CHAPTER 1

The Military and Us: Toward a New Approach to the Study of the Military and Culture

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Federico Fellini’s 1960s La dolce vita features a cameo appearance of an up-and-coming singer who would go on to become one of the most successful and prolific pop and rock stars of Italian music, TV, and culture. Adriano Celentano, though on path to fame, hit a stumbling block, one that threatened to destroy his booming career—military service. And yet, instead of putting a halt to his career, Celentano’s military experience became a nationally mediatized moment that fascinated audiences across Italy. That moment also brought the figure of the soldier to national consciousness in a way that had never happened before in Italian modern history (Fig. 1.1).¹

¹ It is worth noting that Celentano is closely associated with another singer-soldier—Elvis Presley—whose draft was turned into a national spectacle. It may not be surprising, then, that Celentano’s military career also represents the arrival of rock “n” roll to Italy. Presley’s military experience and image have been studied, in order to look at its impact on the US Army and military forces and on society through the concept of war. See, for example, Brian

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Departures and arrivals of soldiers at train stations—to mark the separation and reunion—had by then become a familiar trope for Italians. This trope was now to get a slight twist. For the 1961 edition of Sanremo Music Festival (January 26–February 6), Celentano was greeted at the Sanremo train station by his fellow singer Little Tony (Antonio Ciacci) to attend the music and pop-culture event of the year.\(^2\) Perfectly groomed in McAllister Linn, *Elvis’s Army: Cold War GIs and the Atomic Battlefield* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

\(^2\) Allegedly, Celentano’s military leave was signed by the Minister of Defense, Giulio Andreotti. See Marcello Giannotti, *L’Enciclopedia di Sanremo: 55 anni di storia del festival dalla A alla Z* (Rome: Gremese, 2005), 49.
his military uniform, the carefully orchestrated image crystallized the
counter between the military and music: the military soldier who was
also an artist and famous musician in the same person was a shocking
blend that the Italian public had not seen before. The strangeness of this
image worked in Celentano’s favor by creating additional excitement
around his new identity as singer-soldier, singling him out among others
and connecting him closer to the large number of families who were
deeply affected by military service.3

As an artist, Celentano did not fit well with the image of a military; as a
soldier, he did not fit well with the image of one of the most famous Italian
in-the-making artists. Celentano was in fact associated with a host of semi-
serious nicknames, blending his military and artistic identity with pseudo-
scientific terminologies. One of the most striking was perhaps artigliere
epilettoid (epileptoid gunner/soldier) that was originally used to describe
his Bop dance and then subsequently repeated on the nation TV,4 which
echoed across households and public spaces across early 1960s Italy. The
use of medical vocabulary seems to suggest that the audiences must have
perceived a cognitive dissonance in Celentano’s dual identity as a soldier
and an artist, one that called out for a medical diagnosis.

While conscripted, Celentano himself reported the life-changing impact
that the military experience had on him, both positive and negative. As
much as it was restraining his artistic expression, the service also became a
source of inspiration. In fact, 24,000 baci (24,000 kisses), the song that
marked his career breakthrough as a singer, was conceived during his mili-
tary service. Even though the lyrics don’t refer specifically to the military,
its core idea—as Celentano himself explained in music magazine at the
time—is based on counting time before the next military leave to meet his
lover.5 Whether or not Celentano launched the new trendy topic, he cer-
tainly seems to have contributed significantly to the fact that military ser-
vice became a cool thing to do and a unique place to get to know people

3 “Just when things were going well, the Homeland called me up…. At that moment I
thought that military service was going to be a blow to me, to my career. Back then, it meant
putting on the uniform for eighteen months. And I feared that people would forget about
me at the time. Instead, when the draft ended, I found my fans more numerous!” in “io
proprio io: ADRIANO CELENTANO,” in Il Monello, no. 6, February 2, 1980: 125.
4 See Serena Facci, Paolo Soddu, and Matteo Piloni, Il Festival di Sanremo Parole e suoni
raccontano la nazione (Rome: Carocci, 2011), 91.
5 “Festival di Sanremo: Storia segreta delle 24 canzoni, 24.000 Baci,” il Musiciere: Tutto
sul Mondo della Canzone, December 31, 1960, 7.
one would otherwise never meet. The entire Italian music and TV audience followed Celentano’s service and, for the first time after the Fascist regime, military service became a source of fascination and national entertainment.

Celentano’s story highlights the cultural implications of the military experience, as they manifest themselves in a variety of different cultural productions. As such, this story neatly captures the primary commitment of this edited volume: to sketch out the breadth of different areas of cultural production that reflect on the role in, and impact of the military on, civil society. Even though approaches to the topic adopted in this volume could be abstracted and applied to various nation-states and geographical regions, Italy is a particularly poignant example for the present study because the military played an important cultural and socio-political role after the unification and, as such, was engineered to affect as many Italians as it possibly could. One should not be surprised, therefore, to realize that the cultural resonances of the military experiences are abound in Italian literature, music, art, history, and media.

Indeed, it may seem so obvious that the reader of this volume might be genuinely surprised to see the element of cultural works being singled out so explicitly. Are there really not enough scholarly works already produced on the military and war? A response to this question shall occupy us for the rest of this introduction. In short, one must answer this question in the negative, but in order to demonstrate the significant contribution this edited volume seeks to make, it is important to put our investigations in broader context and offer some clarifications about the relationship between the military and culture through the following subsections:

1. The Military in Italian Society
2. “The Military and Us”: Studying the Cultural Dimension of the Military
3. Overview of the Volume

**The Military in Italian Society**

The military is one of the most powerful institutions in modern nation-states, and its main official role is to protect the governing body from internal and external aggressors. There is no modern nation-state, which
does not have military forces. It is also widely known that the military is an extremely expensive item in national budgets. It draws extremely large economic and human resources and thus, already from this perspective alone, we can assume that it plays an important role in any country’s image (internal and external), politics, economy, and structure. It is curious, however, that despite the important role of the military in modern societies with respect to shaping gender roles, national belongings, civil rights, and so on, the institution is rarely discussed in circles outside military and war studies; its interactions with and influence on civil society and culture seem to be of little interest to academia. In fact, when we talk about military culture, we generally mean the particular atmosphere and codes of ethics or practice within the military, not the impact of the military on culture and society outside the military. When we talk about militarism, we talk instead about an ideological position that informs government policies, higher-level politics, and socio-cultural dynamics that are studied primarily (though not exclusively) in securities studies. And when we talk

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6 Those few countries, which do not have their military forces, have nevertheless the military protection of other (bigger) nations like for American Samoa, the US Army; or intergovernmental military alliance, like in the example of Iceland, which has no standing army and its defense remains a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) commitment. Indeed, even absolute monarchy like the Vatican has military protection, which is provided officially by the Pontifical Swiss Guard and unofficially by the Italian army. And there are continuous conversations ongoing about specific organizations having armed forces: NATO but also the European Union (EU).

7 In this context it is worth pointing out that military institutions tend to be very large organizations with both military and civilian employees. The US Military, for example, is the biggest and most powerful employer in the world.

8 There are excellent discussions that recognize, from a particular point of view, the impact of the military on civil society and on the structuring principles of civil-social institutions, but there are no studies that would systematically examine the breath and meaning of those interactions and exchanges. For interesting case studies, see, for example, Kiran Klaus Patel, Soldiers of Labor: Service in Nazi Germany and New Deal America, 1933–1945, trans. Thomas Dunlap (German Historical Institute, Washington, D. C., New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Margot Canaday, The Straight State, Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009).

9 See p. 37 for a specific discussion on military culture.

10 Like military culture, militarism is also a contested concept, see Bryan Mabee and Srdjan Vucetic, “Varieties of Militarism: Towards a Typology,” Security Dialogue 49, no. 1–2 (February 2018): 96–108; Kostas Gouliamos and Christos Kassimeris, The Marketing of War in the Age of Neo-Militarism (New York-London: Routledge, 2012). On gender, feminist studies and anti-militarism perspectives see the seminal work of Cynthia Enloe, such as, Globalization and Militarism: Feminists Make the Link, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and
about militarization, we talk about cultural and political processes that are associated with fundamentally oppressive effects on society more broadly, something that is primarily studied in relation to history, economy, and socio-political analyses. As an example of such wider conversations around militarization, one might look at the recent protests in the United States (specifically in relation to the “militarization of police forces”), where weaponizing police forces has been at the core of perpetuating systemic racism in the country. Finally, when we talk about war, the military is indeed part and parcel of the discussion, but the main focus is war or the specific cultural and historical implications of the military and society during war. Even though cultural production (art, music, cinema, fashion, etc.) often draws on the military—and I shall come to this point at more length later in this chapter—no good approach or conceptual tool kit has been developed to tackle this continuous influence and complex relationship between the military and culture. Furthermore, it seems like the general perception of the military in many corners of civil society (and possibly in academia) has remained stuck to Michel Foucault’s famous analysis of the institution in his *Discipline and Punish*, where he writes that:

[... ] the army guaranteed civil peace no doubt because it was a real force, an ever-threatening sword, but also because it was a technique and a body of knowledge that could project its schema over the social body. [...] There

Littlefield, 2016); and also Laura Sjoberg and Sandra Via, eds., *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives* (Santa Barbara: Praeger Publishers, 2010).

11 Peter Wallensteen, Johan Galtung, and Carlos Portales, *Global Militarization*, 1st ed. 1985 (New York-London: Routledge, 2019); John R. Gillis, *The Militarization of the Western World, 1870 to the Present* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Mike Davis, “Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space,” in *Variations On a Theme Park*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 154–80; Loïc Wacquant, “The Militarization of Urban Marginality: Lessons from the Brazilian Metropolis,” *International Political Sociology* 2, no. 1 (2008): 56–74.

12 See, for instance, Peter B. Kraska, Victor E. Kappeler, “Militarizing American Police: The Rise and Normalization of Paramilitary Units,” *Social Problems* 44, no. 1 (1997): 1–18; Richard K. Moule, Bryanna Hahn Fox, and Megan M. Parry. “The Long Shadow of Ferguson: Legitimacy, Legal Cynicism, and Public Perceptions of Police Militarization,” *Crime & Delinquency* 65, no. 2 (2019): 151–82.

13 Elsewhere, I have examined the interrelationship between fashion, pop-culture, and the military. See Mattia Roveri, “Fashion in the Trenches: How the Military Shapes the Fashion Industry,” in *The Routledge Companion to Fashion Studies*, ed. Alyssa Dana Adomaitis, Veronica Manlow, Eugenia Paulicelli, and Elizabeth Wissinger (New York-London: Routledge, forthcoming).
was a military dream of society; its fundamental reference was not to the state of nature, but to the meticulously subordinated *cogs of a machine*, not to the primal social contract, but to permanent coercions, not to fundamental rights, but to indefinitely progressive forms of training, not to the general will but to *automatic docility*.14

Foucault’s famous description reinforces an idea of the military as an institution that trains soldiers to lose their individuality (and critical mind) and to become homogeneous machine-like executioners of orders. Even though Foucault himself evokes this concept explicitly to discuss seventeenth-century France, the act of imagining the “ideal soldier” encourages the reader to use their own (rather than the historical seventeenth-century reconstructions) preconceived sketch of the soldier that Foucault will go on to set out in full. Even if his readers started out with a slightly different idea of the “ideal soldier,” Foucault will make sure we all end up with the same concept of the soldier—as a machine. Some recent work has challenged this view based on close examination of contemporary military structures. In a critical analysis of Foucault’s portrayal of the military, Philip Smith has pointed out the fallacy of conceptualizing the military as a large uniform group of automated soldiers and, relying on contemporary research in psychiatry and cognitive science, has drawn attention to the importance of small group formations, emotions, and loyalty to troops as essential characteristics of the military experience.15 Furthermore, studies in military culture—a steadily growing field if assessing by the upsurge of publications in the past few years—have emphasized the subtle and pervasive impact of cultural background and difference for the military structure and decision-making process.16 Nevertheless, it seems that the image of the soldier as an automated machine following orders and losing his/her individuality persists and, despite criticisms, has remained at the core of academic approaches to the military.17

14 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 168–69, my emphasis.
15 See here a useful article by Philip Smith, “Meaning and military power: moving on from Foucault,” *Journal of Power* 1, no. 3 (2008): 275–93.
16 See below for a closer discussion of the topic of military culture with relevant bibliography.
17 This interpretation of the military as the paragon instrument of power seems to underpin some of the recent discussions of Foucault’s biopolitics. See, for example, Reid, “Life struggles: war, discipline and biopolitics in the thought of Michel Foucault Reid,” in *Foucault in an Age of Terror: Essays on Biopolitics and the Defence of Society*, ed. Stephen Morton and
It is worth pointing out, however, that contrary to the one-dimensional image portrayed by Foucault, in some countries, the military was expected to fulfill from day one a myriad of different and complex tasks. Italy is a case in point, where the military was established in 1861, the same year the country was unified and the extension of conscription countrywide in 1863 during the time of military repressions on internal revolts, especially in the Southern regions. The military was thus at the core of a revolutionary phenomenon in the highly fragmented Italian society, which profoundly affected not only the war-ridden territories and the lives of young men who were enlisted as conscripts or professional soldiers (and officers) but also their families and social circles during peacetime. In fact, along with other European armed forces, one of the original guiding principles

Stephen Bygrave (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 14–42. Ali Yaycioglu uses Foucault’s analysis to discuss the Ottoman Empire’s new Order across late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Ali Yaycioglu, *Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 61–63. The appeal to interpret the military in those terms might have class connotations too, since it seems to be most eagerly exploited by middle- and high-class members of society (and academics in particular), those who are less likely to go through the military experience (especially as simple soldiers) and thus experience the military on the ground.

18Liberal Italy’s military forces consisted of the Army and the Navy, the latter of which played a strategic role in the expansion of national interests in the Mediterranean basin and beyond. See Giorgio Rochat and Giulio Massobrio, *Breve storia dell’esercito italiano dal 1861 al 1943* (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), 58–59. Structural distinctions within the Italian military remained in place ever since the establishment of the institution and continued to exist during Mussolini’s regime and the foundation of the Air Force in 1923. The *tessera fascista*, for instance, was compulsory in the Air Force, rejected in the Navy, and optional in the Army. See Giorgio Rochat, “Il fascismo e la preparazione militare al conflitto mondiale,” in *Il regime fascista. Storia e storiografia*, ed. Angelo Del Boca, Massimo Legnami, and Mario G. Rossi (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1995), 151–65 (p. 158). Rochat’s work sheds light on the continuing divisions between the military forces and the political establishment during the Fascist regime. Cf. Giorgio Rochat, *Le guerre italiane 1935–1943. Dall’impero d’Etiopia alla disfatta* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005), 148–52. For a brief, yet informative, perspective on the tensions between the Fascist blackshirts and lower-ranked officers and simple soldiers during the colonial enterprise in Ethiopia, see also Gian Luigi Gatti, “Camicie nere al sole etiopico,” in *L’impero fascista. Italia ed Etiopia (1935–1941)*, ed. Riccardo Bottoni (Bologna: il Mulino, 2008), 186–213 (pp. 207–13).

19See John A. Davis, “Le guerre del brigantaggio,” in *Fare l’Italia. Unità e disunità nel Risorgimento*, ed. Mario Isnenghi and Eva Cecchinato, vol. 1, *Gli italiani in guerra Conflitti, identità, memorie del Risorgimento ai nostri giorni*, ed. Mario Isnenghi (Turin: UTET, 2008), 738–52; on the cultural discourse informing the use of military force ‘to cure’ the South, see Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2006), 179–83.
of the Italian military was to mobilize young men based on their national belonging in order to support the formation (and expansion) of modern nation-states. As Margaret MacMillan notes in relation to the general “militarized” atmosphere of late nineteenth-century Europe, the military was regarded at the time as “the noblest part of the nation” and war as “a necessary part of the great struggle for survival.”

Among other things, the military was conceived as an institution that would help support the unification of the country, to educate and equip soldiers with tools and skills (e.g., basic Italian language) to embrace, and thus to actively shape the “new world”—modern Italy. Rather than simply functioning as a defensive/offensive instrument for the nation’s protection and merely drilling the body to follow orders, the military was regarded as a cultural and educational institution that was expected to help reduce internal frictions and threats to the security of the nation-state. Young men forced to leave their homes and rural villages to take up military service came back—ideally—equipped with experiences and skills they would never have been exposed to at home. The extraordinary importance of military service for Italy’s unification is emphasized in parliamentary discussions on the electoral vote in 1881, where leading politicians such as Francesco Crispi argued that

Nelle città, abbiamo i ricordi della grande rivoluzione, e quindi gli esempi del patriottismo, il quale condusse l’Italia a tanta altezza; nelle campagne ogni anno si riversa tutta quella massa di soldati che esce dall’esercito e che porta in seno alla famiglia, oltre al sentimento della disciplina, la devozione per la patria e per la dinastia, l’amore per questa Italia che gli abbiamo insegnato a difendere.

20 Margaret MacMillan, The War that Ended Peace: The Road to 1914 (New York: Random House, 2013), xxix.
21 Giuseppe Conti, “Fare gli italiani”: Esercito permanente e “nazione armata” nell’Italia liberale (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2012), 86–93.
22 “In the cities, we have memories of the great revolution, and therefore examples of patriotism, which led Italy to such heights; in the countryside, every year masses of soldiers finishing military service bring back, in addition to a sense of discipline, feelings of devotion to the homeland and the King, also the love for this Italy that we taught them to defend.” In Francesco Crispi, Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, Discussioni, Legisl. 14, 1st Session, June 10, 1881, 5957–79 (p. 5970). See further Christopher Duggan, Francesco Crispi 1818–1901: From Nation to Nationalism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 415–22.
Crispi’s description of Italian soldiers reveals a powerful rhetorical discourse around the military that had a profound impact on his contemporaries, especially with regard to the lower-class rural soldier who was to return home in order to educate and share the core of national and patriotic values with his community. This was not the first nor the last time when simple soldiers were involved in complex political imaginations of the country and became symbols of transformed Italy. Similar strategies can be detected in Italian history from Cavour to Mussolini and beyond. It is worth emphasizing that in all those instances the figure of the soldier is not primarily used to discuss military changes of the country but rather to symbolize progressive ideas of education and socio-cultural development in Italy.

Military service itself presented a challenging change for the draftees. Indeed, it was an unprecedented and exciting moment for many, who saw the military experience as bringing about a real change in an infinitely fractured Italy that lacked cohesion and unity. At the same time, however, it was also disconcerting, too abrupt, or confusing to other conscripts, especially those who came from rural Italy and were now transported to unknown worlds through military service, loosing opportunities to continue traditional lifestyle as a result. Indeed, the military experience seems to have been perceived across the board as both exciting and disturbing. This, I would argue, is one of the most distinctive features of the military experience in general: its powerful ambivalence and complexity, a combination of negative and positive emotions and experiences. These ambivalences resurface in the memoirs, literary and

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23 On the history and memories of Italy’s division, see Giovanni Contini, La memoria divisa (Milan: Rizzoli, 1997); for a more recent discussion on the topic, see John Foot, Italy’s Divided Memories (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

24 In his study of Liberal Italy, John Foot underscores that “although many resented conscription[…] for others the experience was an important one, marking the passage from boy to man, and was often the first long time away from home, as well as offering a rich set of experiences (cultural, social, sexual—the call-up often coincided with ritual visits to brothels), and friendships which often lasted for a lifetime.” In John Foot, Modern Italy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 84. On the complex impact of the military in the formation of Italian men through historical perspectives, see Marco Rovinello, “Giuro di essere Fedele al re ad a’ suoi reali successori’: disciplina militare, civilizzazione e nazionalizzazione nell’Italia liberale,” Storica 49 (2011): 95–140; Marco Mondini, “Soldati dunque uomini. L’esperienza militare, la cittadinanza e l’identità di genere: una storia italiana del Novecento,” in Forze armate. Cultura, società, politica, ed. Nicola Labanca (Milan: Unicopli, 2013), 235–50.
philosophical reflections of Italians who went through military service in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. So we hear of those who did everything they could to escape military service as well as of those, like Agostino Gemelli, who found their inspiration in the military. Antonio Gramsci, for instance, was indirectly exposed to socialist ideas from his older brother who regularly sent him copies of Avanti! to Sardinia while serving in the military in Turin. And Umberto Eco published a letter to his son Stefano sarcastically, though no less seriously, referring to this own military experience to argue that:

> Da quest’orgia di giochi bellici è venuto fuori un uomo che è riuscito a fare diciotto mesi di servizio militare senza toccare un fucile e dedicando le lunghe ore di caserma a severi studi di filosofia medievale; un uomo che si è macchiato di tante iniquità ma che è sempre stato puro di quel tristo delitto che consiste nell’amarle le armi e nel credere alla santità e all’efficienza del valore guerriero.

Echoes from literature, music, visual, and performative arts, fashion, and so on, attest, therefore, that the military experience left a crucial trace in the lives of Italians, and it seems that this was the case up until conscription was suspended in 2005, the year when Italian women were finally allowed to join the military forces.

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25 Mussolini famously escaped to Switzerland to avoid going to the military. See Robert Paxton, The Anatomy of Fascism (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 34; Emilio Gentile, Mussolini contro Lenin (Bari: Laterza, 2017), 25. Agostino Gemelli (1878–1959) worked side by side with priests and military personnel, experiencing firsthand the suffering of the wounded soldiers. Gemelli’s military experience was the background to his religious conversion, and as Franciscan friar went on to become a renowned psychologist, and founder in 1921 of the Catholic University of Milan. See Anna Debè and Simonetta Polenghi, “Agostino Gemelli (1878–1959) and mental disability: science, faith and education in the view of an Italian scientist and friar,” Paedagogica Historica 55, no. 3 (2019), 429–50 (p. 432).

26 Giuseppe Fiori, Vita di Antonio Gramsci (Bari: Laterza, 1966), 48.

27 “From this orgy of war games came out a man who managed to do eighteen months of military service without touching a rifle and dedicating the long hours in the barracks to serious study of medieval philosophy; a man who has been stained with so many iniquities but who has always been pure of that sad crime that consists in loving weapons and in believing in the sanctity and efficiency of the warrior value.” In Umberto Eco, “Lettera a mio figlio,” in Diario minimo, 1st ed. 1963 (Milan: Oscar Mondadori, 1978), 115–21 (p. 119).

28 Like the military, in general, conscription has been traditionally studied since the late 1970s almost exclusively through historical and sociological perspectives. For historical anal-
In sum, far from being a basic system of bodily drills and exercise, the military is an institution that pervades the complex fabric of all nation-states, unites its population, and defines its borders and margins; it is an institution that is constantly confronted with ideas of the “other” (as enemies, foreigners, outsiders but also as internal others such as women and sexual minorities), and it consequently cultivates and spreads the makeup of the country, thus fundamentally shaping and moving forward questions about national identity and belonging. Understood along these lines, we might also expect that the cultural impact of the military goes well beyond the strict military environment to national culture and arts far more deeply and broadly than has been discussed thus far. The Italian military offers a good example of these general trends but also features elements that are specifically characteristic to the Italian military experience. Some particularly central focal points of the Italian military are worth expanding a little more at length. The following discussion briefly sums up the main challenges of the Italian military that are reflected, in

ysis, see Nicola Labanca, ed., *Fare il soldato. Storie del reclutamento militare in Italia* (Milan: Unicopli, 2007); Piero Del Negro, “La leva militare in Italia dall’unità alla Grande Guerra,” in *Esercito, stato, società: saggi di storia militare*, ed. Piero Del Negro, pref. Ennio Di Nolfo (Bologna: Cappelli, 1979), 167–266; Virgilio Ilari, *Storia del servizio militare in Italia*, 5 vols. (Rome: Rivista militare – Centro militare di studi strategici, 1990–1992); Domenico Rizzo, *Vita di caserma. Il servizio militare nell’Italia del dopoguerra* (Rome: Carocci, 2012); Marco Rovinello, *Fra servitù e servizio. Storia della leva in Italia dall’Unità alla Grande Guerra* (Rome: Viella, 2020). For sociological studies, see Constantino Cipolla, “Scene e retroscena della vita di caserma tra adattamento e devianza,” *Città, crimine e devianza*, no. 3 (1980), 69–98; Elvio Melorio and Giulio Guerra, ed., *Giovani e forze armate. Adattamento e disadattamento in collettività militare* (Milan: Masson Italia, 1987); Fabrizio Battistelli, *Giovani e Forze Armate. Aspetti sociologici della condizione giovanile e della comunicazione istituzionale* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1996); Fabrizio Battistelli, *Donne e forze armate* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1997); Lorenzo Greco, *Homo militaris. Antropologia e letteratura della vita militare* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1999); Fabrizio Battistelli, Teresa Ammendola and Lorenzo Greco, *Manuale di sociologia militare. Con elementi di psicologia sociale* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2008); Fatima Farina, *Donne nelle forze armate. Il servizio militare femminile in Italia e nella Nato* (Rome: Viella, 2015). It is surprising that given the abundant material on the impact of the military on Italian culture, there is no thorough study of the topic. A more comprehensive study on the cultural reflections of the military in literature, history, and culture is Mattia Roveri, *Disbanded Italy: A Cultural History of The Military* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2021).
one way or another, in the closer analysis of the individual contributions to this volume.

**Internal Paradoxes**

The creation of the Italian military in 1861, the same year of Italy’s Unification, adds a particular nationalist dimension to the institution.\(^{29}\) Homogenizing the fragmented peninsula was based on the idea of a “civilizing mission” that was designed to cure the African-like South by destroying the rebel groups that resisted the national government and to bring education to Italy’s southern regions. General conscription, established nationwide in 1863, was regarded as one of the most effective ways to achieve these goals. Yet a paradox soon presented itself: while the military firmly asserted the power of the new nation by suppressing and modernizing underdeveloped communities, at the same time, it also became stigmatized as comprising mainly of illiterate peasants, who were in need of “civilizing” themselves.\(^{30}\) Indeed, military officers were the first historians to shape the imaginary of criminalized southern brigands, who were recurrently depicted as “black, animal, feminine, primitive, deceitful, evil, perverse, irrational.”\(^{31}\) In fact, the derogatory discourse on the South became even more prevalent during the introduction of military service nationwide.\(^{32}\)

\(^{29}\) On the complex reception of Garibaldi’s military image and the controversies surrounding his charismatic figure after his arrival to Sicily in 1860, see Lucy Riall, *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2007), 277–78; on the historical implications of the disbandment of Garibaldini immediately after Italy’s unification, see Rochat and Massobrio, 26–30. Francesco Crispi (1818–1901), a close friend and supporter of Garibaldi, became an authoritarian Prime Minister in the 1880s and was later celebrated also by the Fascist regime as the “precursor” of Mussolini. As Christopher Duggan has pointed out, Crispi’s political speeches popularized the idea that military service wasn’t antithetical to education and served to bring together different social classes. See Duggan, 443.

\(^{30}\) See, for instance, Miguel Mellino, “De-Provincializing Italy: Notes on Race, Racialization, and Italy’s Coloniality,” in *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 83–99 (p. 84).

\(^{31}\) John Dickie, *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860–1900* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 33.

\(^{32}\) The Pica Law (1863) provided the military with the power to enforce conscription laws. See Lucy Riall, *Sicily and the Unification of Italy: Liberal policy and Local Power, 1859–1866* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.
The importance of the military in both suppressing revolts and leading the way for the formation of Italians through conscription was reflected in huge investments by the new Italian establishment. The military is an expensive item in any national budget, but in the Italian case, the level of disorganization within the institution posed additional challenges. Military reforms between 1871 and 1876 aimed to utilize the military as the breeding ground for a more cohesive society and for the construction of a national identity among a population that was strongly marked by cultural, regional, and ethnic differences. These political and military plans were particularly expensive: from 1861 until the end of the anti-brigand campaign in 1866, the armed forces drained more than one-third of the entire national budget.\(^33\) The military forces remained the single most expensive item of the public budget from post-Unification to the end of the Second World War comprising almost 25% of the government’s total expenditures.\(^34\) This massive spending exemplifies the essential part of military forces in the process of nation-building and in Italy’s concomitant engagement in colonial ventures and arms races with other nations. Irrespective of these large investments, fragmentation within the military establishment resulted in inefficient legislation, and the (costly) project of Italianizing the lower classes through military service was significantly reduced to finance expansionist plans in the early 1880s.\(^35\)

One of the biggest problems of the Italian military, from its conception until (at least) the end of the Second World War, was the level of disorganization within the institution, which was reflected in inefficient planning and internal discord among military officials and politicians about the structure and goals of the military institution. Yet, the extraordinary powers given to the Supreme Command during the First World War, including powers of censorship, afforded the military with a level of political autonomy and power unparalleled among other European national armies.\(^36\)

One of the consequences of this unrestrained authority was the harsh

\(^{33}\) Nicola Labanca, *Il generale Cesare Ricotti e la politica militare italiana dal 1884 al 1887* (Rome: Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito – Ufficio Storico, 1986), 449.

\(^{34}\) Rochat and Massobrio, 69.

\(^{35}\) Gianfranco Mastrangelo, *Le “scuole reggimentali” 1848–1913. Cronaca di una forma di istruzione degli adulti nell’Italia liberale* (Rome: Ediesse, 2008), 75–76.

\(^{36}\) Giovanna Procacci, *Soldati e prigionieri italiani nella Grande Guerra* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2016), 19–23. On violence against the Italian population during the First World War, see Bruna Bianchi, ed., *La violenza contro la popolazione civile nella Grande Guerra. Deportati, profughi, internati* (Milan: Unicopli, 2006).
discipline and brutal punitive measures exercised against military personnel, in particular, against lower-class simple soldiers.\textsuperscript{37} While emerging on the victorious side of the First World War, the Italian military remained profoundly affected by disorganization and internal divisions, which were also reflected in the highly fragmented, traumatized, and impoverished population.\textsuperscript{38} With the politicization of the military forces following the domestic tumults in Rome and Milan in 1919,\textsuperscript{39} the military establishment welcomed the violent advent of the Fascist regime in October 1922.\textsuperscript{40} Using the pretext of protecting the middle classes, while keeping himself away from the internal politics of the military institution,\textsuperscript{41} Mussolini sidelined the military from the Fascist plans to militarize Italian society.\textsuperscript{42} In fact, the Fascist militarization of society paradoxically undermined traditional distinctions between politics and the military, between

\textsuperscript{37} Overall, 25\% of the 400,000 men who were brought before military tribunals during the war were convicted: 4028 received death sentences, of which 750 were executed, 311 were cancelled, and 2967 were in absentia. See Enzo Forcella and Alberto Monticone, \textit{Plotone d’esecuzione. I processi della prima guerra mondiale}, 1st ed. 1968 (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2014), lxxviii–lxxx. On the summary executions during the First World War, see Irene Guerrini and Marco Pluviano, \textit{Fucilati senza processo. Il “Memoriale Tommasi” sulle esecuzioni sommarie nella Grande Guerra} (Udine: Gaspari, 2019).

\textsuperscript{38} See Piero Del Negro, “Army, State and Society in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century: The Italian Case,” \textit{The Journal of Italian History} 2 (1978): 315–28 (pp. 325–26). On the profound transformations and traumatic impact of the Great War on the population and human consciousness, see Antonio Gibelli, \textit{L’officina della guerra. La Grande Guerra e le trasformazioni del mondo mentale} (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991); on the long-lasting impact of the First World War and mental illnesses with a focus on the case study on the psychiatry hospital of Pergine Valsugana (Trento), see Anna Grillini, \textit{La guerra in testa: esperienze e traumi di civili, profughi e soldati nel manicomio di Pergine Valsugana (1909–1924)} (Bologna: il Mulino, 2018). On the exploitation of the labor of women and children during the First World War, see Matteo Ermacora, \textit{Cantieri di guerra. Il lavoro dei civili nelle retrovie del fronte italiano} (Bologna: il Mulino, 2005).

\textsuperscript{39} Marco Mondini, \textit{La politica delle armi. Il ruolo dell’esercito nell’avvento del Fascismo} (Bari–Rome: Laterza, 2006), 30.

\textsuperscript{40} On the “deal” between the Fascist regime and the military see Giorgio Rochat, \textit{L’esercito italiano da Vittorio Veneto a Mussolini 1919–1925}, 2nd ed. (Rome–Bari: Laterza, 2006), 259–71.

\textsuperscript{41} Rochat and Massobrio, 206.

\textsuperscript{42} What distinguished the rules of the Fascist regime from those of the end of the 1800s and of the war period was the exclusion of the military from the direct levers of power. See Giovanna Procacci, “Osservazioni sulla continuità della legislazione sull’ordine pubblico tra fine Ottocento, prima guerra mondiale e fascismo,” in \textit{Militarizzazione e nazionalizzazione nella storia d’Italia}, ed. Piero Del Negro, Nicola Labanca and Alessandra Staderini (Milan: Unicopli, 2005), 83–96 (p. 94).
citizens and soldiers.\textsuperscript{43} Fascist culture overthrew the conventional civil-military divisions bringing about a new type of adhesion and political dependence between the military, the king, and the Duce,\textsuperscript{44} one that would lead to the atrocities and disaster of the Second World War.\textsuperscript{45}

Post-war Italy faced dire economic circumstances and extreme living conditions. Even though the number of fallen in the Second World War did not reach the level of the First World War, the destruction of economy and land was incomparable to the First World War with around 60% of infrastructure destroyed, along with factories and other production units. The immediate demilitarization of the country was top priority of the Allied forces who oversaw the interim period and helped establish stability in the country. Italy quickly embraced, like Germany, the image of a country that has learned from mistakes and would remain a peace-making and a military force in Europe. Even though conscription remained effective until its suspension in 2005, a professional military became a hot political topic between the left (Communists) and the right, and, as such, it was not voluntarily discussed in public by politicians in fear of frictions it may arouse among the population. Since then, Italy’s leading politicians have consistently given the impression of Italy as a “peacekeeping” country that is not involved in military conflicts. Missions abroad, the number of which has steadily increased over the past decades, are framed as humanitarian aid missions and/or support for peace in other countries.\textsuperscript{46} Here comes

\textsuperscript{43}Emilio Gentile, \textit{Fascismo. Storia e interpretazione} (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2002), 239.

\textsuperscript{44}Emilio Gentile, \textit{Le origini dell’ideologia fascista (1918–1925)} (Bologna: il Mulino, 1996), 270–71.

\textsuperscript{45}On the military experience during the Second World War under the Fascist regime, see Pietro Cavallo, \textit{Italiani in guerra. Sentimenti e immagini dal 1940 al 1943} (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997); Mario Avagliano and Marco Palmieri, \textit{Vincere e vinceremo! Gli italiani al fronte, 1940–1943} (Bologna: il Mulino, 2014). On Italy’s military involvement in the Second World War and its implications with the Holocaust, see Davide Rodogno, \textit{Fascism’s European Empire: Italian Occupation During the Second World War} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); on Italy’s failure to confront the Holocaust, see Robert S. C. Gordon, \textit{The Holocaust in Italian Culture, 1944–2010} (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012). On the trauma affecting the Italian population and the role of mental hospitals during the Second World War, see Paolo Sorcinelli, \textit{La follia della guerra. Storie dal manicomio negli anni quaranta} (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1992); see also Paolo Francesco Peloso, \textit{La guerra dentro. La psichiatria italiana tra fascismo e resistenza (1922–1945)} (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2008).

\textsuperscript{46}The military forces are relied upon during the most complex and disruptive collective events also in Italy. The successful demolition of the Morandi Bridge in Genoa, for instance, has been carried out with the intervention of the army. See, for example, “Ponte Morandi, il
another, the final, paradox in the conceptualization of military forces in contemporary Italy. As pointed out recently, such political rhetoric obscures the realities that troops are often facing on the ground. While politicians are increasingly trying to avoid the term “military” in their general explanations of the missions, for the fear of public backlash and of being too closely associated with the military, such a gap in the representation of Italy’s military engagements puts increasing pressure on the military institution and sends out false (and potentially damaging) messages to the troops. The gap between the politicians’ message and the actual content of the military missions themselves seems to have worsened after the suspension of military service. In other words, as soon as there is a lack of political context and connection between the military and other public services, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain a public relationship with the military. And yet, the fear for being associated with the military, and thus sending confusing messages about the country’s military operations, comes at high cost.

Regarding the latest spreading of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) virus, it is not coincidental that it is images of soldiers patrolling around the affected areas in Italy that are reported across the media in Italy and worldwide. See, for example, “Italian soldiers wearing masks in Duomo Square in Milan,” *The Guardian*, February 24, 2020, [https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2020/feb/24/coronavirus-live-updates-china-wuhan-hubei-latest-news-italy-lombardy-south-korea-iran-japan-cases-infections-death-toll-outbreak-xijinping-update#img-1](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2020/feb/24/coronavirus-live-updates-china-wuhan-hubei-latest-news-italy-lombardy-south-korea-iran-japan-cases-infections-death-toll-outbreak-xijinping-update#img-1), accessed February 25, 2020; and Ishaan Tharoor, “Coronavirus epidemic reveals a world in political crisis,” *Washington Post*, February 28, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/02/28/coronavirus-epidemic-reveals-world-political-crisis/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/02/28/coronavirus-epidemic-reveals-world-political-crisis/).

For more and detailed risk assessment, see Piero Ignazi, Fabrizio Coticchia, and Giampiero Giacomello, *Italian Military Operations Abroad: Just Don’t Call It War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
Social Class Tensions

Modern military service across Europe was inherently rooted in social class discrimination.\textsuperscript{48} In post-Unification Italy, the military system was based on the Piedmontese policy of 1854, which privileged the upper classes of the old social order,\textsuperscript{49} who were provided with the opportunity to lead military careers as officers or to avoid recruitment altogether through the payment of expensive fees.\textsuperscript{50} The dual path within the military structures, one designed for the lower classes and one for the higher classes, remained effective until the First World War, despite various attempts of reform.\textsuperscript{51} While higher-class draftees had legal options to avoid conscription,\textsuperscript{52} their

\textsuperscript{48}Virgilio Ilari, \textit{La “nazione armata,” 1871–1918}, vol. 2, \textit{Storia del servizio militare in Italia} (Rome: Rivista Militare – Centro militare di studi strategici, 1990), 279.

\textsuperscript{49}While registering that the privileges of the higher social strata and of the bourgeoisie “furono scrupolosamente conservati,” Del Negro notes that military service was extended also to clerics in 1869. See Del Negro, “La leva militare,” 175, 191.

\textsuperscript{50}Virgilio Ilari, \textit{Dall’ “Ordinanza Fiorentina” di Machiavelli alla Costituzione dell’Esercito Italiano}, vol. 1, \textit{Storia del servizio militare in Italia}, 308. On social class differences and the military as a career opportunity, see Piero Del Negro, \textit{Ufficiali di carriera e ufficiali di complemento nell’esercito italiano}, in \textit{Les fronts invisibles. Nourrir, fournir, soigner}, ed. Gérard Canini (Nancy: Press Universitaires de Nancy, 1984), 263–86; Marco Meriggi, “Militari e istituzioni politiche nell’età giolittiana,” \textit{Clio} 1 (1987): 55–92; Marco Mondini, \textit{Veneto in armi. Tra mito della nazione e piccola patria 1866–1918} (Gorizia, LEG, 2002).

\textsuperscript{51}Vincenzo Caciulli, “La paga di Marte. Assegni, spese e genere di vita degli ufficiali italiani prima della grande guerra,” \textit{Rivista di Storia Contemporanea} 4 (1993): 569–95. For a recent discussion on higher ranked officers during the time of Liberal Italy, see Lorenzo Benadusi, \textit{Ufficiale e gentiluomo. Virtù civili e valori militari in Italia, 1896–1918} (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2015).

\textsuperscript{52}Until the early 1870s, higher-class draftees could opt for \textit{affiancamento} that would grant immediate release from service and \textit{surrogazione}, which allowed conscripts to hire a substitute to serve in their stead. In 1863, 1680 substitutions were granted, while 1030 immediate discharges from service through payment were accepted. See Ilari, \textit{La “nazione armata,”} vol. 2, 281–82. The Ricotti reform of September 1871 attempted to tackle social class discrimination in the military structure by abolishing the privileges of the wealthy to pay their way out of conscription, and it also reduced the period of service for the first category to four years. See Ilari, \textit{La “nazione armata,”} vol. 2, 289–90. At the same time, however, these reforms instituted yet another loophole for the higher classes: the figure of the one-year volunteer. The idea behind this new regulation was to make the military experience attractive to the bourgeoisie, by enabling them to join the military for a shorter period and thus to mobilize higher-class conscripts. The recruitment of higher-class young men was also intended to prevent the excessive militarization of the lower strata of society, something that might have eventually jeopardized the socio-political establishment. One-year volunteers did not, however, blend in well with other recruits because they tended to be highly educated in comparison to their “semi-literate” conscripts and conscious of their “superiority” during
lower-class equivalents, who were most prominently involved in the military throughout the new nation-state, were often faced with no better alternative than emigration. Migration was indeed a significant problem for the government, both for the Liberal and Fascist regimes, because it affected the national manpower needed for its colonial enterprises and undermined the construction of an efficient military system. Indeed, the military did not simply reflect Italy’s social class divisions, but it crystalized them across the line of military ranks: while senior higher-class officers came mostly from the north with an elite socio-cultural background, lower-rank junior officers came from landowners’ families and urban areas of the middle class, while simple soldiers were fundamentally among the poorest and least educated part of society.\(^{53}\)

The First World War brought about serious changes in the recruitment procedure: for the first time there was a real need for soldiers in unprecedented numbers, and for that reason, several adjustments to the existing rules were implemented (e.g., the height restrictions of soldiers was reduced).\(^{54}\) For the first time in Italian history, increased militarization and the construction of a mass army meant also more pressure on the bourgeoisie.\(^{55}\) Changes implemented to the recruitment procedure affected middle-class young men, as they were no longer allowed to pay their way out of the military.\(^{56}\)

In the aftermath of the First World War, the government pushed to reduce the time of compulsory military service to provide a more

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\(^{53}\) See John Gooch, *The Italian Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 7–15; on class during the First World War, see Vanda Wilcox, *Morale and the Italian Army during the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 161–67. According to Rochat, “l’Italia liberale faceva la sua guerra con una capacità di mobilitazione e una dura determinazione che quella fascista non ebbe mai.” See Rochat, *Ufficiali e soldati. L’esercito italiano dalla prima alla seconda guerra mondiale* (Udine: Gaspari, 2000), 42.

\(^{54}\) Ilari, *La ‘nazione armata,’* vol. 2, 313.

\(^{55}\) See further Alberto Monticone, *Gli italiani in uniforme. 1915–1918. Intellettuali, borghesi e disertori* (Bari: Laterza, 1972), 6.

\(^{56}\) By the end of the First World War, the Italian military incorporated between 2,800,000 and 4,000,000 soldiers and officers. Rochat, *L’esercito italiano*, 25–26.
equitable distribution of the obligations of military duty among all social strata. The Italian military forces, however, were cornered by the anti-military wave and the socioeconomic crisis ravaging Italy. Mussolini exploited his military experience during the First World War and the complex political environment to propagate his own vision about the centrality of the figure of the soldier for the nation. Indeed, Mussolini’s public persona and the very cult of the Duce had been constructed around him as both a common soldier and savior of the nation. However, instead of advocating changes in society that would address social class discrimination, Mussolini fully endorsed the hierarchical structure of the military forces and aimed to use this system as a model to militarize the entire population. Empowered by the military institution, he captured the historical power and complexity of the figure of the soldier in order to promote the Fascist militarization of Italian society:

Ognuno di voi deve considerarsi un soldato; un soldato anche quando non porta il grigio-verde, un soldato anche quando lavora, nell’ufficio, nelle officine, nei cantieri, o nei campi; un soldato legato a tutto il resto dell’esercito; una molecola che sente e pulsa coll’intero organismo.

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57 Ilari, “Nazione militare’ e ‘fronte del lavoro” (1919–1943), vol. 3, Storia del servizio militare in Italia, 179.

58 See Luisa Passerini, Mussolini immaginario (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1991), 28–32; Sergio Luzzatto, Il corpo del duce. Un cadavere tra immaginazione, storia e memoria (Turin: Einaudi, 1998), 4–5; Marco Belpoliti, Il corpo del capo (Parma: Guanda, 2009), 25–26; Mario Isnenghi, “Il corpo del Duce,” in Gli occhi di Alessandro: potere sovrano e sacralità del corpo da Alessandro Magno a Ceausescu, ed. Sergio Bertelli and Cristiano Grottanelli (Florence: Ponte alle Grazie, 1990), 170–83.

59 Simona Storchi, “Margherita Sarfatti and the Invention of the Duce,” in The Cult of the Duce: Mussolini and the Italians, ed. Stephen Gundle, Christopher Duggan and Giuliana Pieri (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2013), 41–56 (p. 44).

60 On Mussolini’s Fascist military policy on the military, see Giorgio Rochat, “L’esercito e il fascismo,” in Fascismo e società italiana, ed. Guido Quazza (Turin: Einaudi, 1973), 89–123; also Rochat, “La politica militare del fascismo,” in Fascismo e capitalismo, ed. Nicola Tranfaglia (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976), 159–72. On a somewhat different reading, see Knox, Mussolini Unleashed, 1939–1941: Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy’s Last War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 14–15.

61 “Each of you must consider himself a soldier; a soldier even when not wearing gray-green, a soldier even when working in the office, in the workshops, on construction sites, or in the fields; a soldier tied to the rest of the army; a molecule that feels and pulses with the whole organism.” Speech given in Milan on October 28, 1925, in Scritti e discorsi, 12 vols. (Milan: Hoepli, 1934–1939), vol. 5, 164.
Pronounced during a party rally for the third anniversary of the *Marcia su Roma*, Mussolini blended the biopolitical discourse on the nation as a body with the cultural power of the image of the soldier where “everyone” that is, every Italian man,\(^{62}\) was to become a soldier, that is, a Fascist, though also self-conscious about his social class and role in society. Paradoxically, while the military structures themselves became more democratic from the 1920s onwards, at least in terms of including all men from different social strata without exceptions,\(^{63}\) Fascist plans for the nation reinforced hierarchical vision of society and closed an opportunity toward more equitable and socially dynamic Italy.\(^{64}\)

Unlike in Germany and Japan, the military in Italy was not disbanded after the Second World War, and more than 11 million Italians were enlisted to serve as conscripts between 1945 and 1990.\(^{65}\) The structure of the military was a hot topic in the 1970s and beyond, when these debates became highly politicized and informed by the international context of the Cold War. The communists, who appealed to the still large lower-class base of the military, supported conscription, as they saw such structure as being more under democratic control as opposed to professional reactionary armies. Even though social class tensions became less overtly thematized in post-war Italy, the political undertone emphasized the division between lower- and higher-class conscripts and thus eventually continued to point out the dire social inequalities that became visible in the context of the military.

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\(^{62}\) On the institutionalized discrimination of women in what was propagandized as the first liberating military experience for Italian women in the *Servizio ausiliario femminile* instituted in 1944 by the Fascist regime, see Daniella Gagliani, “Le ausiliarie fasciste,” in *Il ventennio fascista: la seconda guerra mondiale*, ed. Mario Isnenghi and Giulia Albanese, vol. 4, bk. 2, *Gli italiani in guerra. Conflitti, identità, memorie dal Risorgimento ai nostri giorni*, ed. Mario Isnenghi (Turin: UTET, 2008), 485–92.

\(^{63}\) Piero Del Negro, “Un confronto tra le leve in età napoleonica e nell’Italia liberale,” in *Fare il soldato: Storie del reclutamento militare in Italia*, ed. Nicola Labanca (Milan: Unicopli, 2007), 21–30 (p. 29).

\(^{64}\) Gaetano Mosca, *Teorica dei governi e governo parlamentare* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1968), 242, cited in Fabrizio Battistelli, “Crisi e morte della leva obbligatoria,” in *Fare il soldato*, 189–210 (p. 207).

\(^{65}\) Foot, *Modern Italy*, 85.
The assertion, now a commonplace, that “a language is a dialect with an Army and Navy,” encapsulates the formation of national languages and their reliance on cultural authority and political dominance rather than linguistic realities. This saying also sheds light on the association of modern languages (and culture) with military power, which legitimized the elevation of certain dialects to the range of national languages and the development of European “civilizing missions” in Africa and beyond.

In post-Unification Italy, the extraordinary level of illiteracy was a direct result of inefficient levels of schooling and the dominance of regional/local dialects. The extension of conscription countrywide in 1863 started the (slow and complicated) process of bringing young men together to form a nation of patriotic citizens that would share the same language and national identity. Yet, the national census conducted in 1871 still confirmed that conscripts were among the least educated and poorest citizens. The Ricotti reforms of the 1870s were set in motion to modernize the military and tackle the linguistic and cultural division that affected the reorganization of the Italian armed forces and, as a result, of the entire country. The military was conceptualized as “la vera scuola della nazione,” in which scuole reggimentali were intended to provide conscripts with a sufficient understanding of how to read and write Italian. The pedagogical and political discourse positioned the military at the heart of the process of nation-building by emphasizing how the education of soldiers consolidated Italy’s unity.

From the 1870s to the turn of the century, school texts recurrently depicted the experience of conscription as the moment when Italian young men were united in the goal to learn Italian and become proper citizens. The plans for the “educazione morale del soldato” included investments to build up a popular literature, circulated nationwide, that would reduce the cultural gap between officials and soldiers through textbooks and

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66 Attributed to the Yiddish linguist Max Weinreich.
67 On the complex linguistic impact of the military institution and, in particular, of conscription on Italian language, see Tullio De Mauro, Storia linguistica dell’Italia unita (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1991), 106–7.
68 Del Negro, “La leva militare,” 190.
69 Rovinello, Fra servitù e servizio, 292–305; Mastrangelo, Le “scuole reggimentali,” 47.
70 Nicola Labanca, “Una pedagogia militare per l’Italia liberale. I primi giornali per il soldato (1866–1915),” Rivista di storia contemporanea 7, no. 4 (1988): 546–77 (p. 547).
literary works accessible to all social strata. The growth of the publishing industry propagated and reinforced the role of the military as the pivotal institution for the creation of Italians and the fortification of the nation. However, the explicit rhetoric of the “moral education” of conscripts frequently implied and endorsed a conservative view of the organization of Italian society. While conformist trends had emerged in military journals already during the anti-brigand campaign in the 1860s, the pedagogical function of the military was particularly emphasized during the 1870s, when it became linked to a classist view of society that insisted on “civilizing” the lower strata through notions of development and progress.

There was also a political debate to be had over the Italian electorate, and here too the military institution played an important role. Intended to bridge the gulf between the people and institutions, the electoral reform in 1881–1882 caused much anxieties for the ruling class, while at the same time “the educational value of military service was acknowledged: anyone who had been in the army for two years got the vote.”\(^{71}\) The electoral reform extended the right to vote to all literate men above the age of 21, which increased the electorate to 6.9% of the total population. This brought the number of Italian voters to over 2 million from the previous 620,000, “still far from Mazzini’s concept of ‘equal citizenship,’ based on universal (male and female) suffrage.”\(^{72}\) Literacy became now the condition for acquiring the right to vote instead of wealth, and new tax threshold and the lowering of the age for voting were two additional motions that formed an important part of a (slow) process of democratization of Italian society. Paradoxically, the military was both a national laboratory that pushed socio-cultural progress through the education of soldiers and at the same time crystallized gender role division through the exclusion of women from the institution.\(^{73}\) Indeed, while Italy’s political establishment had not been particularly daring in promoting social progress, the military institution and the educational system were at the heart of a series of

\(^{71}\) Duggan, *Francesco Crispi*, 450–51, 419.

\(^{72}\) Axel Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy: From Unification to Fascism* (New York-London: Routledge, 2009), 36.

\(^{73}\) The exclusion of women from the military will be briefly discussed also later. However, given the importance and complexity of the topic, this subject can be only touched upon here in very general terms, with plans to examine this issue more exhaustively in a future project.
reforms and structural changes that paved the way for the formation of the nation and Italian culture in and out of barracks.\textsuperscript{74}

The civilizing mission of the military associated the figure of the soldier with a dual image that cut across the developing cultural fabric of the nation, from military booklets and novels to literary works and newspapers that were written by non-military personnel and targeted the whole population; on the one hand, the soldier was a pupil to be educated and civilized; on the other, he became himself the educator of his immediate familial circle, which most often belonged to the lower segments of society.\textsuperscript{75} The link between the military and education had far-reaching consequences in society because it provided soldiers with the unparalleled social function of Italianizing the population.\textsuperscript{76} By returning from the military to their familial settings, soldiers actively changed their immediate socio-cultural environment and introduced people around them to new prospects and, above all, to the idea of what it means to be/become Italian.

This educational process, however, had also several downsides. For example, it alienated those members of the lower strata who were neither enlisted nor attended schools throughout the period of Liberal Italy.\textsuperscript{77} Furthermore, the long duration of the military draft estranged soldiers from their local context and social relationships, thus causing tensions among traditional societies, where they were brought up and potentially making the homecoming of the newly educated and militarized young

\textsuperscript{74}“La scuola e l’esercito, che erano le due istituzioni privilegiate attraverso cui far transitare i principi ispiratori della nuova politica nazionale, rivestirono dunque in questo passaggio storico un ruolo fondamentale.” In Fabrizio La Manna, “Dalla scuola all’esercito La ginnastica educativa e la “cscriszione scolastico-militare” nell’Italia di fine Ottocento,” Diacronie 34, no. 2 (2018): 1–17 (p. 2); see also Simonetta Polenghi, “Educazione militare e Stato nazionale nell’Italia ottocentesca,” Pedagogia e Vita, 1 (1999): 105–46.

\textsuperscript{75}A fascinating example of the figure of the soldier developing in the past decades of nineteenth-century Italian literature is reported in Luigi Capuana’s Scurpiddu, racconto illustrato per ragazzi, which tells the story of an orphan whose life is changed as soon as he is “adopted” by an anonymous soldier who fought during the first colonial mission.

\textsuperscript{76}On the military and education with a specific focus on orphans, see Simonetta Polenghi, Figli della patria. L’educazione militare di esposti, orfani e figli di truppa tra Sette Ottocento (Milan: Università cattolica, 1999); also Polenghi, Fanciulli soldati. La militarizzazione dell’infanzia abbandonata nell’Europa moderna (Rome: Carocci, 2003); and for the education of crippled soldiers, see Polenghi, Educating the Cripples: The Pious Institute for rickets sufferers of Milan and its transformations (1874–1937) (Macerata: EUM, 2009), 73–80.

\textsuperscript{77}See further Gianni Oliva, Esercito, paese e movimento operario. L’antimilitarismo dal 1861 all’età gioielliana (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1986), 39–40.
men more difficult. This system reinforced a sort of “cultural gap” between young conscripts and their parents and previous generations, who became more isolated and increasingly dependent on their offspring because of their own lack of schooling or military training.

Yet the figure of the soldier became a positive metaphor for fascinating the growing population of readers and pupils in schools. Associations of teachers and pedagogues around the country boosted the reputation of the military and its contribution to the perception of Italy as a “civilized country.” The pedagogical discourse associated with the image of soldiers was also reflected in the development of the publishing industry. Particularly relevant to this trend was the increased importance of journalism and smaller informative publications, which insisted on the importance of the military experience to educate lower-class young men. Military booklets and pamphlets encouraged soldiers to put up with the hardships of military life, while targeting the wider Italian readership to demonstrate that conscription turned lower-class soldiers into obedient citizens. In this way, new magazines and journals popularized the “civilizing” role of the armed forces.

Educating and forming a society of “citizen-soldiers” was also reflected in the concomitant Italian literature ever since the military crackdown on the brigandage in the 1860s, which had offered glamorizing accounts of

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78 See, for instance, the oral testimonies gathered by Nuto Revelli, who records the impact of conscription on the lower strata at the time of Liberal Italy. Cf. Nuto Revelli, *Il mondo dei vinti. Testimonianze di vita contadina* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997).

79 While the level of illiteracy in Italy remained particularly high until the time of the First World War, already since the 1880s, the publishing industry had developed quite significantly. See Giovanni Vigo, “Gli italiani alla conquista dell’alfabeto,” in *La nascita dello stato nazionale*, vol. 1, *Fare gli italiani. Scuola e cultura nell’Italia contemporanea*, ed. Simonetta Soldani and Gabriele Turi (Bologna: il Mulino, 1993), 37–66.

80 Mariella Rigotti Colin, “Il soldato e l’eroe nella letteratura scolastica dell’Italia liberale,” *Rivista di storia contemporanea* 14, no. 3 (1985): 329–51. For a more recent discussion on the topic, see Mariella Rigotti Colin, “Le forze armate italiane nei testi scolastici e nella letteratura per l’infanzia dell’Italia liberale (1860–1900),” in *L’Italia e il “militare.” Guerre, nazione, rappresentazioni dal Rinascimento alla Repubblica*, ed. Paola Bianchi and Nicola Labanca (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2014), 195–215.

81 As Labanca reports, military journals like *Rivista militare italiana*, and periodicals such as *L’Italia militare*, targeted the higher segments of society by reinforcing a nationalist identity that was also intended to support colonial plans. See Labanca, “Una pedagogia,” 546–77 (pp. 554–55).

82 Giuseppe Finaldi, *Italian National Identity in the Scramble for Africa: Italy’s African Wars in the Era of Nation-building, 1870–1900* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 112.
the armed forces and the figure of the soldier through sophisticated cultural and literary formulations. One of the most significant examples is *La vita militare: bozzetti* (1869) by Edmondo De Amicis, who was directly involved as a lieutenant in anti-brigand campaigns in the 1860s. In this work, De Amicis crystallized the encounter between North and South Italy by glorifying the image of heroic soldiers, veterans, and their familial and social contexts as emblems of the new patriotic citizens coming together to form the nation through the educating experience of military service.

One of the most striking elements of *La vita militare* is the ease with which the population and the military personnel communicate with each other in all short stories (involving places and people throughout Italy) without major problems as though they all spoke standard Italian. Paradoxically, *La vita militare* undermines the necessity of Italianizing society through the military experience because it conjures up a deceiving idea of linguistic cohesion in the peninsula. Yet, the insistence on the role of conscription and the military to spread patriotic values confirms how the “civilizing mission” of the armed forces was part of the intellectual and cultural context since Italy’s Unification. De Amicis enjoyed a highly successful literary career and was one of the most widely read authors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This ensured that *La vita militare* continued to hold a prominent position within Italian literature and played a crucial role in shaping the perception of the military for Italian readers. The military life depicted in De Amicis’ works, however, was biased and often misrepresented the true state of affairs in the armed forces. Military officers, for example, are shown as professionals, loyal, and devoted to the concerns of their homeland; the conditions and everyday life in the military were depicted as better and lighter for the conscripts than their life in rural Italy; the relationship between military officials and

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83 *La vita militare* was first published at the time when De Amicis was “[un] luogotenente del regio esercito e redattore dell’*Italia Militare*, l’organo di propaganda del ministero della guerra […].” See Piero Del Negro, “De Amicis Versu Tarchetti. Letteratura e militari al tramonto del Risorgimento,” in *Esercito, stato, società*, 125–66 (p. 130).

84 For a historical contextualization of “making Italians” in post-Unification Italy and De Amicis’ *La vita militare* as a response to Tarchetti anti-military service, see *Nel nome dell’Italia. Il Risorgimento nelle testimonianze, nei documenti e nelle immagini*, ed. Alberto Mario Banti (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2010), 403–7; for a linguistic and editorial history of De Amicis’ *La vita militare*, see Michela Dota, *La vita militare di Edmondo De Amicis. Storia linguistico-editoriale di un best seller postunitario* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2017).
simple soldiers was characterized by mutual respect and friendliness. The remarkable success of *La vita militare* indicates the popularity of the topic among the Italian population, even if it gave only a distorted picture of the institution. Italians seem to have been persuaded that the military was an essential building block of the national discourse.

Changes in the military structure and its role in education came with Fascism, even though a complete restructuring of the military was apparently not in Mussolini’s interests (nor in his power). The Fascist regime was superficially committed to resolving social class tensions and fostering solidarity by insisting on the figure of military officers as cultivated leaders whose social roots were close to the lower strata. The figure of the soldier was also crucial to youth associations organized by the Fascist regime, in order to revitalize the myth of the conquest of the colonies, and to the idea of the militarization of society that was carried out through pre- and post-military trainings. During the Fascist period, physical training was at the core of the education of soldiers, which insisted on the fitness of troops, but also on developing a sense of belonging to Italy through competitions and various athletic contests. This was, in itself, nothing new. As aforementioned, ideas of introducing pre-military service training for children had been already discussed and, in part, implemented during the time of Liberal Italy in the 1890s. Mussolini exploited the success of gymnastics first introduced in the military in Piedmont in the 1830s through the method of Rodolfo Obermann, who observed that gymnastics not only increased the muscular power of students (and soldiers) but also provided the moral and national attachment to the nation. Pre-military preparation (from 8 to 21 years of age) and post-military training aimed to embrace the life of Italians in accordance with a military discipline that would homogenize the country and strengthen the country’s political and economic influences beyond borders. While gymnastics was part of the

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85 Adrian Lyttelton, *La conquista del potere. Il fascismo dal 1919 al 1929* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1974), 140–50; Marco Mondini, “L’esercito e la conquista fascista del potere,” *Storica*, no. 31 (2005): 77–109 (p. 104); Luca Falsini, *Esercito e fascismo. Soldati e ufficiali nell’Italia di Mussolini (1919–1940)* (Rome: Aracne, 2013), 125–27. As Robert Paxton has noticed, “Mussolini prevented the [Fascist] Milizia from invading the professional sphere of the Italian army, except for service in the colonies.” In Paxton, 133.

86 See, for instance, Paola Bernasconi, “A fairy tale dictator: children’s letters to the Duce,” *Modern Italy* 18, no. 2 (2013): 129–40 (p. 133).

87 Gaetano Bonetta, *Corpo e nazione. L’educazione ginnastica, igienica e sessuale nell’Italia liberale* (Milan, FrancoAngeli, 1990), 22–23.
military training since the time of pre-Unification Italy, the Fascist regime emphasized the (powerful) body of soldiers by insisting on the importance of physical strength, hygiene, and discipline, which would contribute to the growth and improvement particularly of physical skills. As the focus shifted more toward securing military fitness and readiness among the population to go to war and perform their duty to the nation, the actual educational and cultural sides of the military experience, that is, the acquisition of skills to read and write Italian, remained in the background.

The Military and Progress

The military, as an institution that is seeking ways to get an advantage over its competitors, is fundamentally invested in pushing the limits of technology and human capability. In the Italian context, the military innovation of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries could be roughly divided between three larger rubrics: the military and the body (statistics, hygiene, sexuality), the military and the extension of the body (technological devices, photography), and the military’s advancement of infrastructure (railway system, natural disasters). All these rubrics could be the subject of separate articles, but what is worth emphasizing in the present context is the way in which the military is interwoven with numerous other fields (sociology, ethnography, medicine, technology, etc.), and how this constant interaction with newest advancements in various domains of knowledge has, in turn, pushed the respective fields further by the resources available in the military.

88 The interrelation between military discipline, emphasis on hygiene, school education, and colonialism paved the way for the racist discourse of the Fascist regime in the late 1930s. See Adolfo Mignemi, “Profilassi sanitaria e politiche sociali del regime per la ‘tutela della stirpe.’ La mise en scène dell’orgoglio di razza,” in La menzogna della razza. Documenti e immagini del razzismo e dell’antisemitismo fascista, ed. Centro Furio Jesi (Casalecchio di Reno: Grafis, 1994), 63–72 (p. 70).
89 See Giorgio Rochat, L’esercito italiano in pace e in guerra. Studi di storia militare (Milan: RARA, 1991); Nicola Labanca, ed., Le armi della repubblica: Dalla liberazione a oggi, vol. 5, Gli italiani in guerra. Conflitti, identità, memorie dal Risorgimento ai nostri giorni, ed. Mario Isnenghi (Turin: UTET, 2009).
90 On the military officer and ethnographer Angelo Pollera (1873–1939), see Barbara Sorgoni, Etnografia e colonialismo. L’Eritrea e l’Etiopia di Alberto Pollera (1873–1939) (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2001).
91 The military often sees itself explicitly as a driving force of innovation. See, for instance, the recent seven-volume publication on military and technology, sponsored by the Italian
Evolutionary and anthropological interpretations of the Italian society that had started to emerge in the nineteenth century are a case in point. With conscription extended countrywide in 1863, unprecedented data about the Italian population started to become available to scientists through medical examinations of the physical and mental condition of draftees. Indeed, in post-Unification Italy, the military became one of the primary sources of information about the newly established nation. Even though facts were open to be interpreted by scientists, the general impression of military statistics was that it provided a universally objective set of data about the entire Italian society, and “through these data the statisticians constructed indicators on the physical appearance and health of the population.” Since the process of Unification, Italian military forces were not only drawing heavily on the studies in social sciences, but they were, in fact, contributing to the development of some of the most controversial evolutionary and anthropological theories. Cesare Lombroso, the founder of the Italian school of positivist anthropology, served in the military medical staff of Piedmont already in the late 1850s and was afterwards enlisted as a military doctor in the unified armed forces during the crackdown on southern brigandage in 1862. His research draws mainly from the data that he had collected from conscripts and criminals, and his mingling of military data with positivist criminology was at the time regarded as progressive and steadfast on resolving Italy’s “backwardness.” Lombroso’s research had a long-standing and profoundly problematic impact on Italian (colonial) politics and culture, but it may not be widely known that the breath and respectability for Lombroso’s findings were largely provided by the amount of data collected from the military.

As the above indicates, the military experience was a massive collective experience for young Italian men, an overwhelming moment that brought...
together soldiers as much as it separated them from their families. While aiming to homogenize the country, the military also had a long reach within the more intimate layers of soldiers’ (and their families’) experiences through photography. Access to photography heralded the recording of memories that served to crystallize (and glorify) the nation’s present and future military missions. Sending photographs and letters during the military experience became the most common way for conscripts to communicate with their families and share their feelings about changes within and outside their surroundings. Due to the high level of illiteracy (at least in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), the practice of sending portraits provided soldiers with the chance to show their families a glimpse of their military experience. A picture would tell a story that they themselves were not yet prepared to tell. Such pictures recorded the encounter between the Italian military and its fragile civil society by revealing pieces of the “new world” that was dominated by progress and innovation, communication, and threat. The spreading of this media had a particularly striking effect in Italy, where the overwhelming majority of the population was uneducated and totally unfamiliar with the new technologies (e.g., photography) that were now associated with the military.

There is a memorable moment in Giovanni Verga’s *I Malavoglia*, where we follow the protagonist’s mother as she develops a particularly affectionate relationship with a portrait picture that her son ’Ntoni had sent her from military service. The picture is described in detail in the novel and the impact that it has on local community is nothing short of staggering: the image of the young soldier is the main topic of discussion among women of all ages and a source of admiration for men of older

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95 Of course, the correlation between the military and photography originates beyond the intimate space of soldiers and their families and among the first functions of photography, as military technology was to define the development of new ways of controlling and mapping the land within national borders and territorial conquests in the colonies. Serving as aids to mapmaking and military operations, landscape photographs, in fact, exemplifies “a convergence and overlapping [of] military and civilian technologies and languages,” where the development of technologies within the military marks the problematic history of violence in colonizing missions. See more in David Forgacs, *Italy’s Margins Social Exclusion and Nation Formation since 1861* (Cambridge, UK-New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 115. On the relationship between photography, the military repression in Southern Italy, and censorship, see Pasquale Verdicchio, *Looters, Photographers, and Thieves: Aspects of Italian Photographic Culture in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Madison, Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011), 82–83.
generations. Yet his mother will go on to engage with the picture in a more religious and private way: by placing it on the altar, she uses the photo as a piece of religious imagery. This photograph now becomes the centerpiece of her daily prayers and religious life. The technological advancements promoted and popularized by the military penetrate the fabric of civilian private lives and herald a new way to convey a sense of oneself and the new environment—by sending a photo.96

The introduction of national conscription brought together thousands of young men, with poor language skills and little in common with each other, outside wartime. It was clear that beyond basic education and training this was also an opportunity to use labor force that was ready at hand for creating and improving the infrastructure in the fragmented peninsula. Railways may have been the most significant building projects of Liberal Italy, and the influence of this project remained central also for later periods, as they drew heavily on the imagery created in those early days of post-Unification Italy.97 The opening of the first 500 kilometers in the 1840s included “the early lines around Naples (some 50 kilometers linking royal residences and military camps).”98 The railways always had a commercial and, even more fundamentally, a military significance. Military-strategic considerations seem to have been particularly important for the first wave of railway building after the Unification.

With the development of railways, a new world of fascinating ideas influenced the perception of the urban and rural space, which were brought together by notions of speed and progress that aimed to define the new national identity. The railway and its association with the image of train stations came to exemplify life-changing moments in the socio-cultural context of Liberal Italy.99 The specific connection of railroads with military service was related to the communal gatherings, celebrating the

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96 For a wide-ranging study on the impact of the military and representations of conscription in Giovanni Verga’s works of literature, see Mattia Roveri, “Drafting Soldiers: The Military in Giovanni Verga,” *The Italianist* 39, no. 1 (2019): 1–19.

97 Dan Bogart’s work offers a useful perspective on the close correlation between the nationalizations of transport systems and external military threats, a topic particularly relevant to the early development of the Italian nation-state. See Dan Bogard, “Nationalizations and the Development of Transport Systems: Cross-Country Evidence from Railroad Networks, 1860–1912,” *The Journal of Economic History* 69, no. 1 (March 2009): 202–37.

98 Stefano Fenoaltea, “Italy,” in *Railways and the Economic Development of Western Europe*, ed. Patrick O’Brien (London: Macmillan, 1983), 49–120 (p. 51).

99 Stefano Maggi, *Le ferrovie* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2003), 82.
departure of soldiers, which renewed a sense of belonging and membership within small communities. The image of Adriano Celentano in his military uniform, arriving with his luggage at Sanremo train station in 1961, evoked a poignant cultural trope that had not only been productively used in songs, artworks, and literature, but that had been part and parcel of millions of Italian men who had conscripted in Italy for over 100 years. That is why it resonated so strongly with the Italian viewers, and that is at least partly why Celentano’s military service was such a nostalgic moment that brought those important moments back to life for his audience and contributed to creating a national spectacle around it.

The image of the locomotive was linked to notions of time and progress that were changing the Italian landscape not only politically and economically but also culturally.\textsuperscript{100} Through the construction of railways, modernization was brought to areas (primarily in the rural regions), which were affected by endemic diseases and socioeconomic underdevelopment. The railway system also enabled the government to reach an ever-increasing amount of people and collect data on the Italian population to an unprecedented extent. Yet, the organization of the Italian railroad system faced serious structural problems due to the role of private enterprises that were unwilling to invest in long-term plans. In fact, Italian railways became part of the national assets only in 1905. Hence, the overall project suffered from a lack of unified vision among the political and financial elites.\textsuperscript{101}

Here once more emerges the sense of overall disorganization and

\textsuperscript{100} For an economic assessment of the relation between railways and industrial development in post-Unification Italy, see Stefano Fenoaltea, \textit{The Reinterpretation of Italian Economic History} (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 167–90; on the cultural correlation between the image of the train and literature, see Remo Ceserani, who points out how “l’introduzione delle ferrovie nella vita economica e sociale dei paesi europei ebbe anche[…]una notevole valenza politica (e militare).” See Remo Ceserani, \textit{Treni di carta. L’immaginario in ferrovia: l’irruzione del treno nella letteratura moderna} (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002), 19.

\textsuperscript{101} Until the railway system was nationalized in 1905, foreign railway companies had built stations in accordance with foreign tastes, a phenomenon that continued to dominate Italian railroad architecture well into the twentieth century. See Albert Schram, \textit{Railways and the formation of the Italian state in the nineteenth century} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3. Mussolini demonstrated the importance of creating a specific Italian-style railway architecture with the construction of the new \textit{Stazione Centrale di Milano} in 1931. Indeed, one of the tenets of the Fascist propaganda was the construction of rails, train stations, and bridges, which were popularized through images and TV documentaries that were linked to the militarization of the nation. While the monetary investment under the Fascist regime in the railroad system was rather moderate, Mussolini exploited the development of
cluelessness about how to best incorporate the military in Italian politics and culture. Nevertheless, the construction of railroads as a way to connect the extremes of Italy through a unified infrastructural system remained for a long time associated with the military forces. Indeed, the most important meridionalisti welcomed the construction of the national railroad system and the extension of conscription nationwide as two of the most significant events to enable the modernization of the South.\textsuperscript{102} Italy’s colonial military missions exported the Italian railway system also to Africa,\textsuperscript{103} and it is partly due to the popular attention and propaganda afforded to those enterprises domestically and internationally that the myth of \textit{italiani brava gente} proved particularly enduring. Mussolini’s one-time vision of a militarized nation that would support imperial projects assigned a crucial importance to the armed forces to developing infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, as well as providing aid to the population in the aftermath of natural calamities.\textsuperscript{104} This is, indeed, perhaps the most prevalent way in which contemporary political powers feel comfortable employing the military: in natural calamities, humanitarian, and peace missions across the world. The construction, rather than destruction, aspect has proven particularly strong in the Italian national imaginary of military service.

In sum, the Italian military could be characterized in many ways as having been affected by similar trends among many nation-states from the nineteenth century until today. There are, however, a few particular strands that are important to take into account within the specific Italian military context. Throughout its history, the Italian military has struggled with political disorganization and a lack of vision. This has led to the perpetuation of class struggle and geographical separation despite various attempts to address these problems on a national level. While conscription

railroads that had started in the early 1900s by insisting on the “treni popolari,” which made trains accessible also to the lower classes. See Maggi, \textit{Le ferrovie}, 187.

\textsuperscript{102} See also Massimo L. Salvadori, \textit{Il mito del buongoverno. La questione meridionale da Cavour a Gramsci}, 2nd ed. (Turin: Einaudi, 1963), 181.

\textsuperscript{103} First to Eritrea, in 1888, where Italians constructed a railroad connecting Massawa to Saati. The extension of this particular line to Asmara in 1911 marked one of the most significant moments in the history of engineering in Africa, which exemplified the modernization of the colonized territory. See Stefano Maggi, \textit{Colonialismo e comunicazioni: le strade ferrate nell’Africa italiana, 1887–1943} (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1996), 117–18.

\textsuperscript{104} Salvatore Botta, \textit{Politica e calamità. Il governo dell’emergenza naturale e sanitaria nell’Italia liberale} (1861–1915) (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2013), 607.
managed to fulfill to some extent its goal of bringing together Italian people, it also exacerbated existing stereotypes about the South and frequently failed to make use of the opportunity to become a progressive force that had been imagined for the military. Finally, the Italian military brought many innovations to the lives of simple Italians, starting from regular hygiene practices to the popularization of photography and self-images and to the sense of tourism and travel (via trains). From a historical perspective, the wide reach of the military institution has been sketched out in rough strokes here, though many of those aspects are examined with closer care in individual contributions.

Given the breath of the impact of the military in Italian culture, history, and politics, it is also worth examining briefly how the military is generally studied and what are the implications of such study for the broader conception of the military in our societies.

“THE MILITARY AND US”: STUDYING THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF THE MILITARY

Many contributors of this volume have been left feeling dissatisfied with the way in which the military, and in particular the cultural dimension and reception of the military, has been under-researched and appreciated in academic scholarship. The most common paths available to anyone interested in pursuing this topic are to find affiliation with military history or war studies. Yet neither of those fields is in any way committed to a closer engagement with the cultural dimension of the military. The following offers a brief overview of the way in which military history and war studies differ from the kind of research undertaken in this volume. In particular, this section aims to clear space for a new field, the cultural dimension of the military, which focuses primarily on exploring the broader cultural and socio-political impact of the military institution on (Italian) society through the way the military is reflected upon and received in a variety of material: from individual documents, blog posts, and sentiments to works of literature, art, and music, to artistic groups or community work that aims to bridge the gap between the military and culture.
Military History

Military history is a complex and politically loaded field of historical studies. In a wider sense, it may encompass any historical, political, economic, and cultural aspects of military forces and warfare. However, it is mostly defined by a focus on recording and discussing details relating to the military structure, its objects, strategies, and eventual warfare from the perspective of military command. In this narrower conception, military historians are not particularly interested in cultural objects or broader conceptualizations of the military in society. Given its specific focus on the isolated institution of the military, military history is often viewed as relevant strictly within the military structures themselves, or attracting big audiences, but having little or nothing to offer for academic scholarship and for any serious study of civil society. The first page of Stephen Morillo’s and Michael F. Pavkovic’s bestseller *What is Military History?* expresses precisely this point when they say that “military history is not the most respected branch of historical inquiry in academic circles. In part this is because of (and despite) its popularity with the general public and its importance in educating professional military personnel.” Within the field of Italian military history, the situation looks much the same. It was only little more than 20 years ago when Antonello Biagini could argue that Italian military history has been able to claim a proper academic and scientific space, thus escaping “il pregiudizio sulla storia ‘minore’.” Before that, military historians and writers were regarded as “militaristi”—supporters of military forces and of their belligerent cultures. The reason for this assessment lies in the fact that ever since Unification, those writing military history were primarily military personnel, officers, and officials.

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105 See Giorgio Rochat, “Otto punti sulla storia militare,” *Rivista di storia contemporanea* 21, no. 2–3 (1992): 481–85; Nicola Labanca, “Sviluppo e cambiamento nella storia militare dalla seconda guerra mondiale ad oggi,” *Revue internationale d’histoire militaire*, no. 91 (2013): 11–81.

106 Stephen Morillo and Michael F. Pavkovic, *What is Military History?*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2013), 1.

107 Antonello Biagini, “Storiografia e archivi,” in *Le fonti per la storia militare italiana in età contemporanea*, ed. Alberto Arpino, Antonello Biagini and Francesca Grispo (Rome: Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, 1993), 15–28 (p. 16).

108 Piero Pieri, who is considered as the founder of Italian military history, was himself a decorated alpini during the First World War. See further Giorgio Rochat, “Piero Pieri e la Storia militare all’Università dagli anni Trenta agli anni Sessanta del Novecento,” in *Le uni-
The Italian military elite, who wrote about their own experiences (and ideological agendas), dominated the field throughout the time of Italian colonialism, the First and Second World Wars, and, indeed, for decades after that. Until the 1970s, and in relation to colonialism in particular, direct access to military archives was inaccessible to anyone outside military circles.  

Some of the most significant works on modern Italian military history have emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War, when scholars started to focus more intensively on Italian military history and anti-colonial studies. Ever since then, the study of colonialism has transformed the scholarship on Italian military history: Angelo Del Boca, Giorgio Rochat, Mario Isnenghi, and Nicola Labanca have all introduced anti-colonial perspectives to the field, in addition to further developing the critical conversation on military history in Italian studies. While military historians had long considered colonialism to be a predominantly military and political enterprise, the recent development of Italian post-colonial studies has successfully demonstrated the wide-ranging socio-cultural effects and implications of colonialism. Yet, the cultural dimension of the military as reflected in literature, art, popular media, and other cultural

versità e le guerre dal medioevo alla seconda guerra mondiale, ed. Piero Del Negro (Bologna: CLUEB, 2011), 247–51; for a recent discussion on the importance of Pieri’s work in the context of Italian military history, see Fabio De Ninno, Piero Pieri. Il pensiero e lo storico militare (Florence: Le Monnier, 2019).

109 See, for instance, Giorgio Rochat, “The Italian Air Force in the Ethiopian War (1935–1936),” in Italian Colonialism, ed. Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 37–46 (p. 37).

110 For example, Piero Pieri, La prima guerra mondiale (1914–18). Problemi di storia militare (Turin: Gheroni, 1947); Roberto Battaglia, La prima guerra d’Africa (Turin: Einaudi, 1958); Piero Melograni, Storia politica della grande guerra 1915–1918 (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1969).

111 Cf. Giorgio Rochat, Il colonialismo italiano (Turin: Loescher, 1973); Angelo Del Boca, Gli italiani in Africa Orientale, 4 vols. (Milan: Mondadori, 1992); Nicola Labanca, Oltremare. Storia dell’espansione coloniale italiana (Bologna: il Mulino, 2002).

112 Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, eds., Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005); Ben-Ghiat and Fuller, eds., Italian Colonialism; Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, eds., Postcolonial Italy; Franca Sinopoli, ed., Postcoloniale italiano. Tra letteratura e storia (Aprilia: Novalogos, 2013). For a fresh study on the portrayal of the military experience during the Fascist colonial mission in Ennio Flaiano’s Tempo di uccidere, see Mattia Roveri, “The Forgotten Askari,” Italian Studies 75, no. 4 (November 2020).
vehicles has not yet gained much attention, despite the wealth of astute observations and engagements with the military they display.\textsuperscript{113} The aim of this volume is to complement and expand the “new military history” that has been prominent in Italian historical accounts in the past decades and examine the impact of the military experience in cultural productions from post-Unification to contemporary Italy.\textsuperscript{114} While relying on military historical studies, the approaches adopted in the various contributions also draw heavily on cultural and literary criticism, post-colonial studies and feminist criticism. As a result, this volume paves the way for (and hopes to legitimize) a new field of study: the cultural dimension of the military.

\textit{Military and War Studies}

Readers might object and suggest that war has been studied extensively and thoroughly in the context of cultural studies, in particular, with respect to artwork and literature that reflect on the profound impact military conflicts have imprinted on individuals and nations. This is, of course, true, as much as it is also true that the military institution is frequently studied in conjunction with or, rather, as preparation for war. The two concepts—war and the military—are interchangeably linked and frequently evoked in the same contexts. In these discussions, the military is treated as an isolated, self-standing, and self-contained institution that ought to be studied in the context of military history or war.\textsuperscript{115} Yet, while some form of the military is usually essential for conflict or war, the military institution, its origins and use, extends beyond wartime and, in fact, examination of the

\textsuperscript{113} “The universal rationalist model has often led to military history that ignores social and cultural factors, separating the military art and military organization from its historical context in order to make clearer the supposed universal principles and lessons.” In Morillo and Pavkovic, 51.

\textsuperscript{114} For a discussion on “new military history” within the context of Italian military history, see Nicola Labanca, “Introduzione,” in \textit{L’istituzione militare in Italia. Politica e società}, ed. N. Labanca (Milan: Unicopli, 2002), 9–42.

\textsuperscript{115} Such strict distinctions that had guided scholarship on war and the military for a long time have been increasingly challenged by scholars of the “war and society” approach. The latter have drawn attention to the impact of the cultural habituation of the soldiers and its impact on military behavior. For more general overview of the interaction between “traditional military history” and scholars representing “war and society approach,” see Michael S. Neiberg, “War and Society,” in \textit{Palgrave Advances in Modern Military History}, ed. Matthew Hughes and William J. Philpott (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 42–61.
military structure outside of war environment might lend interesting insights into the ideology and self-image of the country, its priorities, and socio-political stability. While war introduces an all-encompassing sense of human suffering and existentialism, the military institution taken on its own (i.e., without a particular focus on the military in wartime) is itself a legitimate topic for cultural and cross-disciplinary analyses.

Drawing a boundary between war and military studies is not very easy at all, especially in the context of present inquiry, which focuses on the cultural dimension that has been extensively explored in the context of war studies. It is arguable (and as such left open for contributors of this volume to decide for themselves), for example, whether violence or comradery encountered during military training is comparable to violence or comradery experienced in war. In fact, the preparation for, and a weird anticipation of, war, for something that is not there and that will ideally never be there, seems to make military training during peacetime, psychologically at least, a particularly challenging enterprise with potentially far-reaching impact. And, indeed, many will have gone through military experience without participating in actual conflict or war, confirming time and time again that even without war, the military remains one of the most influential life-changing (for better and for worse) experiences for those who have gone through it. The military, perhaps uniquely among national institutions, seems to enjoy a very ambivalent reputation: while it is often considered as an essential tool for crafting a more homogenous nation-state by instilling values and skills that will enable its recruits to advance in their careers after time spent in the military, it is also often perceived as oppressive, conservative, and violent, triggering the worst in human beings. The ambivalence about the military institution is an important feature that it does not share with war studies: war is always condemned as a negative event (even if necessary or unavoidable), and war studies are often committed to demonstrating just how profound the impact of war has been on different communities and on human lives more generally. In other words, the military shares many points of interest with war studies, but is distinct in its scope and impact, and should therefore be acknowledged as a separate topic, worthy of attention by scholars and laymen alike.

While still primarily engaging with war in its broadest sense, some of the more recent and exciting work focusing on the military institution has been guided by the “war and society” approach that has also been an important methodological point of reference for the present study. At its best, “war and society” scholarship has drawn attention to the broader
cultural, social, and political underpinnings and impact of war and, by turning away from more traditional military history with its focus on strategy and combat, has sought to bring fresh insight into the study of the military institution. However, the focus of such studies generally remains on war experiences; the cultural aspects that are raised in these works are mostly related to ideas of military culture (see more later) as they pan out in the context of war or to particular socio-cultural conditions at the time of war. While all of these are valuable aspects to explore, the focus of the present volume is to offer perspectives on the transformative role of the military within civil society and to demonstrate the deep imprint that it has left on Italians as reflected in their cultural productions (films, journals, music, art, literature, etc.). As such, the emphasis of this study on examining cultural works as reflections of the military experience makes this project distinct from, though surely complementary to, both traditional military history and the newer research conducted under the auspices of “new military history” and the “war and society” approach.

Military Culture

Other readers might wonder, what is the difference between military culture and the cultural impact of the military? Is this not the same thing?

116 It is worth noting, however, that these new trends in the study of the military have not always been welcomed with enthusiasm across the board. As Neiberg’s “War and Society” points out, there is an ever-increasing gap between traditional military historians and scholars pursuing the “War and Society” approach. This is somewhat contested in the helpful overview of the field by Robert M. Citino “Military Histories Old and New: A Reintroduction,” in *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (2007): 1070–90 (esp. pp. 1089–90). On the potential defects of the “war and society” approach and the importance of traditional military history, see, for example, Michael Howard’s essay with a personal tinge “Military History and the History of War” in *Past as Prologue: the Importance of History to the Military Profession*, ed. Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 12–20. It does seem to be acknowledged across the board, however, the new energy that studies on memory have brought to the field. See Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Carol Reardon Pickett, *Charge in History and Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 1997); Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Vintage, 1998); Emily S. Rosenberg *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American Memory* (Durham-London: Duke University Press, 2003).

117 Studies on race and gender have been particularly illuminating. See, for example, Elizabeth D. Leonard, *Yankee Women: Gender Battles in the Civil War* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1994).
First off, it needs to be acknowledged that military culture is itself a contested and complex notion.\(^\text{118}\) It may refer, in a practical way and from the perspective of soldiers, to discipline, professional ethos, ceremony and etiquette, and cohesion and esprit de corps.\(^\text{119}\) But those framing military institutions as organizational cultures have also understood military culture as “the set of basic assumptions, values, norms, beliefs, and formal knowledge that shape collective understandings.”\(^\text{120}\) Since both definitions capture an important aspect of military culture, Finlan has convincingly argued for an interpretation that would combine the two focuses and proposes to look at military culture as “an all-embracing social environment, infused with an explicit martial orientation, in which material and non-material accoutrements, actions, discourses, practices, symbols and technologies revolve around the sustenance of specific identities, histories and traditions.”\(^\text{121}\)

\(^{118}\) For a good overview with references, see Alastair Finlan, *Contemporary Military Culture and Strategic Studies: US and UK Armed Forces in the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 2013), in particular, chapter 1, “Engaging Contemporary Military Culture,” 1–15. Other important contributions include Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Joseph Soeters, “Organizational Cultures in the Military,” in *Handbook of the Sociology of the Military*, ed. Giuseppe Caforio and Marina Nuciarì, 2nd ed. (New York: Kluwer Academic, 2016), 251–72; Joseph Soeters, *Sociology and Military Studies: Classical and Current Foundations* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 25–28; see also Peter H. Wilson, “Defining Military Culture,” *The Journal of Military History* 72, no. 1 (January 2008): 11–41 (p. 12); Allan D. English, *Understanding Military Culture: A Canadian Perspective* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 6–7; Peter R. Mansoor and Williamson Murray, eds., *The Culture of Military Organizations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Mackubin Thomas Owens, *US Civil-Military Relations after 9/11: Renegotiating the Civil-Military Bargain* (New York-London: Continuum, 2011), 142–46; Edwin Dorn, Howard D. Graves and Walter F. Ulmer, *American Military Culture in the Twenty-First Century: A report of the CSIS International Security Program* (Washington: The CSIS Press, 2000).

\(^{119}\) See also J. Burk, “Military Culture,” in *Encyclopaedia of Violence, Peace and Conflict*, vol. 2, ed. Lester R. Kurtz, 2nd ed. (San Diego: Academic Press, 2008), 1242–256. See also Charles C. Moskos, “Toward a Postmodern Military: The United States as a Paradigm,” in *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces After the Cold War*, ed. Charles C. Moskos, John Allen Williams and David R. Segal (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 14–31; Don M. Snider, “A Uninformed Debate on Military Culture,” *Orbis* 43, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 11–26.

\(^{120}\) Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 28.

\(^{121}\) Finlan, *Contemporary Military Culture*, 3.
Scholars working on military culture emphasize that in order to understand military culture of a specific army, it is important to analyze its most prominent wars, especially through the lens of official documents by military officers, and ultimately to shed light on the “evolution of the art of war.” Indeed, appreciating the inner strategies of military units enables us to better understand the past (as in military history), to predict the success, or general behavioral patterns, of armies in conflict (as in political science studies), to problematize the changes and challenges in military structures and to study the military from within (as in sociology and gender studies). In this way, rather than being simply a subsidiary aspect of the study of the military, paying attention to the culture of a given military unit will enable the researcher to penetrate the fundamentals of that particular military institution and organization. This approach has yielded fundamental insight into the way in which military structures work, both historically and for present-day military formations.

However, without counting passing references to military culture, there are surprisingly few analyses with a specific focus on military culture. 

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122 General Luigi Cadorna (1850–1928), for instance, became a symbol for the Italian military fiasco with the Caporetto disaster in 1917. See Marco Mondini, Il Capo. La Grande Guerra del generale Luigi Cadorna (Milan: il Mulino, 2017); Nicola Labanca, Caporetto. Storia e memoria di una disfatta (Bologna: il Mulino, 2017); Luca Falsini, Processo a Caporetto. I documenti inediti della disfatta (Rome: Donzelli, 2017).

123 Piero Pieri, Guerra e politica negli scrittori militari italiani (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1955), iii, my translation.

124 On women and gender in the military through sociological and political science perspectives, see Helena Carreiras, Gender and the Military Women in the Armed Forces of Western Democracies (London-New York: Routledge, 2006); for a specific focus on the representations of gender and the military, see part 5 of The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military, ed. Rachel Woodward and Claire Duncanson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 475–559. On the latest research methodologies in sociological, political science, and anthropological approaches in the study of the military, see Helena Carreiras and Celso Castro, eds., Qualitative Methods in Military Studies Research experiences and challenges (London-New York: Routledge, 2013); also Helena Carreiras, Celso Castro, and Sabina Frederic, eds., Researching the Military (London-New York: 2016); on women’s challenges within the military with a specific focus on the US Military, see Stephanie Szitanyi, Gender Trouble in the U.S. Military Challenges to Regimes of Male Privilege (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

125 Finlan points out that the study of military culture has “great resonance with scholarship that has addressed the idea of a ‘way in warfare’: the notion that specific nation-states and their institutions possess certain approaches to warfare that can be identified over long historical periods.” In Finlan, Contemporary Military Culture, 7. See here, for example, the groundbreaking work by Hull, Absolute Destruction.
in the Italian context. One important element that keeps coming up in the few studies on the topic is the political association of, and civilian resentment for, the military as a right-wing powerhouse. This imagery is a direct result of the Second World War and sets the Italian military apart from its other European counterparts. As a consequence of this particular post-war political situation, the Italian military was rebranded in the 1990s systematically as a “humanitarian force” and has since gained more visibility in society.

With this background in mind, it is worth spelling out the crucial difference between those studies in military culture and the goal of the present volume, to shed light on the cultural dimension and reception of the military. In all those studies that look at military culture more specifically, the focus is on understanding the way in which the military structure works internally by paying attention to the particular cultural implications (sometimes specific to national or geographical environments) and contexts that the military organization is enforcing or depending on. And, indeed, attention to this cultural dimension has offered groundbreaking insight into the successes and failures of particular military systems. However, the approach adopted in this edited volume aims rather to look at the way in which the military impacts society as perceived externally to

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126 While offering excellent overviews and analyses on the social role of the military (in education, journalism, and cultural heritage), the most important military historians and war experts avoid any specific focus on military culture. See, for example, Nicola Labanca and Luigi Tomassini, *Forze armate e beni culturali. Distruggere, costruire, valorizzare* (Milan: Unicopli, 2007); Nicola Labanca, *Fogli in uniforme. La stampa per i militari nell’Italia liberale* (Milan: Unicopli, 2016). An important recent exception is Chiara Ruffa, *Military Cultures in Peace and Stability Operations: Afghanistan and Lebanon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), who dedicates a chapter to investigating contemporary Italian and French military culture. However, while Ruffa’s chapter provides a helpful point of reference for recent work on Italian military culture, she does not offer a theoretical/methodological investigation of the concept “military culture” and that remains missing from the Italian scholarship on the topic. Giorgio Rochat claims that Piero Pieri’s seminal work *Guerra e politica negli scrittori militari italiani* (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1955) sheds light on “four centuries of history of military culture, a topic that remains unattractive for scholars [outside of military history].” However, Pieri’s book does not offer a focused treatment of military culture in Italy’s history. See, Giorgio Rochat, “Piero Pieri e la Storia militare all’Università dagli anni Trenta agli anni Sessanta del Novecento,” in *Le Università e le guerre dal Medioevo alla Seconda guerra mondiale*, ed. Piero Del Negro (Bologna: Clueb, 2011), 247–51 (p. 248).

127 See Gianmarco Badialetti, “Afterword: A View from the Ground,” in *Italian Military Operations Abroad*, 187–93.
the military. In other words, the focus of such an approach is primarily on the way in which military experience is manifested outside the (closed quarters of) military structures during war but also peacetime. Whether such cultural reflections are expressed by the military personnel or civilians does not matter as much as that they are consciously aiming to reach a broader and extra-military audience. The kind of cultural production that we have in our mind is one that offers reflections of military experience and, therefore, tries to translate the internal experiences of the military to outside viewers (even when those on the outside have once been also in the inside).

**What Is the Cultural Dimension of the Military?**

It was important to set out at some length and with reference to other disciplines the way in which present contributions aim to occupy a different space from those studies described before. There will be naturally some overlap between the present approaches and those adopted in military history or war studies. However, the focus on the cultural dimension and receptions of the military in civil society will set this field of study apart from traditional military studies in history, sociology, political science, and war studies. We have not offered a robust or prescriptive definition of the kinds of cultural works that we shall be considering in this volume and/or that would qualify as suitable objects for the study of the cultural dimension of the military. Given the lack of attention paid to this field previously, it seemed best to allow authors to follow their own interpretation of the subject matter and to later adjust it, in more general way, to the overarching topic and research area of the volume. Boundaries between various modes of cultural works are by default fine and arbitrary, but in most cases our contributors have looked at works of art (broadly construed) and cultural production (e.g., journalism), and the way in which these reflect and cast a particular aura on the military institution and experience. Consequently, contributions look at a range of media, from literature, art, to film, history, journalism, and education. Looking at the way these works engage with the topic of the military sheds light not only on the authors and works themselves by pointing to neglected though important elements in their composition but also shows the role and power of these artworks to highlight a sentiment and experience in their own right, to say something meaningful about their perception at the time.
of composition, to cast another perspective on the military experience that is often more nuanced and complex than suggested by militant and/or politically driven publications.\textsuperscript{128}

The idea of bringing together cultural artworks and military studies is somewhat akin to recent trends in other fields. Christopher N. Warren, for example, has recently argued in the context of international law and its demarcations from intellectual history where literature and literary criticism have been recognized as valid sources for furthering our understanding of historical knowledge, that international law has much to gain in rethinking the field as more akin to literary scholarship than to history.\textsuperscript{129}

There is much to learn still from post-colonial studies and their constructive use of literary and cultural criticisms, but there are also newer trends in literary criticism and cultural production that are driven by reader-response approaches and draw attention to the political, socio-cultural, and emotional states of the consumer (reader, viewer, participant).\textsuperscript{130} In other words, focus in many corners of academic world (especially in humanities) has moved toward appreciating the particular experience and the emotional, intellectual, and political reflection that an experience engenders in the subject. Reception studies have contributed to this trend, and this is a major and constantly growing field of study that has brought new insights particularly to the study of the ancient world (Classical

\textsuperscript{128} I follow here the insights of various thinkers who have argued that there is more to artwork than simply surface reflection of historical realities. Hans Georg Gadamer has been influential in thinking about the role of literature in society, see Hans Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, ed. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 154. Peter Widdowson has argued extensively that literature “as a mode of historical understanding [and] as a way of ‘knowing’ how our culture is constituted” can provide an access to historical knowledge and thus be read as complimentary to history. See Peter Widdowson, “Newstories: fiction, history, and the modern world,” Critical survey 7, no. 1 (1995): 3–17 (p. 7). See also Hayden White, “Historical discourse and literary writing,” in Tropes for the past: Hayden White and the History/Literature debate, ed. Kuisma Korhonen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 25–33 (p. 25). For an interesting overview of the scholarly/institutional debates about the topic and a special focus on the contributions made by the journal Literature and History, see Terry Eagleton, “Literature and History,” Critical Quarterly 27, no. 4 (December 1985): 23–26.

\textsuperscript{129} Christopher N. Warren, “History, Literature, and Authority in International Law,” in Oxford Handbook of Law and Humanities, ed. Maksymilian Del Mar, Bernadette Meyler, and Simon Stern (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 565–82.

\textsuperscript{130} See, for example, the fascinating work by Rita Felski, The Limits of Critique (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2015) and its widespread resonances across different humanities fields.
receptions), but that at its core emphasizes the validity of any reception as a subject matter and, as such, seemed to offer a suitable framework for the present volume. Our contributions do not aim to contribute theoretically to furthering those models, but the general focus on the individual or collective experiences, the kind of emotional and intellectual impact the military experience might have on its members, seems to align at least partly with the shifting focus in literary and cultural studies toward conceptualizing and emphasizing the response of the subject.

**Overview of the Volume**

The present edited volume is divided between five larger themes—journalism, literature, memory, ideology, and visuals—that give a glimpse of the kinds of cultural works and theoretical approaches that can be used to examine the cultural impact of the military.

The first section is focused on the fourth estate—journalism and its role in cultivating particular attitudes toward the military, working backwards from the First World War to Italy’s Unification. Marco Mondini’s contribution explores the various media strategies at the time during the First World War when reporting news and war reports was particularly complicated and subject to severe censorship. Indeed, in May 1915, when the Kingdom of Italy entered the Great War, the nation’s cultural mobilization was part of this transnational process of forging an acceptable and comforting “War tale,” where the constant manipulation of national information was essential to building a cohesive narration of the nation at war. Mondini points out, however, that the Italian case remains still marginal in scholarly discussions of the military history between 1914 and 1918, and the development of war culture in the Peninsula is an unknown and neglected subject. To fill this gap, his contribution aims to provide an overview of media strategies (newspapers and periodical press) in the process of forging Italy’s own narration of Total War.

Francesca Gatta’s chapter examines the proximity between sports and the military experience in Italy during the First World War through newspaper articles. The war as portrayed in the newspapers differed greatly from the anonymous experience of mass war that is described in diaries and history handbooks. This can be explained by two factors: on the one hand, wartime censorship did not allow journalist to truly portray the war with facts (as Isnenghi says, without facts, reporters are left with nothing but the rhetoric of heroism): on the other hand, a newly arisen sports
journalism considered sports a preparation for war. This conviction is well represented in the magazine *Lo sport illustrato*, originally a weekly illustrated supplement of *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, which expressed its attitude toward the Italian intervention by changing its name to *Lo sport illustrato e la guerra* at the beginning of the war (and again in 1917 to *Il secolo illustrato*). As Gatta notices, the magazine made ample room for events from the front but interpreted them like sports events with a singular commixture of the languages of sport and the military, which was facilitated by the proximity of sports fields and battlefields.

Morena Corradi’s chapter focuses on the radical press and its engagement with the army and military policies. While tracing the debate over the army and military policies in post-Unification Italy reported and fostered by the Milanese radical press (*Gazzettino Rosa* and *La Plebe*, in particular), Corradi brings into focus the clash between the radical political faction and the institutions over the last phase of the Risorgimento. By denouncing the failure of both political and army leaders, to which the tragic defeats of Custoza and Mentana as well as the young country’s vulnerability are ascribed, radical commentators question the nation-making process, seen as deeply compromised by past and present military policies, with conscription being the epitome of the institutions’ inadequacy and the ultimate betrayal of the Italian people.

The second subject theme examines *literature* and the three contributions focus primarily on the post-Unification and the First World War literary productions. Susan Amatangelo’s chapter looks at one of the most celebrated authors of Italian literature, Giovanni Verga, whose works reveal the influence of Italian Unification and patriotic literature on the author. Early in his career, he portrays war in historical novels that are epic in scope, but quickly turns his attention to stories that are more current; increasingly, his portrayal of history and war become more impressionistic and “human.” Amatangelo focuses on the short story, “L’amante di Gramigna,” where she argues that Verga represents the chaos that reigned in Sicily in the early 1860s, when the newly formed armed forces attempted to suppress the brigands, many of whom had military backgrounds themselves. Peppa, the story’s protagonist, leaves home and her wealthy fiancé to join Gramigna in the bush, becomes his accomplice, and is eventually captured. Amatangelo notices the profound impact of the military on the protagonist as she ultimately transfers her devotion from Gramigna to the *carabinieri* who captured him, able to fulfill her need for excitement but from a “safe” place.
Marco Rovinello’s chapter brings us to the educational dimension of military service and offers an overview of the ways in which spelling books and handbooks (*libri del soldato*), produced between 1861 and 1914, aimed to legitimize military service and persuade conscripts to fulfill their “duties.” He pays particular attention to the extent to which pro-conscription stylistic and argumentative strategies changed according to national/international political framework and sociological profile of the conscripts. Furthermore, by comparing textbooks that were aimed at soldiers to the pro-military materials and the prevalent antimilitaristic propaganda that targeted civilians, Rovinello argues that pro-conscription discourse was adapted to different audiences and used to counter antimilitarists’ criticism on the military draft.

Giuseppe Gazzola’s focus on the Montale siblings offers a unique examination of the military experience of the famous poet Eugenio Montale and his three brothers. As Gazzola notes, all four took part in the military operations against the Austrian army on the eastern Alpine sector in the period 1915–1919. Their sister Marianna, in her correspondence with pen friends from different cities, left a remarkable account of this family saga, which becomes even more interesting when we consider that the writer in the family, Eugenio, used to be extremely reticent about his participation in the First World War. In this chapter, Gazzola draws attention to the role of Marianna as recording the story of her family as well as attempts to reconstruct the war experience of Eugenio Montale and his brothers according to the available documents. Eugenio’s complex and, at times, contradictory relationship with his service in the Italian Royal Army seems to capture the broad outlines of many of his contemporaries.

The third thematic unit is focused around the topic of memory. David Forgacs deals with the dark side of Italian military history: the mass killing of civilians. He examines two massacres in places Italy claimed as its colonial possessions (Tripoli, 1911, and Addis Ababa, 1937) and considers the possible motives of its perpetrators. He then proceeds to ask whether such massacres were believed to be excusable, even though known to be unlawful, within the military culture of the colonial powers. Finally, Forgacs offers insights about why those responsible for the massacres were never brought to trial and why neither massacre, although well known to some historians, has entered the collective memory of Italians. This chapter highlights the widely criticized aspects of the military—the lack of
transparency, violence, and corruption—and ponders on the toll that such moments take on advancing cohesion and tolerance within Italian society.

Fiona M. Stewart examines critically the claim made by several military historians that conscription “made” Italians, in terms of both fostering a sense of national identity and also in educating or developing the conscripts. Through consideration of the experience and testimonies of men and women interviewed by Nuto Revelli between 1970 and the early 1980s, Stewart nuances the prevailing portrayal to demonstrate that conscription did not always have a positive effect on Italians’ standard of living, nor on their patriotic sentiment. Indeed, in the case of the contadini conscripted from Piedmont’s rural communities, conscription resulted as often as not in increased economic hardship, particularly for the family of the conscript, and increased attachment to the local community rather than to any sense of national identity.

The memories of special places are the focus of David Aliano’s chapter on travel to the First World War battlefield sites to understand how the Italian state and its tourist sector projected Italy’s military culture both to the Italian public and to foreign visitors. Aliano makes use of a select number of representative battlefield guidebooks and state-sponsored tours over time, and his chapter analyzes the layered public memories drawn from the empty battlefield spaces and contextualized for the different types of visitors to the sites. Focus, in particular, is on how the Italian military’s wartime experience was used to instill patriotism at home and enhance Italy’s image abroad through battlefield images and memories that paid tribute to, but were also quite apart from, those of the ex-combatants themselves.

The fourth section is dedicated to ideology and explores the way in which the military has been used in ideological ways to pave the way for imaging new political realities in Italy. All three chapters work on artists and ideological environments that made use of the concept of the military from different angles (literature, art, organizational psychology) and thus help shed light on how Italy came to embrace Fascism. Futurist leader Filippo Tommaso Marinetti is the focus of Ernest Ialongo’s study of the impact of the military in art. Ialongo argues that another way of looking at Marinetti’s works is to focus on his vision of Italy as depicted in the person of the soldier and Italian society at war. He draws our attention to the fact that a recurring theme in Marinetti’s work is the soldier as the uncomplicated and dutiful citizen who answers the call of the state to defend the nation and puts aside whatever differences separated him from
his fellow Italians in civilian life, most specifically class and region. When Marinetti writes about society, more generally, he similarly focuses on the issue of duty and sacrifice. Consequently, such themes bind Marinetti’s work from the Liberal to the Fascist era.

Simona Storchi’s chapter explores the military experience in the First World War as narrated in Ardengo Soffici’s diaries Kobilek, La ritirata del Friuli, and Errore di coincidenza. These diaries develop a narrative marked by a sense of interclass comradeship engendered by the war effort and new forms of kinships and allegiances created by communal military life in the trenches. As Storchi insightfully notices, this physical experience of the conflict, which draws together officers and soldiers and sets them in opposition to the high command of the army and the Italian political leadership, is posited as the foundation of a new Italian body politic shaped by a war in which traditional forms of military discipline have been replaced with alternative forms of internalized discipline centered on the cult of the nation. This foundational narrative of the new Italy that emerged from the trenches will inform Soffici’s aesthetic politics in the 1920s and his support of the Fascist regime.

Alessandro Saluppo’s contribution focuses on the militaristic aspect of Fascist soldier groups, the so-called squadrismo. As widely acknowledged, in the course of its development, the Fascist organization became increasingly militarized. The organizational emphasis on hierarchy, discipline, affective cohesion, collective practices of mobilizing and unleashing violence, a binary oppositional friend/enemy mentality, and value system embedded in wartime destructive visions stand out as idiosyncratic elements of this process of militarization. In the first part of his chapter, Saluppo focuses on the changing internal structures of squadrismo and explores at greater depth the challenges posed by the rapid growth in membership, the strategies for preserving organizational control, and the methods to ensure discipline among their ranks. In the second part, he examines the military frame of reference of the squads, including rituals, symbols, and modes of moral reasoning, and the development of a sense of community, solidarity, and identity.

The final thematic cluster of the volume focuses on visuals and, in particular, on fine arts, TV series, and cinema as prominent representations of the military and war experiences. We begin with the general account by Adrian Duran on the evolution of images of the military of and in Italy since Unification. This investigation unpacks the relationship between history and its representation, beginning within the context of Italian national
self-determination in the age of the *Risorgimento*. Duran’s investigation then continues into the twentieth century, touching upon Futurism’s relationships with the technocratic bellicosity of the First World War–era Italy, interwar Fascism, and its mythologies of militocratic *Italianità*, the Second World War, and post-war recovery and the dispersed militarism of the 1960s and 1970s. Interwoven with this historical trajectory will be an enunciation of the evolution of Italian art from late Romanticism through *arte povera* and the attendant discourses of Modernism and Postmodernism in the visual arts.

This section collects chapters that have something to say about the way in which the military institution has been regarded as a model for other institutions or the way it is setting up expected behaviors in particular circumstances. Rebecca Bauman’s chapter explores one of the most cinematized forms of Italian criminal institutions, the Mafia, and its engagement with the military. As she notices, for the past century, military terminology has been increasingly used in the Italian media to describe the Sicilian Mafia, the Neapolitan Camorra, and other organized crime groups in Italy; a linguistic practice that helps shape public perception of such groups by referring to them in terms that seemingly justify the use of violence in illegal forms. Bauman then investigates how the popular usage of terms such as “soldier,” “combatants,” “armies,” and, most notably, “war” have become commonplace in representations of Italian organized crime, including journalistic accounts, but also in the narrativization of military metaphors in film and television series, including *Gomorrah—la serie* (Sky, 2014–present) and Marco Tullio Giordana’s film *Due Soldati* (2017). In so doing, she demonstrates how the adoption of military metaphors has problematized anti-Mafia rhetoric and has become an instrument for normalizing Italian culture’s continuous, problematic fascination with organized crime.

Finally, Shelleen Greene and Mattia Roveri explore the cinematic representations of Black American soldiers in Italian post-war cinema. Through an examination of films and broader contemporary visual culture, their chapter analyzes the portrayal of American soldiers and officers of Italian and African heritage in the Italian cultural imaginary. They point out that as difficult and heated conversations around racial politics are taking place in the United States and despite the image of Italy as offering a respite from those prejudices experienced in America, the representations of Italian and African American military personnel, nevertheless, stage oppositional masculinities, which are in the service of constructing Italian national identity (in terms of race, language, ethnicity).
The variety of themes and subject matter referred to in this volume gives but a brief glimpse of the vast dimension of relevant topics that could well be included in such a study. As such, this volume makes no claims to exhaustiveness and, if anything, hopes that the chapters in this book can inspire fresh conversations on the cultural representations and reflections of the military in Italian culture and beyond. There are several topics that have not been tackled in the present volume, even though they might bring particularly insightful aspects of military service to the table. One of the major fields of study that pertains to the present project, for example, is gender studies.\footnote{On Italian women’s lived experience during the First World War and the public discourse about gender and femininity of the time, see Emma Schiavon, 
*Dentro la guerra. Le italiane dal 1915–1918* (Florence: Le Monnier-Mondadori education, 2018); Stefania Bartoloni, ed., *La grande guerra delle italiane. Mobilitazioni, diritti, trasformazioni* (Rome: Viella, 2016); Belzer Allison Scardino, *Women and the Great War: Femininity under Fire in Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); on Italian women, Fascism and the Second World War, see Maria Fraddosio, “La donna e la guerra. Aspetti della militanza femminile nel fascismo: dalla mobilitazione civile alle origini del Saf nella Repubblica sociale italiana,” *Storia contemporanea* 20, no. 6 (December 1989): 1105–181; Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1920–1945* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992); on women and war, Carla Colombelli, ed., *La guerra non ci dà pace. Donne e guerre contemporanee* (Turin: SEB, 2005). For a recent discussion on Anglo-American and Italian representations of the Allied-Italian encounter during the Second World War, see Marisa Escolar, *Allied Encounters: The Gendered Redemption of World War II Italy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019); for an interdisciplinary study of Italian women’s participation in war throughout Italy’s modern history, see Susan Amatangelo, ed., *Italian Women at War Sisters in Arms from the Unification to the Twentieth Century* (Madison, Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016).} It is precisely in the context of the military that many explicit advancements of gender equality have been achieved in the military (women gained access to the Italian military in 1999 around the time when universal male conscription was suspended, and only in January 2016, all military occupations and positions were opened to women). The way in which gender and queer theory take issue (both positively and negatively) with the military, and with the military as a quintessential patriarchal system, is a particularly fruitful area of research that has been thus far relatively neglected in scholarship.\footnote{A good starting point is Maria Mies’ now classic *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labor* (London: Zed Books, 1968, reprint 1998). In the United States, the topic of military service has been used to discuss citizenship rite to support gender equality in the military forces. For a specific discussion on the feminist anti-militarism and feminist egalitarian militarism, see Ilene Feinman, *Citizenship Rites: Feminist Soldiers and Feminist Antimilitarists* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 40–42. For a more recent discussion on the topic military service, gender, and citi-}
that I presume will be an important part of the conversation on the cultural impact of the military is ecology and insightful criticisms aired against the dominant way of conceiving innovation, manpower, and technology through the military lens (subjecting earth, etc.). Further, there is a sore need for conversations around ideology and notions of militarism and militarization. It has become a commonplace to talk about the militarization of society, particularly in the context of Fascist Italy. Interestingly, such notions are often employed to express a concern, regarding the spread of military thought outside the military,\(^{133}\) thus providing a critique not of the military per se, but of the socio-political institutions that have adopted essential elements of the military in the civilian context. This overarching worry about the possibility of the military overtaking civilian lives informs a lot of contemporary academic approaches to the military (and certain historical periods) and thus makes it difficult to have a more nuanced and politically neutral view of the institution. Interdisciplinary work with scholars who specialize in the psychology and cultural elements of the military organization might help shape the dominant discourse on the Italian military structure and offer a fresh opportunity to understand the wide spectrum of impact that it has exercised on Italian cultural and political landscape. And, finally, cultural reflections in all kinds of art (music, fine art, theater, popular culture, etc.) and the way in which the military plays a role in the way we view and perceive our place in society remain still a most valuable avenue for further exploration. It is my hope that the present edited volume will help open up this avenue of research and facilitate the emergence of thoughtful and sophisticated conversation on the role and depiction of the military in our lives, as reflected through art and cultural work of all kinds.

\(^{133}\) A revealing example is the very first words in the “Editors’ Note,” introducing the edited volume *Militarization: A Reader*, ed. Roberto J. González, Hugh Gusterson, and Gustaaf Houtman (Durham-London: Duke University Press, 2019), xiii, which reads: “This book is the outcome of an initiative by the Network of Concerned Anthropologists, which has worked since 2007 to oppose the militarization of anthropology and society more broadly.”