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This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

Published Version:

Federico Ferretti (2022). Indignation, civic virtue and the right of resistance: critical geography and antifascism in Italy. ANNALS OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF GEOGRAPHERS, 112(7), 1833-1849 [10.1080/24694452.2022.2036091].

Availability:

This version is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11585/853197> since: 2022-11-27

Published:

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2022.2036091>

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(Article begins on next page)

This is the final peer-reviewed accepted manuscript of an article published online on 07 Apr. 2022 by Taylor & Francis in ANNALS OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF GEOGRAPHERS, available at:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/24694452.2022.2036091>

Federico Ferretti (2022) Indignation, Civic Virtue, and the Right of Resistance: Critical Geography and Antifascism in Italy, *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 112:7, 1833-1849, DOI: [10.1080/24694452.2022.2036091](https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2022.2036091)

The final published version is available online at:
DOI: [10.1080/24694452.2022.2036091](https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2022.2036091)

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Indignation, civic virtue and the right of resistance: critical geography and anti-fascism in Italy

This paper addresses the ethical and scholarly relevance of notions such as anti-fascism and resistance for the field of critical and radical geographies, starting from a little-known case, that is the formation of early critical geographies in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s. Drawing upon ideas of civic virtue and non-domination as red by radical and anarchist traditions, I analyse the recently-opened archives of Lucio Gambi (1920-2006), which contain unpublished correspondence revealing the fearless role that this critical historical geographer played in denouncing at the same time the outdated positivistic, conservative and descriptive legacies of Italian geography and the frightful prominence of former Fascist officials in that field. Addressing works of Gambi, of his friend and fellow of the 1943-45 antifascist Resistance, geographer Giuseppe Barbieri (1923-2004) and of the collective Geografia Democratica (1974-1981), I argue for recognising the importance, for critical geographers, of fighting against authoritarianism by adopting values of civic virtue, standing proudly against academic opportunism and political conservatism within and outside campuses, past and present.

Keywords: Critical Geographies; Anti-Fascism; Civic Virtue; Right of Resistance; *Geografia Democratica*

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“*Quattro fascisti al muro!* [Four fascists to be put against the wall!]”

Lucio Gambi’s handwritten note on a 1970 leaflet signed by four Italian geographers whom he deemed compromised with Fascism (LG, 10-20, *Università di Roma*)

This paper discusses matters on ethics, prickliness and coherence between means and ends by addressing the case of anti-fascism in the construction of Italian critical geographies, around works of Lucio Gambi (1920-2006), Giuseppe Barbieri (1923-2004) and the group *Geografia Democratica* (1974-1981), based on the exploration of new archives including the huge Gambi collection at the Classense Library in Ravenna, whose parts containing correspondence were opened to researchers only after 2018 following Gambi’s Will. I extend international literature on geographies of anti-fascism and on the construction of critical and radical geographies from the 1960s-1970s (Barnes and Sheppard 2019; Heynen 2013; Heynen et al. 2017), with an emphasis on cultural traditions outside the Anglosphere (Craggs and Neate 2020; Ferretti 2020a; Melgaço 2017; Paiva and Oliveira 2020). This paper also fills lacunas in the international recognition of scholars such as Gambi, whose key works were never translated into English, with few exceptions.

My argument is twofold. First, antifascism was a constitutive component in the formation of Italian critical and radical geographies, due to the centrality of this matter in the peculiar experience of Italian radicalism between 1968 and 1977 (Balestrini and Moroni 2003) and to values that were solidly rooted in alternative geographical traditions by early anarchist

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geographers, of which Italian critical geographers were always aware (Farinelli 1992; Gambi 1973). Second, wider notions of resistance and civic virtue should be key for current critical and radical scholarship drawing upon ideas such as “undisciplining” geography which, for Simon Springer (2016), means both the refuse of petty disciplinary boundaries and the need/right to challenge unjust political or academic powers. This matches ethics of individual insubordination that Ron Horvath calls “disobedience training [or] teaching resistance to hegemonic practices” (Horvath 2016, 102, 115).

While John Holloway (2005), although praising insubordination, considers it as part of a dialectics in power relations, I match here James Scott’s views, considering insubordination as the ethical ground of a myriad of “everyday forms of resistance” (Scott 2012, 8) necessary to any agenda of social transformation. In this vein, I connect insubordination to what I call “prickliness”, substantivating the adjective *scomodo*, which was attributed to Gambi and may be translated into English as “prickly”, “thorny” or “disturbing”, being classically used to qualify someone who challenges a power in place, managing to disturb its eventual holders and taking the risk of retaliation. Although they held relatively strong academic positions, geographers like Gambi had to face the hostility of an entire academic establishment, which highlights the “insubordinate” side of their attitude. Their political, intellectual and ethical legacy suggests that scholars should act resistance and insubordination at each time that their freedom of research and speech is hindered by political power or suffocating conformism.

Second, I make the case for putting more emphasis on anti-fascist themes in current critical geographical scholarship, in a period that sees the dreadful coming back of the Far Right under

the form of sovereignism and White supremacism. These phenomena are taking increasingly violent aspects under the form of aggressions to migrants, activists and non-white persons, or spectacular demonstrations including the attack to the Capitol on 6 January 2021 as well as the attack to the CGIL (the Italian reformist union) offices performed by neo-fascist groups in Rome on 9 October 2021. It is also worth noting that, in Italy, “anti-immigration, xenophobic and openly racist political propaganda” (Cassina-Wolff 2019, 62) is quite common in conservative political arenas, well beyond the few groups that claim explicitly a neo-fascist inspiration. This paper responds to recent calls by authors such as Anthony Ince for the “the development of anti-fascist geographies” (Ince 2019, 1) considering the voluntaristic aspects of anti-fascism beyond mere institutional or inter-state conflicts (Ince 2021).

In recent years, scholarship on anti-fascism lamented that “scholars have traditionally paid less attention to antifascism than fascism” (Fitch, Ortiz and Underwood 2019, 1) and committed to fill this gap by fostering what Kasper Braskén, Nigel Copsey and David Featherstone call “a discussion on the varieties of global anti-fascism ... around the world [considering the] abundance and complexity of anti-fascist ideas, movements and practices” (Braskén, Featherstone and Copsey 2020, 1, 2), which appears in the plurality of the political standpoints inspiring antifascist movements. Culture is a central point for current anti-fascist studies, arguing that: “Examining the messy, debated, and intertwined cultural interactions of antifascism is critical to understanding the larger antifascist phenomena — Examining antifascism through a cultural lens can best shed light on these questions, as antifascists used cultural practices” (Fitch, Ortiz and Underwood 2019, 2). Antifascist geographies are doubtlessly a new and promising field to extend this growing body of scholarship.

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While anti-fascist studies are globalised, acknowledging the fact that the fascist phenomena occurred well beyond Europe, Italy remains an outstanding case due to its history, and to the lack of a complete purge of Fascist officials from the administration after 1945, which led to continuing confrontations afterwards due to the disappointment of several early antifascists who considered their cause to have been betrayed under the newly-instituted Italian Republic (1946). My case also shows the need for connecting theory and practice, that is scholarship and activism, given that both Gambi and Barbieri, beyond being original intellectuals, took roles in the armed antifascist Resistance in 1943-45.

In this paper, I analyse Gambi's unpublished correspondence with other Italian geographers surviving at the Classense Library, Gambi's and Barbieri's published works, and the small but relevant body of sources produced in the 1970s by the informal group *Geografia Democratica* (hereafter GD) and the ephemeral journal *Hérodote-Italia* (hereafter HI). While Gambi's archive still lacks a public inventory that would allow analysing how this collection was constructed, it can be considered as an example of what Hodder, Heffernan and Legg define the "widely dispersed ... unexplored collections" (Hodder, Heffernan and Legg 2021, 1) that aim at preserving radical memories. In the first part, I put this story in the context of "prickliness" as understood in the tradition of anarchism and radical republicanism that broadly inspired early Italian critical geographers. In the second part, I address Gambi's earliest attempts to innovate Italian geography opening it to international contaminations and to the wider intellectual field, and the outraged reactions that this triggered among the most conservative tenants of the discipline. In the third part, I address Barbieri's and Gambi's

antifascist engagement. In the fourth part, I analyse the attempts of these geographers, in the 1970s and 1980s, to pass the baton to a new generation of critical scholars, and the related difficulties.

1. Republicanism, anarchism and resistant virtues

To understand Gambi's and Barbieri's contribution, I draw upon ideas of freedom as non-domination and civic virtue in the tradition of "civic", or "classical", republicanism (Pettit 1997; Skinner 1998), intersecting with anarchist traditions in defending individual and public freedoms. There is a long history of cooperation between anarchists and radical republicans in contexts such as Irish anticolonialism (Ferretti 2017; Gutiérrez and Ferretti 2020), the Italian Radical Risorgimento (Ferretti 2016; Carocci 2017) and the anti-fascist exile and resistance, when the republican and "liberal-socialist" movement *Giustizia e Libertà* to which Gambi and Barbieri referred, was one of the allies of the anarchists (Ferretti 2020b). According to Maurizio Viroli, freedom as non-domination means that liberty is not the mere absence of constraints, but the guarantee that no arbitrary power can be exerted on an individual. "The liberty of servants ... consists in the absence of obstacles to pursue their finality. Conversely, the freedom of citizens consists in not being subject to the disproportioned or arbitrary power of someone else" (Viroli 2012, xii), even when those who exert this power are democratically elected.

Intrinsic to non-domination is the notion of civic virtue, which means that citizens, and especially public servants—including academics, should adopt the highest ethical standards, deeming liberty the accomplishment of one's duty that, importantly, should be a moral one, that "cannot be imposed" (Viroli 2012, 116) by the state or by another individual. As examples

of civic virtue, Viroli mentions Piero Martinetti, “one of the few university teachers who refused the humiliation of the oath that the Fascist regime imposed in 1931” (Viroli 2012, 79) alongside other antifascist intellectuals such as Carlo Rosselli (Viroli 2012, 121), one of the founders of *Giustizia e Libertà*, assassinated by Fascist thugs, Ernesto Rossi (Viroli 2012, 122), and Piero Gobetti (Viroli 2012, 128). This exposes how civic virtue includes the right of resistance (Pettit 1997), which means that “resistance to oppression is a right and a duty of the citizen” (Viroli 2012, 130). It is around the concept of resistance that one can understand the personal and professional experiences of geographers such as Gambi and Barbieri.

This duty to resist complements Michel Foucault’s notion of “fearless speech” or “the courage of truth”, translating the Greek term *parrhesia* (Foucault 2019), which Viroli calls “absence of worry” (Viroli 2012, 45). Thus, those who accomplish civic duties “are not at all docile; they are capable of revolting ... to reject an unjust law” being led by “a moral feeling, namely indignation against prevarications, discriminations, corruption, arrogance and vulgarity” (Viroli 1999, 66). This indignation can be clearly seen in Gambi’s pamphlets denouncing the permanence of Fascist personnel in Italian universities, chiming with Viroli’s statement of the importance of “passions” such as “love for liberty ... disdain ... deep feeling for rejecting injustice” (Viroli 2012, 137). In post-war Italy, this characterised those who intransigently opposed the reappointment of former Fascist officials in the Republic’s administration, as “intransigence means not forgiving and not forgetting too lightly” (Bobbio and Viroli, 33). Gambi was an example of this civic passion and intransigence, academically and politically.

About notions such as non-domination and civic virtue (Pettit 1997; Pocock 1981; Skinner 1998), Nadia Urbinati argues that non-domination should include democratic ideas of equal participation in public affairs, evoking historical figures who are universally acknowledged by the authors quoted above such as Giuseppe Mazzini. For Urbinati, a situation of “equal liberty” (Urbinati 2012a, 620), implies that “disagreement becomes a constitutive virtue” (Urbinati 2012b, 170). These notions recall works by anarchist geographers Elisée Reclus and Peter Kropotkin, that is two inspirers of Italian critical geographies. Indeed, the anarchist tradition has a strong ethical component, which is famously expressed by Errico Malatesta’s idea of the coherence between means and ends as a key anarchist principle (Malatesta 2014). There, intransigence intervenes whenever an alliance or a compromise stands in contradiction with the ethical premises of political action: the Italian teachers who lost their jobs because they refused the Fascist oath mentioned above provided a clear example of this ethical and political correspondence between means and ends.

Finally, intransigence means applying the right/duty of resistance by revolting, whatever this may cost in terms of persecutions, rather than sacrificing one’s principles to abide to an unjust power. For Reclus and Kropotkin, a paradigmatic figure embodying the moral premises of insubordination was Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza, whose work was later considered as a reference for critical social theory (Deleuze 1970; Negri 2014) and for the idea of “Radical Enlightenment” (Israel 2001). Reclus declared his adhesion “to Spinoza’s philosophical School” (Reclus 1858) in his youth, and confided to Kropotkin how his own carceral experiences were alleviated by reading “great Spinoza” (Reclus 1884). Spinoza’s philosophy was an inspiration for Kropotkin’s *Ethics*, arguing that Spinoza “could not conceive morality

as something based on coercion exerted by the State. ... [He] created a truly ethical teaching, permeated with deep moral feelings. Such was also his personal life” (Kropotkin 1924). The last sentence is key to understand the need to merge consistently theories and praxes for both anarchist and radical republican traditions given that, for Reclus and Kropotkin, Spinoza’s example of personal integrity in facing political and religious persecutions was not less important than his theories. In the same way, for Gambi, the personal involvement of certain geographers with Fascism was not less serious than the epistemic limits that Italian geography showed at that time, and both issues had to be addressed with the same energy.

2. Between “*bischeri*” and conservatives: the prickliness of an innovator

Lucio Gambi was born in Ravenna in 1920. The ancient capital of the Byzantines in medieval Italy, this town is one of the main centres of Romagna. This regional inscription explains much of Gambi’s trajectory for two reasons at least. First, because Gambi, despite his cosmopolitanism and multilingualism, took his main cases from critical histories of his region’s landscapes (Bolognesi and Giovannini 2018). Second, because Romagna is one of the Italian cradles of anarchist and radical republican groups since the Risorgimento. Gambi took part in the 1943-45 Resistance in the *Partito d’Azione* (the continuation of *Giustizia e Libertà*), “serving as a dispatch rider and often crossing the front lines. He was a classical product of the socialist and libertarian culture, and of Rosselli’s *Giustizia e Libertà*” (Emiliani 2014). After the 1945 Liberation from Nazi-Fascism, Gambi’s attitudes confirmed his intransigence and little attraction for forgetfulness or forgiveness given that, in the town of Forlì, he founded a radio “to follow the trials of Fascist officials in real time” (Emiliani 2014).

According to one of his most emblematic disciples, Franco Farinelli, Gambi claimed his “ideological and cultural choices” (Farinelli 2013) all his life long. Until his late days, he felt that “the liberation of our country from the Nazi-Fascist oppression” (Farinelli 2013) was never fully accomplished. Since the beginning of his studies, Gambi took distances from positivism thanks to his readings in the “humanistic and idealistic tradition” (Farinelli 2008, 51) including authors such as Benedetto Croce, who inspired his interest in history. According to Farinelli, Gambi’s background “speckled with anarchism his political views ... in all his acts he communicated ... a deep aversion for ... politicians’ logics, for their way of doing politics, finally for compromise. Consistently, this aversion matched his sharp refuse for each behaviour that was not based on ... personal accountability” (Farinelli 2008, 52). In 1975, Gambi resigned as the Director of the newly founded Emilia-Romagna IBC (Institute for Cultural Heritage) as he could not accept the schizophrenic views of politicians conceiving “political action and intellectual action” (Farinelli 2013) as separated (Santini 2008). What is said above about intransigence, civic virtue and prickliness could not be better explained.

Farinelli deems Gambi’s position in Italian geography as a “heresy ... consisting in refusing the naïve, but then generalized belief in the possibility of an objective description of the world” (Farinelli 2013). Thus, he was an epigone of the tradition established by Carl Ritter and Alexander von Humboldt as “critical knowledge of the earth” (Farinelli 2013), and a forerunner of humanistic geographies (Farinelli 1997; Proto 2012). In the 1950s, the first challenge that Gambi launched to Italian geography was contesting its nature of a “monster-science”, which encompassed so heterogeneous matters that a geographer could be the “jack-of-all-trades”, and was substantially deaf to wider tendencies in the intellectual world. Gambi took inspiration

from the French *Annales* school, and from Reclus, in using historical approaches for enabling geography to address social and political matters. Accordingly, Gambi criticised notions such as “geographical landscape” by geographer Renato Biasutti as an excessively naturalistic one (Gambi 1961a), proposing an idea of “dynamic” region (Gambi 2008, 74) that, for some authors, anticipated constructivist approaches (Galluccio and Sturani 2008).

Another former *Partito d’Azione* partisan fighter, Giuseppe Barbieri was the geographer who had most “civil and cultural affinity” (Farinelli 2013) with Gambi and who first defined him a “prickly geographer” (*geografo scomodo*) in his recollections. Barbieri explained the reasons of the old geographical establishment’s violent reaction against Gambi, that is “the diktat pretending that [Gambi’s] was not geography and there is only one geography” (Barbieri 1997, 15). Gambi’s main “sin” was that of vocally protesting against the hegemonic notion of “integral geography” (Gambi 1964, 3). It was especially the case with the pamphlets *Geografia fisica e geografia umana di fronte ai concetti di valore* (1956), *Geografia nell’insegnamento delle Università* (1959) and *Geografia regione depressa* (1962). The latter’s title sarcastically recalled positivistic definitions of the economic status of certain regions, this time referred polemically to geography as being an “underdeveloped region” itself.

Most of these works were republished in the principal collections of Gambi’s writings such as *Questioni di Geografia* (1964) and *Geografia per la storia* (1973) that became classical readings for geographers of the following generation. Gambi expressed disappointment for “a geography putting its hands everywhere, a unique geography *touche à tout*” (Gambi 1964, 48), and considered a big misunderstanding the pretention that geography was a “synthesis science”.

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For Gambi, the adjectives synthetic and analytical should apply to the methodologies that are deployed at each time rather than to the very disciplines. Thus, geography should encompass three well distinct fields, that is a specialised physical geography, an “ecological geography” whose inspirers included French social geographer Max Sorre, and a human geography especially inspired by the *Annales*, whose geographical drive was emphasized by Gambi in defining Fernand Braudel’s geo-history as “human geography under historical problematics” (Gambi 1964, 45). Importantly, Gambi never neglected the ethical side of scholarship’s makers, highlighting how Marc Bloch was not only an innovative historian of landscape, but also a fighter for freedom who “fell under the German machine-guns” (Gambi 1964, 44) in 1944 due to his participation to the French Resistance. Hence, ideas of intransigence and civic virtue are core in Gambi’s thinking: as discussed above, theory cannot go independently from practices and ethics, and a genial scholar should also be an ethically worthy person.

The most “scandalous” of Gambi’s writings, in these years, were *Insegnamento* and *Regione depressa*. In the first, Gambi fumed at the “childish pretention” for synthesis alleged by the tenants of “integral geography”, deriding the “vertiginous width and undefinable substance of this discipline” (Gambi 1964, 60). For Gambi, geography was completely out of place in the humanistic curricula where it was generally taught, also due to geographers’ descriptive positivism and refusal of considering wider intellectual debates. Gambi concluded mocking the “ridiculous” pretention “of encompassing the most disparate things of our world in the incommensurably wide arms of geography” (Gambi 1964, 63). *Regione depressa* added some spicy political metaphors to Gambi’s criticism of a “geography without adjectives” (Gambi 1964, 71). It was the case with Gambi’s denunciation of the presence, in Italian geography, of

“a Far Right which is castled with feudal spirits over concepts they inherited from previous generations [being] used to deliria of greatness, unmoving in their certitude of detaining the Truth” (Gambi 1964, 97). In these milieus, old barons were “afraid of all draught of fresh air” (Gambi 1964, 88). For Gambi, this geography was only chosen by “mediocre” (Gambi 1964, 86) students for their dissertations, because it could not match the political and cultural interests of new generations that were growing up in post-war Italy, unlike older people who had experienced the “bleak, gloomily closed and fanatic, Jesuit, police-like environment of the years between 1922 and 1942” (Gambi 1964, 86), that is the Fascist dictatorship. Gambi mentioned explicitly his adversaries within “integral geography”, including powerful academics such as Aldo Sestini (1904-1988) and Alberto Mori (1909-1993).

A correspondence folder surviving in Gambi’s archive shows the disappointment of his conservative colleagues before these pamphlets, but also the presence of some (although shy) admirers. A non-academic friend of Gambi wrote from Rimini that it was “no surprise” that *Insegnamento* had “raised a hornets’ nest” in the academic world, while praising Gambi’s “steady nonconformism ... and fighter’s spirit” (Angiolino 1960). Conversely, geographer Giuseppe Morandini (1907-1969) wrote from Padova that he was “saddened” by Gambi’s brochure, arguing that it was “detrimental to the common cause” (Morandini 1959) of geography. From Naples, Carmelo Colamonico (1882-1973) wrote in quite disappointed tones to Gambi reproaching him to have chosen “the worst moment to raise the matter” as amidst these polemics “only few students would choose geography” (Colamonico 1959). More aggressive, with tones that seemed almost intimidatory, was a letter from Mori, who expressed his “regret” for Gambi’s pamphlet, claiming staunchly for the “true and lively integral

geography”, blaming Gambi for sending his writing to colleagues of other disciplines, which would create “serious harm” to geography, and expecting Gambi to “rectify” (Mori 1959). Alleging that Gambi’s critiques jeopardised geography’s positions in the “dishing out” of academic posts was a leitmotif of these letters, confirming the intellectual limits of a discipline whose tenants do not respond to the substance of Gambi’s questionings.

Gambi had some more friendly exchanges with other Italian intellectuals, such as an unidentified correspondent from the headquarters of the *Enciclopedia Italiana* who jokingly wrote to him: “I hurry up to congratulate before your fellow geographers lynch you. Needless to say that I agree with you” (Unidentified, 1959). Gambi also corresponded with famous philosopher Guido Calogero, who discussed Gambi’s proposals to have a reformation of geography’s curricula (Calogero 1958). Significantly, one of Gambi’s letters to Calogero stated that, still in 1957: “Among Italian geographers, we are only two thinking this way, but we are the two youngest ones” (Gambi 1957). While the other one was arguably Barbieri, what is significant is the long-term strategic view that is revealed by Gambi’s generational remark: as the dissidents were the youngest ones, one could bet on incoming transformations in the discipline due to generational turnover. In a 1961 letter to geographer Roberto Pracchi (1911-1996), Gambi dated his first “heretical declarations” to the period 1954-56. At that time, he decided to challenge the old establishment after a “geographic excursion” where he was reproached by Renato Toniolo (1881-1955) of lacking something so immaterial as “geographical spirit” (Gambi 1961b) as the sole response to Gambi’s questionings. Thus, Gambi was hoping to have increasing followers as the elderly retired. As I detail below, Gambi

was quite right in his bet, even though his partial “victory” was far from resolving all the problems of Italian geography.

Amazingly, among the few who endorsed Gambi’s early pamphlets, some are difficult to identify, such as a correspondent from Rome who praised *Area depressa* and fumed at “S” (seemingly Sestini) with sarcastic tones. “Good! I have read and enjoyed – thus, I am evil. You have nailed S in such a way that I don’t know how he could reply. But you still ignore what actions our eminent colleague was able to do” (Unidentified 1963). After working several years in Messina (Campione 2007), Gambi was then established as a Chair of Geography in Milan: yet, this letter seemed to allude to some risk of retaliation from those whom Gambi criticized. Anyway, it was *Area depressa* that triggered the harshest reactions against him.

Elio Migliorini (1902-1988) wrote complaining about some “very inopportune” remarks contained in *Regione depressa* and about Gambi’s “ingratitude towards those who supported you” (Migliorini 1963). This letter offered to Gambi the possibility of replying by raising a key point for the principles of civic virtue and non-domination as well as for problems that still affect Italian universities. Gambi deemed this allusion to gratitude as “the morally most important point” (Gambi 1963a) in Migliorini’s letter, claiming that it was not because some people sat in some board which appointed him somewhere that he had to shut up forever and never criticize them. For those familiar with Italian university and its feudal permanencies, this is still today an outstandingly telling point. It is no coincidence that, among his examples of “servants’ freedom”, Violi includes situations where “young scholars know that their career does not depend on the quality of their works, but on the arbitrary whim of their professor”

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(Viroli 2012, 9). The feudal mindset of those who are still called the Barons imply that scholars who owe their career to someone must remain faithful and obey until their mentors retire. This leads to shameful situations, including inverse meritocracy, denounced by international literature (Gambetta and Origgi 2013) and by praiseworthy associations such as *Trasparenza e Merito*.¹ Conversely, Gambi's actions anticipated Viroli's contention that, "when the Republic is corrupted ... someone should have the force to redeem it" (Viroli 1999, 64).

In 1963, Gambi received another stormy letter from Mori, who repeated several times his "deploration" of Gambi's pamphlet and reiterated the usual arguments undermining all critiques to geography as ways to give "weapons to geography's enemies" (Mori 1963). While it is impossible to summarise here Gambi's meticulously detailed responses to the letters of his adversaries, it is worth mentioning his polemical exchanges with Mario Fondi (1923-2012). Although an antifascist and a socialist (in his letters, he vividly complained that Gambi treated him as "a reactionary"), Fondi expressed rather conservative views on the nature of geography. The first incident between the two men was a book review in which Fondi violently tore apart the *History of the Italian Agricultural Landscape* by Emilio Sereni, triggering Gambi's critiques to the small-mindedness of geographers who considered people like Sereni (neither a geographer nor an academic) as intruders, while they should have learnt from the intellectual stimulations that Sereni provided in bringing to Italy the methods of authors such as Bloch (Ferretti 2015). Fondi replied to Gambi attacking again Sereni and criticising "you, the avantgarde geographers" (Fondi 1962) for excessively politicizing academic debates. Yet, in a new letter, Fondi commented in more conciliatory tones about *Regione depressa*, "your

¹ Website <https://www.trasparenzaemero.org/>

incendiary brochure” (Fondi 1963), although criticizing Gambi’s attitude as potentially leading to his disciplinary isolation. Gambi replied restating all of his points, for instance the argument that “Sereni did things that geographers should have done if they were in line with the times” (Gambi 1963b), but also revealing that he considered Fondi as an interlocutor rather than an adversary. Gambi confided to Fondi his hope that, in the middle term, the “integral geography” people “will be less numerous and less harmful” (Gambi 1963c).

Some letters sent from the University of Bologna (where Gambi would move from Milan in 1976) by Mario Ortolani (1909-1998) show that Gambi was gaining some (cautious) supporters. Although agreeing only partially with the arguments exposed in *Regione depressa*, Ortolani expressed his admiration “for those who bravely act for the progress of our discipline, without personal advantages” (Ortolani 1963). He also criticised some old-fashioned tenants of the discipline such as his Bologna colleague Umberto Toschi (1899-1966), whose possible work as the President of a “Benito Mussolini University” in Bari during the fascist dictatorship was the object of Gambi’s archive investigations (*Schemi*, n.d.). Gambi had also intriguing exchanges with two geographers who proposed to organise a restricted conference of geographical dissidents in conspiracy-like tones. They were Alessandro Cucagna (1917-1987) and Giorgio Valussi (1930-1990) from Trieste, who wrote to Gambi requesting a discussion “among friends”, involving those, such as Gambi and “Barbieri [who] are not stubbornly tied to the old geography and feel the need of new formulas” (Cucagna and Valussi 1963). Gambi replied that having such a “friendly” meeting was one of his old projects, and suggested to organise it in Florence where Barbieri was based, implying “some other friends” (Gambi 1963d) such as Aldo Pecora (1928-1985). While there is no further information on this

project, this correspondence clearly anticipated the matters which led to the creation of *GD* in the following decade as I discuss below.

An example of Gambi's integrity in matters such as academic recruitment, chiming with notions of civic virtue, was his 1967-1968 correspondence on the polemics that accompanied the appointment of Francesco Compagna (1921-1982) as a Chair of Geography in Naples. A progressive politician and "meridionalist" scholar (Antonsich 1996, 18-21), Compagna was not trained as a "geographer", hence the opposition of the "integral" geographers, who could include every subject in their field but did not like that people outside their circles took up the label of geographer. To give an example of this polemics' tones, it suffices to quote Gambi's letters to Ortolani, where he wrote that: "There is a so frightening flourishing of idiots among geographers (*C'è così paurosa fioritura di bischeri tra i geografi*), that [there would be no arm] in allowing [Compagna] to fecundate the field of geography" (Gambi 1968a). Furthermore, rejecting a famous scholar over petty disciplinary boundaries would have further compromised geography's reputation in the intellectual field.

Importantly, Gambi was not directly involved in this appointment and, despite his friendship with Compagna, he proved that he could be prickly also with his friends. Few years later, he had an equally stormy discussion with Compagna over this latter's actions as a member of parliament in antifascist PRI (*Partito Repubblicano Italiano*), whose choice of supporting the election of conservative Giovanni Leone as the President of the Republic with the support of the Right was considered a betrayal by some activists. I could not find Gambi's original letter, but from Compagna's response to Gambi's "accusation letter" (Compagna 1972), one can infer

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that Gambi's critiques to his fellow were quite harsh. Civic virtue means also that ethical principles should prevail over private interests and personal connections. While first referring to individual ethics, this notion is a powerful tool for activism as far as intransigent individuals participate in public life and in preserving the antifascist and combative identity of their respective political groups.

3. Antifascist geographies

Born in Modena in 1921, Giuseppe Barbieri is less known than Gambi, yet there were several reasons that made him Gambi's first ally during many years. One was antifascism: in his youth, Barbieri fought as a partisan in the *Partito d'Azione*, risking his life in armed clashes with the Black Shirts and the Nazis. After his death, an important piece of his resistant recollections was found in the archives of the University of Bologna, and published in the *Rivista Geografica Italiana* after request of the late Gambi (Direzione 2006). This text was a commemoration of Barbieri's "fallen comrades" (Barbieri 2006, 159) during an attempt of anti-fascist insurrection at the University of Bologna in October 1944, the harsher period of Nazi and Fascist occupation, known as "the battle of the University of Bologna". In this paper, Barbieri recounted how the Institute of Geography, where he was then a student, became the headquarters of the projected revolt. In its offices, there was a clandestine radio connected with the Allies, and a clandestine workshop for consulting the cartographic archive to inform them, in the context of what Barbieri defined a "first-class clandestine military organization" (Barbieri 2006, 160). Amazingly, geography served for making war as Yves Lacoste famously argued, but this time it was Resistance war. Barbieri concluded arguing that: "Science is morality, honesty, duty and sacrifice ... Outside this, we do not recognize any other science"

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(Barbieri 2006, 162). This meant expressing an activist idea of geography and scholarship in their association with ethics and civic virtue, outside which scholarship would not serve.

Although pre-fascist Italian geography included some unorthodox and anticolonial scholars challenging its positivistic and imperialistic core such as Arcangelo Ghisleri (Ferretti 2016), very few academic voices dissented after Mussolini seized power in 1922. Geographers almost unanimously adhered to fascism and to its disgraceful colonial endeavours in Africa, as Gambi showed (Gambi 1994). After 1938, most of them became supporters of the shameful Racial Laws adopted following Nazi Germany. Many also committed to support Mussolini's (and therefore Hitler's) military effort during Second World War, when one of the redactors of the journal *Geopolitica*, inspired by Haushofer's *Geopolitik*, Ernesto Massi, actively participated in war operations. According to Marco Antonsich, this behaviour stood in continuity with the servile attitude of those geographers who, even before Fascism, considered to be "servants of the state" (Antonsich 2009, 261). While, for Antonsich, the *Geopolitica* group supported Mussolini's decision to enter the war in 1940 rather than inspiring it, it is worth noting that, according to Costantino Caldo, at the journal foundation in 1938 one already perceived the "militarist breath" (Caldo 1982, 188) that would have led Italy to war. In 1942, a German-Italian geographical meeting held in Würzburg revealed clear intentions of putting geography at the service of Hitler's and Mussolini's endeavours (Gambi 1994).

Contrasting the shameful history of geographers' complicity with Nazi-Fascism, the 1943-45 *Resistenza* was considered by Gambi and Barbieri as much more than a youth experience, as it was also a matter for geographical investigation. For instance, the project for an *Historical*

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Atlas that Gambi coordinated between the 1960s and 1970s had to include historical maps of Fascist political repression and partisan resistance (*Progetti* n.d.). In Gambi's writings on his region, the geographer made the case for exploring the use of territory by partisan groups. In the lowlands around Ravenna, very far from the mountains with which the *Resistenza* is popularly identified, partisans "used the river banks as a battlefield for their moves, their stakeouts, their attacks" (Gambi 2008, 185). This intrinsically contrasted with the way of making war of German regular troops, that was mainly based "on topographical maps. Conversely, the knowledge of territory of the partisan brigades was mainly ... the result of ... mental maps" (Gambi 2008, 264). Among the exceptions, one should obviously consider Barbieri and the young geographical fighters of the University of Bologna.

Although less vocal than Gambi in publishing scathing pamphlets, Barbieri was equally intransigent in his ethical choices. In 1971, he resigned from the Committee of Italian Geographers in a "scandalous" way, that is with a public statement, denouncing the elitism and the lack of transparency of this Committee, which was only accessible to the few who were already Full Professors. For Barbieri, academic hierarchies did not matter as for merit, given that often "one passes academic concourses for organizational rather than scholarly merits" (Barbieri 1971, 82). Following Gambi, Barbieri criticised those geography teachers "who discuss of stars and comets in humanistic colleges ... who do not address the big problems of the current World" (Barbieri 1971, 82), as well as the "conservative and traditional measures" (Barbieri 1971, 85) proposed by President Mori. It is no surprise that Franca Canigiani, in her biographical paper on Barbieri, wrote that he was deemed "a subversive and a disruptor" (Canigiani 2005, 289) due to his alliance with Gambi. Finally, Barbieri shared Gambi's ideas

of personal integrity as he “kept away from academic competitions and relationships with the power” (Canigiani 2005, 300).

As antifascism was at the core of this collaboration, it is not surprising to see the names of some of Barbieri’s and Gambi’s common adversaries, such as Mori, in the handwritten files where Gambi recorded basic information on geographers’ relations with Fascism from 1922 to 1945. According to these files, Mori resulted to have taught a course titled “Biology of Races” (*Alberto Mori*, n.d.) at the University of Urbino in 1942-43, some of the worst years of Italy’s support for biological racism and antisemitism, which was supported by the GUF (University Fascist Groups). Yet, if Gambi started to do his “filing” work at the National Library in Florence to chase former Fascists still operating in the discipline, it was first to defend himself against the attacks that he received for his pamphlets. In 1963, Dino Gribaudi (1902-1971) published an article that violently attacked Gambi, titled “Against a destructive critique to geography” (Gribaudi 1963). There, Gribaudi incautiously challenged Gambi’s antifascist remarks arguing that not all Italian geographers acted so badly under the dictatorship. Unluckily for him, Gambi had huge documentation and could contend publicly that, during the Fascist regime, Gribaudi was far from being a nonconformist, and that this past was too close to the present to deserve Gambi’s forgiveness or forgetfulness.

Gambi’s reply was titled “Issues of scientific content and cultural vitality. Discourse to a geographer”. The first and longer part of this text (sections 1-4) was dedicated to counter Gribaudi’s attacks by confirming Gambi’s arguments against “integral geography” intended as “mere description of the Earth, ... a collector-like notionist field that is not science” (Gambi

1973, 87). The last part (section 5) started discussing how Gribaudi was right in one point, that is on noting Gambi's intransigent opposition to Fascism. If Gambi disliked traditional geography, it was also because "many of the men who practice it ... have backed numerous and significant political actions of Fascism", from the support to Italian imperialism in Africa (Gambi 1994) until "the crime of racism [that is the so-called Racial Laws] after 1940" (Gambi 1973, 103). Gambi provided extensive evidence that whoever the alleged nonconformists evoked by Gribaudi were, Gribaudi was not in that list. An entire folder of Gambi's archives contains the results of his investigations on the embarrassing Fascist past of most of his colleagues and on the concrete dangers that were still represented by the reorganisation of the Right, including in the academy, in the 1960s-1970s (Rosati 1973).

In his paper, Gambi extensively quoted some Gribaudi's frightening writings of the 1940s, that argued "scientifically" for the "superiority of certain races over others", praising the "intellectual skills of the White man" over "those of the Negro" and called for rediscovering tenants of scientific racism such as Gobineau (Gambi 1973, 103). Gambi even found a 1940 paper where, under the form of geographical notes, Gribaudi expressed enthusiasm for Mussolini's decision of entering war, and even eulogized Adolf Hitler as "a man moved by a vivid and deep sense of humanity" (Gambi 1973, 105). The fact that thousands of young people, including future geographers such as Barbieri and Gambi, had chosen instead antifascism and Resistance implied that excuses justifying collaborationism on the grounds that everybody was compelled to abide to Fascism were simply untenable. An alternative choice was possible, and was grounded on intransigence and civic virtue. Gambi's 1970 allusion to

“four fascists” in this paper’s exergue show how he identified elements of continuity in those behaviours, such as links between geographers and *Movimento Sociale Italiano*² members.

In the archive, a puzzling subfolder contains the letters that Gambi exchanged with the editors of the *Rivista Geografica Italiana*, where Gribaudi had published his paper, and where Gambi requested the right to reply. Strikingly, a part of the journal’s editors requested him to withdraw the last part of his paper, on Gribaudi and Fascism, which Gambi obviously refused. The first reason advocated by the editors (eventually Sestini), was that Gambi’s part 5 was “a personal attack to Gribaudi to document his past as a Fascist. This is not necessary to support the ideas that you express in the former parts” (Sestini 1965). Thus, the pretext for censorship was to avoid “personalisms” in a scholarly journal. Gambi immediately replied that this part was eminently geographical, given that it contained “a small piece of the history of Italian geographical thought between 1938 and 1944” (Gambi 1965a). Thus, one could not understand why the *Rivista* allowed Gribaudi to attack Gambi without conceding to the latter the right of replying. In the journal’s editorial board, Sestini was substantially supported by Bruno Nice (1916-1993) while Gambi’s paper was defended by Barbieri, who tried to obtain a mediation, arguing with Sestini for an entire “three-hour meeting”: the compromise proposed was the reduction of the fifth part of Gambi’s text to just one page. According to Barbieri: “1 – This was the maximum that one could obtain; 2 - I believed that even just one page would have crushed Gribaudi, with the quotes reduced to the most telling sentences ... This would have had more officiality, reaching 700 fellows and subscribers and 100 foreign journals” (Barbieri 1965). Yet, Barbieri guessed that Gambi would have refused the compromise: indeed, Gambi

² The afterwar Far-Right Italian party, of which the aforementioned Massi had been vice-secretary.

published his paper as an independent brochure, after sending a formal complaint to the Society of Geographical Studies (Gambi 1965b).

The following year, Gambi printed another of his “scandalous” brochures, *I carismatici della geografia* (The Anointed of Geography). There, he continued to sharply criticise that: “Monster-Science ... including geologists and geodesists, astronomers and linguists, zoologists and botanists, and even generals and admirals, who, in the name of geography, throw together catalogues of the most disparate things” (Gambi 1966, 7). This time, Gambi discussed the appointment to an “economic geography” post, in Rome, of economist Mario Bandini, laughing at the “integral geographers” who had anointed every sector of human knowledge as possible geography and then complained over this appointment claiming for the respect of disciplinary boundaries. Instead, it was another kind of critique that Gambi made to Bandini. Again, Gambi documented how Bandini had publicly endorsed Mussolini’s colonial war against Ethiopia in 1936, supported the rural politics of the Fascist regime, and praised Nazi Germany’s economy by quoting nothing less than the “Mein Kampf” (Gambi 1966, 11). Gambi sarcastically noted how astonishing was that “integral geographers” did not want to accept a member so brilliantly fit to their club. The *Carismatici* was endorsed by Ortolani, who also defined “useless” (Ortolani 1967) the committee from which Barbieri would have publicly resigned in 1971, and by Gambi’s friend Angiolino, who praised this example, in times when “people do no longer dare to call a Fascist who was so, and among the most shameless ones” (Angiolino 1967).

Only in 1975, a motion that was signed by approximately 100 participants at the Italian Geographical Congress celebrated in Salerno argued for: “An intransigent condemnation of the

growing and organised fascist violence, which is made possible by the now undeniable connivance and complicity that they find at the highest levels of the state [expressing] a deep satisfaction for the definitive successes that the peoples of Indochina are obtaining in their hard struggle to free themselves from the oppression of US imperialist capitalism” (*Mozione* 1975). Therefore, as I discuss in the next section, anti-fascism and anti-capitalism were among the constitutive bases of the experience of early Italian critical geographers, where intransigence and right of resistance were more than mere slogans, although there were different attitudes about accepting mediations, as highlighted by the exchanges between Gambi and Barbieri about the censoring of *Discorso a un Geografo* in the *Rivista*.

4.1968 and beyond: building a critical tradition

As recently noted by Elena dell’Agnese, Claudio Minca and Marcella Schmidt di Friedberg, Gambi was one of the rare Italian geographers who engaged actively with the youth revolts of 1968, being based in one of the epicentres of these movements, that is the Milan *Statale* University (Dell’Agnese, Minca and Schmidt di Friedberg 2021; Mangani 2008). One of his students in those years, Paolo Macry, recollected how students were delighted to have a teacher who dared to address current matters and to break “all prejudices on peoples without history” (Macry 1997, 10). In 1968, Gambi exposed his positions in a brochure, titled *Geografia e Contestazione*, which highlighted again how the epistemic and political limits of Italian geography appeared in the attitude of most Italian geographers before facts that were upsetting the entire world. With very few exceptions, they sided with the reactionary front or “remained closed in haughty silences” (Gambi 1968b, 1). Not only geographers, but also academic authorities of the *Statale* fell under Gambi’s scrutiny, due to their support to police repression,

a strategy that, for Gambi, a scholar should always consider inadequate. Gambi sided with students in denouncing “academic authoritarianism” and the idea of “subordinating schools to the exigences of capitalistic production” (Gambi 1968b, 3).

Quoting Noam Chomsky and other radical authors, Gambi concluded criticising an educational system that, “drawing upon liberal agnosticisms before social problems or from hypocrite Christian-democrat class-collaborationism, wants to ignore the existence of classes and class struggle” (Gambi 1968b, 8). While this shows that Gambi’s thought was not devoid of a class struggle component, it is worth noting his awareness of radical traditions in geography and of the need for rediscovering these to rebuild the discipline. He anticipated later rediscoveries of Reclus and Kropotkin arguing that geography should resume “the function to which (and for which they intelligently cultivated it) several federalist and anarcho/libertarians, several scientific and utopian socialists of the last century believed it was destined” (Gambi 1968b, 1). Documents surviving in Gambi’s archive show that it was around these “other” geographical traditions that he started conversation with Farinelli, a scholar who played a leading role in Italian geography in the following years.

In a letter that he wrote to Gambi in January 1974, young Farinelli acknowledged reception of a “Humboldt volume”. At the same time he complained about the conservative “ideological direction” of the Bologna Geography Institute where he considered to be quite isolate, mentioning three historical figures as models of his own “Romantic phase”: “The pauper Varenus, the leader Reclus and the generous noble Kropotkin” (Farinelli 1974a). While Farinelli’s wishes to overtake this romantic phase to assume more realistic stances seem more

akin to some pragmatism than to Gambi's notion of intransigence, the mobilisation of these authors revealed the importance, for radical Italian geographers, of seeking noble ancestors. In a letter of the same year responding to Gambi's remarks on one of his earliest papers, Farinelli exposed a concept that will be key in his own work reassessing the histories of European geographies (Farinelli 1992). That is, the need for changing geography "by reinterpreting its own tradition, using its very weapons against it" (Farinelli 1974b). This means that, if geography often served the political powers in place, its intellectual tools could be subverted and used for contestation, as Barbieri and his fellows did with their mapping skills during the Resistance. This also meant un-disciplining geography by challenging "disciplined bourgeois science" and proclaiming historical approaches as key to "every geography that pretends to affirm itself as new/other" (Farinelli 1974b). How disruptive were Gambi's positions is confirmed by Farinelli noting that Gambi was the only geographer "declaredly antifascist whom I know" (Farinelli 1974b).

According to Farinelli, it was Gambi who gathered "a combative bunch of young geographers" (Farinelli 2013) under the label *GD*. Yet, although Gambi is unanimously recognized as the main inspirer of this group, his personal participation to its activities was relatively discreet. What is undoubtable is that the memory of *GD* remained incredibly disputed and contentious, leading to very harsh polemics, such as those between Farinelli and Massimo Quaini (Farinelli 2006; Quaini 2006), still taking place many years after the end of this experience. This termination is generally located around 1981, the year when the last issue of *HI* (1978-1981) was published. As for the starting date, most authors indicate 1976, when informal meetings of geographers assuming *GD* as a label started taking place (Cavallo 2007). Yet, it is possible to

identify the beginning of critical geographers' gatherings with the conference *Theoretical Bases of Geographical Research* held in Dégioz in 1974, as suggested by Gino Lusso (2007).

There, several geographers who would later contribute to *GD* (see the list published in 'Che cos'è Geografia Democratica' 1979, 198-199) were already in attendance, such as Gambi, Quaini, Maria Carazzi, Sergio Conti, Giuseppe Dematteis, Gino Lusso, Renato Mazzucca, Anna Segre, Paola Sereno, Bruno Vecchio (Buscaglia et al. 1975, 2). Importantly, this conference, which took place in the bilingual region Valle d'Aosta, had a transborder dimension, being organised by the Turin Economic Geography Laboratory with the participation of geographers from France and French Switzerland, including innovators of Francophone geographical epistemes such as Claude Raffestin and Charles Hussy (Fall 2012). Importantly, this conference was opened by a speech of Gambi, who was clearly considered as a mentor by the youngest scholars in attendance. This speech was provocatively titled "Those who declare themselves geographers actually deal with historical matters" (Gambi 1975) and extended Gambi's line of proposing geo-history as a challenge to stubborn disciplinary enclosures, including a new statement on the necessity of linking intellectual and political work. In a response to Quaini during the conference discussion, Gambi importantly clarified that the political value of scholarship was intrinsic to intellectual work and did not depend on its belonging to a political ideology or party, as "ideology and methodology ... should be clearly separated ... There cannot be a scientific ideology, but an ideology tout court, which also implies that science has political contents" (Buscaglia et al. 1975, 137-138). Therefore, labels that started to become popular in these years such as "Marxist Geography" did not make

much sense to Gambi, while the idea of a pluralistic social and political commitment of scholarship beyond ideological labels always did.

In line with this pluralistic inspiration, GD was “an informal and open group” (Dematteis 2005, 17), as Giuseppe Dematteis recalls. For Dematteis, this group had to face many challenges because most of its members were early-career scholars, and “a real persecution of young ‘democratic geographers’ was made by the Chairs” while “only two” GD members were already Full Professors (Dematteis 2005, 18). The other challenges were due to the heterogeneous nature of the group, especially around the creation of HI by the likes of Quaini, who wanted to push the group towards ideological Marxism, which many criticised as “Quaini’s excessively dogmatic Marxist position” (Antonsich 1996, 28). This was a far cry from Gambi’s ideas, also considering his republican, federalist and left/libertarian inspiration.

Gambi’s political references included “the lesson that was taught ... by federalists, anarchists and socialists one century ago” (Gambi 1973, 69). As this quote is taken from a speech given in 1971, there is little doubt that this “lesson” coincided with the 1871 Paris Commune, which is considered as a main reference for socialism in general but especially for anarchism and radical federalism (Berneri 1992). Italian anarchist, socialist and republican authors interested in federalism found a main inspirer in Carlo Cattaneo (1801-1969), whom Gambi called the pioneer of the “vertical construction” (Gambi 1964, 112), that is the study of regions through an approach that today one may call “holistic”, considering all their dimensions (including social, cultural and historical) instead of the mere cartographic/statistic ones. Gambi argued for the rediscovery of a federalist, anticolonial and meridionalist tradition that, in Italy, started

from Cattaneo and passed through works of socialist and/or republican federalists such as Arcangelo Ghisleri and Napoleone Colajanni, continuing with antifascists such as Gaetano Salvemini, Piero Gobetti and Antonio Gramsci, a wire that was “resolutely cut by Fascism” (Gambi 2008, 302) and had therefore to be resumed. Interestingly, this matches Viroli’s historical Pantheon, where Cattaneo is deemed an example of “civil virtue” (Bobbio and Viroli 2003, 12), the protagonist of “a federalist theory of political freedom” (Viroli 1999, 16) including “communal self-government” (Viroli 1999, 93), and an inspirer for the “federal reform which had its centre in the commune” (Viroli 1999, 95). This was exactly one of the points of Gambi’s work on regionalization (Gambi 2008), recalling ideas of anarchist decentralisation (Berneri 1992), a tradition that is surely closer to federalist anti-authoritarian republicanism than to Marxism. It is noteworthy that, in a short presentation of GD published in the second issue of HI, a sort of mediation was tried between these contrasting ideas, indicating as references: “The theoretical and methodological contributions of Marxism [and] the action of authors such as Carlo Cattaneo” (‘Che cos’è Geografia Democratica’ 1979, 197). Although quite odd, this juxtaposition gives a rather accurate idea of the two main political directions that were represented in the group.

Farinelli relates an amazing anecdote on the proposal that was made by those who disagreed with the idea of importing *Hérodote* from France, and proposed instead to create a journal to be called *Il Pisacane*, which was informed to a different political and epistemic project, that is “rescuing and promoting the specificity and originality of our own critical-geographical tradition” (Farinelli 2006, 164). Farinelli recalls that it was Gambi who proposed the name *Pisacane* (personal communication to the author, December 2017). Indeed, it would be difficult

to imagine anybody else having this idea, given that Carlo Pisacane (1818-1857) was a protagonist of the radical and republican Risorgimento, a friend of Cattaneo, a forerunner of anarchism, and even an expert of military geography (Carocci 2017; Pisacane 1894). Finally never published, *Il Pisacane* had to express the rediscovery of neglected political and geographical traditions talking to current problems and reverting the very weapons of traditional geography against it, as Farinelli wished.

This split in the group also explains later differing views on whether the main accomplishment of GD should be considered HI (Quaini 2006), the 1979 *Conference on The Fieldwork Enquiry in Italy* (Cavallo 2007) closed by Dematteis calling on behalf of the group for “an epistemic and ... political reflexion” (Dematteis 1981, 1), or even the 1976 *Atlas* of the *Storia d’Italia* published by Einaudi, a big volume that was edited by Gambi in collaboration with Farinelli, Quaini, Sereno, Teresa Isenburg and others. Importantly, this work pioneered critical approaches to historical geography, for instance by analysing peasants’ houses as a way to deal with “subaltern ... classes” (Gambi 1976, 479), challenging studies that privileged masters’ houses and castles. Yet, most authors agree that, rather than the production of material output, the main outcome of GD were the “ideas, passions and projects” (Cavallo, 2007 3) that were exchanged in the group, which was a “great laboratory of formation” (Coppola 2007, 271) to “remain alive” (Turco 2006, 740), having established the premises for changing Italian geography in the following decades (Dematteis 2007).

Among the elements that deserve to remain alive one can mention the emphasis that many put over contestation as ethics, that is the right of resistance understood as a “revolt against old-

hats” (Coppola 2007, 269) and the rediscovery of neglected figures such as the “deplorable communitarian Reclus” (Coppola 2007, 270). Doing a final balance of this movement would be problematic as many of the “young democratic geographers” will become later new academic barons and few of them remained faithful to their revolutionary premises. Yet, this is a matter which is beyond the reach of this paper and could be the object of further work. For now, one cannot refrain from highlighting the deep motivations of people like Gambi, who always followed ethical principles in assessing geography’s methods and ideas. This is further shown by his regret that, in the history of cartography, technical progresses “were mostly due to those frightening, disgraceful events which are called wars, because they push men to know better the regions that they destroy” (Gambi 2008, 221). Keeping constantly an eye on the beacon of ethics, trying to employ means that are consistent with civic duties and applying the right and duty of resistance are the great insights that this experience can still provide to critical geographical scholarship and activism.

Conclusion

This paper has shown how substantial are the contents that critical geographies from different traditions than the Anglo-American ones can bring to the debate, extending current endeavours to write the history of critical and radical geographies worldwide. In the Italian case, one of the key features in the rising of these tendencies was antifascism. While this is not surprising if we consider the meaning of notions such as fascism and antifascism in Italian cultures and the heated confrontations that took place in those years, this results nonetheless of outstanding importance for current conversations on how scholarship should address the problems raised by the coming back of the Far Right under the forms of sovereignism, xenophobia and white

supremacy. Furthermore, this provides theoretical and practical insights by stressing the need that scholars apply ethical civic virtues including the right to (intransigent) resistance and insubordination when facing an unjust power or a hegemonic establishment.

These notions should not be confused with mainstream “ethics in research”, limited to the mere protection of data and intellectual property for the profit of big publishing houses, and should be filled with substance. This substance is critical thinking which is coherently associated with practices in the fight to get rid (epistemically and politically) of conservatism, fascism, colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism in geography. This can include refusing compromises and striving for innovating scholarship through multilingual and transdisciplinary contaminations as Gambi did. While further research is needed on the subsequent outcomes of these stories for the Italian case, one can note that, while in 1968 Italian geography, according to Dematteis, there was “only Gambi, *vox clamans in deserto*” (Dematteis 2007, 276), now critical tendencies are trying to make their way also in Italy.

This paper has further demonstrated that “engagement with these diverse histories can help to animate contestation of the far right in the present” (Braskén, Featherstone and Copsy 2020, 2), especially showing how intellectuals like Gambi and Barbieri took part in the *Resistenza* and fostered geography’s public engagement. Thus, their example challenges current populist stereotypes of leftist intellectuals as opportunist people and structural parts of the “establishment”. Given that, as noted above, such stereotypes do not only concern avowedly neofascist groups, antifascist cultures fostered by critical geographies can give a great

contribution to address these wider cultural and social matters, that are now very serious in Italy and elsewhere.

Acknowledgements

Since my earliest times as a student in Bologna, I have heard amazing anecdotes on Gambi, which inspired my curiosity and then my work. For this wealth of inspiration, I have to first acknowledge Carla Giovannini, Chiara Santini, Marco Petrella, Franco Farinelli and the regretted Stefano Torresani. Thanks also to Anthony Ince, David Featherstone and the other participants to the session on antifascist geographies at the RGS-IBG conference in 2014. At that moment, I did not yet have the idea of writing this paper, but continuing archival research on Gambi's work led straightforwardly to link his ideas to the contents discussed at that conference. Many thanks to the librarians of the Classense Library in Ravenna and the Estense Library in Modena who assisted me despite my visits to these libraries occurred during a period of pandemic semi-lockdown in Italy, especially Ravenna archivists Claudia Foschini and Silvia Fanti. Many thanks also to the anonymous referees for the *Annals*, who provided decisive insights to improve my paper, and to the editor, Kendra Strauss.

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published research papers in the major international peer-reviewed journals in my field of study, in English, French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese

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