

# The eclipse of the nation (1940-1945)<sup>1</sup>

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I

**B**ERLIN, June 2003. Sometimes, hesitation and silence reveal inconvenient problems. The president of the Italian Republic, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, invested intensely during his government to resurrect patriotism in Italy (for example, giving life to the cold and disdained Vittoriano, the gigantic altar of the fatherland that preserves, in the center of Rome, the monument to the soldier killed in action). We can imagine that he probably also in his speech at Humboldt University in Berlin, in June 2003, made some reference to national unity – that he represented -, to Italian history, to the fatherland. But when, at the end of his speech, a student asked him why, after the restoration works of the Italian embassy in Berlin, also the symbols of fascism (two fasci littori) had to return that previously had been at the ancient residence offered by the Third Reich to Mussolini (and eighty Jews were obliged to work for that construction, he reminded) – the president answered that question apparently with a certain hesitation: “I have not yet visited the embassy, I can’t answer exactly, it is no fact that I have dealt with”. But then he explained that the two fasci “represent an experienced historic period; in Italy, we have not banned all symbols of the fascist era, because they are witnesses of a historic period but not meant to evoke them”.

It must be difficult to represent, with one’s own person, the unity of a nation, especially if that nation is Italy. Somehow, the president managed to get out his dilemma by stating that history is made up of “experienced historic periods”. Some periods can only be witnessed. Others can, or should, be evoked and celebrated. In view of the dissonant multiplicity of periods and situations, the president affirms unity and, thus, continuity in a slightly acrobatic way. But that is his constitutional function.

Two years before, Ciampi stated in the biggest Italian newspaper, in an official discussion about the thesis of “death of the fatherland”, that he had “experienced, as a young officer, the dramatic events of 1943”:

I have experienced the collapse of the State; I have experienced the confusion of the absence of ‘orders’ in that time that I believe was the most tragic period in the history of our Italy. As many others in my situation, we find guidance in our consciousness: deep in that consciousness, a feeling of fatherland vibrated. This is what I intend to say, in my testimony as citizen.

Thus the collapse of the Italian state was affirmed, and the subterranean, internal continuity of the “feeling of fatherland”, also in the terrible war year, 1943. State, fatherland: no trait of the nation in those tacitly controversial thoughts.

Actually, only the presence of the word nation provides even more uncertain limits to the discourse; “almost synonymous” words like fatherland, people, national state, and national community are recovered. We are conducted, like in a kind of vertiginous Ferris wheel, to deal with decisive questions: the destinations of the nation, life, death, the future of the fatherland. In this tangle, or in this web of different phenomena, it is useless to intend precise definitions. The historian Roberto Vivarelli focused, on several recent occasions, in a painstaking and intense way, on the expressions and implications of the problem of the Italian nation, and insisted about the necessary distinctions between the positions in difficult times, 1943 - 1945, in addition to the successive, conventional or political reconstructions. But he has not escaped from a substantial uncertainty either: he seems to affirm and deny at the same time the continuity of the Italian national “community” by means of the tragic events of the middle of the past century.

Now, the nation and its approximative synonyms – not only the Italian nation – disappear and reappear all the time, particularly in the reconstructions of the final dramatic events of World War II. In this article, I would like to present a first attempt to measure the impact of the events that culminated, within the period 1943 – 1945, in the work and in the intellectual biography of some important intellectuals, not only Italians, who in those moments directly or indirectly faced the problem of the nation or of their relationships with it.<sup>2</sup>

## 2

Again in Berlin. The Argentine writer Osvaldo Bayer lives in exile in a house a few blocks from the graveyard of the Prussian generals that he often visits. A bit further, the airport of Tempelhof, which has been flying the flag of the United States since the end of the last war (every morning the US anthem is transmitted through loudspeakers and enters through his window). In Bayer’s text that I quote in the following, there is a perfect image of a new world in which fatherland and nation fade again and two big empires take their place:

I am in front of the crypt of Family Trützchler von Falkenstein. A perfect monument for forgetfulness. The peeling wall of the chapel, the abandoned iron laurel crowns. The workers of the graveyard - Italians, Portuguese – with a practical sense chose it as a deposit for sickles, carts and fertilizer bags. My general! General Louis Trützchler von Falkenstein, they really forgot you! Not even a soldier to bring his general a flower! Only the peasants of his old East Elbian large lands still remember their Junker, their ‘Young Sir’. With all that pride, all golden epaulets and the leather boots, the impeccably measured uniform and his monocle, in such a way that the eye could cast sharp eagle glances! Where did all that end? His speeches about fatherland and more about fatherland and about the enemies

of the fatherland? General Trützchler von Falkenstein. His name alone scared the recruits. They twisted their tongues to pronounce it. His funeral monument still preserves the marks of forty years ago on the walls, when the Red Army attacked Berlin from the south to get to Tempelhof. The Russian shots on your monument, general, and there, a few meters away, the US American flag since forty years.

It is the same view, so to say, that dominates the extremely selective memories of Paolo Emilio Taviani, Italian partigiano and politician: the alliance against the Atlantic Pact of the followers of Giuseppe Dossetti (of Christian Democracy), in 1949, was inspired by an anachronistic national logic; the entire Italian republican history should be interpreted in the light of the foreign policy (of a double foreign policy of the two major forces, of the communist and Christian democracy); the end of the national partisan unity, in 1947, is also the end of the national “scale” to describe and interpret the New World.

Also the historians enter the new world, as we will see, deeply changed, even “dilacerated”. The momentary loss of the national “scale” produces, at first, two divergent tendencies: towards the researches limited to very restrictive environments and towards universal history projects. For the first tendency, the remark of Corrado Vivanti should be considered: “Nobody (in the first post-war years) thought he could address himself to a work of not only national scope, but a bit vaster than a province or region”. As an example of the second tendency, the universal history project with which the publisher Einaudi entrusted the historians Chabod and Momigliano, right after the war, is important. At the base of the project, as Edoardo Tortarolo reminded, is the vision elaborated by Chabod already in the thirties:

The only not strictly national history that can be thought and written, at least until the Nineteenth Century, is the European history, since our way of judging, our historical mentality, the points of view with which we can assess the facts [...] are strictly connected to the values that the European civilization boasts to have created.

In a letter of 1949, Momigliano deepens the crisis of the “national scale”, solved through the European key by Chabod (in the line of History of Europe of Croce): also the European values pose some problems:

Universal History. I agree with you that a history of that kind must be thought as history of the problems of the past that have still a current value [...] What I am more interested in is to know how you answer the following question. Every universal history, it seems to me, includes an analysis of the essential characteristics of the nations with which we have civilization in common and an analysis of the exemplary characteristics of the nations for which we acknowledge, thanks to our civilization, a common humanity. Greece and Rome interest us because they communicated essential elements of our civilization; but China and Japan interests us because, thanks to our [civilization], we acknowledge values of humanity there.

Naturally, acknowledging the value of humanity is the principle of unification of the civilization; but it is the principle, not the conclusion. In this sense, universal history is the contribution to the universalization of history. Now, how do you think you organize those two aspects of a universal history / history of our civilization? History of our humanity?

Photo: Agence France Presse



*The governor of Rome, King Victor Emmanuel III and Mussolini together in 1925 in Italy.*

The universal history project of publisher Einaudi was entrusted to Corrado Vivanti in 1964, after several attempts to launch it in the fifties, and definitively shipwrecked; but then it turned, in 1966, into the embryo of the History of Italy (in a profoundly modified context, the national “scale” reappeared).

More or less in the same period, Momigliano raised the question again in a conference held in Erice, in 1967, the doubt, which expressed not settled tensions about our past (it should be noted that he now adds two references to the ancient Hebrews and the first Christians, absent in the letter to Chabod of 1949). Salvatore Settis remembers:

Momigliano started with a question: why is Ancient History studied? There are two different ways, or better, opposed ways to answer that question, he then said: one is saying that all events of men, in every time and place, deserve study and attention; the other one is that all traits of our past (for example in Italy) in

culture, in language, in the monuments, in the institutions, in the landscapes, are so imposing that they interest us and oblige us to study the past to understand an important part of ourselves. If we choose the first answer, it does make absolutely no difference for an Italian to study History or Art of ancient China or of ancient Rome; if we choose the second one, the study of ancient China will have a particular meaning for the Chinese, the study of ancient Rome will have a particular meaning for the Italians; in order to understand himself, a European must consider not only the ancient Romans, but also the ancient Greek, the Hebrews and the Christian culture of the first centuries as unwaivable and interconnected parts of the own cultural roots. <sup>3</sup>

### 3

Let's go back to our topic. The following remarks on some scholars and the eclipse of the nation in the middle of the Twentieth Century resume the reflection started with an essay on "collaboration" with the fascist regime of three Italian historians, Carlo Antoni, Federico Chabod and Arnaldo Momigliano. Let's recapitulate its content briefly. In a chapter of History of One Year, presented in Corriere della Sera in July 1944, Benito Mussolini asked: are we facing an eclipse or dusk of the Italian nation? An eclipse, he answered: Italy, like the ancient Rome or Prussia, cannot die. The current war, he went on, is a war of religion, not of nations. The lost honor will be reacquired only with shed blood in a fight that is also a civil war: first of all, the contempt of the German ally for the treason of September 8, 1943 needs to be erased.

The historical references of Mussolini's speech also stemmed from an account by a scholar of the Italian Institute for German Studies, Carlo Antoni, his voluntary or involuntary collaborator. The episode allowed me to clarify that, in the case of relationships between the high culture and totalitarian regimes, the right question, in my view, is not if the scholars were fascists, antifascists or pure "technicians" (as the jurist Piero Calamandrei intended to be), but another one: what was the political space in which their work was carried out?

Such political space was crossed by conflict of public (to the state, to the fatherland, to the nation, to the government, to the profession, to the school, to the science) and private (to family, to oneself and to career) loyalties. The extension and configuration of those conflicts (a real tangle), the solutions that are finally presented always create the limits, variables of the political space in which the scholar works. The essay ended with the statement that, in the biography of the three persons in question, a decisive role is performed by what happens in the period 1943 - 1945: end of fascism, crisis of the Italian nation, collapse of the national state and disappearance of the monarchy, moral crisis of the fatherland, end of a whole world.

Finally, a great wreckage had happened. The fact that life went on, that things went back to their place – at least, it seemed like that – does not mean that such wreckage had not happened. In many cases, it was a conventional

reconstruction of the events, ex-post. Our authors placed themselves in a new political space, sometimes paying silent sacrifices. Well, I mentioned the fact that later, around 1960, the unreleased knots of the traumatic change came to light, for example, in the hard correspondence between Chabod and Momigliano, concerning the necrology of Antoni.

Now, it is about trying a first measurement of the impact of that “silent earthquake”, by means of studying some loyalty conflicts, or moments of an intellectual biography. We will see how some historians think the nation-State as historical individuality and in which relation they are with it.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4

Let's open the Report on conditions in Liberated Italy north of Army control line, no. 15, of April 20, 1945, transmitted to the allied command by the British information and propaganda services (P.W.B.). In the first appendix, Reactions to allied foreign policy, we find the opinions in first person of Piero Calamandrei, attorney and jurist, dean of the University of Florence, influential member of the Action Party.

For those who, like myself, have regarded the struggle as a war not of nations, but of religion, with the best Italians on the side of the fighters for liberty, the arrival of the Allies has not proved a delusion. We felt that the Allied army was our army, and we watched the inevitable destruction of our cities and countryside with feelings of restraint, for their victories were our victories.

War of religion, not of nations. The fight for freedom justifies the destructions on Italian territory, the allied army is our army. However, continues Calamandrei, the English are wrong when considering that the Italians are “all equally responsible for Fascism and the war”: they should distinguish between fascists and non-fascists, the opportunists, the antifascists. Moreover, the allies should not look at the monarchy to restore a conservative order: the monarchy is responsible for fascism.

The Italian nation, divided in its interior according to clearly political and moral lines, aligned on two fronts in one war for freedom, was overshadowed in that explanatory picture that is the same as Mussolini in *History of One Year*, even if the religion for which the fight is executed on that side is not that of race, blood and honor.

In two speeches, held in Bari, on January 28, 1944, and in Rome, on September 21, 1944, Benedetto Croce repeated the same reasoning: in the world, a war of religion is fought, not of nations.

A severe civil education – we can read in the speech of Bari – had made the principle axiomatic that, when the first shot of a cannon is heard, a people should silence all its quarrels and merge into one will only for the defense and victory of the fatherland, which, being right or wrong, is the fatherland. And we were reluctant in obeying that solemn principle, and the reluctance was not that of a



rebellious passion, but came from an inner voice, from a sense of truth that led us to warn that the observance of the old maxim would be, this time, an impossible effort, a terrible hypocrisy towards us. Little by little, we understood: we started to hear around us a reasoning according to which the current war was not a war between peoples, but a civil war; and more exactly, that it was not a simple war of political and economic interests, but a war of religion; and for our religion, that had the right to command us, we resorted to feeling uninvolved in view of the wish of an Italian victory...

At closer sight, more than an irreversible detachment with regard to the wish of the fatherland, more than overcoming in a superior, religious sphere, of the merger into a single will of the quarrels, of which our nation consists (will and merger intensified at the moment of war), a suspension, reversible, however, of the national will is verified, in the numerous writings of Croce of that time – that would require a more accurate analysis than I can perform in this conference. And soon that suspension ends.

In a letter of Croce to Einstein, of June 1944, it is Italy – since the fall of the Roman Empire! – that identifies with freedom, the nation coincides with religion: “Since the fall of the Roman Empire, Italy has never had illusions of dominating the world; it actualized or tried to actualize freedom, and in freedom it unified itself, and its nationalism and fascism derived from foreign concepts”. It can be observed, following the analysis of Michele Maggi, that such return to the national dimension touches the identification with the Italian nation of Croce himself, “the greatest of the living Italians”: the voice that speaks on the radio on November 8, 1944 is not only Croce’s voice, but also the one “of the Italian people, of the real Italian people”. Man of the nation in the absence of the state in pieces, the philosopher represents the Italian unity. Thus, in Croce’s Notebooks, on April 16, 1945, we can read:

Among all those nice words that I am hearing and receiving with a peaceful soul because I had forecast them since some time as a natural effect of the fall of fascism, one, this morning, moved me: a statement that had been spoken out by somebody I do not know: ‘while Croce lives, we Italians will not feel alone’. This moved me because I felt identified with the old Italy, emotionally close to me.

Some successive interventions of Croce show how much that identification was sentimental, connected to contingencies and completely political. In the argument with Ferruccio Parri, in the “Consulta” of September 1945, the “old Italy”, that he loved, is the real, democratic Italy opposed to the little Italy denigrated by the fascists. In the speech of March 1947 about the Constitution project, Croce argues against the local autonomies and regions for the state unity of the Italian people. So, the speech of July 24, 1947 about the peace treaty is a defense of national dignity, of the Italy that does not die.

With a substantial review of the theories about the war of religion, Croce holds that “we all lost the war, because it also involved us, without exception, us that cannot separate ourselves from the good and bad of our fatherland... This is unanimous and evident”. It is not possible to approve the peace treaty because it is an offense to the honor of the fatherlands – continues the philosopher-, takes away the self-respect of the Italian people, is a durable “diminishment” that future generations will be able to feel on themselves, it is a treason of the “legacy left by our fathers”, having “let our common Mother being criticized, disgraced and submitted, submissively receiving an unjust penalty”. We all lost the war, affirms Croce acrobatically, but no part of the common Mothers is the regime that declared it: “the fascist parentheses were completely foreign to the tradition... imitation of the nationalisms and totalitarianisms of the others”, provoked by the World War. Croce here refers to a nation without body, purely spiritual, almost a ghost. A great part of the Italian history remains excluded: the entry into the war from 1915 on, the more recent developments, the new Constitution, the acceptance of the peace treaty and the new situation that was being created. The others remain excluded: the nationalists, the fascists.<sup>5</sup>

5

Also the other ones – the nationalists, fascists and the followers of the Republic of Salò – still defended the unity of the nation. All is the keyword of the article “Reconstruct” of Giovanni Gentile, published in *Corriere della Sera* on December 28, 1943.

The feeling of fatherland is alive today, I would say, exasperated, in the soul of all Italians, even if in more varied and contrary forms. The war actually, reaching the extremes, imposed upon all, rich and poor, men and women, old, young and children, it's a tough reality and its sinister consequences, with an eminent, urging threat: the threat of the destruction of a defeated country. And it makes everybody feel that now everything is at stake, the very life of each individual, even if such individual could have thought before that the state was in danger, and not he himself [...]. The nation is in danger, and the fatherland disintegrated [...]. Followers of England and of Germany, antifascists and fascists, lost Italians and Italians with guidance and firm in the place of combat will discuss whose fault it was and what the way back to the light will be.

It is an illusion, holds Gentile, to separate the destiny of the state from the destiny of the nation and of its singular components: when “the fatherland disintegrates”, the “very life of each individual” is in danger. There is no empty space, there is no distance between the individual and “the whole”, that is the nation state. The annihilation of the country causes individual ruin. Maybe from that order of thoughts, in a last analysis, derives the disappearance of the philosopher. For sure, only one of the idealist Siamese twins - Croce and Gentile, which were separated by the fascist government – managed to represent, with his own person, the unity of the nation: the other one disappeared, annulled also physically.



Nation and state coincide, for Gentile, in a precise sense. After the fall of fascism, but before the cease fire of September 8, 1943, the philosopher recovers, for publication, a series of Roman conferences of 1942 - 1943: therefrom derives *Genesis and structure of society*, his first book published posthumously and printed in December 1945.

Nation – can be read in chapter VI, § 2: Nation and State – is not constituted by soil or common life and by the consequent common traditions, customs, language codes, religion etc. All this is the matter of the nation - which won't be such if it has no conscience of that matter and does not assume it in its conscience as the constitutive content of the very spiritual essence; and, therefore, it will not make this the subject matter of its own will. As that will is, in its current and concrete form, the State: already founded or in process of being founded; and truly in every case to be founded (preserving is a continuous founding, a continuous creating). Will. A mistake of the nationality doctrine, which would be entitled to unity and state autonomy. It is not nationality that creates the State; but it is the State that creates (seals and makes) nationality - which, conquering its own unity and independence, celebrates its political will, the achiever of the state.

Here is the idea quite disseminated in the new world that is born from the Great War that the conservative revolutions fulfill the nation more than any other political system. Only the ultranationalist totalitarian revolutions – as the fascist and the Nazi ones – make nations grow.

So, such growth of the nation can be an intensification of internal coherence – as the one that should happen, according to Croce and Gentile, at the moment of entering the war or of being defeated – but also an extension of the frontiers.

Giuseppe Bottai defends, in an article of November 1932 that is inspired by the “Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution”, that Italians of Italian race, Roman Catholics and fascists have, as opposed to the Germans, “well marked moral frontiers”.

Nothing vague, floating, simply sensible or even supersensible, magic and hermetic. Of other peoples it may be said – as a German said about the Germans – that they don't have frontiers or bodies and debate a distressed and confuse dream. The Italians have well marked moral frontiers and a clear vision. In order to correspond to their temperament, fascism had to introduce an order or real powers, of acknowledged values, of concrete activities [...] Fascism is felt as an inspiration, as an intuition, as an act of faith; and there are individuals incapable of feeling it, deprived of their ideal fascination, even if regularly enrolled. But fascism is also, as we can see, the substance of reality, a tangible order, a created thing, a made thing, that is there, in front of our eyes; and we belong to it and possess it.

Looking at fascism: here is, ten years after the March over Rome, the fact that dominates the celebration. The fact is that fascism is seen [...] It is a thing that

is shown, like an architecture, in all its concrete and well measured elements [...] Therefore, fascism can have an exhibition. Due to its reality, its “visibility”. (Can a show of liberalism also be made, with small or big nothings under pneumatic bell glasses? Or an exhibition of the democratic intentions?)

In the body of fascism – that is seen: the reference to the measured elements reminds us of urban cityscapes of “fulfilled metaphysics” – the Italian nation can, or must grow.

It is a crisis of growth, a “profound” one, that Walter Maturi speaks of, rather ironically, in the article *Nation* (History of the principle of nationality), published in 1934 in volume XXIV of *Italian Encyclopedia* (and never updated since).

The World War – writes Maturi – was the most complete triumph of the principle of nationality: the multiethnic empires like Russia, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire disintegrated, the national states bore the toughest tests with fantastic moral power, state and nation today coincide in all of Europe and even bolshevist Russia became much more Russia than it had been under the czars. In international law, the courageous utopia of Mazzini and Mancini became a dogma and the jurists are debating to ensure, with the protection of minorities, exhaustively, fully, mathematically the principle of nationality. But a fulfilled ideal, say the old romantics, is a destroyed ideal: for those who are not content with the facts and observe the passion and the ideals being developed, nationality is not an arrival point any longer, but a starting point. The international juristic organism, which should eternally warrant the situation of the world of the World War, was substantially violated by all, and thus new ideals are being developed (empires, European Federation, Federation of the World), and all have the ultimate state of happiness as a goal. In the Nineteenth Century, the principle of nationality was limited to Europe only; not only the Germans, the English and the French, but also the Italians, the purest defenders of the principle, introduced that limitation: Mazzini divides the non-European countries in influence spheres of the European nations and feels, like Herder, a moral aversion against the Asians: for him, calling a State as China is the biggest sign of disdain (Austria, China of Europe): the non-European peoples, with the exception of the Americans, for him, are peoples without history, without progress, activities and, thus, without moral power. In view of the appearance of the non-European nationalities, the largest part of the Europeans of today feels more European than fully nationalist. But both logically closing the concept of Europe and broadening the concept of nationality, the European concept of nationality, as it was felt in the Nineteen Century, tends to suffer a deep crisis.<sup>6</sup>

## 6

Let’s get back to the document of the British information and propaganda services of April 20, 1945, a couple of days before Liberation. Appendix II, called *Florentine personalities - The Democrazia del Lavoro*, opens with a brief and

singular biographical note (that is followed by another one, probably related to it, that we will leave here on the side):

Carlo MORANDI. Born: 6/3/1904 in Pallanza (Novara)

Took his degree in literature. A teacher of history and philosophy in the classical high schools (Liceo Classico), he became “Provveditore agli Studi” and is at present professor of modern and contemporary history at the University of Florence.

He has published several volumes and about 60 minor studies on the political and diplomatic history of Italy and Europe during the past three centuries. He has undertaken historical research abroad and held a series of lessons in Paris; He collaborates for principal scientific and cultural Italian reviews and for the “Revue Historique de Paris.” He directed a cultural periodical, “Popoli”, which was suppressed after a year (1940-1941) by the Fascist Government. He is now in charge of the “Historia” collection of the Florentine publishing firm Barbera and contributes articles for various daily papers on problems of foreign policy. He is a member of the Partito Democratico del Lavoro and of the Directive Council of the Florentine Section. Within the Party he is chiefly concerned with cultural, educational and international problems.

At first sight, nothing to say: a brief profile, of probably autobiographical origin, of a “technician”, a History professor. From his presumably remote laboratory, many studies stemmed, upon which a precise political guidance would not be incumbent. However, some problems with the fascist government are casually mentioned – for an intelligent reader, a few words are enough – , that suppresses a magazine he led (actually, together with Federico Chabod, not mentioned herein). On the eve of the Liberation, he commits himself, as intellectual competent in foreign policy, to the Democratic Labor Party and writes in several newspapers: that is all.

Something, however, could be said. The brief, immediate note with which the British services marked their potential interest in the activity of Carlo Morandi (and of Filippo Tedeschi, the owner of publisher Barbera, to which another less brief biography refers) – those few lines are the point of arrival of a complex regeneration path. For Carlo Morandi was one of the main ideology technicians of the fascist regime, close collaborator of the ministry of National Education, Bottai, active propagandist on the field of revisionism, between the two wars, and more recently involved, as intellectual, with the “new Mediterranean irredentism”. Based on an excellent PhD thesis of Mirco Carrattieri, full of new facts and to be published next, it can be seen, for example, that the closer the war gets, the more the interests of Morandi move from modern history to the recent history of international relations, with an explicit political use of history. In the time of mobilization and war propaganda, Morandi warns that an era has ended, the era of the national principle, and defends with his writings the projects of a “new Mediterranean order” of a “new Europe”.

“The current war” – writes Morandi in *Primato*, April 1941 - “goes beyond nationality and nationalism, and adds revolutionary suggestions towards a new order on European scale to the Mediterranean imperial motives”. That order is based on a “hierarchy of powers that cannot be suppressed”, not on a “utopian equality of nations”.

In short, the portrait (or self-portrait) of Morandi, preserved in the document of 1945, is symbolical, stylized, reproduces a distant picture of the intellectual who in November 1942, in the “Congresso Volta” about the idea of Europe (reserved to a few militant ideologists), proposed an Italian cultural initiative in view of the German military force; that judged the Mediterranean Sea a “vital space” of Italy and suggested the integration between the new Nazi European order and the new fascist Mediterranean order.

Photo: Agence France Presse



*Dictators shaking hands: Adolf Hitler (1889 - 1945) and Benito Mussolini (1883 - 1945)*

That distance and the course that produces it constitute the major problem. Also here, the eclipse of the nation is one of the central elements. Morandi regards as overcome, after the World War, the context of the abstractly equal singular nations (the crisis of growth about which Maturi spoke). It is Europe the “great nation” that can act in the scenario of the new world. Until the first military defeats, Morandi thinks that the Nazi ally should be contained and not refused (the objective is to reserve the Mediterranean for Italy). As he writes in 1943, in *War for Europe*, it is decisive to “establish... if Europe should restrict itself more and more, almost crumpling, under the pressure of the Anglo-Saxon forces to the



West and the Bolshevik forces to the East, or can it reacquire a full freedom and independence by eliminating that lethal dangers that threaten it”: in this picture, the Italians are the better Europeans, Mazzini is the symbol of the connection existing between “solution of the national problem and the European revolution”, and it is necessary to expect to win the “difficult war” of the Nazis.

Next, the sequence is started that will lead to the reappearance of the nation: military defeats, crisis and fall of the fascist regime, cease fire and disappearance of the State, national moral crisis, German occupation, civil war and liberation war, end of the war, allied occupation, rearrangement of the powers in a national context, democratic restoration in a new international order.

It is not easy to measure the impact of those events in the view of Morandi (who spends the period between September 30, 1943 and October 1944 in the field in Barga, together with a colleague). Particularly, it would be necessary to deepen his reflection about the “internal” moral crisis of the Italian nation, whose traits appear in an interesting successive discussion with Salvemini on the idea of nation. Clearer, maybe, is his interpretation of the new international picture. In the centre, there is always the crisis of the principle of nationality (the new affirmation of the National States seems anachronistic to him). But in the place of the Mediterranean empire and the Euro-fascism, of the “revolutionary community of ideas and of peoples”, that crowns the “Mediterranean Resurrection” (an idea that is also found in Chabod, as Massimo Baioni noted) – instead of the “absorption of the national activity in the imperial dimension of fascist Italy”, there is now a



Photo: Agence France Presse

*Reverend Margario Santino delivers the Episcopal encyclical “For the Fatherland” to Mussolini.*

sometimes perplex assumption of the European federalist movement, that seeks, in the first after-war years, its place between the two blocks (Morandi sees with appreciation the forces that try to escape the bipolar alignment, as the “socialist Europe” of Silone). It is not easy to mark the stages of that course of regeneration. For historical perspectives and investigations – as the one about *The Left in Power*, which would like to “find again, in the roots of the liberal Italy, an alternative to fascist degeneration” – are hardly and ambiguously reset, as noted by Carratieri; sometimes, the same texts are materially reinterpreted, corrected, turned around in their general meaning.

Let’s compare, for example, the two versions of September 1942 and of July 1944 of an observation about the European unity (the “hopes” for a new Europe disappear and the tendency becomes detached, historical):

The first version – writes Carratieri on p.253 - said: “The problem of the European union completed, ideally, its first cycle; in the tragic atmosphere of the Second World War, it opened its new phase, rich in experience and full of hopes”. [In the second one], instead, we can read:

The problem of the European union ideally fulfilled its first cycle; recovering it means considering the intimate nexus that connects it to other political-ideological problems of the Nineteenth Century and mainly to the nationalities, in their pure origins and in the nationalist and imperialist developments that led to the great crises of the Twentieth Century.

The general ideological revision about the destinies of the war is observed more clearly, as it appears in an important letter of May 22, 1945 to Gioacchino Volpe – who, as we will see later, will not make revisions and regenerations.

Dear professor, thank you for your long letter that made me reflect, once more, on the aspects of our moral crisis (with regard to the seriousness of the moral losses we all agree). I agree with many things that you say (for example about the vulgar pamphlets against the Savoys), less so with others. Such as with the problem of the war: a victory of ours would have confirmed the fascist ‘system’, and would also have admitted (but not proved) the Italian capacity of freeing itself from a dictatorship, the Germany of Hitler, or better, the whole Hitlerian Europe, would have impeded a return to political forms more adequate for our spirit. And then, what could the results of a victory be in the international context? A German pax, as the one that Visconti Venosta had been indicating since 75 as the most serious calamity for Italy. Since 1938, the defunct dictator was only a ‘brilliant (sometimes, not even that) second’ in comparison to the German partner. Our country has, since years, been living in an atmosphere of latent civil war: this is the reality; the solution came unfortunately more from outside than from inside. But it was inevitable that we had to pay ‘a high fracture price’; the most serious mistake of fascism was to have separated Italy from the *Kulturkreis*, from the circle of a Western European culture and civilization to make it adhere, badly and without



an intimate persuasion, to a Nazi (and central European) myth that was foreign to it. So we accelerated the end of a prominent political function of Europe. Now we only need to transform the old Europe into a 'national park' of humanist culture; the great modern life will happen somewhere else, but the 'clergymen' will keep the flame alive.<sup>7</sup>

7

The impression that one has based on those few notes about the regeneration of Morandi is the one of wreckage, not of salvation or redemption. His - complex and significant - case is the paradigm of an impossible reorientation, of the extreme difficulty to readapt ideas and researches projected, felt, nourished in an environment that dilated the Italian nation as a great imperial power of a dominating region (Europe) of the world; adapt them to a new context, after the "silent earthquake" that made that nation of the fatherland state drown.

Certainly, the writings of those difficult times, during the war and in the first post-war years, about the history of the Italian nation, about Europe, Germany, romanticism, Nazism, are like experiences, ambiguous attempts to overcome a deep ideological uneasiness by means of the invention of a new national tradition: this is not only valid for Morandi. And the attention of the British information services for those shipwrecked ex-fascist intellectuals is noteworthy in the scenario of the "cultural cold war" that is started in the sphere of a new possible public commitment. And also the proximity of Morandi with Silone, who will be one of the generals of that secret cold war, together with Nicola Chiaromonte and Carlo Antoni.

Fit into the new national parties, mass parties and smaller ones, into the transnational movements and associations, supported by the allies and their apparatuses, by the communists or by the Church, the shipwrecked like Morandi, Antoni or Chabod seem, in every case, capable of an "operative" re-adaptation on the field of public commitment: they are not bereft of resources. The uneasiness about which we are talking acts on a deeper level.

Thus, when Chabod writes to Sestan, in February 1944, that he does not want to have anything else to do with Gentile, with his institutes and publishing activities, it can be noted that maybe that separation was possible only partially and superficially. In the writings of Chabod about the nation, the theoretical presumptions of Gentile remain, as Pier Giorgio Zunino observed; and, as I would add, also the implicit and almost hidden presumptions in the conferences of the 1943 - 1944 winter about the nation and Europe.

The organization of his university course should be carefully observed. Chabod talks about idea, sense, principle of the nation; he speaks about "nationality". The first part is a kind of summary-comment of the theories of Fight Against Reason of Carlo Antoni, a book published by publisher Sansoni, connected to Gentile, and not by Laterza, connected to Croce (although Croce had invited him): "Explaining the sense of nationality" - says Chabod -

means explaining the sense of historical individuality [...] the nation is [...] the soul, spirit and only secondly a bodily matter; it is spiritual ‘individuality’, before being a political entity, State à la Machiavelli, much more than a geographical-climatic-ethnographic entity, according to the formulas of the authors of the Sixteenth Century.

Soul, spirit, before body, State: an attempt to invert the theory of Gentile that it is the State that creates the nation. It is the dimension of the State, not the nation that eclipses here; the ideas and the feelings remain, the things and the men in flesh and blood disappear – who in that winter, during which Chabod spoke in Milan, already fought in two different states, later divided according to less clear political lines, as Roberto Vivarelli showed. Maybe the hiding of Gentile’s presumptions is intended by Chabod in that inversion. But let’s see how the speech continues. A little later, he speaks about “Freedom: [...] a great word that [...] will, almost always, accompany the nation”. For the Italians, it was a new freedom to be created; not an old one to be restored, as for the Swiss. Then, Chabod leaves Antoni and continues alone. With the analysis of Rousseau, the problem of the State, of the general will is presented:

Of the statement of a fact, created mainly of the past, the nation, is transformed into the “will” of “creating” a new fact, that is, a State founded on popular sovereignty and, therefore – this is inevitable -, becoming a “national State”. Novelty of extraordinary importance. Therewith, a previously absent act of will unites with the cognitive act [...].

Political freedom, will: the nation is “full conscience, in a people, of what it wants”. The problems, continues Chabod, appear when it is intended to “transform the cultural nation in a territorial nation”, a transformation that Italy and Germany had in common in the Nineteenth Century. But between the two movements, “there is absolute diversity, or even opposition”: the Italian is a voluntarist, the nation “expresses itself” outside of it, in the almost religious respect of the “trinity made up together with freedom and humanity”, and in the European context; the German movement is, in contrast, naturalist; thanks to the idea of mission and primacy, it moved away from the “humanitarian European sentiment”.

It now becomes clear that the portion of the course regarding the nation – defined as freedom and will, as sentiment and idea, not as historical fact: Chabod, the historian of the balance between the powers, of the State, of the empires, which keeps distance from things – is only an introduction, well guided, to the portion about Europe, as future nation, quintessence of the nation: all will, and nothing State. It is about seeing, says Chabod, how Europe, “from simple acquisition of the intellect” became a “sentimental and volitive factor”. For that purpose, he designs the “history of the ‘thoughts’ about Europe”. Here Europe is the expected nation, the nation how it should be. The thinking of Chabod turns more and more away from the nation-States, which at that moment were

fighting with bloodshed against each other (and within themselves). In Chabod's conferences, something of that tough reality of the things shines through. In the second half of the Nineteenth and the beginning of the Twentieth Century, he affirms, "it could seem [...] that the Europeans should feel always more Europeans" – that is, progressed, Christians, as a "balanced body" – but, "in reality, it was not like that". Reality was an estrangement from Europe, the technique was transferred overseas, the political system became global, the nationalism turned itself to the conquest.

In other words, the course about the nation and Europe is not only a scientific and scholarly operation. It is the construction of a virtuous national genealogy: Europe is an ideal nation, without naturalist and state contents. Chabod puts away the dimension of the national State that expands into empire in detriment to others, transforms it from a fact into danger and negative tradition, into an anti-value foreign to the trinity Italy-Europe-Mankind. The publication of the course in two separate parts, about the nation and about Europe, by Sestan and Saitta, does not help to comprehend that very clear line: in the most acute moment of the moral and state crisis of the nation, Chabod applies a dissolution of the political dimension, of the power of the nation.

In what extent that occultation was an operation of cultural, yet virtuous politics becomes clear when considering the political activity of Chabod after the winter of 1943 - 1944.

Now the ideas of Chabod about the German, naturalist, and the French-Italian, liberal, meaning of nation were put to test in a concrete context, on the border of the Aosta Valley region with France. Chabod aligns with the Resistance in the Aosta Valley from 1944 on (as we can read in the good book by Sergio Soave, *Federico Chabod politico*, 1989); in 1946, he will be the first president of the regional council. The direction of his activity – in addition to the autonomist political project – is the fight to keep his region as belonging to Italy, against the separation attempts of the Aosta Valley and against the French aspirations to annex the Aosta Valley to France; and this since August of 1944, or better, since the Chivasso declaration of December 1943. This is a crucial point. For the Chabod as historian of ideas, nation, understood in the liberal (Italian and French) sense, is a fact of free choice of the populations, the continuous plebiscite about which Renan spoke. For the Chabod as politician, instead, the nation to which the Aosta Valley should belong is Italy, the decisive plebiscite – filed by the Francophile inhabitants, who believe, with or without reason, to be the majority and able to win, thanks to the damages of the bad fascist government in the twenty years and the French support – should not be held, should not even be spoken of.

The declaration of October 20, 1944, of the representatives of the Aosta Valley opposing the annexation to France, among them Chabod in the first line, clearly says: "in the event of annexation of the Aosta Valley to France, we will immediately start an irredentist agitation to bring the Valley back to Italy. We

are and want to be Italians”. The position of Chabod, who chooses Italy, who expresses his free will, is certainly legitimate. Less in accordance with the liberal conception of the nation is the armed prohibition to perform the plebiscite (and in March 1946, president Chabod will run the risk of being defenestrated by the demonstrators).

In the end, would the plebiscite have been, in that context, so free, with the French army on the border and almost in the valley? Would the behavior of Chabod not be an exemplary case? It is the demonstration that the plan of the ideas is hardly translated into things, that hardly the liberal conception of the nation remains when facing an armed will – which proves decisive (also with regard to the purposes of the result of the plebiscite, if it had taken place in the Aosta Valley).

Chabod thinks in Milan of the Republic of Salò, the nation as freedom, but acts on the Italian frontier, after the liberation, the nation as force (and as State) – in view of the French that do the same (they seek territorial expansion in the old way).

The full recovery of a public dimension took place, as we have seen, also for Chabod, in an intimately contradictory and not settled ideological context. But still that recovery was not smaller. In January 1946, Chabod agrees to write a history of the CLNAI and of the fight for freedom of the North of Italy, commissioned by men like Pertini, Longo, Parri, Valiani, Merzagora. The completely political procedure is quite interesting that he would follow in his work: “dosage” of the witnesses to be interviewed, of the persons who will have access to the collected documents, final joint verification of the work – to be delivered until April 1946, to be “used” in the peace negotiations. Another evident example for his also political reorientation in the new situation is the mission in Paris, in 1948, together with Carlo Morandi, to negotiate the recovery of the Italian diplomatic documents withdrawn from the Allies.

The eagerness of reorientation in view of the eclipse of the nation and the collapse of the State, thus, penetrates the scientific walls in the heart of the historical researches of those shipwrecked intellectuals. The “political” nexus between nation and Europe is found in the courses of Lucien Febvre at the Collège de France: in 1943 - 1944 he teaches about Michelet and French history; in December 1944, about Europe; but he announces, for the two following years, a course on Honor and Fatherland, on which he had been working since February 1943 – in those same days, his friend and collaborator Marc Bloch interrupted the work for his book on history, *Métier d'historien*, and went into the clandestineness in Lyon.

Febvre starts with the events relative to the two Psichari brothers, the great-grandsons of Ernest Renan, both of them officials, opposed against each other in the civil and military conflict of the French nation. Following the central theme of the history of the two concepts, honor and fatherland – that “colors” the first one negatively and the second one positively -, he tries to explain two loyalties, two “sources of the national feeling”, a feeling that is opposed to the State, “a mechanics

that is indifferent to any moral demands”. It is an investigation about the nature and formation of the social relations, motivated by the angst with regard to the future. The book that derives from the conferences is still only sketched (in 1996, the notes about Honor will be published by Thérèse Charmasson and Brigitte Mazon, for publisher Perrin, then in Italian by Donzelli in 1997). The recovered prefaces indicate a progressive path towards a presentation of the concepts as “pure history”. Those conferences were, quite the contrary, political gestures of a precise signal. The discomfort with regard to what had happened, before and after the defeat, and what then happened with the liberation, finds expression in a kind of metaphysics of the national unity (“schism: restituting an aura of horror to that term”, writes the historian). But it mainly causes a removal of the present and recent past: no mentioning of the defeat, of the occupation, of the collaboration, of Vichy, of the Resistance, of the persecution of the Jews: nothing. In view of the destruction of the social relations on French soil, Febvre resorted to an ideal fatherland, conveying an intellectual and brilliant body to an invented, but not completely unreal republican national tradition.<sup>8</sup>

## 8

That, silently, something substantial had changed – while the nation eclipsed and the State collapsed -, that a deep drama had developed, not only still candescent witnesses show, like the *De profundis* by Salvatore Satta (1948), but also some more apparently vibrating stories of irreversible disorientation of intellectuals hit by the wreckage. In contrast to Lucien Febvre, Marc Bloch faces realistically, in the difficult period from 1940 to 1943, the problems of social union and nation. His perception of what happened in the thirties was different (a decisive point, also for other shipwrecked intellectuals that we cannot even mention here). The biographic itinerary was also different, very different, as Bloch, as a Jew, found himself displaced from the center of the French nation, where he believed he stood, first on the border, then outside – with the statute of the Jews of October 1940.

The sketch of a history of France in the context of European civilization (September 1939), the third chapter of the testimony about the defeat, written in the summer of 1940, the project of a volume on the origins of the French nation for the collection organized by Albert Grenier, are moments of a painstaking investigation of the broken threads in the “mechanism” of the French nation, a necessarily limited research and only sketched as results, but which involves the central problem, that is, the real limits of the French national unification.

It is certainly difficult to say in which way Bloch’s political activity and his investigations, if he had survived, would have been reoriented. But in the radical choice of clandestineness in Lyon, in March 1943, I think a radical change can be detected, with regard to the “indirect” patriotic commitment of the European comparative history researcher that Bloch had been in the thirties.

Also the Romanian religion historian, Mircea Eliade, suffered an irreversible disorientation at the opposite political margin.

Legionary of the Iron Guard, and, therefore, imprisoned from July to November 1938, Eliade spends the war years abroad, as a cultural attaché of the Romanian embassy, in London, until February 1941, then in Lisbon, after the rupture of the diplomatic relations with England, and until November 1944, when he found asylum in Paris with the help of his friend Georges Dumézil (he had already been in the city in November 1943 during the occupation, having regarded the city as “magnificent”). Eliade hates democracy and liberalism; he naturally hopes that the Axis wins the war, that Bolshevik Russia is destroyed. In Lisbon, he writes a book about Salazar to provide a dictatorship model (and a spiritual revolution) for his country, and to make himself useful during the war. There, he affirms the values of a Christian totalitarianism of the person, of the family, of the earth and in accordance with the cosmic rhythms.

Upon request by the Portuguese propaganda minister, João Ameal, between September and December 1942 he wrote, in French, a history of the Romanians, the bulwark of the Christian Europe against Turk, Slavic, Bolshevik invasions: but who will read it, he asks, if the Axis loses the war? More than a history, *The Romanians, Latin People of the East* – published in Lisbon and in Madrid in 1943 – is the picture of an immovable nation, perpetually threatened in its very existence, conscious of its precariousness. The origins explain almost everything: the ethnical-Dacian-Romanian element endures and resists, in spite of the repeated invasions.

In view of the aggravation of the military situation in December 1942, Eliade writes: “I could not accept history, without the Romania that I knew” (he had been there in July for the last time). In April 1944, Bucharest is bombed by the Americans; in August, it surrenders to the Soviets. “Nothing in history will have sense anymore”, writes Eliade, “if the Russians take possession of Germany, and thus of Europe” (not so much because they are communists, but because they are Russians). In view of the German defeat, he thinks of suicide.

From the intertwining of the ideological motives and the historiographic activity, facing the nth eclipse of the Romanian nation, the project of *Cosmos and History* originates, the great book that will be published in 1949, in Paris, by Gallimard, under the title *Le mythe de l'éternel retour* [The myth of the eternal return]. Therein, Eliade seeks and describes in the archaic thinking a different horizon than the historical horizon (and of modernity itself). The history are the events that press and cause pain and suffering. With regard to them, the modern historicism is ineffective. Not by chance – he holds – it was born in nations for which history was never, as for the Romans, a “continuous terror”.

We take the liberty of emphasizing that “historicism” was created and professed above all by thinkers belonging to nations for which history has never been a continuous terror. These thinkers would perhaps have adopted another viewpoint had they belonged to nations marked by the “fatality of history”. It would certainly be interesting, in any case, to know if the theory according to which everything that happens is “good” simply because it has happened, would



have been accepted without qualms by the thinkers of the Baltic countries, of the Balkans, or of colonial territories.

Thus, the disorientation of the war years produces in Eliade a clearer focusing on the problem of history that translates into taking a distance full of implications. Instead, it may seem strange that Eliade has continued, even after the war, to regard himself as a historian of religions.

It was under such title, anyways, that he collaborated with anticommunist cultural companies as *Encounter*, the magazine of the Congress for Cultural Freedom indirectly financed by the CIA. A note of the Foreign Office, already in the war years, had foreseen that possibility: Eliade “is a man that can be useful to us.”

In his case, the new direction of his public activity and of the researches does not produce any bad conscience and shadowy zones, where it is better not to venture. He produces removals of the past. When Gershom Scholem, in the spring of 1972, writes him to ask if it is true that he had been a legionary in the Romanian Iron Guard, Eliade answers him no, it is not true.<sup>9</sup>

9

Gioacchino Volpe writes to Federico Chabod, in an undated letter, but of the first months of 1944:

Thanks God I have not lost the liking for the work, in spite of the feeling of having failed in my work (the generations who are now between thirty and seventy years old will consider themselves a bit failed, after this collapse that is not only military!), in spite of the almost total absence of the civil objectives that always remain deep in our work and presuppose the existence of a fatherland, of a national society, of a state, things that have now disappeared or are somehow vanishing, alive only in the memory of the past and in the hopes of the future, more than in the concrete present.

Loss of the civil objectives, which are the reasons of the historical work: the diagnosis of Volpe clearly defines the authentic loss of the shipwrecked intellectuals about whom we are talking in these notes. With secure intuition, Volpe tended to amplify the area of the defeat that he detected in himself. As opposed to his students Chabod and Morandi, he will not manage to recover a public dimension as intellectual, and his case is exemplary therefore.

Volpe had sought, in the medieval times, the national origins, looking back towards what seemed to him a “natural order of things” – the slow building of the European nations. Then, he had left the medieval era and conveyed to historiography a national function, as political education of the new Italy, more or less based on the Libyan war, as shown by Giovanni Belardelli. During the World War, and right after it, he had used history as a weapon for the combat of the propaganda service of the army, and with the advent of fascism he had managed to keep a margin of ideological distance to the totalitarian government regime that, however, he served with great dedication. The presumptions on the ground of his scientific work – in particular, about international relations – were the identification

of the society with the nation, the vision of ideal (and territorial) frontiers of the nation destined to be enlarged, the transformation of the nation-State into an Empire.

All those reasons are destroyed by the events of 1943 - 1945. Judged “unworthy of serving the state” in July 1944, dispensed from service and retired, like a survivor, Volpe will manage to finish *Modern Italy*, in 1949 (“it seems to me”, he will note, “as if I was conducting a cadaver”, (his and Italy’s, probably). In a certain sense, trying, without much conviction and more than once, to put Volpe back into the circuit of teachings and studies, Chabod and other old students of the Roman history school tried a smooth reanimation of the cadaver of their own past – which, however, is not re-evaluated and remains buried, where a history extremely difficult to be accepted had destined it. The nation, to which Volpe remained faithful, could not be found anymore.

From the afterlife, Volpe wrote to Rosario Romeo, in January 17, 1960:

Saitta [...] insisted about the question of my ‘nationalism’, which in the past times would have jeopardized my activity as historian. It would be nice if somebody said what my ‘nationalism’ is. It is simply taking the State, the Italian nation as subject matter of the recent history of Italy; the State as general activity of the nation, both political and economical and social, or even cultural, where culture resents of in politics and influences politics. And what must be the task of a historian that takes a country in its ensemble in a determined era as subject matter? Is it ‘nationalism’ having followed the ascension of Italy with affection, its will to be somebody in the world, the consolidation of its national conscience? I do not understand what those young people want. Should I only study the classes and their fights and workers’ problems? I would then have served badly the classes, Italy and history.<sup>10</sup>

## 10

In conclusion, a few notes, as comments to the dossier that I have presented. A part not indifferent to the uncertainty that is related to the word nation, discussed by the authors whose experiences and difficulties we saw, derives from the fact that they focus on the idea and keep distance from things, from the real observable connections of which a nation is made up. That tendency reveals a totally political tension that refers to the nation as a desired thing, the historical process as governed by the individuality that wants (hence the relation between the idea of nation and historicism, that are born and sink together), the relations between politics and culture as field to be guided and guide that commands. And it is in this sphere of thoughts that the void is produced, which I tried to describe with those stories of shipwrecked intellectuals.

## Notes

- 1 Revised and extended text of the speech held on October 18, 2006, at the Scuola Superiore di Studi Storici da Universidade de San Marino, as a part of the seminar about “Nation, Nationalism, Internationalism”. The notes of each section were included for this edition, under Advanced Studies.
- 2 “Ciampi and the Fasci littori”. Report of the agency Ap-Biscom of June 26, 2003. Affirmation about the collapse of the state in the answer to Ernesto Galli della Loggia (1996), published in *Corriere della Sera* on March 5, 2001. For “Vivarelli and the Italian nation”, see Vivarelli (2000), and his participation in the discussion about the republican Italian history (Vivarelli, 1999, p.230-5; 2006, p. IX-XXVIII), as well as the pages about nation (Vivarelli, 2005). For the uncertainty about national community, Vivarelli (2006, p. XIV) speaks about the “national community dissolved on September 8”, while on p. XVII there is still a national community that has “effective responsibilities” and a “disturbing past”; as Vivarelli clarifies, he writes about history to “settle the accounts with his own life experiences [starting with the militancy in the Italian social republic], to use it to mature the conscience: his own individual one and, which is more important, the conscience of the community for which those experiences always continue to belong” (my italics; here he seemed to allude to a continuity of the national community, in spite of September 8).
- 3 “Graveyard of the Prussian generals” (Bayer, 2006, p. 378). For “Taviani’s Memories”, see Taviani (2002). — “Very much changed masters and researches with local scope”. The “laceration” produced by the war is spoken of by Ernesto Ragionieri in 1975 in Belfagor, concerning Carlo Morandi (cf. Santomassimo, 1995, p. 83). For the quotation of Corrado Vivanti, (2002, p. 13). For the first generation of Italian historians, that is formed in the post-war era – with the notable exception of Rosario Romeo – the nation is mainly a historical problem, a question mark (thus, not anymore a motive of the research work itself). We should think on the notes of Ruggiero Romano (1994, p. XVII), for whom the nation is only an idea, defended by nationalist historiographic ambitions, while the country is a fact, or of Girolamo Arnaldi (1994) when commenting the encyclopedic undertaking of Pierra Nora for France (already published in *Le Débat*, 1994, v. 1), or in the project of the book *L’Italia e i suoi invasori* (Arnaldi, 2002). — “Universal History”. About the Einaudian project and the letter of Momigliano, see Tortarolo (2002); for the attribution to Corrado Vivanti, see Mangoni (1999, p. 941). — For recalling Momigliano’s conference, see Settis (2004, p. 3).
- 4 “Essays about the three historians during fascism and the correspondence of 1959”, see Mastrogregori (2006); for the comment to the “correspondence of 1959”, see *Storiografia* (v. 8, p. 9-101, 2004) with a bibliography.
- 5 The document of the Psychological Warfare Branch: preserved at National Archives of the United Kingdom, Foreign office, series 371. — “Croce”, see Maggi (2001, p. 175-6: Bari speech) (p. 180: Rome speech) (p. 1: letter to Einstein), and Croce (1983, p. 179: argument with Parri) (p. 188: project of the Constitution) (p. 204-15: about the peace treaty); for the quotation of the notebooks, see Croce (1987, p. 275).
- 6 “State and Nation”, see Gentile (1946, p. 57). About the late Gentile, see the remarks of Sasso (2000). — “See fascism”: for quotation of Bottai, see Schnapp (2003, p. 83).
- 7 “Morandi”, see Carrattieri (2006). — “Mediterranean empire and Italian resurrection”, see Baioni (2006, p. 251, 252, 258).

- 8 “Antoni and the attempts to overcome the ideological uneasiness”. It is impossible to present here the case of Carlo Antoni, of the preface of *La lotta contro la ragione*, of April 1942, in which he relates the idea of the nation and the origins of historicism to the final dissolution of the concept of the nation in some writings in *Mondo*, 1949 - 1959; the sketch of *History of Italy* in November of 1943 would be an important intermediate step; see Ippolito (2003, p. 241-54: to p. 243, note the “not unimportant ambivalences” of Antoni’s analysis regarding the ideas of people and nation). — “Chabod”, see Soave (1989, p. 44 - rupture with Gentile); for the presumptions, at Gentile, of the studies of the idea of the nation, see the remarks of Zunino (2002, p. 107-40, particularly on p. 136). – For the quotation of the course of 1943 - 1944, see Chabod (1974, p. 17 – nationality and individuality, (p. 25-6: soul, more than body) (p. 32: freedom) (p. 55-6: will to create a new fact) (p. 75: what the people want) (p. 67: cultural and territorial nation) (p. 68: naturalist and voluntarist way) (p. 79 et seqq. and 9: German and Italian movement) (p. 8: idea and value of Europe) (p. 163-4: estrangement from Europe). – The situation that causes the difficulties of the course about the idea of the nation is reflected in the new version of the first volume, the *Premissas, da Storia della politica estera italiana*: as shown by Traniello (2002). – *History of the Committee of national liberation of the North of Italy*, see Soave (1989, p. 128-9). - “Mission in Paris with Carlo Morandi”, see Carrattieri (2006, p. 327).
- 9 For Salvatore Satta, the disappearance of the fatherland “is the most grandiose event that can happen in the lifetime of an individual”: see Satta (2003, p. 53, best existing edition). - “Bloch”, see Mastrogregori (2001, p. 38-42), and Lezioni 2003 - 2004, *Marc Bloch e il Novecento*, lezione XVI (site of the Dipartimento di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea dell’Università di Roma “La Sapienza”). - “Eliade”. Biographical notes on Eliade, a long unpublished text (I thank Natale Spineto for the anticipation) of the editor of the diaries, Mac Linscott Ricketts, who subjects the volume of Laignel-Lavastine (2002) to a strong critique. – *Book on the Romanians of 1943: Italian translation of Enrico Montanari* (Settimo Sigillo, 1997). – Quotation about the historicism, see Eliade (1971, p. 152n).
- 10 “Volpe and Chabod”, see the edition of the letters by Frangioni (2002). - “A bit failed generations”: it is very interesting that Volpe even refers to those born around 1915, in the letter to Chabod, when building the arch of the “a bit failed” generations: he regards as decisive the participation in the national impulse of the post-war era and in the fascist experience, also for younger generations than his, even the one of Chabod and beyond. In a letter of October 27, 1967, to Rosario Romeo, Volpe confirms his assessment of 1944: “I see in you the best representative of the current generation of our historians (I know three: my masters, between 1800 and 1900; ours, of which I am the last survivor; the last one, yours)”: see the edition of the epistolary Volpe-Romeo, by Pescosolido (2000). – The letter from Volpe to Romeo of January 17, 1960 is quoted at Di Rienzo (2004, p. 317-18).

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*ABSTRACT* - The observation of some documents and facts of the cultural history of the period from 1940 to 1945 gives us the impression that the nation and some correlated terms (such as patriotism, people, national community, State) continuously disappear and reappear, especially in the reconstructions of the final facts of the Second World War. A kind of void - in the convergence of world changes and "national" events - was, then, created; which could be called a "nation's eclipse". The "histories by historians", briefly presented here, indicate that this void has involved a series of decisive cultural elements in the structuring of national social relations. The void is soon concealed and filled with new contents, but one should be aware of it in order to understand how "new" communities of citizens were formed after the Second World War.

*KEYWORDS* - Historiography (1940-1945), Nation, State, Cultural History.

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