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Nations in A Showcase: A Comparative Perspective on the Italian National Jubilee (1961) and the Meiji Centennial (1968)

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Abstract: In 1961, Italy celebrated the hundredth anniversary of its unification. A wide range of initiatives commemorated the centennial, highlighting the glorious deeds of the *Risorgimento* and their long-term, positive legacy. Seven years later, Japan embarked on a similar task with the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the Meiji Restoration (1868). Like the Italian National Jubilee, the Japanese one praised the country's achievements, presenting Meiji Restoration as a successful transformation unmatched in world history. Although there is literature about the Italian and Japanese centennials, there has been no attempt to comparatively analyse them. Yet, the two jubilees reveal interesting similarities that deserve further attention. In both cases, the official commemorative agenda proposed a self-congratulatory narrative linking the ideal starting point of modernization – Risorgimento/Meiji Restoration – to the arrival point, namely the economic "miracles" that the two countries were experiencing. Both in Italy and in Japan, the anniversaries posed crucial questions concerning the historical assessment of the totalitarian regimes. Finally, in both cases the celebrations were the subject of intense domestic debates. Through an investigation of carefully selected first-hand sources in Italian and Japanese, the paper will make a comparative analysis of the Italian National Jubilee and the Meiji Centennial in order to gain theoretical insights on the way the parties in power used history to build national identity.

Keywords: Meiji Centennial, Italian National Jubilee, public use of history, Risorgimento, Meiji Restoration

On May 9, 1961, the Communist newspaper *L'Unità* published an article that sarcastically stigmatized the leaders of the party in power – the Christian Democracy Party – and the ruling classes. The occasion for this article was the inaugural ceremony of the Italian National Jubilee, commemorating the

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hundredth anniversary of Italy's unification. According to the newspaper the dominant groups of Christian Democrats and their spoke-persons abandoned themselves to an orgy of self-congratulatory rhetoric [...]. 'We are all Italians', claim these people while showing a tricolor ribbon on their buttonholes. Wait a minute. You are the Italians that donated to the country a set of bloody wars and twenty years of dictatorship and, even today, you are ridden with nostalgia and temptations. Italian workers, on the contrary, want neither war, nor fascism, nor exploitation any longer: it is in this stance that the working classes are the only part of our society fully entitled to celebrate the unification centennial.[1]

Seven years later, Japanese historians affiliated with the academic journal *Rekishigaku kenkyū* (Historical studies), endorsed a statement that harshly censured the Japanese government-sponsored initiatives to celebrate the centennial of the Meiji Restoration (1868). Among other things, the authors of the statement accused the party in power – the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) – of ideologically monopolizing the celebrations. Instead of encouraging a frank and open debate about the complex events of the last century of national history, so the argument went, the Meiji Centennial organizing committee was surreptitiously introducing an interpretation of national history sympathetic with the government's vision.[2]

The above-mentioned criticisms attest to how heated the controversy concerning celebrations in both countries was. Indeed, the very object of the commemorations posed several challenges. Addressing Italy's unification implied taking a stance on the long debate about the achievements and the limits of the *Risorgimento*, the nineteenth century movement for Italy's unification and independence. Likewise, celebrating the Meiji Restoration meant providing an answer to the many questions surrounding that epoch-making event. Besides, contentious issues about national identity were not just the starting points of the centennials, but also what followed. In particular, the Fascist period in Italy and totalitarianism in wartime Japan posed cumbersome questions about the long-term implications of the modernization processes that Italy and Japan had embarked on in the second half of the nineteenth century. The way these two tragic epochs were remembered and the way the last century of national history was portrayed on the occasion of the celebrations in Italy and in Japan called into question visions of the past and, more interestingly, interpretations of the present.

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1 Quoted in Gentile 1997: 363.

2 Rekishigaku kenkyū 1968: 63. *Rekishigaku kenkyū* was just one of the 54 Japanese historical associations that published a statement criticizing the official celebration. On this point, see Botsman 2018: 290.

In the light of this, the choices made by ruling parties in Italy and Japan about the organization of the celebrations take on a special meaning. How did the Christian Democracts and the LDP approach the celebrations in 1961 and 1968? Were the accusations reported by *L'Unità* and *Rekishigaku kenkyū* justified? This article will address these questions through a comparative analysis of the Italian National Jubilee and the Meiji Centennial. Although there is literature about the Italian and on the Japanese centennials and a growing interest in drawing parallels between Italy and Japan in several areas, there has been no systematic comparative analysis of the two events.[3] Yet, the two jubilees and the historical background of their preparation reveal interesting similarities. Both Italy and Japan were defeated in World War II. After 1945, they repudiated militarism, embraced democracy and sided with the United States. During the Cold War years, thanks to their peculiar geopolitical position, they served as irreplaceable bulwarks against the spread of communism in Europe and in East Asia. It was in such context that the most powerful parties in Italy and Japan, the Christian Democracy Party and the Liberal Democratic Party, led the two countries to attain an honored place in the international society and achieve peace and prosperity with the blessing of the United States. Such a peculiar background, no longer existing in 2011 and 2018 when Italy and Japan celebrated respectively the 150th anniversary of unification and the 150th anniversary of the Meiji Restoration, makes this case-study particularly interesting.

This paper will make a comparative analysis of the Italian National Jubilee and the Meiji Centennial. Through an investigation of carefully selected first-hand sources in Italian and Japanese, analogies and differences between the two countries will be analyzed in order to gain theoretical insights on the public use of history, and more specifically on the way the parties in power used history to build national identity.

1 The Christian democrats and the Italian National Jubilee: From the "great makers" of *Risorgimento* to the "great makers" of economic growth

On the eve of the Jubilee, Italy was in the midst of a profound economic and social transformation. While many Italians were enjoying economic prosperity,

3 Recent comparative studies on Italy and Japan include: Boltho et al. 2001; Samuels 2003; Watanabe 2014; Hofmann 2015.

much of the population was still heading abroad in search of a better life. Between 1946 and 1957 there were 1.100.000 more Italians leaving Italy for the United States, Canada and Latin America than those who repatriated. The North-South divide still jeopardized any real unity of the country. Despite the strenuous endeavors to improve the situation through the *Cassa del Mezzogiorno* (Southern Development Fund) and other *ad hoc* policies, the South remained largely underdeveloped, with few industries and an average per capita income that was far below that of the North. The conspicuous dualism of the Italian economy largely reflected this territorial gap and further aggravated the situation: most of the high productivity, advanced technology industries were located in the industrial triangle of the North, while the South hosted mainly traditional, labor-intensive, low productivity sectors.

However, despite these difficulties, Italy managed to overcome the hardships of the early postwar years and was enjoying impressive economic growth. Especially between 1958 and 1963, GDP growth reached unprecedented levels (6,3%), investments in machinery and equipment increased by 14% per year and industrial growth more than doubled in comparison with the 1951–8 period. In a short span of time, Italy went from being a largely agricultural economy to becoming a modern industrialized one, its "economic miracle".[4] The defeated country's metamorphosis into an economically strong and recognized member of the international community became worldwide visible at the Olympic Games, held in Rome in 1960, which became a showcase for its achievements.

In these years, the political direction of the country was in the hands of the Christian Democrats. When the National Jubilee was celebrated in 1961, a government headed by Amintore Fanfani and supported by the Christian Democracy Party and other minor centrist parties was in power. It was the last centrist government before the beginning of the innovative but ephemeral season of center-left governments in 1962. Not surprisingly, it was the very same Christian Democratic Party that played a decisive role in the organization of *Italia '61*, the celebrations for the centenary of Italy's unification. The national organizing committee of the Jubilee (*Comitato "Italia '61"*) was chaired by Giuseppe Pella, a Christian Democrat politician, then serving as Ministry of Finance in the Fanfani Cabinet. Another Christian Democrat was Amedeo Peyron, mayor of Turin and president of the local organizing committee.

The choice of Turin as the center of the celebrations was no coincidence. Being the engine of Italy's unification, the first capital of the unified kingdom (1861–1864) and one of the most dynamic hubs of the economic miracle, it was a

4 Ginsborg 1998: 285–292.

perfect "bridge between past and future".[5] Associating the glorious deeds of the Unification process with the achievements of the present was not only the reason for staging the main celebratory events in Turin, but it was also clearly inherent in the themes of the three main exhibitions of *Italia '61*: the historical exhibition, the exhibition on the Italian Regions and the International Work Exhibition.

The historical exhibition was held in Palazzo Carignano with the aim of illustrating the *Risorgimento* through a targeted display of relevant documents. The intentions of the scientific committee were to show, with a minimum of pedantry, the origins of the process that led to Italy's unification, the thoughts of the key players that made that process possible and the variety of ideas underpinning it.[6] Although the focus was undoubtedly on the *Risorgimento*, the chronological frame of the exhibition's historical narrative went from the late eighteenth century to 1861. The Parthenopean Republic – formed during the French Revolutionary Wars in the kingdom of Naples (January 1799–June 1799) –, the Cisalpine Republic – formed in the North of Italy (1797–1802) – and the concomitant spread of Enlightenment ideas were indicated by the organizers as an important precondition of the subsequent struggle for independence that took place in different parts of Italy. For this reason, the first hall of the exhibition was devoted to Italy's Enlightenment heroes such as Cesare Beccaria, Pietro and Alessandro Verri and Gaetano Filangieri: furthermore a French Encyclopedia was put on display to testify that the *Risorgimento* was not just an epoch-making event of Italian history, but had to be understood as an important chapter in a broader European and world history.[7]

On the other hand, the decision to have the historical narrative end in 1861 excluded a set of important events from the expositive account, thus reinforcing the selective nature of the presentation. The exhibition's terminating point was actually conceived with a relative degree of flexibility, as shown by the final room of the exhibition, which presented World War I and *Resistenza* (the struggle to liberate Italy from Nazi-occupation) as the final phase of the fight for freedom that had started in the Nineteenth century with the *Risorgimento*. Yet, confining the chronological limit of the exhibition to 1861 had important implications. Among other things, it entailed cutting off the complex ties between the *Risorgimento* and the "Roman question", the long dispute between the State and the Church, which

5 Gori 2015: 308.

6 Comitato nazionale per la celebrazione del primo centenario dell'unità d'Italia 1961: 230, "L'ordinamento della mostra".

7 Comitato nazionale per la celebrazione del primo centenario dell'unità d'Italia 1961: 232–233, "L'ordinamento della mostra".

had been a formidable obstacle on the way to Italy's unification. Not only did the exhibition downplay the problematic role of the Church and the Catholic forces in *Risorgimento*, but it also stressed their importance by making an implicit distinction between reactionary and liberal Catholics. The exhibition seemed to suggest that, where as all the blame for the troublesome aspects of the "Roman question" was to be placed on the reactionary Catholics, the liberal ones, epitomized by Antonio Rosmini, Enrico Tazzoli and Niccolò Tommaseo, were to be praised for their precious contribute to the cause of Italy's unification.[8]

The two other exhibitions that formed the backbone of the celebrations for the national jubilee were intended as a useful complement to the historical exhibition. The exhibition on the Italian regions – featuring nineteen pavilions corresponding to the nineteen regions – balanced the emphasis on unity that characterized the narrative of the historical exhibition with a purposeful appraisal of the diversity and richness of the Italian regions. The International Exhibition of Work, titled "Man at work. A hundred years of technological and social development: accomplishments and future scenarios", compensated for the historical exhibition's celebration of the past by focusing on the present "economic miracle" and Italy's future industrialization.

The inauguration of the three exhibitions on May 6, 1961 marked the official start of the celebrations, although several commemorative initiatives had been held before that, such as a solemn gathering of the two Chambers of Parliament, chaired by the President of the Republic Giovanni Gronchi (March 25), the laying of ceremonial wreaths on the graves of Victor Emanuel the Second, Cavour, Garibaldi and Mazzini (March 27), and a ceremony held on the Vatican Hill in the presence of Pope John XXIII, to celebrate the achievement of national unity (April 11). The closing ceremony of the National Jubilee took place on November 4th, the anniversary of Italy's victory in World War I. Interestingly, November 4th was presented as the date leading to "the accomplishment of National unity", which had been prepared through the *Risorgimento* rather than as "the epilogue of a long, hard war", as President Gronchi explained in his speech to the Italian army. Needless to say, this interpretation implied not only a temporal extension of the *Risorgimento* – which was accordingly extended up to 1918 – but also an acknowledgment of the importance of the Italian army, praised as an "unreplaceable garrison of freedom".[9] A glance at

8 Comitato nazionale per la celebrazione del primo centenario dell'unità d'Italia 1961: 291, "L'ordinamento della mostra".

9 Comitato nazionale per la celebrazione del primo centenario dell'unità d'Italia 1961: 93, "Il Presidente della Repubblica alle Forze armate a chiusura dell'anno centenario. IV novembre 1961".

the calendar of the initiatives held throughout the country confirms the central role of the Italian army in the celebrations.[10]

The political rhetoric of the Jubilee provides further interesting insights into the way the ruling party conceived the task of celebrating the hundredth anniversary of Italy's unification. Many of the speeches given by political leaders evoked and celebrated the *Risorgimento*. As has been amply documented by recent studies, comparison with the *Risorgimento* was "a fundamental part of the political struggle" and of historiographical reflection not only in 1961, but also on the occasion of the 1911 national anniversary.[11] In both cases, the interpretation of the *Risorgimento* offered was rather "conciliatory". Following a well-established convention, the unification was portrayed as the fruitful encounter of two powerful forces (the democratic tradition of the *Risorgimento* and the Savoy monarchy, legitimised by the plebiscites of 1859–60), successfully driven by the "great makers" of unification: Vittorio Emanuele remembered as "the gentlemen king" (*Re galantuomo*); Cavour, as "the weaver" (*il tessitore*), Garibaldi, as "the hero of two worlds" (*l'eroe dei due mondi*) and Mazzini as the republican thinker (*il pensatore repubblicano*).[12]

Overall, in their public speeches and through the decisions of the organizing Committee the Christian Democrats supported a historical narrative that emphasized the role of the *Risorgimento* and the founding fathers while attaching marginal importance to the events that followed 1861. Not only in the historical exhibition but also in other commemorative initiatives, the history of unified Italy was pushed into the background. World War I and *Resistenza* were mentioned just to emphasize their important role in Italy's achievement of national unity, whereas the Fascist period was almost completely neglected.[13] In such a narrative, the role of Catholics in the process of Italy's unification was

10 National celebrations that actively involved the Italian army included the following: meeting of the association of the Gold Medal winners (May 7, 1961); national meeting of the Alpines national association (May 14, 1961); Carabinieri parade (June 4, 1961); parade of the national military forces (June 11, 1961); parade of the air forces (July 9, 1961); inauguration of the memorial to the ordinary soldier (September 24, 1961). A complete list is available in Comitato nazionale per la celebrazione del primo centenario dell'unità d'Italia 1961: 103–128.

11 Baioni 2011: 397–415; Gori 2015: 305–315.

12 See, for instance, the speech delivered by Amedeo Peyron at the inaugural ceremony held on May 6, 1961 at Palazzo Madama in Turin. Comitato nazionale per la celebrazione del primo centenario dell'unità d'Italia 1961: 67–69, "Saluto del Sindaco di Torino, Avv. Amedeo Peyron, al Capo dello Stato". Baioni 2011: 398–399.

13 It is even more interesting to note that, in some of the commemorative initiatives, references to the Fascist period were included, but they presented a rather controversial and cloying vision of the period. In this respect, TV and radio programmes are particularly interesting. Merolla 2004: 105–121.

considerably reassessed. Hence, the "Roman question" was only allusively dealt with, as in the already mentioned display of the historical exhibition. In other cases, reference to this sensitive issue was made only to praise the successful overcome of the internal divisions that had originated from the conflict between Church and State. For instance, one of Pella's speeches mentioned that Catholics had finally regained internal peace because in the anniversary of Italy's unification they could find a "collective confirmation" of the fact that the "historical conflict that for decades had troubled his spirit of Italian and believer had been overcome".[14] Gone were the days when the anniversary celebration was a highly divisive issue for Catholics, as in the 1911 fiftieth anniversary celebration of Italy's unification.[15] In 1961, not only was the Church one of the main institutions involved in the celebrations – e. g. with the already mentioned ceremony held on April 11 – but the speeches of eminent state official resonated with confessional suggestions that would have been totally unconceivable fifty years before.[16] In conclusion, the "retrospective catholicization" of the process of national unification was one of the most striking features of *Italia '61*, as has been remarked.[17]

Most of the speeches and the celebrations were overall self-congratulatory in tone and tended to emphasize accomplishments and achievements, rather than addressing unresolved issues. However, references to Italy's problems and contentious issues were not totally absent. For instance, both the President of the national organizing committee, and the Prime Minister mentioned the North-South divide and the social issue in their inaugural ceremony speeches. In Pella's case, the mention was framed in a heartfelt appeal to keep alive "the message of the founding fathers". Along with a message of freedom, love for Italy, internal and external peace – Pella stated –, the message of the fathers also included a message of justice and concord.

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14 Comitato nazionale per la celebrazione del primo centenario dell'unità d'Italia 1961: 72–73, "Discorso del Presidente del Comitato "Italia '61" On. Giuseppe Pella". References to the North-South divide and the social issue are also included in the speech held by President Gronchi before the chambers of Parliament on March 25, 1961. Comitato nazionale per la celebrazione del primo centenario dell'unità d'Italia 1961: 47, "Testo del messaggio letto dal Presidente della Repubblica On. Gronchi al Parlamento nell'aula di Montecitorio il 25 marzo 1961".

15 Baioni 2011: 401–402; Gori 2015: 306–308.

16 Comitato nazionale per la celebrazione del primo centenario dell'unità d'Italia 1961: 50, "Testo del messaggio letto dal Presidente della Repubblica On. Gronchi al Parlamento nell'aula di Montecitorio il 25 marzo 1961", Comitato nazionale per la celebrazione del primo centenario dell'unità d'Italia 1961: 77, "Discorso del Presidente del Consiglio On. Amintore Fanfani", Comitato nazionale per la celebrazione del primo centenario dell'unità d'Italia 1961: 74, "Discorso del Presidente del Comitato "Italia '61" On. Giuseppe Pella".

17 Gentile 1997: 360; Baioni 2011: 409.

> There cannot be a truly unified and united Italy without bridging the no longer sustainable gap between region and region and, within the society, between the more and the less privileged classes. The endeavor to uplift the South of Italy, to which the heart and mind of Camillo Cavour were devoted with so much passion and far-sightedness, is an increasingly urgent imperative at the end of the first century of unification. The implementation of a better social justice among the members of the national community [...] indubitably belongs to the deep *Risorgimento* spirit [...].[18]

For his part, Fanfani approached the social issue as a crucial problem for Italy. The achievement of a social and economic unity based on an equitable redistribution of the gains of progress, argued the Prime Minister in his speech on May 6th, was vital in order to shield the attained political and moral unity from "corrosion". It was up to every citizen to contribute to this cause; yet, the mobilization of the civil society should not become an "alibi" for the government. Moreover, it was equally important that unity be achieved not only within Italy, but also within Europe. As Europeans, Italians should do their best to contribute to the progress of peace and unity in the Old Continent, being aware that the achievement of this target would be as hard as it had been in the case of Italy's unification.[19]

2 The LDP and the Meiji Centennial: Beyond the spirit of occupation, in the name of the Meiji forerunners

In 1968, the days when Japan was a defeated and humiliated country, striving to overcome the material and spiritual legacy of war destruction were long gone and Japan was in the "era of high-speed growth". Since the early 1950s, the Japanese economy had expanded at a striking pace, with an average GNP growth rate in excess of 10%. By 1973, Japan had become the third largest economy in the world after the United States and the Soviet Union.[20] It was the end of economic recovery and the beginning of a new era of development, as the 1956 edition of the *Economic White Paper* officially announced: "It's no longer postwar" (*mohaya sengo dewanai*). As for Italy, the recognition of

18 Comitato nazionale per la celebrazione del primo centenario dell'unità d'Italia 1961: 73, "Discorso del Presidente del Comitato "Italia '61" On. Giuseppe Pella".

19 Comitato nazionale per la celebrazione del primo centenario dell'unità d'Italia 1961: 75–77, "Discorso del Presidente del Consiglio Amintore Fanfani".

20 Gordon 2009: 243–244.

successfully regained affluence and the newly found honorable place in the international community became manifest world-wide at the Olympic games, held in Tokyo in October 1964. The Olympics, shortly preceded by Japan's inauguration of its first bullet train service, projected an image of a prosperous and technologically developed country, with an unprecedented confidence in itself.

Japan's conservative Liberal Democratic Party, established in 1955 had governed the country ever since. The Prime Minister at the time of the Meiji Centennial was Satō Eisaku, at the lead of his second Cabinet since taking office in 1964. Although Satō will be remembered because of the unprecedented achievements of his Cabinet (e. g. Okinawa reversion, award of the Nobel peace prize for his commitment to halt the spread of nuclear arms), he acted in substantial continuity with his predecessors. In the name of the fight against communism, he prioritized Japan's special relationship with the US, complying with the ally's requests in the Vietnam war, which was then entering a crucial stage of escalation. In so doing, the Prime Minister remained faithful to the tenets of the Yoshida doctrine, a set of security policies grounded on a combination of antimilitarism and reliance on the US military umbrella that had so far been the North Star of Japan's diplomacy. In domestic politics, Satō continued the efforts of the previous governments to temper the "excesses" of the Occupation period (1945–1952). A broad consensus existed in the LDP that the Allied Forces had gone too far in their reformist policies, and that many of the measures that they had "imposed" on the Japanese people should be scaled back.

These included not only some of the momentous reforms that had reshaped Japanese politics and economics, but also what came to be labelled the "Occupation view of history" (*senryōshikan*), an interpretation of national history that regarded the Pacific War as the culminating stage of a detrimental course of history rooted in the contradictions of Japan's modernization. According to the prevalent interpretation in LDP circles, this view of history was at the heart of the democratizing measures approved during the Occupation and became established as a consequence of the work of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (1946–1948). Because of its distorted approach and obsessive emphasis on the dark sides of modern Japanese history – so the argument went – the "Occupation view of history" had inflicted a deep-wound on the Japanese nation by robbing its people of their national pride. It was therefore considered urgent to restore the *status quo ante* and implement a spiritual mobilization of the people, all the more after the successes of the Marxist revolutions in China, North Korea and North Vietnam.[21]

21 Dufourmont 2008: 216.

With the restoration of the National Foundation Day (*kenkoku kinenbi*) in 1966, Satō's cabinet gave an important contribution to the campaign for overcoming the "Occupation view of history". Its anniversary celebration, which had been abolished under the occupation (1948) because it was considered a relic of nationalism and militarism, had significant implications in terms of collective memory and national identity not only because it commemorated the foundation of Japan and the accession to the throne of its first legendary emperor, but also because it was based on the myths presented in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, rather than on scientifically verifiable records. Not surprisingly, the decision was met with the satisfaction of Shintō groups, conservatives and right-wing organizations, but also the protests of historians and intellectuals, who accused the government of endangering the "scientific" nature of history by imposing "thought control".[22]

1966 was also the year in which preliminary work for the Meiji Centennial got officially under way. On May 11, the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the Meiji Centennial (hereafter "Committee") took place. At the end of July, the government conducted a national survey on the incoming anniversary in order to test the degree of awareness and the expectations of the people. Interestingly, the majority of the interviewees – 52,8% – declared not to know that the government was at work preparing the anniversary celebration.[23] By the end of the year, the Committee had approved the framework document "Celebrating the Meiji Centennial" (*Meiji hyakunen o iwau*) and had reached an agreement on the overall structure of the government sponsored initiatives. The celebrations were to be based on a positive assessment of the hundred years that had led to the building of a modern country, thanks to the "astonishing courage and vitality" of the Japanese people. They were to contribute to reviving the experiences and teachings of the past so that Japan could approach the new century in a fruitful way. As for the practical organization of the celebrations, it was to be based on the so-called three pillars, namely the greening of the country, the preservation and display of history and the setting up of an instructional cruise programme that would allow Japanese youth to travel abroad and open their minds.[24]

The final result of the preparatory activity was a rich and diverse commemorative programme that included both short-term activities – such as "The

22 Tōyama 1992a: 220–230; Tōyama 1992b: 246–261. Botsman 2018a: 290–291; Kapur 2018a: 309–311; Dufourmont 2008: 204–221.

23 The survey sample (3000 people) was drew on Japanese citizens of at least 20 years of age. Interviews were conducted from July 28 to July 31 1966. See, Naikakufu.

24 Rekishigaku kenkyū 1967: 42–44.

Japanese Youth Goodwill Cruise Program", the showing of a government-produced film, commemorative festivals (agriculture, commerce and industry, art), a national athletic contest, a national gathering of Japanese youth, a celebration of elderly people and the release of commemorative cigarettes, postcards, stamps – and permanent projects – such as the building of the National Museum of Japanese History, the establishment of "Musashi-Kyūryō National Government Park" and of "Meiji no mori Quasi-National Park", the compilation of the Meiji Emperor Chronicles. A solemn ceremony held in Tokyo on October 23, 1968 (the day of the Meiji imperial reign's era start), concluded the celebrations.[25]

The manner in which the LDP handled the anniversary provides interesting insights about the way the party viewed the centennial, which formed the very target of the celebrations. First of all, the hundred years of national history were cast as the history of Japan's modernization, its transition from feudalism to modernity, from the status of a small East Asian state to a "world-famous" one, from ashes and defeat in WWII to its postwar economic miracle, as Satō significantly summed up at the beginning of a speech delivered in Gifu.[26] Again, it was a "journey" that had begun with the oligarchs' decision to catch up with the Western countries and ended with the achievement of modernity in the fields of economics, politics and culture.[27]

The emphasis on modernization went hand in hand with an interpretation of national history that was rather conciliatory and often indulged in self-congratulatory rhetoric. Overall, the hundred years that had elapsed since 1868 were celebrated as a success-story, whose account resonated with the optimistic interpretations of the theory of modernization.[28] In the past, Japan had succeeded in avoiding colonization.[29] In the present, Japan was a respected member of the international community that could rely on a solid "national strength" (*kuni no chikara*). As Satō clarified, this strength was based on economic growth,

25 Naikaku 1968: 31–36.

26 The Prime Minister's speech was delivered on January 27, 1968. Naikaku sōri daijin kanbō 1970: 191, "Daigojūhachikai kokkai ni okeru shisei hōshin enzetsu 第五十八回国会における施政方針演説".

27 Naikaku sōri daijin kanbō 1970: 212, "Meiij kaigen hyakunen ni saishite no danwa 明治改元百年に際しての談話". Analogous remarks were presented in the document drafted by the Committee, titled "Celebrating the Meiji Centennial". Rekishigaku kenkyū 1967: 44, "Meiji hyakunen o iwau 明治百年を祝う".

28 Walthall 2018: 366.

29 See, for instance, the greeting delivered on the occasion of the last meeting of the preparatory committee. Rekishigaku kenkyū 1967: 50, "Satō sōri no heikai aisatsu 佐藤総理の閉会あいさつ".

technological development and historic and cultural traditions, rather than grounded on an arsenal of nuclear weapons.[30] "National strength" had made possible an unprecedented prosperity and the equally unprecedented tribute paid to Japanese culture with the award of the Nobel prize in literature to Kawabata Yasunari in 1968. It is very interesting to note that not only in public speeches, but also in his personal diary, Satō interpreted the successes of the present as evidence of an uninterrupted continuity with the Meiji era. For instance, in the October 17 1968 entry, he reported the news of the Nobel prize as a "wonderful achievement" and explicitly linked it to the Meiji Centennial.[31]

In the future, according to the conciliatory interpretation voiced by the government, Japan should hold firm to the teachings of the Meiji Fathers in order to maintain an honorable place in the world, a target perfectly consistent with the history of Japan that could proudly claim to be one of the modern nations that has prospered in the world in the last a hundred years. What drawing lessons from its glorious past exactly meant was made clear in several speeches that shrewdly linked the catch-phrases of Satō's cabinet to the rhetoric of the Meiji Centennial: "defending its own country with its own hands" (*jibun no kuni wa jibun no te de mamoru*), campaign for a non-military use of nuclear energy on the basis of Japan's unique status (the only country to have suffered the atomic bomb), achieve "the national ideal" (*minzoku no risō*), strengthen "the pride of the Japanese people" (*Nihon minzoku no hokori*).[32]

Basically, the historical view embedded in the words of the Prime Minister and shared at large in the LDP circles was a teleologically oriented narrative that linked the prodigious industrialization of the Meiji era to the economic miracle of the 1960s without taking stock of what lay historically in between. In particular, references to the war and the military regime that ruled Japan were almost completely absent from the narrative offered during the Meiji Centennial celebrations. Typically, the hundred-year history was recalled by referring to the glorious beginnings -the deeds of "the forerunners"- and to the superb achievements of the economic miracle. Mention of the war was mostly made in an allusive and self-justifying tone that left the issue of responsibility completely out of the public discourse. For instance, in the already mentioned speech delivered on January 27, 1968, Satō alluded to the need for "overcoming the

30 Naikaku sōri daijin kanbō 1970: 205, "Kokusei ni kan suru kōchōkai (Gifu) ni okeru enzetsu 国政に関する公聴会　(岐阜）における演説".

31 Satō 1968: 336.

32 Naikaku sōri daijin kanbō 1970: 191–194; 205, "Daigojūhachikai kokkai ni okeru shisei hōshin enzetsu 第五十八回国会における施政方針演説"; "Kokusei ni kan suru kōchōkai (Gifu) ni okeru enzetsu 国政に関する公聴会　(岐阜）における演説".

wound of defeat in World War II", adding a few lines after that Japan "had to consider with humility the experience of failure".[33] Again, in the speeches that Satō held on the occasion of the Committee's first and last meeting, the war was recalled indirectly. In his conclusive meeting's speech, he indirectly referred to it as a "problem" (*mondai*) that had nullified the "achievements of the predecessors" (*senpai no chikuseki*), whereas in his first speech, he mentioned the war only as a hurdle that Japan had managed to get past: "The positive achievements of these hundred years, which have brought with them momentous, epoch-making progress and development, draw the admiration of the whole world, because Japan has managed to restore its national strength and rebuild the country, despite the fatal and serious wound inflicted by the world war".[34]

Finally, one more significant feature of the celebrations was the representation of Japan as a guide for the developing countries. The already mentioned framework document, "Celebrating the Meiji Centennial", after assessing that Japan had achieved the historic target of catching up with the West, argued that, by virtue of its development, Japan was "in the position to be asked for guidance by neighboring and friendly countries alike".[35] In this case as well, the Meiji legacy was turned into a rationale for legitimizing the government's agenda. As Satō elucidated in one of his speeches that cleverly harmonized the analysis of the challenges that confronted the archipelago at the time with a dissertation on the achievements of the past, Japan was an "Asian country" (*Ajia no ichiin*) and as such it could not help being concerned with the North-South divide. Given that peace and prosperity in Asia were inextricably linked to peace and prosperity of the archipelago, Japan should "actively contribute to stabilizing the people's livelihoods" in the East Asian countries through an adequate economic cooperation.[36]

3 Conclusion

The Meiji Centennial celebrations and the Italian National Jubilee were a crucial stage in the postwar process of constructing and disseminating memory in the

33 Naikaku sōri daijin kanbō 1970: 191; 194, "Daigojūhachikai kokkai ni okeru shisei hōshin enzetsu 第五十八回国会における施政方針演説".

34 Rekishigaku kenkyū 1967: 34; 50, "Satō sōri no kaisai aisatsu 佐藤総理の開催挨拶"; "Satō sōri no heikai aisatsu 佐藤総理の閉会挨拶".

35 Rekishigaku kenkyū 1967: 44, "Meiji hyakunen o iwau 明治百年を祝う".

36 Naikaku sōri daijin kanbō 1970: 193, "Daigojūhachikai kokkai ni okeru shisei hōshin enzetsu 第五十八回国会における施政方針演説".

Japanese and Italian societies. The involvement of the populations, the wide range of initiatives put in place to commemorate the two anniversaries, the attention given by political parties in power to the arrangement for the celebrations indicate how high the political stakes in the two events were.

As has been shown, both jubilees were conceived as an opportunity to mark the two countries' impressive economic growth and their re-integration into the international community. The historical narratives embedded in the commemorative initiatives in Italy and Japan stressed their positive achievements, while leaving in the background unresolved issues and persistent sources of domestic conflict. Not coincidentally, it was precisely these issues that oppositions groups in both countries brought up. The scope of this paper and the limitations of space make it impossible to thoroughly address their criticisms, but it is interesting to note that the main source of discontent about both commemorative initiatives was the conciliatory approach that characterized them: rather than celebrating an apparent success – they argued – it would have been more appropriate and urgent to tackle the real problems stemming from the divisive and challenging legacy of the last hundred years of national history. In a way, opponents in Italy and Japan were attacking the very idea that the National Jubilee and the Meiji Centennial were worth celebrating.[37]

Another analogy between the Italian and the Japanese jubilees concerns the importance that the proposed narratives gave to the beginnings and endings of the centennials. In both cases, the founding fathers (the Meiji restorationists, and the "great makers" of Italian unification) and the glorious origins of the modern state ("bakumatsu", *Risorgimento*) were almost deterministically connected to the equally glorious present (the two "economic miracles"). In both cases, what lay in between those beginnings and endings of the hundred-year historical journeys was considered of limited importance. The memory of the Fascist dictatorship and of the wartime regime in Japan were marginal in the overall economy of the narratives and, as shown, they were mainly cast as a temporary, circumscribed deviation from the path leading to present-day progress and modernity. On the whole, such an approach allowed the ruling parties (LDP, Christian Democrats) to use the commemoration as a powerful tool of self-legitimation: through a skillful public use of history, the governments in power were indirectly presented as the pilots of the successful story that went from defeat and ashes to international recognition and prosperity.

Notwithstanding these interesting analogies, the way the Christian Democrats and the Liberal Democratic Party handled the celebrations also presents important differences. Among them, is the different attitude they

37 Merolla 2004: 35–55; Nagahara et al. 1968: 1–29; Kapur 2018a: 311–313.

showed towards the foundations of *postwar* Italy and *postwar* Japan. The Christian Democrats crafted a narrative that fully incorporated the symbols and values on which postwar Italy was based, namely its being a republican, democratic and antifascist country. The most interesting evidence of this was the role that the *Resistenza* played in the commemorative initiatives. As analyzed above, the fight for the liberation of Italy was presented as a "second *Risorgimento*". This interpretation of *Resistenza*, while drawing on a well-established idea, suggested that there was a valuable continuity between the two historic epochs, a continuity conducive to the achievements that Italy had so far attained. Despite the distorting effects of the celebrative rhetoric, on this point the Christian Democrats were not making a totally unfounded claim. To start with, the partisans who fought to liberate Italy from Nazi-Fascist rule also included Catholics, who clung to the same values on which the Christian Democratic Party would base itself in the postwar era. Moreover, historically speaking, the reference to the *Resistenza* was a due action since the partisans' contribution was an essential element of victory over Fascism and of Italy's troubled transition from war to peace. However, in the light of the minimization of the Fascist dictatorship in the narratives underpinning the Jubilee's celebrations, invoking the *Resistenza* appears as a rhetorical device, instrumental for legitimating the Christian Democrats' vision and power.

In Japan, where resistance against the military regime had been a circumscribed phenomenon and defeat was followed by a long and incisive occupation of the country, the transition from war to peace took on distinctive features that led to different patterns of remembrance. This was particularly evident in the Meiji Centennial where "postwar" played a contentious role. As shown above, the historical narrative of the celebrations reflected the LDP's understanding that "postwar" was not only the dawn of a new and promising era leading to the impressive achievements of the 1960s, but also a time when on Japan were "imposed" visions and values at odds with its own national spirit, encouraging a biased perception of the past epitomized by the "Occupation view of history". In this respect, and as far as the LDP was concerned, *sengo* was not only a unifying factor for the Japanese people in their humiliation of defeat and determination to regenerate the country, but also a problematic legacy requiring corrective action. For this reason, the LDP deliberately used the Meiji Centennial as leverage to overcome the postwar spirit and confute the "Occupation view of history". The party cast the Allied Occupation as a breach in the line connecting the Meiji restorationists to the present-day Japanese. Accordingly, it understood the superseding of the Occupation legacy as the necessary precondition for cherishing the lessons learnt from the Meiji oligarchs and contributing to the prosperity of future Japan.

Ultimately, the analogies and differences presented above point to the larger political context in which the two celebrations were inscribed. In Japan, the Meiji Centennial was held at a time when the Japanese democracy had assumed a more stable and durable configuration. The Anpo system, born out of the protests that had accompanied the revision of the Security Treaty (1960), had reconfigured Japanese society, culture and politics.[38] One of the most notable implications of this system was a stabilization of the conservative rule and a "significant narrowing of the range of permissible free expression".[39] In this setting, the LDP could conveniently exploit the celebrations as a showcase for both Japan's and the party's achievements. Criticism was not absent, as we have already mentioned, but it was fragmented and no longer capable of challenging the ruling party through nationwide protests. This implied, for instance, that the battle between the alternative visions of history at stake in the Meiji Centennial celebrations was far less confrontational than it would have been ten years before. In the 1950s, the clash between the progressive and conservative forces rallying around the two contradictory symbols of the Occupation – "Peace Constitution" versus "Reverse Course" – took place in the Diet and in the streets in *a crescendo* of tension that culminated in the 1960 battle over the revision of the US-Japan Security Treaty.[40] In 1968, when the power relations had changed in favor of the conservative camp, the contradictions had been resolved and dissolved in a vision of history that reaffirmed the primacy of the Reverse Course legacy. The success of this operation was enhanced both by the new self-confidence brought about by economic growth and the revival of nationalism, a growing trend in 1960s Japan, as shown by the publication of Hayashi Fusao's revisionist history – *Affirmation of the Greater East Asia War* (1963) – on the widely-read monthly magazine *Chūōkōron*.[41] Overall, the dynamics of the Meiji Centennial celebrations confirmed the durability of the post-Anpo "conservative revolution" and the effectiveness of the institution-building process that in the early 1960s contributed to channeling political disagreement into less destabilizing routes.

In Italy, the National Jubilee was celebrated before the country experienced the unprecedented disruption catalyzed by the 1968–9 mass protests. The early 1960s were the preliminary stage of a "cycle of protests" – spanning from 1960 to 1976 – that made possible a series of reforms that would consolidate Italian

38 Kapur 2018b.
39 Kapur 2018b: 218.
40 Kapur 2018b: 11.
41 Hayashi, 2014.

democracy, after the faltering beginnings in the 1950s.[42] The overall structure of the Jubilee faithfully reflected the power relations characterizing this stage: an influential conservative rule, still capitalizing on the cohesiveness of the Catholic block, and an opposition centered on the powerful Italian Communist Party. The passing of the divorce law (1970), and even more the defeat of the abrogative referendum on that law (1974) would make clear that the unchallenged status of the Christian Democrats – which had played such a great part in shaping the architecture of the Jubilee – had its days numbered. Under the wrenching transformations brought about by the economic boom, the irreversible secularization of politics, and the profound impact of the protests of the late 1960s, Catholic unity collapsed. By 1976 – exacerbated by the oil crisis, the terrorist attacks, the widespread corruption scandals and other circumstances – not only the Christian Democrats, but the whole postwar Italian political system entered the inexorable phase toward its demise. The definitive end would arrive in the 1990s, with the "mani pulite" (clean hands) judicial inquiry and bring about a thorough reset of the political scene.

Not even a single party of those taking part in the 1961 national Jubilee existed in 2011, when a divided Italy celebrated its 150th anniversary of national unification. In Japan, on the contrary, a reinvigorated LDP welcomed the 150th anniversary of the Meiji Restoration. Interestingly, the rhetoric used on this occasion resonated with some of the ideas voiced fifty years before. The "Meiji spirit" (*Meiji seishin*) – often evoked in Prime Minister Abe's speeches – was implicitly premised on a vision of history calling for a "dismissal of the postwar regime" (*sengo rejimu kara no dakkyaku*) that would allow Japan to cope with its national crisis (*kokunan*) as effectively as the Meiji fathers had.[43] Despite the similarities of Abe's arguments to the rhetoric of the Meiji Centennial, the domestic and international context was completely different in 2018 Japan and 2011 Italy. Gone was the Cold War with the reassuring certainties on which both Japan and Italy had based their economic and security policies. Gone were the days when the narratives celebrating the national histories could mobilize hearts and minds. In a way, the Italian National Jubilee and the Meiji Centennial were the last anniversaries to draw on modern national myths. After them, nationalism kept on being a handy resource for the ruling parties, but the national myth, to borrow Emilio Gentile's words, became nothing more than a "simulacrum", trundled on stage for script requirements.[44]

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42 Colarizi 2019: III–XVI.

43 Abe 2019. For a detailed analysis of the Meiji Sesquicentennial celebrations, see Botsman 2018.

44 Gentile 1997: 373.

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