism are articulated through people's experience, what they make of it daily, how they confront it, and how they can exist despite, against, and because of Fascism's absent presence. Moreover, the ethnography informs broader discourses on how place and the nation are performed through their past. The ethnographic case of Latina, therefore, informs but also complicates significantly debates on the presence of Fascism in contemporary Italy and how the past permeates and shapes the present. The question of how *Latinensi* can find a sense of place within their city, within Italy and beyond, and within history remains an open, deeply uncomfortable, and unresolved matter.

Notes

1. Defensive obstacles built with wood and barbed wire used, among other conflicts, during WWI.
2. Throughout this article, I refer to the city as Latina (its current name, adopted in 1945) to avoid confusion.
3. The towns built by the Fascist regime are collectively known as 'New Towns' or *Città Nuove*.
4. The Resistance to Nazi-fascism.
5. The process of unification of the Italian nation that took place at the end of the nineteenth century.
6. See also minutes from the city council meeting of the 06/12/1951, 07/12/1951, *Celebrazione 18 Dicembre*, Folder 61/1, Archivio di Stato di Latina, Latina, Italy.
7. While *bonificatori* and *coloni* are two distinct groups, both are seen as having given a fundamental contribution to the birth of the city and both are strongly tied to Latina's foundation.
8. *Quadrato* literally translates as the geographical shape of the 'square', a name that was given to the first settlement, which was organized in a square.
9. At the beginning of my fieldwork, Latina's mayor was removed following a vote of no-confidence. A prefectorial Commissioner (*commissario prefettizio*) took the place of the mayor for the duration of my fieldwork.
10. For a detailed account of Latina's involvement in the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* see Mangullo (2015).
11. A photo of the mural painting can be seen here: <https://www.facebook.com/gruppoANMllatina/photos/a.100888055346389/102663051835556/?type=3>
12. The twenty years of fascist rule.
13. The name of my interlocutor has been changed to maintain anonymity. Ethical approval for my doctoral field research was granted by the Department of Anthropology's Ethics Committee at Durham University. My interlocutor provided informed consent prior to our conversation.

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Notes on contributor

Elena Miltiadis is a social anthropologist with experience in the anthropology of fascism, places, place-making, affects, and belonging. Her doctoral thesis (2020) is one of the first comprehensive and lengthy research projects to investigate fascism's absent presence in contemporary Italy in such ethnographic depth and from a community's perspective. It contributes to and expands understandings of how communities elaborate, negotiate, and give meaning to their existence through, against, and beyond their contested identities. She has co-authored a chapter for the forthcoming *Routledge Handbook of Heritage Destruction* on heritage in post-conflict contexts (2023).

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