



# *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature*

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Cover: Photograph by Edward de Grazia: "Livia Paggi at the cemetery, Civitella della Chiana, 29 June 1991."

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2. See, e.g., R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval French Literature and Law* (California: U. of Cal. Press, 1977); see also essays on the *Njal's Saga* by Ordoer and Slusher in this journal's previous number.

3. Langbein, "The Appeal," in Smith, *Development of Legal Institutions* (Minnesota: West, 1965), p. 181.

4. Again re-inforcing our earlier observation that irrational factors have always influenced testimony, consider the common etymologies of the words *testis* and *testimony*.

5. See Claude Lanzmann, *Sboab: An Oral History of the Holocaust* (New York: Pantheon, 1985).



# *Story of an Ordinary Massacre: Civitella della Chiana, 29 June, 1944*

Victoria de Grazia and Leonardo Paggi

## I. The Event

The events surrounding the SS massacre committed in the tiny Tuscan hilltown of Civitella seem clear enough. The afternoon of June 18, 1944, four German soldiers who had lost contact with their unit trudged up to the village and after wandering through its medieval alleyways, stopped off at the fascist recreational club just off the central square. At dusk they were attacked by several partisans out to grab their weapons. Perhaps because the Germans had been drinking, they put up unexpected resistance, and two were killed. A third man who was unscathed made his way down with his wounded friend to their comrades below. By the next day, many townspeople had fled into the countryside out of fear of a German reprisal. Those remaining sought to demonstrate their community's disapproval of the deed by attending a ceremony for the dead soldiers. Subsequent contacts with nearby German command posts led various trusted intermediaries to believe that the villagers had been exonerated of responsibility. After three days, most of Civitella's several hundred inhabitants were back home.

A week later, at dawn on June 29th, a Sunday morning and the feast day celebrating Saints Peter and Paul, the SS units of the Wehrmacht's Goering Division surrounded the town under the cover of a fog and rushed through the town gates. Moving from house to house, they burst through the front doors and shot down the men as they leaped from their beds. When they reached the town square, they routed the several scores of people gathered inside the Church for mass. Pushing aside the women and children, they lined up the men, including the priest and, five by five, machine-gunned them to death. They then looted and mined the houses. Subsequently they proceeded

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to two smaller villages nearby, Cornia and San Pancrazio, where they killed dozens more, including several women. Altogether they murdered around 250 people.

Later that day, according to the testimony of the abbot of Vertighe, a monastic retreat just below the neighboring town of Monte San Sansovino, the SS troops returned to their bivouac. They carried bicycles, clocks, vases, and other loot, and they were raucously drunk. The abbot, who had become familiar with their movements, had worried at their unusually early start at 3:00 am (to rendezvous with fascist guides from Arezzo, it was later surmised). But the first news he heard of the massacre was from an SS captain he had befriended, a devout Catholic who blurted out to him, while staggering to his quarters, "Nous avons assassiné."<sup>1</sup>

Why was there such a ruthless reprisal for such an insignificant act? Certainly it was not German army policy to retaliate on such a scale every time disbanded soldiers were assaulted. The wantonness of the attack seems all the greater because fully ten days elapsed between the incident and the reprisal to which it gave rise. What machinations occurred in that interval? Were the Wehrmacht commanders simply trying to trick the villagers into returning before unleashing their troops? Or was their conciliatory attitude overridden by the SS commandos attached to their units? Did the still-active fascists from nearby Ciggiano and the provincial capital at Arezzo play a role in changing their minds, perhaps convincing the Germans that Civitella was really a hotbed of partisan activity? Why didn't the partisans of the area, knowing that the Germans had committed reprisals in nearby zones, warn the villagers or try to protect them?

One point seems certain from the outset: the reprisal bore no relationship to the actual threat of resistance activity in the Valdichiana area. Civitella itself was a typically conservative hill town. Isolated and devoutly Catholic, its population of artisans, municipal employees, professionals, and small landowners contained no very wealthy proprietors and few miserable poor. In spite of these conservative traditions, it is true that most all *Civitellini* had cautiously welcomed the fall of Mussolini in July 1943; they celebrated the armistice on September 8th that promised to end Italy's involvement in the war; and they approved when the authority of the local fascist *gerarchi* collapsed. By 1944, the two best-respected figures of the town, the parish priest Don Alcide Lazzeri and the chief medical officer, the Florentine Dr. Luciano Gambassini, openly voiced this collective disaffection with the old regime, each in his own idiom, of course -- the former's was a humanistic Catholicism, the latter's a humanistic communism -- while even the mild-mannered fascist party secretary

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turned a blind eye to the comings and goings of the partisans. Even so, resistance actions locally remained sporadic and ineffectual, especially in comparison to other areas in the vicinity, including the Pratomagno highlands and the Casentino hills, where well-supplied rebel bands were nurtured by their political contacts with Florence and could find sanctuary in the woods and caves of the mountainous terrain. Locally, the rebels numbered at most a dozen, including a lycée student, the son of local farmers, a one time lieutenant in the Parachute corps Edoardo Succchielli (called Renzino), and several young men hiding out from military recruiters. Unable to challenge the Germans militarily nor well enough linked up to the more vigorous and better armed groups nearer to Florence, they resigned themselves to awaiting the Allies' approach in order to unite their little band with fellow rebels nearby.

More probably, the massacre was precipitated because the area itself was acquiring a growing strategic importance to the Germans as the war in Italy progressed. By the late spring of 1944, the Allies had finally broken through the German defenses at Monte Cassino and were moving toward Rome, which they liberated on June 4. In the next four weeks (including those crucial ten days between the incident and the massacre), the Allies pushed up the western side of the peninsula on a broad front, one line of march advancing through the Valdichiana. Perhaps the Germans perceived that the ridge that separated the Arno and the Chiana valleys, the ridge upon which Civitella was perched, was an increasingly important strategic barrier to the Allies' advance, and that potential rebel activity there was correspondingly more menacing. This might explain why such drastic countermeasures seemed expedient. Anyway, the Germans risked nothing, for the local partisans held no hostages and were in no position to launch a counterattack, much less defend the little town. As it turned out, the hills around Civitella would indeed become a battle front for 15 days in early July as the advancing British engaged German forces sometimes in hand-to-hand combat. When Civitella itself was finally liberated by British troops on July 16, 1944, it was a pile of ruins, its massive walls and citadel blasted apart by Allied bombardments and toppled onto the houses the Germans had mined and looted.<sup>2</sup>

Still, any deeper explanation of the massacre must connect the German actions at Civitella to the broader conduct of the war, and specifically to the changes in warfare that occurred after the Germans launched Operation Barbarossa, against the Soviet Union in June, 1941. As the Wehrmacht ran into stiff resistance and Hitler's promise to solve the "Jewish Question" was immensely complicated by

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bringing hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews under the areas of German occupation, the Nazi leaders condoned the mass murder of unarmed civilians. Initially, they justified their war against the population by identifying specific groups, namely Jews and Bolsheviks, as the instigators of resistance. To retaliate behind the lines, the advancing army had been equipped with specialized commandos, the notorious *Einsatzgruppen*. They were largely composed of men who had been well-disciplined professionals in civilian life and who had transferred their efficiency and ambition to their new line of duty. At the Babi Yar ravine, they killed over 33,000 Jewish civilians in only two days, September 29-30, 1941, allegedly to punish partisan attacks on the German command in nearby Kiev.<sup>3</sup> At the same time as the Nazi leaders pursued more systematic methods of concentrating and exterminating Jewish populations, they extended the techniques of reprisal to all of the German-occupied territories.

Before Barbarossa, the German armed forces had treated the civilian populations of occupied France, Belgium, and Holland in accordance with Germany's broader goals in western Europe: to obtain the cooperation of puppet regimes and to ensure the acquiescence, if not collaboration, of local citizens. As resistance to the Nazi occupation grew, the techniques of reprisal first practiced on the eastern front were applied elsewhere. Civitella's experience was thus preceded in scores of towns from Crete and Lidice in Czechoslovakia to the Vercors in France; it was to be repeated elsewhere in Italy too, at Marzabotto, Boves, and other localities of Italy's northcentral regions. Each occasion witnessed the element of surprise to maximize the catch, the drunken soldiers screaming "*Raus, Raus!*" the round-ups, the formal executions in the town center, the burning of bodies and mining of houses to obliterate the deeds, the retreat accompanied by mop-up actions nearby and often by even greater wantonness. It is thus perfectly conceivable that the devoutly Catholic, French-speaking SS captain of whom the Abbot of Vertighe spoke had served before in France, and before that in Greece, Yugoslavia, or on the great expanses of the eastern front.<sup>4</sup> In that sense, Civitella's massacre was an ordinary event, its rituals common to the whole history of Nazi violence in Europe.

## II. Interpreting the Massacre

The testimonials of the massacre published here were first gathered during the Summer of 1945 at the initiative of Romano Bilenchi, a writer originally from the provinces around Siena. His fiction and cultural commentary made him prominent among those coteries of young intellectuals in Florence who were becoming more

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and more outspoken against the regime in the late 1930s, and in 1940, he had published his best-regarded novel, *Il conservatorio di Santa Teresa*. But the crisis of fascism brought a halt to his career as a novelist, and by late 1943, he joined the armed resistance. Just after the war, he founded the quarterly journal *Società*, where the testimonials were first published in 1946. His journal aimed to provide a new forum for young intellectuals in democratic Italy. In 1947, he became editor of the freewheeling Florentine daily, *Nuovo Corriere*, which he headed until 1956.

Bilenchi's motives in gathering and publishing the testimonials were doubtless multiple. One stated aim was to commemorate his friend, Gastone Paggi, a doctor who had supported the Florentine Resistance by giving medical aid to partisans tortured by the notorious Carita' band. Only a few days before the massacre, at the urging of Florentine comrades who feared for his safety, he had joined his wife and children at her family's home at Civitella and there he had been killed along with his father-in-law and the other men. It was through his widow, Elda Morfini Paggi, who had since returned to Florence with her children and elderly mother, that Bilenchi and his friend Marta Chiesi obtained the written testimonials from the massacre's survivors.<sup>5</sup>

Bilenchi's was an aesthetic choice as well. The publication of these voices of the people -- spontaneous, unedited, crying out at the horrors perpetuated by the Nazi fascists -- was consistent with the whole thrust of Italian neo-realism at its origins during the immediate postwar period. As a genre, the testimonies were thus akin to the experiments of the cinema in those years: Rossellini's *Open City* (1945), conceived in occupied Rome and filmed when the city had barely been liberated; Vittorio De Sica's *Sboeshine* (1947), whose heroes were Roman street urchins, or Luchino Visconti's story of the struggles of impoverished Sicilian fishermen, *The Earth Trembles* (1948). The testimonies also had affinities with the populist realism of Bilenchi's Florentine compatriot Vasco Pratolini's *A Tale of Poor Lovers* (1947).<sup>6</sup> Neo-realism, thus armed itself with the strength of feeling identified with the common people to blast away at the encrusted bombast, the lies, and the twisted reasoning of two decades of fascist rule.

It was the springtime of hope; in the pained yet clear voices of the Italian populace, there was the rediscovery of Italy's humanity. Women's voices played an especially important role in this quest, as the figure of the earthy Pina (Anna Magnani) of *Open City* or the adolescent girls of Pratolini's tales of plebeian neighborhood goings-on attest. Prevailing literary conventions construed the emotions

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identified with women as the life pulse of the collectivity and as restorants of nurturing values.

At bottom, Bilenchi's decision to publish the testimonies was political. The strategy of the Italian left at the time aimed to keep alive the antifascist alliance in order to provide the broadest support for a politics of reform. In 1946, the coalition governing Italy amidst increasing difficulty was still the one formed during the Resistance. Providing evidence of fascist atrocities was a way to underscore the unity of the Italian people against the old regime and against political forces unwilling to confront its ignominious legacy.

Just a year later, in the summer of 1947, the same texts appeared in French translation in an issue of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Temps modernes* entirely devoted to Italy. By 1947, the Cold War had begun, and the French left was trying to find its way between Soviet communism and American hegemony. Sartre was hoping that the example of Italy's humanistic communism might offer a countermodel to the Stalinist tendencies that were already deeply-rooted in the French movement. In his view, the reborn Italian communist party responded to the demand for sweeping intellectual and moral reform that Piero Gobetti and Antonio Gramsci had advanced as early as the 1920s. This view was underscored in the contributions of the writers Alberto Moravia and Guido Piovene, who contended that fascism was yet another, if graver, manifestation of the corruption, cynicism, and authoritarian spirit of the centuries-old counterreformation in Italy. The young Moravia was an especially astute cultural critic. In Italy, the ethical sentiment of the Renaissance had given way to the sentimentality of the Baroque. Ferocity and meaculpas went hand in hand: "an outpouring of tears, an outpouring of blood, D'Annunzio and De Amicis, the same rhetoric to cover up the worst deeds of fascism." The section of the issue containing what Sartre retitled the "lament of Civitella" had a double purpose: to document German atrocities and to demonstrate the Italian people's broad support for the Resistance.<sup>7</sup> The "lamento" was thus interpreted as the community's fierce cry for deliverance; memory of the event was consecrated as part of the legacy of antifascism, at once an inspiration and source of identity for the beleaguered left.

In *The Mandarins*, Simone de Beauvoir, too, referred to the legacy of Nazi terror, though by the 1950s she appeared skeptical about whether this memory exercised a salutary effect on left intellectuals, about whether the powerful emotions aroused thereby could reinforce the rational foundations of their political commitment. At one point in her novel, she had her main protagonists, Henri and Dubrueiul, along with the latter's wife Anne, going into the French

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countryside for a vacation, as if in search of respite from the existential anguish they experienced as the meaning of the Resistance struggle dimmed and the threat of extinction by the H-Bomb loomed over Europe. In the course of their travels, the three reached Vercors -- the site of Nazi atrocities on an even vaster scale than those perpetrated at Civitella. As they saw it from afar, it looked like "one of those innocent, secret places of which one used to think, 'Here at least war and hate will never manage to penetrate.'" But as they approached and saw the makeshift crosses, they knew "there was no refuge anywhere." Yet it was hard for them to draw inspiration from the sight of the survivors clustering around for a day of commemoration: "Old men and young, women and children . . . all dressed in black, sweltering in their heavy funeral clothes. There were five thousand of them, perhaps ten thousand, vying with each other for the shade of dead trees and scorched walls. Squatting by the roadside, leaning against the cars and carriages, they unwrapped loaves of bread and bottles of red wine. Now that the dead had been fittingly gorged with speeches, flowers and military music, the living could eat."<sup>8</sup> What meaning could these urban intellectuals draw from this mass of grieving individuals? Perhaps the inspiration could not be political, de Beauvoir suggested, at least not in the accepted sense of the term.

As the Cold War progressed, it was inevitable that the story of Civitella would be reinterpreted in Italy as well. As the testimonials suggest, the relationship of the villagers to the partisans was not unequivocal. Some expressed sympathy, perhaps even complicity; others disapproved of their recklessness. At the time the survivors wrote their testimonials, however, their understanding of the massacre had not been colored along political lines. This occurred only later, in the course of the late 1940s and 1950s, as Italian politics was polarized between left and right, and between Christian democrats and the Popular front of communists and socialists. Local conservatism fed off of the religious fundamentalism of Pius XII, the political manipulations of the Christian democratic party (which condemned the partisans for their irresponsibility), and the largesse of Italy's emerging welfare state. Indeed, the latter, operating from nearby Arezzo under the patronage of Amintore Fanfani, delivered survivors' pensions, housing, and other aid to the relatives of the victims.

By contrast, the left found Civitella's ambiguous legacy difficult to deal with. The unease leading the PCI on the national level to ignore Civitella in favor of Marzabotto and other sites of Nazi reprisals (where the survivors had remained staunchly communist) was compounded on the local level by the rapidly changing economy. In the years of the Italian "miracle," Civitella suffered the double

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disadvantage of being a hill town and a town of women alone. Its economy was in ruin, its skilled men all dead, the survivors traumatized by the death and destruction, the children declassified. Down in the valley, economic development went hand in hand with the growth of the Communist party. Civitella, backward and seemingly reactionary, became something of a puzzle to the left, as well as an embarrassment.

A highly publicized trial served to crystallize the antagonistic interpretations of the Civitella catastrophe. In 1950, the association of partisans successfully sued for libel a journalist employed by the Florentine Christian democratic newspaper, *Il Mattino*, who had written that their reckless behavior precipitated the German massacre. From that point on, the controversy over the meaning of the events of Civitella became a frontline battle between local communists and Christian democrats. One side blamed the fascists, the other the partisans (which is to say the communists).

In this context, the left elaborated its own myths about Civitella, as is testified by the reconstruction of the history of the Resistance in the province of Arezzo conducted by Antonio Curina, a school teacher who had participated in the uprising in the ranks of the radical Action party. To prepare his volume, Curina invited Luciano Gambassini to present his first published account of the Civitella massacre. In it, he spoke of the frustration of a country doctor, marginal to the burgeoning anti-fascist culture of Florence and long isolated from the incipient partisan movement; of the powerful camaraderie among the men, and the belief in the necessity of violence to redeem Italy from the oppression and humiliation suffered under German fascist rule; of the astonishing amateurishness of partisan warfare -- the missed encounters, the arms never dropped, the botched explosive charges. Gambassini's was also a tale of wishful thinking, insensitivity, and forgetfulness. At his best in his evocation of the poverty and wild beauty of the Valdichiana, he recalled the humanitarian traditions of 19th century socialism; at his worst, his descriptions of the "Germanic hordes" and the "fateful June 29" employed the bombastic phraseology of the Stalinist left in the 1950s. Try as one might, no resident of Civitella would have recognized the hospice's nurse "La Menca," as she was familiarly called, an altogether decent neighbor who occasionally passed food and news to the men, once she had been transmogrified by lofty words into a "woman of rare courage and resolutely anti-fascist."

The thrust of Curina's volume is of course comprehensible in light of the attack unleashed by the Christian democrats against the partisans; this was part of a broader onslaught against the left and

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labor movement, which since the elections of April 1948 had been thrust into the opposition. In the Italy of the 1950s, it needed to be stated again and again that the fascist regime ultimately caused the massacre: its leaders had dragged Italy into the war and then abandoned the country to German occupation; and at Civitella and elsewhere, its local cohorts had actively cooperated with the SS troops. Nonetheless, the rhetoric that commemorated the dead as "fallen in the war of liberation" or characterized the women survivors as "heroines of the resistance" left much to be desired. Inherited from the military-political language of the Resistance (and before that from the Risorgimento heroes of the 19th century), it gave semantic expression to the difficulties experienced even by this humanistic leftist tradition in coming to terms with the complex aspects of individual social experience. By contrast, the Catholic tradition was far more flexible and more responsive.

But when simpler men spoke of their experience in the Resistance, the stakes were more visible, the individual human and moral dilemmas clearer. This was best illustrated by the poignant 1979 testimony of Vasco Caroti, one of the five men involved in the attack on the Germans. Eighteen at the time, a draft dodger, and an apprentice craftsman, he would later become a successful small entrepreneur in the local furniture industry. Caroti recalled that he and his comrades had been goaded to attack by the insults of fellow townsmen, who said that the partisans spoke a good line, but did nothing to rid the town of a few Germans. Without embellishment, he spoke too of his community's sensitivity to the value of human life, German as well as Italian.

As soon as my compatriots saw that we were good and ready [to confront the Germans], they forgot all the negative comments they had made that day and we made up. Some even came up to me.

--Good fellows! That's it . . . Show them this is no place for them.

I was the first to enter. The four Germans were drinking, sitting around relaxed and tranquil . . . . In effect we all entered at once. Five armed men bursting into a room to slaughter four individuals caught sitting unawares equals four cadavers nailed to their chairs. But we didn't want to kill. We pointed our guns.

--Haende hoch! shouted Renzino.

Three Germans raised their hands immediately, but the fourth tried to resist. He only had a

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dagger, because his machine gun, which he had nearby the table, my companions had kicked out of the way.

--Hands up! Renzino went again.

The dagger was sheathed and the German was trying to get it out. The partisans' hesitation to fire, the example of the officer. . . , I don't know what happened. Another German tried to move and Bibi fired a round at him.

Renzino fired a pistol shot at the officer with the dagger. He aimed at his hand so that he would stop pulling it out and maybe the shot went wide. The German, extracting the weapon, grabbed Renzino with his free hand, and he shot at him again. This time in the chest. Perhaps it was too late because a man struck in the chest still has enough strength to strike a blow. But Dario, at the very moment that the dagger was raised, slammed a bullet into his temple. The officer, who robust and tall towered over Renzino, went down, and the dagger hit the floor with such violence that it bent. . . .

Of the four Germans, two were dead, one wounded and one was unscathed. I saw him escape through the wine cellar and I followed him. Terrified he scrambled up onto the bars of the window. I didn't touch him because there was a standing order not to shoot except in case of extreme emergency.

I ran to warn Renzino.

In the meantime, the townspeople were running away terrorized, some exclaiming.

--Enough! Enough! What are you doing!?

And their tone was distraught and accusing. It was obvious that my compatriots had a touch of compassion for the enemy, and, though they wanted to see them surrender, they didn't want their deaths. That is the spirit of our people.

Renzino, answering me about the disarmed SS man who had taken refuge in the wine cellar, said:

--Let him be, that way, 11 lives may be saved.

But only one life was saved, the German's. At Civitella, the enemy's fury put no limit of numbers on the waste of human lives.<sup>10</sup>

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### III. The Women's Testimonies

The testimonies of the massacre collected by Bilenchi and Marta Chiesi yield a very different reading from that suggested by the political polemics of the Cold War. All but two of the testimonies were by women. The men's were not included in the French translations. One of the latter has been translated here,<sup>11</sup> largely for the sake of completeness, for it offers less compelling accounts of the events, perhaps because mere survival was so extraordinary that the conventions of narrative suggested dealing only with that fact.

In any case, the testimonies all underscore that the massacre was a frightfully gendered event. At Civitella at least, the reprisal was conducted against the men, though why that should have been so is not altogether clear. Was it out of respect for the normal conventions of war and reprisal? Or because, objectively, the attackers had been male? Or because it was the men, if they became partisans, who presented a threat? If so, why was it that at Cornia and San Pancrazio, they killed women, too? At Civitella, the SS commandos thus determined that the men and the women would have different fates: the men to be killed, the women to bury them. For some survivors, the screams that "the Germans are killing the men" announced the calamity. "Being a man meant being condemned to death," as one woman wrote, "regardless of political views. Even the local fascists were killed, even the town's fascist party secretary." The unnaturalness of this destiny was brought home when the women faced their first task alone, to identify and bury the dead. Most commented on this: on being "among women alone," on "giving each other a helping hand." "It was I, his wife, who made him his coffin and when his coffin was made as best as possible, we took a cart on which we placed my husband and two other men and we took them to the cemetery where I dug his grave myself." Again the Widow Falsetti: "I don't know how we had enough strength, we women, to do what we did; we transported our dead to the church, all cooperating and helping one another." The Widow Caldelli's version is much the same: "We gathered up the dead ourselves, made the coffins ourselves, loaded them ourselves onto the cart used for collecting the town's garbage and, three by three, we brought them to the cemetery."

Beyond that, the testimonies are remarkably diverse. The attitudes -- be they stoicism, rage, shock, or resignation -- reflect differences of education and class, age and individual temperament, not to mention the degree of loss. Like any story, they subscribe to textual conventions that bear scrutiny. One is especially struck here by the difference of narrative style between the tale of town and family

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told by the bourgeois women and the simpler chronology, *in medias res*, recounted by the poorer women.

Accordingly, Laura Sabatini and Elda Morfini Paggi, whose families belonged to the local gentry (their husbands, respectively, a wealthy Florentine merchant and a doctor) were very different in political outlook, education, and social background. Yet their accounts bear some resemblance, insofar as they were constructed as explanations of the tragedies both of their family and of their community. Sabatini's testimony locates the start of events at the town center, where both the fascist club and her family's palace once the site of the medieval mayoralty (*podesta*) were located. Knowledgeable about local events, as hostess to various visitors, she gives an informed account of the partisan's activity, the effort to mediate, and the SS's strategy. Her story tells of the destruction not only of the men, but of the beautiful Church and her own magnificent home. Elda Morfini Paggi opens her story as a fairy tale -- with Civitella as a haven from war, as indeed it had been for her family -- and concludes it in tones reminiscent of the tragic fatefulness of Greek epics.

By contrast, the less educated women, perhaps instructed to tell exactly what happened, punctiliously catalogue the events as they were thrust upon them. The unfolding of the catastrophe follows the sequence of their daily routines, getting up, preparing the children for bed, going to mass. The testimony of Anna Cetoloni (the Widow Caldelli) is typically spare and evocative, from the moment on her way to Church she hears the Germans are approaching, to her prayers to God to give her and her children the courage to endure their destiny and bury the dead.

In the face of calamity, the bonds with the children appear both life-giving and constraining. Paggi's account as well as Assunta Lammioni's are especially intense in this regard. Paggi testifies to the conflict she feels between her passionate love for her husband and the desire to remain near his corpse -- which she had tried to revive with a shot of camphor -- and her duty to her family to follow German orders to quit the town and drag her four children and old mother to safety. Other women, too, perceived her as a symbol of this frightful tension, a Niobe wandering through the town, nightgown besotted with blood, her children underfoot, screaming out to acquaintances, "they killed my Gastone!" Like Lammioni, who had children around the same age, Paggi speaks of leaving the children in order to return to the burning town to search for her relatives' bodies.

Assunta Lammioni's plight appears especially grave, for she had lost contact with two of her three children at the time of the massacre, and her smallest was only a babe-in-arms. But on her first

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trip back, she finds her brother-in-law alive; a victory of sorts, she recalls -- at least one of the several brothers had survived. But not until the day after does she find her husband, his body intact, killed with a wound in the heart. By the time she locates the other two children and returns with them to her infant at nearby Poggiali, her grief and fatigue have caused her milk to dry up.

#### IV. The Document Today

What does it mean to republish these texts today? The entrenched political positions created by the Cold War came to appear meaningless in the wake of November 9th, 1989, when the Berlin Wall was torn down. But the question of how to treat Nazi atrocities remains an open question, especially in the wake of German reunification. As early as the summer of 1986, historians in the German Federal Republic became embroiled in a controversy over the meaning of the German past. More than an academic debate, the *Historikerstreit*, as it came to be characterized, demonstrated the existence of two conflicting political self-definitions within the postwar West German state. Some contended that Nazism was a kind of parenthesis in national history which, however deplorable, should not cancel the sense that Germans belong to a grand historical tradition. Others contended that Nazism was bound up with the whole trajectory of German nationalism and state-building. Needless to say, the implications of this wide-ranging debate extend beyond Germany, raising questions about interpreting the whole of the European past.<sup>12</sup>

Suffice it to emphasize here that the kind of intellectual utopia conceived by the Weimar historian Friedrich Meinecke<sup>13</sup> -- which called for the foundation of a nation-state combining ethos and kratos and was thus both just and rational -- was destroyed by the course of history. To repropose today this or any related conception of the nation-state is both preposterous and dangerous. One might questionably seek to relativize the significance of Auschwitz by comparing it to the Gulag or even Cambodia. But it is undeniably as much a part of the German essence as the two sites Nietzsche used symbolically to encapsulate the meaning of the German homeland (*Heimat*): Weimar and Potsdam.

The idea that a historical legacy can be reconsecrated once purged of its evil elements has been proven not only fallacious but wholly obsolescent by events in contemporary Germany. Significantly, the very language in which the major economic and cultural problems of German reunification has been couched derives not from the historicist utopias of the old nationalist tradition but from what has been called the "nationalism of the mark," the pride and economic



clout that comes from having a strong currency. In the wake of World War I, nationalist German intellectuals held up Germany as a uniquely pure example of *Kulturnation*, a nation whose identity transcended the crass realities of markets and material culture. Arguably, Germany today is a model of the very opposite: a Civilization without Culture. There is little trace of the old heroes (*Helden*), whereas the merchants (*Haendler*) who were once regarded as more congenial to Anglo-American society, now abound.<sup>14</sup>

In some respects, the history of contemporary Germany only highlights trends common to Europe as a whole. Nowhere in the old world did traditional notions of national sovereignty survive the destruction and massacres of the two world wars. To move beyond the Cold War, it is fruitless to belabor the Germans with the "burden of guilt." With the end of the Cold War, it is possible to foresee the transformation of the very notion of national culture, moving Europe toward forms of unification beyond those of the common market, toward a new kind of multicultural society. As this new European tradition emerges, what will become of the memory of a Civitella?

The slogan "the past which will not pass away" (*Vergangenheit die nicht vergeben will*)<sup>15</sup> used by those who would want to archive the Nazi past in order to regenerate German national identity--came to mind last August, when we were driving back over the short stretch of road connecting the hill of Buchenwald (on which Goethe directed his *Iphigenia in Tauris*) to the city of Weimar. The poignant beauty of the countryside glimpsed through the camp's barbed wire fences, the rolling hills of Thuringia (which remind one of the gentle slopes of Tuscany) sharpened the perception of the human suffering that occurred day-in-day-out from 1937 to 1945. In the stone quarry, where forced labor was used to kill masses of prisoners, wild rabbits ran through the bushes.

The historian Ernst Nolte's idea that "the past hangs over the present like an executioner's sword" here sounded meaningless, abstract and irrelevant. On the contrary, the presence of the past is the result of acts of compassion, love, and mourning. The categories of space and time that Kantian philosophy identifies as preconditions of human knowledge do not, according to Freud, exist in the realm of the unconscious and the emotional. Trauma is something indelible; rationalization can remove, but not cancel it from the individual's psyche. It lasts forever. There must be something analogous for the lives of collectivities.

In premodern societies, catastrophes gave rise to myths, to metahistories which, handed down from generation to generation, told time and again of the eternal confrontation between good and

evil. Secularization has deprived modern societies of this possibility. What is important about the testimonies republished here is that they transcend the process of manipulation that inevitably accompanies every effort at historical contextualization. The women of Civitella's "lament" has a universalizing dimension. The rituals of death and life to which it testifies recall the photographs of Soviet women lowering the bodies of the men hung *en masse* by the Nazis and then dragging the caskets through the mud to burial. They recall the pietà of Renaissance triptychs and sculpture. To say this is not to propose that women be defined as the custodians of memory or the authentic voices of community. At Civitella, these responsibilities devolved to them because of the very dynamic of the massacre. That, too, is why their testimonies still speak so eloquently.

1. The abbot's memoir is referred to in Enrico Biagini, *Civitella, un castello, un paese, un martirio* (Arezzo, 1981). The assistance of Dr. Lapo Melani, director of the Biblioteca comunale di Arezzo was indispensable to completing this essay.

2. These surmises, like other questions about the immediate causes of the massacre, bear further investigation: in the SS archives, in the Italian national government archives, in Allied sources, and through local histories. On Italian sources, see Augusto Antoniella, "Fonti per la storia aretina dal fascismo al Dopoguerra conservate nell'Archivio di Stato di Arezzo," in Ivan Tognarini, ed., *Guerra di sterminio e resistenza. La provincia di Arezzo 1943-1944* (Naples: ESI, 1990), pp. 327-336. On the German archives, see Enzo Droandi, "La guerra nell'Aretino nel Kriegstagebuch della 10ma Armata Germanica, 15 Giugno-2 ottobre, 1944," *La battaglia per Arezzo, 4-20 luglio 1944: Atti e memorie dell'Accademia Petrarca* Vol XLXI, 1983-1984 (Arezzo: Landi, 1984).

3. On Wehrmacht methods in the USSR, see Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 3 vols., revised ed. (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985); and more specifically Arno J. Mayer: *Why Did the Heavens not Darken?: The "Final Solution" in History* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), pp. 234-279. These English-language analyses draw on detailed reconstructions in Helmut Krausnick and Hans Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppen des Weltanschauungskrieges Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und SD. 1938-1942*, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1981); and Bernd Wegner, *Hitler's Politische Soldaten: Die Waffen SS, 1933-1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schoeningh, 1990, 4th ed.).

4. George H. Stein, *The Waffen SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War, 1939-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966, 1990), which refers to: Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution: The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe 1933-1945* (New York: Beechurst Press, 1953), see also Gerald Reitlinger, *The SS, Alibi of a Nation 1922-1945* (London: Heinemann, 1956).

5. This information is contained in Romano Bilenchì's own preface to essays by him, *Cronaca degli anni neri* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1984), which also republished the women's testimonies.

6. On this, see Victoria de Grazia's afterword to Vasco Pratolini, *Tale of Poor Lovers* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989).

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7. Guido Piovene, "L'Église Catholique et le fascisme," *Les Temps modernes*, August-September 1947 at 222-235; Alberto Moravia, "Un Déluge de larmes," *Id.* at 279-285.

8. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Mandarins* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1956), p. 246.

9. Luciano Gambassini, "La resistenza aretina vista da un medico condotto," in Antonio Curina, *Fuochi sui monti dell' Appennino toscano* (Arezzo, 1957), pp. 307-321.

10. Vasco Caroti, "Lo scontro nel dopolavoro di Civitella," in Edoardo Succielli, *La Resistenza nei versanti tra l'Arno e la Chiana* (Arezzo, 1979), pp. 152-153 [translation by the authors].

11. The morning of June 29th I got up to go to Holy Mass. As soon as I left the house, I heard that the Germans were there. I continued toward the church thinking that it was troops in retreat. Then hearing some shots, I wanted to leave town. But by then it was impossible because the German barbarians had shut the gates of the town and it was no longer possible to escape. I shut myself in the house with my wife, four daughters, mother, brother, and sister. We exchanged a few terrified words. Outside there were shouts, and explosions of rifles, machine guns, and hand grenades. Suddenly, there was a violent banging on the door and, at that, I was more frightened than ever. I looked at my daughters and wife and I told them to open the door. As soon as the door was open, I heard "Out," I grasped the two girls closest to me and started to climb the stairs. I hadn't had time to reach the top before they brutally grabbed me by the arm and conducted me to the middle of the town square along with the priest's brother and some other compatriots. There, next to those beasts, we glanced at each other, our faces convulsed, thinking that if our papers were in order they would set us free. They searched us, they took our money, and they held us in the square to await the hour of doom. We saw the houses in flames, the women running to leave the town, we heard the screams of the girls calling "Daddy," the priest calling out, "Save my people who are innocent." But there was nothing to be done. The cruel hearts of those barbarians were unmoved. In the meantime, they started to line us up five by five to die. The priest, seeing that there was nothing more to be done, made a request to bless us parishioners for the last time and this was granted. With his hand, he blessed all, and we crossed ourselves and prepared to die. In the meantime, the lines moved up. I saw my fellows fall to the ground, and I thought, "Now it is my turn." I heard shouts, crying out for wives and children, Finally, the fire hit me. I threw myself to the ground, I felt the wound wasn't mortal and I was still alive. I felt the drops of blood of other dead fall on me. Many, as soon as they were killed, were carried into the doorways of the houses where they were burnt. I realized that I too would meet that end and summoning up courage, I tried to escape. I leaped and landed on the orchard garden and from there I made another jump and landed in the woods where I managed to save myself. I walked a little, but I began to lose strength. Blood ran down from my throat and hands. In that condition I reached a house in the woods where I was treated. But my fear was so great that I was unable to find a place where I felt secure. The faces of those butchers of human flesh were ever-present and I was so far from my family. Some people took care of me and I passed the night in the woods. The next day, two men carried me to the hospital of Civitella where I found my wife and daughters. They cleaned and disinfected me with care, but my fear was still so great that I wanted to return to the woods. The morning was frightful: I felt weaker and weaker, and I wanted to find a house where I could rest. I set out on foot. The road that I had to cross was filled with German trucks. I was with my wife and daughters and we cautiously crossed the road. Once more we were in the woods, but a little while later we reached the house of relatives of my wife where I was cared for by Doctor Gambassini. The German barbarians continued to track us down and not a day passed that there wasn't another victim nearby us in the woods. Although I was covered with wounds, I

insisted on being carried into the deeper woods where it was impossible to find us and where I stayed for eight days. Because of the medication, I went back to the house where my wife could care for me. That day was almost sadder than June 29th. The Germans got me again and they took me from my family and brought me once more with them. I believed that they wouldn't do anything to me, given how wounded I was and that I wasn't able to do anything they wanted. But they were ever harsh. That voice saying "Raus" once more pierced my brain and I set out with them. They slapped me, they beat me, and they set me to work sawing wood. I couldn't do anything with my hands and the Germans tortured me constantly with their rifle butts and left me the whole day without eating. That evening toward eight I was let go. I could no longer stand on my feet when I heard the shouts of my wife and daughters coming to get me. Gino Bartolucci [Translation by the authors.]

12. For an overview and interpretation of this debate see: Hans Ulrich Wehler, *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit? ein polemischer Essay zum 'Historikerstreit'* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1988); Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Richard J. Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (New York: Pantheon, 1989).

13. These ideas are developed in Friedrich Meinecke, *Machievellism: the doctrine of raison d'etat and its place in modern history* (1924), trans. Douglas Scott (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).

14. This contrast was developed in the well-known work of Werner Sombart, *Haendler und Helden. Patriotische Besinnungen* (Munich and Leipzig: Dunker & Humblot, 1915).

15. This is the title of the article by Ernst Nolte published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 16, 1986, which set off the *Historikerstreit*.