

Politics, Murder and Love in an Italian Family

What did it mean to live with fascism, communism and totalitarianism in modern Italy? And what should we learn from the experiences of a martyred liberal democrat father and his communist son? Through the prism of a single, exceptional family, the Amendolas, R. J. B. Bosworth reveals the heart of twentieth-century Italian politics. Giovanni and Giorgio Amendola, father and son, were both highly capable and dedicated Anti-Fascists. Each failed to make it to the top of the Italian political pyramid but nevertheless played a major part in Italy's history. Both also had rich but contrasting private lives. Each married a foreign and accomplished woman: Giovanni, a woman from a distinguished German-Russian intellectual family; Giorgio, a Parisian working-class girl, who, to him, embodied revolution. This vivid and engaging biographical study explores the highs and lows of a family that was at the centre of Italian politics over several generations. Tracing the complex relationship between Anti-Fascist politics and the private lives of individuals and of the family, *Politics, Murder and Love in an Italian Family* offers a profound portrait of a century of Italian life.

R. J. B. Bosworth is one of the world's leading historians of modern Italy. He is an Emeritus Professor at Jesus College, Oxford, and the author or editor of thirty-one books and many chapters and articles. He published his first book with Cambridge University Press, *Italy, the Least of the Great Powers: Italian Foreign Policy before the First World War*, and was co-editor, with Joseph Maiolo, of the second volume of *The Cambridge History of the Second World War*. His numerous prize-winning publications include the definitive biography of Mussolini in English.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-28021-1 — Politics, Murder and Love in an Italian Family
The Amendolas in the Age of Totalitarianisms
R.J.B. Bosworth
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Figure 0.1 Giovanni and Giorgio, staring at different futures (1911).

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R. J. B. Bosworth

University of Oxford



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UNIVERSITY PRESS

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CAMBRIDGE
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
 103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009280211

DOI: 10.1017/9781009280167

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First published 2023

First paperback edition 2025

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data

Names: Bosworth, R. J. B., author.

Title: Politics, murder and love in an Italian family : the Amendolas in the age of totalitarianisms / R.J.B. Bosworth.

Other titles: Amendolas in the age of totalitarianisms

Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, [2023] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022033343 (print) | LCCN 2022033344 (ebook) | ISBN 9781009280174 (hardback) | ISBN 9781009280211 (paperback) | ISBN 9781009280167 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Politicians–Italy–Biography. | Amendola family. | Amendola, Giovanni, 1882–1926. | Amendola, Giorgio. | Anti-fascist movements–Italy–History–20th century. | Italy–Politics and government–20th century.

Classification: LCC DG574 .B67 2023 (print) | LCC DG574 (ebook) | DDC 945.09092/2–dc23/eng/20220928

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022033343>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022033344>

ISBN 978-1-009-28017-4 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-009-28021-1 Paperback

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For David Laven and his love for a myriad of Italies

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Preface

‘What a fine fellow you are!’ she would say. ‘How fine and fat!’ In these parts [the Basilicata] ... fatness is a mark of beauty; perhaps because the underfed peasants can never hope to attain it and it remains the prerogative of the well-to-do.*

Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli: The Story of a Year*
(New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1947), p. 154

I have written my Covid book. It displays what happens when an old historian is locked down, the Bodleian is to most intents and purposes closed, but trade with Italian second-hand bookshops is open. A pandemic may have been the initial trigger of *Politics, Murder and Love in an Italian Family: The Amendolas in an Age of Totalitarianisms*, but its other origins lie well in the past and in my own ‘*lungo viaggio*’ (long journey) into being the historian I am of modern Italy. My first memory date is 1976. Then, having departed from Australia just before the disastrous election of 13 December 1975, when a benighted popular vote supported vice-regal intervention and sent the enlightened Labor government of Gough Whitlam packing, my wife, Michal, our two small children and I lived in Rome through the next twelve months. I spent most days trekking across town to the diplomatic archives held at the Farnesina, planned to be the headquarters of the Fascist Party but finished after 1944 and converted into the ministry of foreign affairs. I was then an ‘old fashioned[ish] diplomatic historian’, starting to write *Italy, the Least of the Great Powers: Italian Foreign Policy before the First World War* (Cambridge, 1979). The archives were only open from 9 a.m. till 1 p.m.; in reality, given the surly habits of the lady keeper there, from c. 9.30 a.m. to c. 12.15 p.m. During those hours she spent most of her time in the consultation room talking loudly on the phone. It was a relief

*Carlo Levi’s 1935–6 record of peasant thought far from Gramscian theoretics or ‘democracy’, but perhaps an unspoken assumption of the large presence of the Amendolas, father and son, in Italy’s South.

to turn over the last ambassadorial telegram of the day. I knew that I had a whole afternoon to Romanise.

This year – 1976 – turns up in Chapter 6 in my story of the Amendolas. In the national elections held on 20 June, the Italian Communist Party almost achieved a *sorpasso* (an overtaking) of the Christian Democrats who had ruled since 1946 – that is, even longer than the Liberal Country Party had dominated Australia before Whitlam. Such a gain might have entailed a *compromesso storico* (historic compromise) in a Eurocommunist manner with global effect. For an ‘*indipendente di sinistra*’ (independent leftist) like myself, at least for part of 1976 I could boast to depressed friends enduring reactionary ‘Liberal Country Party’ restoration in Australia that Italy might be different.¹

Before and after the elections, Mike, I and the children could happily go to such local leftist consciousness-raising events as a *Festa dell’Unità* (punning on unity and the name of the communist daily paper, *L’Unità*) beside, say, gorgeous Castel San Angelo. At the cinema, we could view the first (162 minutes) and second (154 minutes) parts of Bernardo Bertolucci’s *1900*, with its allegedly definitive peasant history and what now seems its cor blimey Anti-Fascist message on the imminent triumph of the Resistance. Why else did (Marx’s) old mole of revolution turn up (for the second time in the movie) in the last scene? We could pack into the Teatro Eliseo on the Via Nazionale and hear Oxbridgean, radical, ‘milord’ Denis Mack Smith address a vast audience about his new book on Mussolini, *Le guerre del Duce*.² It offered a rival, less polite, view of the Duce from that being ponderously advanced by Renzo De Felice, the ultimate ‘archive rat’ in his endless ‘biography’ (minus the human side) of Mussolini.³ A major contributor to this debate was none other than Giorgio Amendola. In 1976, he gave an interview about Anti-Fascism in what was then a modish publishing activity. More about that work can be found in Chapter 6.⁴ But, better than observing historiographical wrangles, I could read – and did read – another new book, Giorgio Amendola’s *Una scelta di vita*, and enjoy its mixture of party and family, politics and sex. Readers of *Politics, murder and love in an Italian family* will find a similar amalgam in the pages that follow.

In 1977, my family and I returned to Australia, to stay there most of the time for the next three decades, if with annual trips to Italian libraries and archives. At the University of Sydney, there had been a major development with the arrival of a new Professor of Italian, the globalised Venetian Gino Rizzo. He could tell a good story about how, when an ordinary Fascist soldier, he had somehow lost his rifle but managed to hide the fact from his officers for over a year. Rizzo presided over a foundation named after his very English predecessor, Freddy May.

From the History Department I was invited to be the Frederick May Foundation's (FMF's) deputy director. Before too long, Whitlam accepted a role as the FMF's honorary governor and became an active participant in its events. That European winter, I travelled to Rome together with Rizzo and Gianfranco Cresciani, a Triestine immigrant to Australia and 'my first student', although he knew far more about Italy than I did, and was, and is, the only serious historian of Italians in Australia. We were a little astonished to be greeted with largesse at the *Ministeri dei Beni Culturali and degli Affari Esteri* (Ministries of Culture and of Foreign Affairs). It seemed that Italian government circles had decided that the 1976 crisis in Australia meant that it was an interesting country, even though the sizeable post-1945 emigration from Italy there had ceased a decade earlier.

So, every four years, while Gino and I stayed in post, in 1978, 1982 and 1986, the FMF could stage grandiose, interdisciplinary conferences. We could welcome the greatest figures in contemporary Italian culture – Umberto Eco,⁵ La Gaia Scienza,⁶ Adriano Spatola,⁷ Giulia Nicolai, Alberto Asor Rosa, Francesco Alberoni, Giuseppe Bertolucci, Franco Ferraresi, Marina Zancan, Laura Balbo, Dacia Maraini, Paolo Valesio, Luigi Ballerini, Paolo Sylos-Labini, Marcello Colitti – and a parade of major historians – De Felice, Enrico Serra,⁸ Emilio Gentile, Giovanni Sabbatucci, Ettore Sori, Gianfausto Rosoli, Franco Venturi, Sergio Bertelli, Sergio Romano,⁹ Giorgio Spini,¹⁰ Giuliano Procacci¹¹ and Rudolph Vecoli.¹² I have fond memories of Procacci (who was an Italian Communist Party senator) and Spini (the Waldensian leftist father of Valdo Spini, a sometime mayor of Florence destined to play a considerable part in what might be termed 'the strange death of Italian socialism') sitting on the lounge floor of our Sydney terrace in August 1978. They were helping us to a better knowledge of the words and tunes of such wartime songs as *Fischia al vento* (PCI) and *Bella ciao* (more generic). The flag of the 'Myth of the Resistance' had been planted in Australia (where the majority of immigrants, poor and rich, actually retained a nostalgia for Mussolini).

During its halcyon days, the FMF aspired to high cultural contact with Italy at its most contemporary, defying the immigrant world whose cautious and self-appointed leadership had been accustomed to represent itself cosily in meetings of Dante Alighieri societies. There, the deepest hope might be that, after listening to some talk or other, an Australian could peer knowledgeably at a Michelangelo (or was it a Botticelli?) and, more usefully, distinguish pappardelle from fettuccine on their next visit to Rome, Florence or Venice. By contrast, the FMF, steering away from 'pretty history' (as I, for one, disdainfully called it),

published an academic yearbook, entitled *Altro polo* (Gino Rizzo assured us that the words appeared somewhere in Dante and so might have prefigured the religious poet's discovery of the Antipodes). I co-edited two of these,¹³ but there were others on topics far from my own interests and knowledge.¹⁴ All tried to be serious and to blend Italian and Australian expertise.

I had come back from Cambridge to Sydney in 1969 wearing a Harris tweed sports coat and a St John's College tie, still in quite a few senses a child of an Australo-British Empire (even if I had long supported Pakistan at cricket). But the FMF and its friendly and fascinating visitors were immersing me in an Italy that I could scarcely otherwise have known. I discarded the tie and doffed the coat. My path to being a historian of modern Italy was opening. And somewhere there was Giorgio Amendola's last autobiographical volume, *Un'isola*, with its artful mixture of Fascist tyranny and corruption, Giorgio's romantic love at first sight in Paris for Germaine, his working-class lifetime partner and wife, and their marriage on the prison island of Ponza. When I came to write a great deal about what I always call 'the Italian dictatorship', I was conditioned by Giorgio's image of totalitarianism, Italian-style. In his portrayal, it may have been intrusive and murderous but it always offered the chance of a special case. In other words, it was always potentially corrupt, Italian-style.

In Giorgio's account, Fascism, however bloody, never overwhelmed the family, the Italian family (and, hence, the Italian communist family). I have spent my lifetime exploring the nature of Mussolini's Italian dictatorship. In this, very likely, my last book, readers will find that I continue to avoid cosy moralising about absolute evil, even when Giovanni Amendola probably invented the word '*totalitario*' and then sacrificed his life to the Italian dictatorship's bloody violence. Father and son were very different men. But each saw his own truth through a glass darkly, as all of us do or ought to admit to doing.

Abbreviations

ANC	Associazione Nazionale dei Combattenti e Reduci
ANI	Associazione Nazionalista Italiana
BANU	Bulgarian Agrarian National Union
BR	Brigate Rosse
CLN	Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale
EEC	European Economic Community
FMF	Frederick May Foundation
GAP	Gruppi di Azione Patriottica
GDP	gross domestic product
IMRO	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation
M5S	Movimento Cinque Stelle
MSI	Movimento Sociale Italiano
MVSN	Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale
PCdI	Partito Comunista d'Italia
PCI	Partito Comunista Italiano
PDS	Partito Democratico della Sinistra
PFR	Partito Fascista Repubblicano
PNF	Partito Nazionale Fascista
PPI	Partito Popolare Italiano
PSI	Partito Socialista Italiano
RSI	Repubblica Sociale Italiana
SAP	Sezione Alleati del Proletariato
SPQR	Senatus Populusque Romanus