Everyday Spaces: Bars, Alcohol and the Spatial Framing of Everyday Political Practice and Interaction in Fascist Italy

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Abstract
Whilst the ‘everyday’ is, of course, a temporal designator, connected to the chronology of human experience, in reality, ‘everyday life’ historians have often used a spatial frame to seek to understand past historical actors’ everyday lives, experiences and practices. Focusing on Fascist Italy and using the example of ‘bars’ and the practices of consumption, political (and other) sociability, transaction and exchanges enacted within these spaces, this article explores some of the possibilities opened up by using a spatial frame to examine everyday practices and lived experiences in a dictatorial context. Thinking about ‘everyday life’ and the lived experience of dictatorship through a spatial lens not only requires a shift in terms of the venues that we investigate, away from classic seats and sites of formal projections of power and towards those spaces – like bars – in which the ‘unofficial relations of power’ were articulated and negotiated. It also prompts us to ‘play with scales’, as Jacques Revel put it, to examine the unit of the individual body, the street, or the city not just to identify microscopic historical practices, but to understand how macroscopic structures, processes and power relations operated at the level of the everyday and vice versa, highlighting dynamic, reciprocal relationships – between institutions and individuals, state and society, centre and periphery, and among historical actors themselves – and to examine the processes of movement between these scales of experience. In this way, through the examination of interactions and practices enacted in Italian bars, the article will explore a novel facet of the ‘lived experience’ of these dictatorships and demonstrate the value in understanding dictatorships as being constructed neither exclusively ‘from above’ or ‘from below’ but both between and across these units of analysis.

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Despite the ambiguity in nomenclature – ‘everyday’ being evidently a chronological descriptor – scholars interested in exploring the histories of everyday life, including those lived under dictatorships, have long been concerned with the spaces in which subjective lived experiences, practices, actions, attitudes and worldviews are enacted, formed and constructed. In the works of early Alltagsgeschichte historians, for example, the venues in which Eigen-Sinn\(^1\) ['stubborn willfulness'] behaviours, tactics and symbolic practices were put into effect were clearly in view, from factory floors, public squares and streets, to swing music clubs, markets and homes.\(^2\) Academics’ fascination with the queue, a spatial configuration and practice so often equated with Englishness in Anglophone cultural discourse, but equally all too familiar to contemporaries and scholars of dictatorship from the Soviet Union to Francoist Spain as a locus in which citizens, especially women and children, in search of food, housing and other basic needs, spent innumerable hours of their days, is further illustration of the way in which ‘the everyday’ has been spatially framed.\(^3\)

Whilst earlier everyday life historians, principally working in the 1980s–1990s, were less explicit in their spatial framing of the worlds and practices of their historical subjects, more recent everyday historians of twentieth-century dictatorship have consciously explored everyday ‘space’ and sought, to quote the article in which Steege et al. outlined the twenty-first-century ‘second chapter’ of everyday life history, to map ‘the everyday locations in which larger, imagined communities are constituted – or dismantled’.\(^4\) Even as this has rightly entailed and been articulated as a shift in academics’ gaze, from the classic and formal seats of power towards those sites of ‘unofficial relations of power’\(^5\) in which dictatorial authority, policy and practice were also proclaimed, enforced, negotiated and contested,\(^6\) in addition to a change in historical venue, it also

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\(^1\) Thomas Lindenberger, Eigen-Sinn, Domination and No Resistance, Version: 1.0, in: Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte, 3.8.2015, available: http://docupedia.de/zg/Lindenberger_eigensinn_v1_en_2015.

\(^2\) Alf Lüdtke, ‘What Happened to the “Fiery Red Glow”?’ Workers’ Experiences and German Fascism’ in idem ed., The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life, William Templer, trans. (Princeton, NJ 1995), 198–251; Detlev J. K. Peukert, Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life (New Haven, CT 1989).

\(^3\) Sheila Fitzpatrick, Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times – Soviet Russia in the 1930s (Oxford 1999), 43–4; Joe Moran, Queuing for Beginners: The Story of Daily Life from Breakfast to Bedtime (London 2007) 1–8; Kate Fox, Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour (London 2005), 153–61.

\(^4\) Paul Steege et al., ‘The History of Everyday Life: A Second Chapter’, The Journal of Modern History, Vol. 80 (2008), 364.

\(^5\) Belinda J. Davis, Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin (Chapel Hill, NC 2000), 5; Steege et al., ‘The History of Everyday Life’, 361.

\(^6\) Joshua Arthurs, Michael Ebner and Kate Ferris, ‘Introduction’ in idem., eds, The Politics of Everyday Life in Fascist Italy: Outside the State? (Basingstoke 2017), 8.
necessitates the acknowledgement, and serious exploration, of the connection and relationship between space, practice and agency. ‘Everyday spaces’ are not simply passive, empty containers for the kinds of interactions and exchanges and agency-laden acts that interest everyday life historians to take place. On the contrary, past historical actors interacted with, and were in terms of themselves and their practices to some extent conditioned by, the spaces they traversed, visited and inhabited; and vice versa, individual, societal, cultural interactions and practices shaped those spaces in both real and imagined terms. In this way, everyday life histories that are spatially framed should seek to understand how past spaces were used and experienced, recognizing space as both the product and shaper of social, political, cultural, economic exchanges, relations and practices.7 We should recognize the multivalent and flexible ways in which everyday spaces were used and experienced, given that, as Steege et al. said, ‘common stops in the daily routine of local inhabitants […] could] hold a variety of meanings that are often in play simultaneously’.8 In addition, we can note significant variations in terms of frequency and profundity in the experience of, and engagement with, particular everyday spaces: some places and spaces may be traversed or visited only once or occasionally; others might be encountered fleetingly but frequently; others still would be regularly inhabited day-by-day, perhaps for several hours at a time. In all of these cases, space still has the potential to shape, and to be shaped by, lived experiences and practices.

This article explores the mutual interdependence and interactions between space and political practice in Fascist Italy within and around a particular set of spaces: bars, cafés, osterie, and other places in which alcohol was served and consumed. The places in which alcohol was consumed publicly were important spaces of Italian and fascist life; bars were places where people met to discuss politics (among other things); the mix of politics and alcohol was often convivial but could also turn to conflict. As such, this article argues that bars and alcohol played crucial roles in facilitating and shaping political sociability, interaction and expression at individual and local levels and, thus, were important mediating agents in the negotiated relationship between individual Italians and the regime. In a first section the article sets out the use of bars as spaces for political interaction and sociability in the decades before, as well as after, the rise to power of Mussolini’s fascists in 1922, recognizing the intersections between space, class and gender in shaping these interactions. In a second section, the article moves to consider the nexus between drinking spaces and political conflict in the lead up to and around the March on Rome which brought Mussolini and the fascists into government. The third section explores continuities and changes in political practices in bars and using alcohol over the course of the

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7 In this respect, the so-called ‘spatial turn’ in historical studies has been influential, along with scholars who pioneered the examination of space as a construct and in relations of space and time. See, for example: Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space (Oxford 1991); Karl Schlögel, In Space We Read Time: On the History of Civilisation and Geopolitics (Chicago 2016); R. White, ‘What is Spatial History?’ The Spatial History Project working paper 2010, accessed 10/9/18. Available: http://web.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/pub.php?id=29.

8 Steege et al., ‘The History of Everyday Life’, 364.
fascist dictatorship. A fourth section examines the interplay and interdependence between space, practice and agency in the uses of bars and alcohol.

**Bars as Spaces of Political Sociability**

*Esercizi pubblici,* that is spaces licensed to serve food and drink, including alcohol, for consumption on the premises, including bars, *osterie,* *trattorie,* *caffè,* *spacci,* *bettele* and *alberghi,* were – and remain – key spaces of everyday sociability and interaction. Ubiquitous in every Italian town, city neighbourhood and village, *esercizi pubblici* fulfilled vital, multivalent roles in structuring and shaping local communities. Aside from social and economic functions as places where, for example, (mostly, but not exclusively, male) friendships could be fostered and identities articulated away from domestic settings (largely imagined as female-dominated spaces) and where economic exchange and personal advancement could be transacted, *esercizi pubblici* also operated as important political spaces.10

Individual bars developed reputations and associations with particular political creeds or parties, which were often built up and endured over several decades, as the proliferation of *osterie* guidebooks published in the early decades of the twentieth century attest. These affiliations could arise due to a given bar’s physical and geographical location, the known political persuasion of its host, particular historical incidents and/or usages of the bar for political ends, or a combination of these. According to Chino Ermacora, author of a ‘sentimental guide to *osterie*’ in the heavily contested borderlands of Friuli and Istria, since the period before the Great War, the *Trattoria al Monte* (Udine) ‘was considered a refuge’ for Triestine irredentists ‘when they came into the kingdom to take a dip in *italianità* [Italian-ness], to stock up on newspapers, publications and even bombs’.11 At the outbreak of the Great War – and before Italy’s entry to the hostilities – the trattoria ‘threw open [its] doors to those who preferred the risk of desertion to the dishonour of the Austrian uniform’. It furnished a meeting place for irredentist ‘secret committees’, hosting frequent meetings between the Udinese committee and their Venetian counterparts, headed by future Fascist Party secretary, Giovanni Giuriati, provided free board and lodging to fugitive interventionist irredentists, and ‘was transformed meanwhile into the newsroom of the first interventionist newspaper published in Italy, *L’ora o Mai!*’.12 The *Trattoria al Monte*’s indelible association with irredentism and Great War interventionism made for an entirely natural political trajectory to its becoming

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9 Henceforth ‘bar’ is often used as a shorthand for all *esercizi pubblici* in this article, though it should be noted that, according to industry insiders, when used in the name of a drinking place ‘Bar …’ specifically denoted an establishment ‘in which one exclusively drinks standing’ (*Enotria* August 1926 ‘Notizie a spizzico’). Where it is necessary to refer to a particular type of drinking place, such as *osterie* and *trattorie* (which also served food, and occasionally also had rooms), these terms have been used.

10 An example of how these multiple functions operated in another dictatorial context can be found in David Gilmore, ‘The Role of the Bar in Andalusian Rural Society: Observations on Political Culture under Franco’, *Journal of Anthropological Research,* Vol. 41, No. 3 (1985), 263–77.

11 Chino Ermacora, *Vino all’ombra. Guida sentimentale delle osterie del Friuli, di Trieste e dell’Istria con un panorama dei vini italiani ad uso del bevitore intelligente* (Udine 1935), 104.

12 Ermacora, *Vino all’ombra,* 106.
the location in which, in 1919, ‘the first [local] Mussolinians, those of the earliest eve [vigilia] and most ardent faith, gathered’.

The Trattoria al Monte was far from alone in being known for its particular political affiliation. Staying in Italy’s north-eastern corner, the Trattoria della Paolate, the Trattoria all Ghiacciaia and the Albergo Roma, all in Udine, had historical associations with the risorgimentalist and, later, irredentist causes. Other bars, like the ‘proletarian wine co-operative’ run by the father of Laterio Antonelli in Frascati, outside Rome, or those clustered around Via Garibaldi and Campo Santa Margherita in Venice, were known for their association with the Italian Socialist Party (and from 1921, the Italian Communist Party). In the Frascati cantina’s case, the political reputation of the bar was linked to the host’s own political convictions. In others, such as the Trattoria al Capon in Venice’s Campo Santa Margherita, it derived from the venue’s location within its neighbourhood; the ‘Capon’ was at the heart of what one fascist Blackshirt labelled Venice’s ‘Bolshevik quarter’ (often referred to by its early-twentieth-century inhabitants as a ‘Republic’ within the city): ‘The Camera del Lavoro [trade union centre] is nearby and moreover the two cafés in the campo and the trattoria “Capon” are receptacles of Red delinquency’. In both cases, the esercizi pubblici were venues for political speech-making, election campaigning, organized meetings (and sometimes printing presses) as well as for more informal political discussions between drinkers.

At the same time, many bars were acknowledged to be spaces that brought together people of differing, even opposing, political persuasions. In small villages, with only one drinking establishment in the vicinity, sociability with political opponents or even enemies was unavoidable. Elsewhere, such encounters were actively sought out. In Venice, the Osteria da Codroma in Fondamenta Brianti was chosen as the regular meeting place of the ‘Sette savi’, a friendship group of noted Venetian nationalists including long-time mayor, Piero Foscari, precisely because of its ‘proximity to the Socialist headquarters’. As Elio Zorzi, author of the Osterie Veneziane guidebook, described it:

His osteria [Codroma] at that time was frequented by the most eclectic clientele you could imagine; and given that it was found, and is still found, in one of the most plebeian quarters of the city, formerly a stronghold of the Socialist Party, the small but bellicose group of Venetian nationalists frequented it assiduously, not only because one ate like the Pope there, but also to challenge the enemy in its own position.

13 Ibid., 107.
14 Ibid., passim.
15 Archivio Diaristico Nazionale (ADN) MP/90 Laterio Antonelli Il mio essere. Romanzo autobiografico sotto-titolo Vattene te zoccola, 39. His father ran the cantina sociale del proletariato in Frascati until forced to move to Rome in 1923 (where he also ran an osteria) after a brutal ‘punishment expedition’ during which his father was beaten to a pulp, the family furniture smashed and books burned; Giovanni Sbordone, Nella Repubblica di Santa Margherita. Storia di un campo veneziano nel primo Novecento (Portogruaro 2003), 28; 153–66; Alessandro Casellato, ‘I sestrieri popolari’, in Mario Isnenghi and Stuart Woolf, eds, Storia di Venezia. L’Ottocento e il Novecento (Rome 2002), vol. 2, 1603–4.
16 Raffaele A. Vicentini, Il movimento fascista veneto attraverso il diario di uno Squadrista (Venice 1935), 113.
17 Maria Damerini, Gli ultimi anni del leone. Venezia 1929–1940, Mario Isnenghi, ed. (Padua 1988), 96–100.
18 Elio Zorzi, Osterie veneziane (Bologna 1928), 84.
In the years before 1922, the political discussion at the Osteria da Codroma was, by all accounts, genial – the regulars and the host found common ground in their support for the colonial war in Libya – but the combination of political debate and alcohol was not always convivial, of course; previously companionable regulars could be irrevocably divided by their views on the contentious political debates of the day, as happened at the Osteria al Tempio d’Agrippa in Rome when the question of Italy’s entry into the Great War triggered ‘conflicts among the clientele’ of socialists, radicals, Catholics, journalists and politicians in the months before Italy’s entry into the conflict in 1915.19

In line with being spaces in which people with diverging political viewpoints mixed, bars were also spaces that provided opportunities for encounters between individuals of different classes and genders. As is clear from the osterie guidebooks whose proliferation in the early twentieth century both reflected and fuelled this phenomenon, working-class drinking (and eating) spaces, especially osterie, took on a fashionable cachet with certain groups who found authentic italianità in their atmospheric spaces, furnished simply ‘in antique style, with low vaults and, even when it’s a very bright day, the darkness is so medieval that one has to switch on the – alas! – electric light’.20 These were ‘the places that were the most humble, characteristic and frequented by ordinary folk [del popolo]’, where one could drink local wines, eat local dishes and converse with ‘real’ Italians.21 The chance to drink and eat local wines and foods alongside ‘ordinary folk’ resonated particularly with bourgeois Italians, especially those with nationalist politics. Maria Damerini, whose newspaper editor husband Gino was one of the ‘sette savi’ group of leading Venetian nationalists mentioned earlier, frequented the city’s Osteria da Codromo among other similar city haunts, and observed, ‘in those years [by which she meant the late 1920s–1930s] it was considered stylish to frequent taverns (‘La Vida’, ‘L’orso’, and so on), making them fashionable’.22 Speaking of fritolini [originally Venetian esercizi where fried fish were sold], Elio Zorzi confirmed:

Certainly, the most elegant and refined man, in tailcoat and chapeau claque, with his lady in evening dress and covered in jewels, could enter the lowliest bettola [dive] in Venice, without anyone deducing some scandalous motive for this and without any of the regular clients of the bettola directing, let’s say, a discourtesy towards them, nor even an unpleasant glance.23

The fashion for frequenting working-class osterie among upper and upper middle class Venetians in the early decades of the twentieth century, attracted by the

19 Osterie Romane (Milano 1937), 65–73.
20 Hans Barth, Osteria. Guida spirituale delle osterie italiane da Verona a Capri, Giovanni Bestolli, ed. (Rome 1926), 33.
21 Barth, Osteria, xxiv. It should be noted that these osteria guidebooks were written for specific intended readerships, including wealthy foreign travellers to Italy and the authors’ Italian friends and wider fellow middle-to-upper-class Italians.
22 Damerini, Gli ultimi anni, 71. For an eclectic list of well-to-do clients of the osterie around Campo Santa Margherita, especially the famous Capon, including Gabriele D’Annunzio, Lloyd George and Jimmy Carter, see Sbordone, Nella Repubblica di Santa Margherita, 177–8.
23 Zorzi, Osterie veneziane, 64.
opportunity to imbibe their imagined Italianità, ensured that whilst many caffè and bars were socio-economically homogenous, others – not only the seedily-stylish osterie but also those situated at transport intersections, for example – were frequented by, and thus became sites of encounter between, Italians of varied socio-economic means and status.

Moreover, whilst the clientele of esercizi pubblici were for the most part male, it is worthwhile observing that these were also places in which women were present, and in which they too engaged in political, social, economic and cultural transactions and interactions. Women were present in bars and osterie because they worked in them: for example, several of the osterie cited in Chino Ermacora’s Vino all’Ombra were run by ‘padroncine’, including the Trattoria alla Ghiacchiaia and the Trattoria della Paolute, run first by three sisters and, following their deaths, by siore Marie.24 Women – of all classes – were also present in bars because they drank and socialized in them. L’Antica Adelaide was, according to Zorzi, the favoured Venetian osteria of ‘the milk women’, who brought milk from mainland villages to the provincial capital each morning. At the other end of the socio-economic scale, Venice’s elite society women regularly frequented various city pubblici esercizi, from elegant cafés to (newly fashionable) atmospheric osterie. Annina Morosini, the ‘grand dame’ of Venetian high society had a regular table at the Caffè Florian in St Mark’s Square.25 The upper-middle-class Maria Damerini and Irene Brin, in addition to exclusive hotel bars and upmarket cafés, patronized working class osterie: in Damerini’s case, with her husband, Gino; in Brin’s case, alongside ‘girls from good families’.26

The everyday spaces in which alcohol was consumed varied enormously, of course, in terms of location and clientele, from historic, bourgeois cafés, occupying the most prestigious locations in the main square of the city, to small, sawdust-strewn bettole [dives]. Of particular concern to Italian temperance campaigners, positivist criminologists and, certainly in its early years of rule, to the fascist government were osterie [taverns] and bettole.27 Osterie and bettole were decried as dark, unhygienic dens that fuelled alcoholism and by extension undermined societal harmony and progress. ‘The “anti-alcohol” movement’s newspaper, Contro l’Alcoolismo, and leading temperance campaigner Dr Eugenio Bajla, frequently invoked as their most crucial aim that of ‘keep[ing] men out of the osteria’, a task they often devolved responsibility for onto Italian wives.28 A new ‘defence against alcohol’ law, which the then recently installed fascist government introduced by decree in 1923, and converted into law in 1926, legislated a reduction in overall numbers of licensed premises in the country to one per 1000 inhabitants (a measure that if fully implemented would cut their number by 50 per cent), restricted

24 Ermacora, Vino all’ombra, 51–2; 83.
25 Damerini, Gli ultimi anni, 244.
26 Ibid., 71; Irene Brin, Usi e Costumi 1920–1940 (Palermo 1981), 16.
27 Paul Garfinkel, Criminal Law in Liberal and Fascist Italy (Cambridge 2016), 284–343.
28 See, for example, Contro l’Alcoolismo 31 March 1923 and 30 June 1924 ‘Proposte prathcie per la propaganda antialcoolista’. Kate Ferris, ‘Women and Alcohol Consumption in Fascist Italy’ Gender and History (2021), 1–37.
opening hours to 10am–11pm, and increased the sales tax on wine. Mussolini himself, in his infamous 1927 Ascension Day speech that heralded the regime’s drive to regenerate the Italian ‘race’ through population increase, hailed ‘the reduction in number of outlets [selling alcohol] which were very numerous: 187,000 osterie in Italy! We have closed 25,000 of them and we will continue vigorously in this direction […] to close these outlets of cut-price ruinous bliss’.

Wine industry producers and merchants also acknowledged the need to ‘rehabilitate the taverns’, to ‘modernize’ these drinking spaces by making them ‘hygienic’, more ventilated, lighter and brighter, and by welcoming in a more ‘respectable’ clientele, including women and families. During the 1930s, ‘new osterie’ were established in a number of northern-central cities, along with a series of ‘botteghe del vino’ – wine shops in which the product could also be consumed on the premises – intended to educate and broaden the oenological tastes and knowledge of a modern audience of family-orientated wine consumers.

Mussolini’s lauding of the closure of ‘these outlets of cut-price ruinous bliss’ in 1927 notwithstanding, the regime leadership understood the potency of osterie and similar drinking spaces as cultural vectors of italianità. Giuseppe Bottai, founder of leading regime journal, Critica Fascista, and Minister for National Education from 1937, eulogized ‘characteristic osterie, where […] one eats well, and drinks even better’ (despite being teetotal himself), and was a member of the ‘I Romani della Cisterna’ club which met regularly at the osteria of the same name during the late 1920s. Moreover, following the declaration of the Italian empire, after victory in the war with Ethiopia in May 1936, these venues formed part of the material construction and imposition of Italian imperial rule. Plans drawn up the by Federazione Nazionale Fascista Pubblici Esercizi in 1937 for a ‘model colonial licensed premise’, actually realized in Libyan ‘colonial hotels’ like the Uadan and the Mehari on Lungomare Volpi in Tripoli, stressed the need to construct buildings ‘in keeping with the style of inns corresponding to Italian traditions’ given ‘the importance that cafés, bars, restaurants and osterie [taverns] have in the work of building social structures for the aforementioned colonizers’. At the same time, in line with the wine industry’s own ‘rehabilitation’ efforts, these were to be light, ‘healthy’ spaces, a world away ‘from the dives [bettolume] and from the malodorous and smoky locales that brutalize the worker at rest, following hard hours of manual or cerebral labour, passed under the tropical heat and pounding rains’.

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29 Regio Decreto-Legge 7 October 1923 Disposizioni per combattere l’alcoolismo. The 1923 Regio Decreto updated earlier legislation, passed in 1913 which had theoretically reduced the per capita density of taverns to 1 per 500, restricted opening hours for taverns selling alcoholic drinks with alcohol content over 21%, introduced age restrictions on alcohol consumption and banned absinthe. The original 1913 legislation (R.D. 19 June 1913, n. 632 Provvedimenti per combattere l’alcoolismo) had also included more stringent regulations, such as the introduction of inebriate hospitals, but these were removed during parliamentary deliberations thanks to alcohol industry lobbying. See Paul A. Garfinkel, ‘In Vino Veritas. The Construction of Alcoholic Disease in Liberal Italy, 1880–1914’, in Mark Holt, ed., Alcohol: A Social and Cultural History (Oxford 2006), 61–76.

30 Benito Mussolini, Discorso dell’Ascensione: il regime fascista per la grandezza d’Italia (Rome 1927), 13.

31 Brian J. Griffith, ‘Bacchus among the Blackshirts: Winemaking, Consumerism, and Identity in Fascist Italy, 1917–1937’, Contemporary European History, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2020), 406–8.

32 Enotria August 1937 ‘Botteghe del vino’ 170–6; Griffith, ‘Bacchus among the Blackshirts’, 407–8.

33 Bottai was the son of a wine merchant. Osterie Romane, 8; 275.

34 Enotria April 1938 ‘L’osteria coloniale’ 155–7.
Bars, Alcohol and Political Violence in Fascism’s Accession to Power

Given their well-established role as venues and facilitators of political sociability, it is perhaps not very surprising that alongside more overtly political spaces such as *case del popolo* [socialist clubs], *camere del lavoro*, political party headquarters and printing presses, and alongside work and public spaces such as factories and squares, bars were key sites in which political power was contested between fascists and socialists, communists and other anti-fascists, both during the *biennio rosso* and in the lead up to, and following, the fascist takeover of power in 1922.35

Evidence from contemporary diaries and memoirs demonstrates that, very often, bars were singled out and visited specifically with the intent to perpetrate political violence. Raffaele Vicentini, a Venetian *squadrista* from the fascist movement’s early pre-March on Rome days, detailed numerous incursions between fascist *squadristi* and local socialists and communists that took place in and around the city’s bars. He acknowledged that he and his fellow *squadristi* would frequent the working-class bars of Via Garibaldi in Castello and Campo Santa Margherita in order ‘to drink and sing war and patriotic songs’ with the express hope of inciting a (violent) response from the workers drinking there.36 On 5 April 1921, for example, he, along with several other Venetian and Triestine fascists, came under revolver fire from the windows of Caffè Garibaldi, and surrounding buildings, on Via Garibaldi. Three days later, a fellow fascist, R. Sapori, was assaulted by ‘a group of subversives led by none other than the bar-owner’ as he sat in Bar Roma in calle dei Fabbri reading *Italia Nuova* (a local fascist newspaper). In an act of reprisal, another fascist *squadrista* later ‘entered the locale, approached a group of subversives and, without speaking, took the copy of *L’Eco dei Soviet* [a pro-Soviet newspaper] out of the hands of one of them and tore it up. Immediately, the communists rose to their feet and one of them fired a revolver shot in the direction of the fascist’. Other fascists who had gathered for the ‘punishment expedition’ joined the fray and the ‘fierce battle’ that ensued resulted in gun-shot injuries to one fascist and one communist.37 On 11 October 1922, two weeks before the March on Rome, an 18-year-old fascist, Giovanni Cattelan, was shot in the stomach following a ‘mild dispute with some subversives’ in Bar delle Mozze; seven days later, he died of his injuries.38

Bars, *osterie*, and other everyday spaces specifically known for their working-class clientele and/or location in working-class districts were, of course, intentionally targetted. In

35 On political violence and the march on Rome see Giulia Albanese, *La marcia su Roma* (Rome 2006); Matteo Milan, ‘Origins’ in Joshua Arthurs, Michael Ebner and Kate Ferris, eds, *The Politics of Everyday Life in Fascist Italy*, 19–49. The prevalence of bars as loci for political violence is noted by Michael Ebner in *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini’s Italy* (Cambridge 2011) and also, with reference to the city of Venice in particular in: Casellato ‘I sestieri popolari’, especially 1583; Luca Pes, ‘Il fascismo Adriatico’, in Mario Isnenghi and Stuart Woolf, eds, *Storia di Venezia* vol. 2, 1313–54; Sbordone *Nella Repubblica di Santa Margherita*, 217–28.

36 Casellato, ‘I sestieri popolari’, 1583.

37 Vicentini, *Il movimento fascista*, 109.

38 Ibid., 261–3.
addition to the bars of Castello, the Venetian fascists of the first hour directed ‘ambushes, violence and defeats’ at the ‘Bolshevik quarter’ of Santa Margherita because it was home to ‘red delinquency’ in the shape of the Trades Union Centre and left-leaning osterie. Conversely, as Laterio Antonelli, explained, esercizi frequented by a bourgeois clientele could remain largely untroubled by the political violence; during local fascists’ Sunday ‘incursions’ into Frascati’s Piazza Roma, ‘The two Grand Cafés, in which the noble men and women [signorotti] serenely seated around their table were savouring restorative drinks, hadn’t closed because their ambience was not to be disturbed by fascists. But the osteria di Pugliese, which was mostly frequented by peasants and workers, was closed’. As Vicentini’s testimony illustrates, it was not only that the spaces in which alcohol was sold and consumed became venues for fascist and anti-fascist political violence; the consuming of alcohol in itself, and its accompanying rituals and practices, were integral to the enactment of that violence. Despite the repeated emphasis in regime imagery to Mussolini’s own abstemious, austere diet and almost ascetic lifestyle, as part of which it was asserted that he ‘never [drank] wine’, intended as an exemplar for all good fascists to follow, in practice drinking alcohol was hardly a barrier to becoming the ideal fascist man of regime projections. On the contrary, drinking constituted both a prelude and epilogue to the commission of violent acts; drinking – being inebriated – and drinking songs inflamed tempers and emboldened actions. Niccolò Chiarini, for example, from the hinterlands of Florence, recalled the punishment expeditions of the early 1920s, the nicknaming of castor oil as ‘vin santo’ [dessert wine] and his own father’s observation of those who had ‘administered’ this ‘punishment’ upon him: ‘they were drunk, some more than others’. Similarly, Laterio Antonelli testified to how alcohol formed an important element of post-violence ritual:

Somebody claimed to have heard it said that in these political violence operations, after carrying out their stunts, the fascists also used to take the opportunity to abuse their power by going into trattorias, cafés, bettole to revive and reinvigorate themselves. After which, they would leave without paying anything, saying to the owner of the locale upon presentation of the bill for what they had consumed, that the Duce would pay; alluding to Mussolini. If, then, an owner were to express particular resentment towards the refusal to pay however much was their due, the fascists accused them of being a subversive and turned the locale upside down, destroying everything.

In this reading, the alcohol/violence nexus was circular: the enactment of political violence is epilogued by ‘reviv[ing] and reinvigorat[ing]’ alcohol consumption; the failure of the host to accept non-payment for this consumption engenders further violence. The relationship between alcohol and political violence also found artistic expression: the

39 Ibid., 113.
40 ADN MP/90 336.
41 Carlo Dall’Ongano, Mussolini e lo sport, cited in Luisa Passerini, Mussolini Immaginario: storia di una biografia 1915–1939 (Rome-Bari 1991), 122–3.
42 ADN MP/89 Niccolò Chiarini, Piangere per un gatto, 15.
43 ADN MP/90 Laterio Antonelli, Il mio essere, 283.
The Use of Bars and Alcohol for Political Expression and Interaction Under the Dictatorship: Continuities and Changes

Following Mussolini’s accession to power (1922) and the establishment of the dictatorship (1925–1929), esercizi pubblici were left in a profoundly ambiguous position by the regime. In one respect, the dismantling of the apparatus of parliamentary democracy meant that bars were effectively one of few remaining non-official spaces for working-class sociability, as long-standing spaces of working-class and rural everyday culture and sociability, including the Case del Popolo, Camere del Lavoro, political party headquarters, left-wing newspapers and their printing presses, etc. were dissolved and organized leisure activities were subsumed within the state’s own national ‘afterwork’ leisure organization, the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro [OND], in the second half of the 1920s.45 OND centres, housed in local neighbourhood and city headquarters, as well as in larger factories and other sites of major employment, often contained their own spaccio or bar, as did the network of newly-constructed neighbourhood PNF headquarters known as Case del fascio.46 Through the inauguration of these new spaces of political sociability that were at least partly recreational, the regime intended to foster social-political interactions and practices that could be more easily scrutinized, regulated and bent to its blend of coercive and propagandistic ends. The effect of these developments was to drastically reduce the amount of unregulated, or even semi-regulated, space and scope for working-class and rural Italian political interactions and, arguably therefore, to augment the place of bars in everyday political sociability and political-social-cultural practices.

However, and herein lies the ambiguity, whilst we might label bars ‘non-official’ spaces in fascist Italy, they should certainly not be viewed as entirely unregulated spaces that operated outside the gaze of the dictatorship: on the contrary, bars were seen by the regime as suspect places and were subjected to a legislative and policing ‘crackdown’ over the 1920s.47 Bars were also key zones of operation for regime informants who supplied fascist prefects and OVRA [secret police] chiefs with reports based on the gossip, rumours and ‘public mood’ they overheard and detected therein.48 Like train carriages and stations, they proved useful stomping grounds for informants because they were places where people both congregated and transited through day-by-day: paradoxical spaces that offered familiarity to regulars and

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44 Enotria February 1937, ‘Fervori dionisiaci degli artisti di Rovereto’.
45 Victoria de Grazia, The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy (Cambridge 1981).
46 Lucy Maulsby, ‘Case del fascio and the Making of Modern Italy’, Journal of Modern Italian Studies, Vol. 20, No. 5 (2015), 666–8.
47 Victoria de Grazia, How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy 1922–194 (Berkeley, CA 1992), 202.
48 This is clear from the informants’ reports held in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome (ACS): MIN CUL POP gab. b.163 f.1052; MI DGPS OVRA b. 7 f. III zona; MI DGPS OVRA b. 7 Sardegna.
impersonal transience to more infrequent or one-off customers. In addition, the apparent ability of alcohol to act as a lubricant for political discussion aided the informants’ task. The logical conclusion of this was that bar owners often became informants themselves.\textsuperscript{49} In contrast, bars that had or developed reputations for harbouring ‘subversive’ people and behaviours could find themselves under surveillance and even closed down.\textsuperscript{50} The bar licensing system, including legislated opening hours, was controlled by the police, enforced by the 1926 Public Security Law.\textsuperscript{51}

How, then, did people use bars as political spaces during the dictatorship? Did political practices and interactions in bars change over the course of the ‘twenty-year’ dictatorship? Did the political interactions and practices enacted in bars during the dictatorship work to help shore up or to ‘un-make’, as Ruth Ben-Ghiat put it, the dictatorship? Here, the ‘collage of miniatures’ – to use the Alltagsgeschichte term – of 359 police records pertaining to political crimes of ‘subversive acts’ and (from 1931) ‘offences against the head of government’ committed in bars, as well as contemporary diaries and memoirs held in the Archivio Diaristico Nazionale, offer a number of useful indications.\textsuperscript{52} Examined quantitatively and qualitatively, these sources can tell us much about the continuities and changes in the cultural-political functioning of bars.

One important continuity revealed is that alcohol and bars continued to function as lubricants and venues for political exchange – and conflict – throughout the ventennio, particularly in the country’s northern and central provinces.\textsuperscript{53} The public security police files for the northern province of Bergamo show that bars remained consistently the most prevalent location for low-level political ‘crimes’ in the province, with the exception of the year 1924, before the full apparatus of the dictatorship had been installed.\textsuperscript{54} The percentage of incidents investigated as potential ‘subversive acts’ that took place in the province’s streets and piazzas increased again relative to bars around the mid-1930s – as Ebner has shown, there was ‘a spike in political repression around

\textsuperscript{49} Ebner, Ordinary Violence in Mussolini’s Italy, 57.
\textsuperscript{50} See, for example, ACS MIN INT DGPS AGR 1924 b.58 Arezzo & Bergamo.
\textsuperscript{51} Testo unico delle leggi di pubblica sicurezza, R.D. 6 November 1926 n.1848, approved Regio Decreto 18 June 1931 n.773.
\textsuperscript{52} ACS MI DGPS AGR.
\textsuperscript{53} The police files for southern provinces tend to be much thinner, making it difficult to identify patterns and trends in comportment with certainty. The files for Bari, for example, contain reference to one investigation of a political crime involving alcohol in 1924, and one investigation in 1935 that did not involve alcohol or bars. In Lecce, one incident was investigated as potential ‘subversion’ in 1935 involving alcohol consumption, the same in 1937. (ACS MI DGPS AGR: 1924 b. 58 Bari; 1935 b. 9 offese al Duce Bari; 1935 b. 4 Lecce; 1937 b. 6 Lecce.) As Ebner argues, in the first decade of fascist rule, policing powers were directed at ‘suppress[ing] common criminality and organised crime rather than political repression’ in the southern regions, though Lecce and Bari are located in the southern region that was subject to the greatest political repression in that decade, Puglia. In the period 1935–1943, Ebner further argues, the apparatus of fascist political repression was effectively ‘nationalised’ and extended also throughout the South. Ebner, Ordinary Violence in Mussolini’s Italy, 169–71.
\textsuperscript{54} ACS MI DGPS AGR 1924 b. 58 Bergamo; 1927 b.135 Bergamo; 1932 Sez. 1a b.3 Bergamo; 1935 b.3 Bergamo; 1937 b.3 Bergamo; 1939 b.8 Bergamo; 1940 b. 11b Bergamo; 1941 b.7 Bergamo.
1935’ connected both to disquiet at the Ethiopian war and to the intensification of coercive efforts to remake Italians at home\textsuperscript{55} – but it should be noted that all the incidents recorded in 1935 as taking place in streets and squares were cases that took place on the journey home from a bar (and in which the accused was described in police reports as ‘drunk’). Of course, these are records only of those political altercations that went noted, and investigated, by the fascist authorities. We might speculate that, for example, private homes were spaces that hosted and facilitated politically ‘subversive’ discussions, actions and practices more often than is indicated in these recorded incidents. Nevertheless, the ‘collage of miniatures’ illustrates the persistence of bars functioning as venues for the expression of unsanctioned and potentially regime-hostile views and beliefs through both the consolidation of the dictatorship (1925–1929) and the intensification of the regime’s imperial-racist-totalitarian project in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{56}

Alongside a broad-based continuity in the use of bars and alcohol as spaces and conduits of political sociability and interactions, including conflict, it is crucial to recognize that the nature of these forms of expression and exchange underwent substantial changes during the \textit{ventennio}. In the early years of fascist rule, before Mussolini’s avowed intent to rule ‘totally’ had been proclaimed and before and during the consolidation of dictatorial rule, the political encounters that took place in bars (and were reported and investigated as ‘subversive acts’) tended to involve multiple actors, often in organized groups, evident premeditation in the choice of venue, and to involve physical violence, often serious. For example, in 1924 in the province of Arezzo, the only incident investigated involved 12 individuals; in Turin in the same year, of the two incidents recorded as taking place in bars, one involved four ‘socialists’, the other 19 ‘communists’.\textsuperscript{57} The incident in the province of Arezzo, recorded in late December 1924 in the village of Montemarciano, actually resulted from a pre-arranged ‘punishment expedition’ embarked upon by ‘around 15’ fascist Blackshirts who travelled to Montemarciano ‘with the intention of putting in their place some of the local subversives’. The Blackshirts entered the \textit{osteria} ‘of a certain Antonio Gozzi, situated in the middle of the village and frequented by subversive elements’. Inside, the fascist Blackshirt Federico Coppi slapped Vasco Bindi, presumed ‘responsible for subversive propaganda’, inciting a scuffle in which gunshots were fired just outside the \textit{osteria} door.\textsuperscript{58} Of the eight violent political encounters that were recorded in Bergamo in 1924 as having taken place in bars or \textit{osterie} or following evenings spent drinking in one, four of these resulted in loss of life.\textsuperscript{59}

By the end of the 1920s, however, and through the 1930s, the political encounters involving bars and alcohol in the police records changed markedly. After 1927, it is

\textsuperscript{55} Ebner, \textit{Ordinary Violence in Mussolini’s Italy}, 182–3.
\textsuperscript{56} Alexander De Grand, ‘Mussolini’s Follies: Fascism in its Imperial and Racist Phase’, \textit{Contemporary European History}, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2004), 127–47.
\textsuperscript{57} ACS MI DGPS AGR 1924 b. 58 Bergamo; MI DGPS AGR 1924 b. 58 Arezzo; MI DGPS AGR 1924 b. 60 Torino.
\textsuperscript{58} ACS MI DGPS AGR 1924 b. 58 Arezzo.
\textsuperscript{59} ACS MI DGPS AGR 1924 b. 58 Bergamo.
rare to read a case involving more than five actors and by the 1930s the cases of suspected political ‘crime’ in bars involving large groups of actors, evident premeditation and serious physical violence all but disappear. Instead, the commission of ‘subversive acts’ and, from the turn of the decade, the newly-distinct crime of ‘offending the head of government’ were much more likely to involve individuals or pairs, usually family members or friends, and to constitute ‘micro-acts’ that appeared to be – or certainly were later presented as – spontaneous actions: the singing of ‘The Red Flag’ whilst drunk; an off-colour joke at the expense of Mussolini, the King, local fascist leaders or militia members.

The police records for the alpine province of Como for 1932 are illustrative of the changes in the types of political expression and activity involving alcohol and its spaces of consumption from the turn of the decade. Of the four incidents investigated in the province that took place in esercizi pubblici, all involved individuals or pairs and none involved physical violence. In October 1932 Antonio Cannobio was investigated and punished for having announced to his drinking-companions in Caffè Sport, ‘I am an anti-fascist, I don’t care about being sent into internal exile [confino]. [...] Fascists salute in the roman style but I salute like this’, whilst making ‘an indecent hand gesture’. Later that month, Gaetano Medici shouted ‘long live the Alpini, long live socialism, long live the Red Flag, long live Italy’ as he returned home from drinking in a bar. In December, Giuseppe Introzzi was investigated for having shouted ‘long live Lenin’ to two fascist militias at a fortieth birthday gathering at a restaurant in Fino Mornasco. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Introzzi was judged to have ‘drunk excessive quantities of wine’ at the time of the offence; Medici was considered ‘to be in a clear state of drunkenness’; Cannobio, for his part, ‘rather drunk’.

Of course, these changes in the use of bars as spaces for political interaction resulted from a combination of factors. The consolidation of the regime’s repressive network after 1925–1926, the expanding definition of what constituted ‘political crime’ and increased targeting of ‘ordinary speech offences’ in the 1930s including in southern regions which in the first decade of fascist rule had been policed more for ‘common criminality and organized crime’ than ‘political repression’, are important here, though (as Ebner also argues with respect to political confinement [confino] cases) differences in forms of political sociability practised in bars were marked more by urban and rural distinctions than by a North–South divide. Additionally, the extension of what Paul Corner described as Italians’ recognition and acceptance of, and negotiation within, the ‘limits imposed on [their] behaviour’ as the fascist regime entered its more ‘total’ – at least in intent – phase of rule in the 1930s, also helps account for the evolution from political encounters in bars that were premeditated, politically organized and relatively large-scale to interactions that were mostly (apparently) spontaneous outbursts involving

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60 See, for example, ACS MI DGPS AGR 1932 sez 1a b.12 Como.
61 Ibid.
62 Ebner, Ordinary Violence in Mussolini’s Italy, 166–214.
63 Paul Corner, ‘Collaboration, Complicity and Evasion under Italian Fascism’, in Alf Lüdtke, ed., Everyday Life in Mass Dictatorship: Collusion and Evasion (Basingstoke 2015), 79; see also Alexander De Grand, ‘Mussolini’s Follies’. 
individuals or small groups more likely to be family or friends than political allies. Whilst the physical, mortal risk may have subsided somewhat from the levels of violence of the early 1920s, the risk to one’s freedom and livelihood of hosting political meetings affiliated to now-banned parties was high, as many bar owners who found their businesses either temporarily or permanently closed as a result, discovered to their cost. Both bar owners and their clients adapted to the changing regulation of their everyday spaces of operation. For some, that entailed eking out the kind of ‘room for manoeuvring’ identified by Alf Lüdtke as operating in Nazi Germany, as in other ‘mass dictatorships’: variance in practice and ‘modes of conduct’ underwritten by individual ‘situation’ responses and subjective agency within ‘social and historical processes [that are] malleable and not predetermined’. Some bar owners and patrons exhibited a dogged persistence in maintaining bars’ pre-standing political functions as well as resourceful ‘manoeuvring’ around the strictures places on bars. This was the case, for example, with Caffè Sciaretta in Rome, which was investigated in September 1932 on the suspicion that it continued to host ‘habitually meetings of individuals all held to be antifascists’ including known ‘communists’ and ex-republican party members (although initial investigations failed to throw up evidence of illicit political gathering, or even discussion, the political police took the opportunity to fine the locale for being open 15 minutes past the legislated closing time). Further, Laterio Antonelli, son of a left-wing politically active cantina host, recalled how one of his father’s ‘anarchic’ friends, a fellow bar-host (whose son had incidentally been baptized by Mussolini during his socialist days), ‘was compelled to close his osteria’ in 1927, with the result that ‘the antifascism moved to the [osteria] “Calice D’oro” in Piazza di Porta S. Giovanni; causing a lot of trouble for the then Commissioner for Public Security’.

The changes in political functions and usage of bars during fascist rule must also be set alongside broader changes in tastes and drinking practices in interwar Italy. Due to a rapid increase in wine production, which effectively doubled between the last decade of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth century, and a consequent decrease in prices, wine – especially vini comuni – had become associated with working-class drinking cultures. This image, which dampened wine’s cachet in the eyes of many middle-class consumers, was not dislodged when prices began to rise again after the First World War. From there, levels of wine consumption per capita fell markedly, from a peak of 112.7 litres consumed annually between 1921 to 1930 to an annual average of 88.2 litres in the following decade (1931–1940). The combination of over-production and declining consumption, along with increased taxation and the entrenchment of wine’s

64 Alf Lüdtke, ‘Ordinary People, Self-Energising and Room for Manoeuvring: Examples from 20th Century Europe’, in idem, ed., Everyday Life in Mass Dictatorship, 22–5.
65 ACS MI DGPS AGR 1932 sez. 1 a b. 16 Roma.
66 ADN MP/90 Antonelli 57–8.
67 Griffith, ‘Bacchus among the Blackshirts’, 396–7.
68 Only in 1970 did per capita wine consumption exceed 1921–1930 levels and, indeed, from there it has continued to rapidly decline, to consumption levels of 50.5 litres per capita per year in 2003. Emanuela Scarpellini, Material Nation: A Consumer’s History of Modern Italy (Oxford 2011), 6–7; Alleman Allemani, Francesco Cipriani and Franco Prina, eds, I cambiamenti nei consumi di bevande alcoliche in Italia. Uno studio esplorativo sul decremento dei consumi negli anni 1970–2000 (Rome 2006), 36, available at: https://www.alcol.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/images_Quaderni_quaderno-17-ita.pdf.
image as a working-class drink, eschewed by middle-class drinkers, especially women, in favour of cocktails and vermouth, which were endowed with fashionable cosmopolitan cachet, led wine producers and merchants to declare their product ‘in crisis’. Undoubtedly, the imagery of Italy’s ‘ever so modern misses’ – particularly upper middle and aristocratic women – drinking ‘three cocktails, simply for fashion’s sake’ a day (‘horrible poisons’, according to the wine magazine, *Enotria*) was pervasive by the early 1930s. Such imagery was fuelled not only by the wine industry journal, but also by the depictions in Hollywood films and the Italian ‘white telephone’ films that emulated them, of mixed-sex drinking in glamorously illicit speakeasies, bars, nightclubs and aspirational domestic settings, and by the regime-sanctioned discourse of the so-called ‘crisis woman’, an archetypal urban, thin, child-free, employed-outside-the-home, ‘modern girl’, who drank and danced in fashionable city bars, nightclubs and tabarins, and who became a ubiquitous trope deployed in newspapers, magazines and popular song, particularly in the years 1931–1933. Still, whilst the existing evidence on contemporary social practices of drinking does (unsurprisingly) confirm that some Italian women, most notably those of greater socio-economic means, embraced drinking fashionable ‘American’ cocktails – albeit alongside other alcoholic beverages, including the beleaguered Italian wines – overall per capita consumption of spirits did not rise relative to wine in this decade, and instead followed a similar trajectory of declining consumption.

Still, the idea that alcohol consumption and choice of alcoholic tipple was indelibly linked to the irrepressible transnational forces of ‘modernity’ persisted. Writing in *Enotria*, Giovanni Zibordi described Italian villages of yesteryear as ‘place[s] of good drinkers’ where ‘wine [drinking was] a widespread custom in every class; and the ‘respectables’ of the place, the doctor and the engineer, the pharmacist and the notary, frequented the hotel or even the modest *osteria*, and played *tressette* [a card game] or chatted, emptying the bottle, smoking cigars or pipes, together with the commoners [popolani]’, juxtaposing this against ‘the “life in a hurry” of the modern age [which] is also the enemy of wine’. Modern life had brought new health scares and changes to work patterns and occupations which were said to have in turn helped cause the reduction in national wine consumption – ‘the train driver, the car driver, the tram or electric railway driver cannot drink as could the wagon driver, the coachman, the postilion of the old means of transport’ – but it was also the perceived acceleration of the tempo of contemporary ways of life that was indicted as having diminished the consumption of a drink ‘that one used to drink leisurely, seated at the *osteria* table’. Instead, ‘today one gulps down rapidly, standing up, the drinks – alcoholic or not – with which the business

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69 *Enotria*, October 1938 ‘Vino e salute’.

70 Natasha V. Chang, *The Crisis-Woman: Body Politics and the Modern Woman in Fascist Italy* (Toronto 2015); de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, especially 73; 212–13; Ferris, ‘Women and Alcohol Consumption in Fascist Italy’, 11–15.

71 Liquor consumption declined from 0.6 litres average annual consumption per capita in 1921–1930 to 0.2 litres between 1931 and 1940. Scarpellini, *Material Nation*, 6–7.

72 *Enotria* Sept. 1938 ‘Perche non si beve il vino’. The author also held ‘modern life’ responsible for the cigarette’s eclipsing of pipe and cigar smoking.
man or retailer or travelling salesman or worker reinvigorates energy, or seeks to quench their thirst. A similar argument was made by Giovanni Mariotti in his 1931 osteria guide, Quando siam dall’oste insieme ..., when he observed that ‘even the cafés [in Turin] are ever disappearing because people are in a hurry and prefer the bar, where in a moment one drinks, pays and goes away’.

Intersections of Space, Practice, and Agency in Bars and Involving Alcohol

One of the most frequent practices investigated as a ‘subversive act’ in the 1930s that took place in a drinking space or during/after drinking was the singing of banned political songs, especially ‘The Red Flag’: 97 of the collage of 359 ‘miniatures’ examined for this article were episodes involving the singing of a banned political song. The nexus between political song and alcohol is, of course, not new. Nor is the significance of what Anderson termed ‘unisonance’: the ‘experience of simultaneity’ engendered by the singing of a ‘national song’, or indeed a song denoting political belonging like the fascist anthem, ‘Giovinezza’, or the socialist ‘Red Flag’, stimulates ‘the echoed physical realization of the imagined community’. This sense of belonging through unisonality still holds when the political song is sung by one person, as was the case in many of the miniatures examined here; the lone singer is bound to their community by ‘imagined sound’. The consequences of being caught singing a song like ‘The Red Flag’, though they varied, could be very serious indeed. In 1932, Luigi Agnelli and Giuseppe Travaglia were found guilty of singing ‘The Red Flag’ in a trattoria in Gualdo Tadino, near Perugia. As the trattoria owner, Agnelli was condemned to 10 days in prison and – perhaps worse – had his trattoria licence revoked. In 1935, in Turin, Vittorio Maino was sentenced to a year in internal exile [confino] for ‘in a state of drunkenness, sing[ing] under his breath the hymn “The Red Flag”’. Singing ‘under his breath’ failed to protect Maino from punishment perhaps because he was a repeat offender with known past political affiliations to anarchism; he had already been given an ammonizione [punishment which restricted movement] in 1933 for the very same offence. The singing of a banned political song during or after drinking alcohol was also the political ‘crime’ that was most often subject to post-hoc claims by the accused that deployed drinking and drunkenness as a

73 Enotria Sept. 1938 ‘Perche non si beve il vino’.
74 Giovanni Mariotti, Quando siam dall’oste insieme... (Rome 1931), 65.
75 See, for example, R. J. B. Bosworth, ‘Everyday Mussolini: Friends, Family, Locality and Violence in Fascist Italy’, Contemporary European History, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2005), 23–4. As Ebner points out, what constituted a ‘political song’ was open to (potentially broad) interpretation; in Italy’s north-eastern border region, singing ‘Slavic language songs’ could be interpreted as ‘hostility to the Italian nation’ and subject to punishment. Ebner, Ordinary Violence in Mussolini’s Italy, 171.
76 Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London 1991), 145.
77 Ibid.
78 ACS MI DGPS AGR 1932 sez .1a b. 15 Perugia.
79 ACS MI DGPS AGR 1935 b. 7 Torino.
mitigating excuse. Marino Pegorer, for example, who was arrested and denounced for singing ‘The Red Flag’ in a trattoria in the newly-reclaimed town of Littora in response to ‘some militiamen and Great-War assault infantrymen [who] were singing patriotic hymns’, claimed ‘not to remember anything due to the state of inebriation in which he found himself’.80

The ‘defence’ of having consumed alcohol, and specifically of having been drunk, was very often raised by accused individuals themselves, deployed as a mitigating factor or excuse, after the event, for political speech acts and modes of behaviour deemed subversive and criminalized by the fascist regime. It also fed into the assessments made by the fascist prefectures, Carabinieri and Special Tribunal for Political Crimes as to the seriousness of the crime and the moral/political character of the accused, though the outcome of these assessments could vary considerably. For example, Ambrogio Pagliani, a carpenter from Milan entered a bar in Corso Genova on 27 November 1935, ‘already in a state of drunkenness’ according to the police report and engaged in a discussion about the on-going Ethiopian War, in the course of which he declared ‘that the high-ups of the PNF are all thieves and during the World War they all went into hiding’. In his statement to the police, Pagliani claimed that ‘he could not remember what had happened because he was drunk’. Because of this, along with his supposed good moral conduct as a husband with four children he was released with a caution after being held for 30 days.81 Similarly, in Garagusa, near Matera in southern Italy, Giovanni Rospi was arrested in June 1932 for ‘offending against the National Flag’ whilst ‘in a state of drunkenness’, but was released without penalty when he came before the Special Tribunal for Political Crimes in the September because it was judged that ‘when he committed the offence, he did not intend to do so because he was in a state of accidental drunkenness’.82

The idea that drunkenness was a form of temporary dementia or insanity that affected one’s culpability or responsibility for actions taken under its effect was a principle enshrined in law until 1930: the legal code of Liberal Italy, the 1889 Zanardelli code, in art. 48 set out a complex scientific formula which distinguished between ‘accidental’ or ‘involuntary drunkenness’ and forms of ‘voluntary’ and ‘procured drunkenness’ and drew distinctions between ‘full’ and ‘partial drunkenness’.83 The formula and distinctions were used to determine alcohol-related imputability, and allowed for reduced sentences (in some cases absolution) for acts deemed unintentional. The imputing of criminal responsibility to alcohol was cause for great consternation within the Italian temperance movement; both the temperance newspaper Contro l’Alcoolismo and Raffaele Garofalo, writing in Nuova Antologia in 1926, decried ‘the scandal of absolutions and sentences of ridiculous penalty due to excessive leniency in the very frequent cases of drunkenness’, urging that Italy follow the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ countries’ example and recognize that ‘non-accidental’ drunkenness

80 ACS MI DGPS AGR 1935 b. 4 Littoria.
81 ACS MI DGPS AGR 1935 b. 5 Milano.
82 ACS MI DGPS AGR 1932 sez. 1a b. 14 Matera.
83 Codice Penale 1889 Art. 48. Garfinkel, Criminal Law in Liberal and Fascist Italy, 301–2.
is never a circumstance for omitting or attenuating the penalty: in fact this has the significance of an aggravating circumstance, because the delinquent has voluntarily placed himself in a condition that is prohibited by law in so far as he, no longer having control over his very self, becomes even more dangerous than if his mind were not obfuscated.84

This was a point of law that the Italian wine producers’ lobby, who were otherwise implacable in their hostility to the Italian anti-alcohol movement, were prepared to concede. Indeed, it was revised in the fascist-era reformulation of the legal code, known as the Rocco Code (1930), which abolished the Zanardelli code’s definitions of voluntary and habitual intoxication as grounds for diminished responsibility and instead insisted that these be considered as aggravating factors warranting harsher punishment.85

The outcome of making recourse to a defence of impaired responsibility through drunkenness was not always as positive as it was for Pagliani and Rospo, especially if the accused was judged to be a ‘habitual drunkard’.86 In their reports, the arresting and reporting officers almost always classified the degree of drunkenness of the accused individual at the time of the committal of the offence using terminology such as ‘partially drunk’ and ‘clear’ or ‘full drunkenness’, in accordance with the formulations set out in the Zanardelli code. In addition, they expressed judgements as to whether a given individual was a habitual drinker/drunkard as evidence of their moral character, and indeed also their political standing, as the two were often conflated. However, these assessments, which drew a direct line between individuals’ moral and political character and excess alcohol consumption fed into the consequences faced by the accused for his/her actions in decidedly ambivalent ways. Whilst the prefecture report assessed Pagliani as ‘of good moral conduct: until now he has not given rise to concern about his political attachments, though he is not enrolled in the P.N.F’ and, another point in his favour, ‘he has a wife and four children’,87 for others, having consumed alcohol before or during the commission of the act under investigation, clearly worked against them in terms of how their political/moral character was assessed.

Above all, for those deemed a ‘habitual drunkard’ – the code word in the police records was ‘dedito al vino’ or dedicated to wine – which was often associated in the reports with homelessness, vagrancy and unemployment (and occasionally linked to domestic violence) being in a state of drunkenness at the moment of committing a political ‘crime’ increased rather than reduced the likelihood of receiving harsher penalty.

84 Contro l’alcoolismo July–Aug 1926 ‘Alcool e delitti’; Raffaele Garofalo ‘La necessità di una riforma della legislazione penale’ Nuova Antologia Fasc. 1301 June 1926, 320–31.
85 This still left the legal possibility of ‘accidental drunkenness’ [art. 91] being grounds for diminished, or abso- lution of, responsibility, depending on whether the accused was judged fully or partially drunk.
86 Michael Ebner demonstrated that those Italians sentenced to confinement for ‘trivial speech acts’ and, indeed, for so-called political crimes in general, in addition to being predominantly from lower classes (urban working class, peasants, sometimes lower middle class) also included a disproportionate number of individuals ‘with histories of criminality, unemployment, alcoholism, and mental illness’. Ebner, Ordinary Violence in Mussolini’s Italy, 177.
87 ACS MI DGPS AGR 1935 b. 5 Milano.
Fifty-three year old Giorgio Manco, for example, a ‘destitute, married with four children’ from Matino, near Lecce, judged ‘somewhat dedito al vino’ was sent into internal exile [confino] for three years for ‘contempt for the institutions and offence towards His Excellency, the head of Government’. In the same year (1935), two cases of ‘offence towards the Head of Government’ committed by men judged ‘dedito al vino’ in Ascoli Piceno illustrate the connections made between habitual drunkenness and domestic violence. In June Pietro Olivieri was condemned to one year and six months of reclusion for declaring, ‘you fascists are all like sold meat …. Fuck Mussolini’, among other ‘outrageous phrases’. In his report, the local prefect, assessed the ‘previous offender and dedicated to the vice of drinking’ Olivieri as,

of violent character, he is little attached to his family whom he sometimes abuses. Work-shy, he squanders his inadequate earnings in vice, which is why he is an individual not at all respected, whom all keep at a distance. He is not enrolled in the P.N.F. – He has no political criminal record and served conscripted military service in the Royal Navy.

A few months later, in November, the prefect wrote to the Interior Ministry in Rome to request a caution [ ammonizione] for Domenico Patrizi who one evening,

returned home drunk, assailed his wife Maria Monsignori, for trivial reasons. All of a sudden, he attempted to beat her but the woman managed to escape into the street where, however, Patrizi caught up with her and, after delivering various punches upon her, pronounced the following sentence: ‘It’s the fault of that Goddamn [p’rco di Dio], the Virgin Mary and Mussolini’.

In assessing Patrizi’s character, the prefect continued, ‘Patrizi is war-wounded and has a good political record. He often gets drunk and abuses his wife. In 1933 he was sentenced to two months of detention for drunkenness’. In all of these cases, the moral (and class-based) judgements reached by officials about individuals who were considered ‘dedicated to wine’ were weighed alongside, and often equated with, the judgements reached on individuals’ political character.

Despite the introduction of the Rocco legal code in 1930, which almost entirely removed the possibility for imputing criminal responsibility to alcohol, the earlier concept of imputability derived from drunkenness evidently lingered in the attitudes and actions towards political crimes both among agents of the state and the individuals accused of these crimes long after the change in law. As the ‘collage of miniatures’ of the 359 legal cases investigated shows, ascribing behaviours and speech acts that were deemed politically criminal by the fascist regime to excess alcohol consumption and to being in a state of (uncharacteristic) drunkenness such as to have induced out-of-character

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88 ACS MI DGPS AGR 1935 b. 4 Lecce.
89 ACS MI DGPS AGR 1935 b. 9 offese al Duce Ascoli Piceno.
90 ACS MI DGPS AGR 1935 b. 9 offese al Duce Ascoli Piceno.
91 ACS MI DGPS AGR1935 b. 9 offese al Duce Ascoli Piceno.
actions and utterances, was a tactic that, when deployed by Italians, especially those who were in employment, had a family and/or were not known locally for their political affiliation, very often worked to help them evade or lessen punishment by the regime.\textsuperscript{92}

In addition to the ways in which the consumption of alcoholic drinks shaped political practices within bars, the spaces themselves worked to condition conduct therein. Although, as will be discussed subsequently, this spatial framing of practice and lived experience very often happened organically and (relatively) spontaneously, it was also the case that drinking spaces were intended to shape political thought and action by design. The drive to ‘rehabilitate’ the country’s popular [popolani] bars and osterie into light, airy, healthy spaces was framed in the language of ‘hygiene’ beloved of the regime.\textsuperscript{93} As mentioned, the laying out of the “‘model colonial licensed premise” in Italian East Africa (A.O.I.), to be located in ‘suburban areas of colonial centres or on isolated highway crossroads’, with a ‘hygienic-sanitary’ kitchen, bar and tables on the ground floor, spilling out onto a pergola-covered terrace outside on the ground floor, living quarters for the host and rooms for travellers on a second floor, vegetable garden and – naturally – vines in the grounds outside, were intended to ‘closely adhere to the breath of new, lively, healthy, life that Fascism has given [to colonies]’.\textsuperscript{94} The furniture, building materials and architectural model were purposefully designed with economy, local resources and ‘sober simplicity’ in mind.

In the colonies and on the peninsula alike, esercizi pubblici hung portraits of Mussolini (and the King) on their walls; the Grande Albergo Italia in Udine went one better in fixing a signed photograph of the Duce, who had stayed at the inn twice, ‘in a place of honour’ alongside ‘hundreds of photographs, posed for maximum sentimental effect’ that covered the inn’s vestibule.\textsuperscript{95} Ermacora, in his Friulian osteria guidebook referred frequently to the paintings and portraits of irredentist and nationalist heroes, scenes and landscapes as setting the political atmosphere of the drinking spaces he described. Across Italy, posters carrying regime decrees as well as fascist aphorisms and slogans were fixed to the walls of esercizi pubblici. Radios brought the sounds and words of the Duce direct to drinkers’ ears.

The material objects contained within these spaces also became accoutrements to political expression and interaction. Chairs, tables and bottles could become weapons and/or tools of defence. Material objects and more ephemeral ‘material’ found within bars could become the targets of or catalysts for political expression and conflict: the locale’s copies of newspapers; songs and speeches transmitted through radio wirelesses; regime proclamation posters; portraits of the Duce and so on. For example, in Mestre in 1927, Giuseppe Tiozzi was arrested for inscribing a communist hammer and sickle in chalk on the bar of a central caffè.\textsuperscript{96} In November 1935, the ‘at this point drunk’ Mario

\textsuperscript{92} Michel de Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life}, S. Rendell, trans. (Berkeley, CA 1988), xvii–xx, 34–7.
\textsuperscript{93} \textit{Enotria} June 1933 ‘La riabilitazione delle osterie’.
\textsuperscript{94} \textit{Enotria} April 1938 ‘L’osteria coloniale’ 155–7.
\textsuperscript{95} Ermacora, \textit{Vino all’ombra} 124.
\textsuperscript{96} ACS MI DGPS AGR 1927 b. 137 Venezia.
Rosa Clot was arrested in a trattoria in Turin for responses he gave to a broadcast that ‘the premise’s radio was playing [which was] “Regime News” [Cronache del Regime].

On hearing the Duce’s name mentioned, he said ‘big head’ and then on hearing the words ‘Black shirt’ he added: ‘go take it in the ass’ [vai a prenderlo nel sedere] – and then, again, ‘you only need be a Black Shirt to be a tramp’.

The inn-owner, Pia, irritated by Rosa Clot’s behaviour switched off the radio then shooed him out of the premises, but he returned there after a few minutes and repeated ‘you only need be a Black Shirt to be a tramp’.97

One month later, this time in Gottolento, near Brescia, Giuseppe Ugo Gervasio was arrested following an episode in a local caffè in which ‘he removed his hat and made as if hang it on a picture containing the Duce’s effigy’ repeated times; because there were no hooks or protruding material on which to hang the hat, it fell to the ground each time.98 Gervasio was admonished and denounced by a fellow drinker, a fascist ‘of the first hour’ who had been ‘wounded for the fascist cause’, and who ‘considering the same gesture to be offensive towards His Excellency the Head of Government, scolded Gervasio to have greater respect for the Duce’. According to witnesses, ‘both Gervasio and the other people in his company were somewhat drunk’. In another notable case, a builder from Osimo in the province of Ancona, in the bar of his local Dopolavoro took a sip of the glass of wine he’d just ordered,

and then sprayed the liquid against the opposite wall onto a rural propaganda poster on which, amongst other things, was the reproduction of Mussolini’s portrait amidst soldiers and blackshirts. Later, when he had finished drinking, with just a few drops of wine remaining in the glass, he hurled that in the same direction.99

The builder, Ricci, claimed after the fact that ‘whilst he was drinking, involuntarily in the act of gesturing with the glass a bit of wine went and hit the poster’. Although the principal witness, Ricci’s drinking companion, asserted that it had been an intentional act and despite the fact that Ricci was known to have held socialist views in the past, the Prefect was disposed to consider this a credible defence and Ricci was released with a diffida; it is interesting to note though that the propaganda poster, conserved with the case papers in the archive, still bears the trace of the wine stain which covers the lower section of the poster denouncing the League of Nations sanctions, placed on Italy in November 1935 as a result of the invasion of Ethiopia, and specifically a photo montage of bayonet-wielding soldiers with a large superimposed figure of Mussolini at its centre.

97 ACS MI DGPS AGR 1935 b. 7 Torino.
98 ACS MI DGPS AGR 1935 b. 9 Brescia.
99 ACS MI DGPS AGR 1935 b. 9 offese al capo del governo, Ancona.
Conclusion

Alongside, and in combination with, vital social, cultural and economic functions, bars were thoroughly political spaces. Drinking spaces themselves were subject to regime and regime-sanctioned attempts to reshape both the material spaces themselves and the interactions they housed on multiple fronts, from ‘hygenic’ interventions to bring light and air, through the regulation of opening hours and the presence of regime representatives, including militias, public security police and OVRA informants intent on policing or reporting the utterances and actions of drinkers. The Duce himself – in portrait form – watched on, while his words were printed on decree proclamation and propaganda posters that lined the walls of esercizi pubblici and were broadcast through the bar radio. At the same time, unlike other pre-existing spaces for political sociability and forms of organized leisure, bars were not closed down wholesale or subsumed into regime structures. They therefore operated as a sort of in-between space or ‘grey zone’ that continued to host – and to shape, in some respects – political behaviours, interactions, speech acts and actions involving forms and degrees of agency and of Eigen-Sinnig practices through the dictatorship. Political practices enacted in bars changed markedly; with the consolidation of the dictatorship in the late 1920s and, again, with the intensification of the fascist totalizing imperialist-racist project in the 1930s (particularly from around the decade’s mid-point), Italians’ engagement in practices, actions and speech acts that could be labelled ‘political crimes’ increasingly took the form of non-organized, apparently unpremeditated, ‘micro-acts’ as drinkers and hosts manoeuvred – to borrow Lüdtke’s phrase – around and sometimes at or even over the edges of permissibility and legality. It remains clear, though, that even during the 1930s and the so-called ‘years of consent’, bars continued to be spaces for the enactment of political sociability – and conflict – among friends, family and acquaintances as well as with fellow-frequenters of the esercizio; discussions and interactions in which individuals exercised (limited) agency evidently continued to take place within their walls – no doubt the often dis-inhibiting intoxicating products sold and consumed therein played a role in facilitating this.

In addition, while the ‘collage of miniatures’ of police investigations into possible political crimes committed in bars and involving alcohol self-evidently demonstrates the use of bars for political utterances and actions that were (judged) hostile to the regime, this source base along with other evidence amply demonstrates that bars were also important spaces for pro-fascist political expression. Fascists were, of course, present in bars not only in order to uncover and catch out critical political expression; they also drank in them, discussed politics, and sang ‘patriotic hymns’ in them. Bars and other drinking spaces were fundamentally ambivalent, but not passive, political spaces. Whilst they could host multiple, potentially divergent and opposing forms of political expression, this did not render them empty spatial frames; on the contrary, the material structure of bars, the objects contained in them, their location, opening hours, their host, all had the potential to shape the practices and attitudes enacted and formed therein, though again these could serve to augment or detract from the dictatorships’ aims, to bring individuals closer to, or to achieve distance from, the regime.

Alcohol itself played a similarly multi-faceted, and sometimes contradictory, role in the negotiated relationships between individual Italians and the regime. Drinking
bookended fascist political expeditions and bonded the perpetrators of its violence through its rituals and song. Having consumed alcohol and/or being in a state of drunkenness could be used as a tactic to evade or lessen punishment for the commission of political ‘crimes’ under its influence, a facet that was deployed by the accused but also was often accepted, and sometimes put forward by the political police and prefectures even after the 1930 change in the law on alcohol-related imputability. In this sense, alcohol acted as a facilitator in processes of finding ‘room for manoeuvring’ within the dictatorship, processes that were practised by both representatives and subjects of the dictatorship. At the same time, examining the role of alcohol helps reminds us that any ‘room’ for manoeuvre had limits: recourse to the tactic of claiming legal imputability for political crimes due to alcohol consumption was weighed by the authorities in relation to individuals’ supposed political and moral character. Having known political associations, but also being unemployed, without fixed abode, domestically violent, and ‘dedito al vino’ helped mark out some of the limits to which alcohol might help one to manoeuvre within, around, towards and from the Italian dictatorship.

**Funding**

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council [grant number: AH/L007436/1].

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