

The school myth of the March on Rome

Teachers' materials

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Violence against things

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The "March on Rome"

The development: fascism in power

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A new era

The King and the order

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The <<subversive>> inhuman enemies

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SOLEMN RECEPTION IN ST. PETRONIO'S CATHEDRAL

Promoted by the Balilla Opera and the School Directors of the District, on the morning of the 27th, in St. Petronio Cathedral, a solemn and touching ceremony took place to commemorate those from Bologna who died during the Great War and due to fascism.

This solemn function which marked the beginning of the school year was attended by Civil Authorities, Militaries, Men of Church, Personalities and Associations: there were numerous Balilla and Giovani Italiane teams and various local Primary and Secondary School children. HE Cardinal archbishop Nasalli Rocca was pontificated.

Introduction

Those generations who attended Italian primary schools between 1925 and 1942 were either not born yet or were very young when fascist violence had reached its highest intensity and when the March on Rome was brought to an end (between 1919 and 1922). Their knowledge about that period and the significance that it had for national history was therefore indirectly built through familiar storytelling, public initiatives and the pedagogic work that was carried out in schools.

It is difficult to historically judge familiar stories. These narrations were told differently depending on which political side the families stood on during that time; there were some fascist families who developed a sense of victory and pride connected to the Duce's gain of power while others had been defeated. These people had been imposed with public silence which probably - very cautiously - was not kept in their homes and even with their children. The wider ranks were those who kept distant from conflict and who adapted to the silence of the new situation while accepting to fulfil the tributes that those in power

were requiring. This was done as compulsory practice or in exchange for family or work stability.

The question regarding the public sphere was different. The regime was able to get a lot of attention from the public in the celebration of the new role of the nation which seemed particularly powerful and innovative compared to past history. Immediately, when power was seized, great attention was paid to the <<transformation of the main forms of self-representation of fascist identity in the State's national rituals>> (Ridolfi, 2003). Even the commemoration of the seizure of power, initially marked with the March on Rome, was already celebrated a year later by creating great symbolic rituals which lasted over several days in the main cities. Mussolini's attendance started from Turin and continued to all the stops of the march. He held speeches in all of the different cities which depicted important moments in the acquisition of power (Milan, Bologna, Florence, Perugia, and finally Rome). In 1924 the celebration was less intense than usual due to the tense situation which the homicide of Matteotti had created and due to the temporary regime crisis. However, in 1925, the ceremonies were back to normal with extra emphasis and they were the occasion for the apposition of fascism – soon to become emblem of State- on the main public activities which had been recently fulfilled. Finally, in 1926 with law 1779 of October 21st, the 28th of October was appointed as public holiday and it was maintained so until the regime collapsed. This is not the place to analyze the invented parts of this public myth that contradicted the reality of things, but it is useful to underline several invented elements in self-representation that were used for propaganda and to construct a public image of fascism which helped to obtain approval from the different social classes. Taking the sole example of the term "revolution", through which fascism presented itself, the fact that economic power assets remained the same as those before the seizure of power clearly shows us now that nothing revolutionary had really happened.

In addition to these two transmission channels of the event– a familiar, private one and a celebrative, public one – it was mainly at school that most children were able to listen to and organically learn the public reconstruction of that time, developed by those who had triumphed. The regime's investment on this front was significant: in 1925 already, newsletter 102 of October 19th granted a holiday one year in advance with thanks to the acceptance of the civil holiday. This shows that school was considered ahead of its time in the fascist construction of new Italian people. In previous years, Dario Lupi's activism forced the launch of the reform, with its many liberal and authoritarian notions, through the use of newsletters making practical school life an open space for propaganda. A clear example launched by Lupi in November, 1922, involved making schools in charge of taking care of parks and Remembrance streets. Trees were planted in the parks to remember the victims of the Great War; the undersecretary's idea was to elect guards of honour in the schools by selecting good students who had to take care of the sacred place in particular moments of celebration. The best representatives of the new generations were symbolically given the task of commemorating those who died for their country. When this initiative was made official by the royal law of the 9th of December, 1923, the day of the 28th of October was already one of the days when the guards of honour had to do their part, as well as the day of entry to war, Victory and day of the Statement. Shortly afterwards, other symbolic trees were planted in the parks to represent the "martyrs of the fascist revolution", by now, seen as a continuation of the renovation of the nation which started with their participation in the war in 1915-18. The choice of making the 28th of October a holiday in schools meant that this day was given a lot of importance but not that the propaganda was lessened. On the contrary, in schools it was doubled and experienced by citizens on this day:

<<A holiday is granted to all the schools of the Kingdom for the third anniversary of the March on Rome (28th October). This decision, made by the National Government, has great significance. It is important to remember and celebrate this date which marks the beginning of the profound renewal of Italian political life, after war and victory, giving us a clear and virile vision of the Nation while restoring the dignity and the authority of the State. I therefore request you to illustrate this to the students, altogether or in their separate classes, the day before the anniversary in your schools.>> (Circ. 102 of October 19th 1925, signed by the Minister)

This illustrates that even before the so-called <<adjustment politics>> started changing the accent of the reform by loading it with fascist stresses and choices, the interventions of the ministry forced school life to use propaganda, mainly regarding the recurrence of the March on Rome.

How was the story of the March told to young generations?

In class, the march and the fight against subversives using all of the tools possible was spoken about. Texts were read and written dictations were done (hundreds of traces of these can still be found in archives specialized in these sources such as the remaining notebooks in the Indire in Florence or the remainders in the Museum of the school of Paolo and Ornella Ricca of Macerata), but at the same time indirect tools were used such as illustrated book covers or radio broadcasted lessons proposed by Eiar.

In order to trace some general guidelines regarding the myth, materials found in primary school textbooks were used starting from the 1930-31 school year. These textbooks filled with seasonal civil and religious recurrences, hardly ever missed out the date of the 28th of October. Sometimes the material about this day was concise and mentioned in one text only, however, other books had chains of stories which led the children from the World War 1 epic to the fight against a red or subversive period up to the fascist national redemption ending in the gratefulness of the King and the handover of the nation's destiny to the Duce.

Younger children's textbooks portrayed the 28th of October as a holiday and a day of joy and celebration. The national flag, symbolised and used in squad action quarrels, was immediately imposed by Lupi in schools on January 1932 with a ceremony including a salute to the flag and a choir singing. It became the protagonist of the streets and windows and made every young fascist celebrate the beginning of the ritual of the <<new era>>. At this point, the story of the March was simplified and started to resemble a fable where the "good" (fascists), guided by the Duce, defeat the "bad Italians" and renovated the nation. In all stories, the 28th of October represented a key date of fascist <<political liturgy>>. It was not only seen as a focus point for Italian history but also as the new foundation of the nation. From 1925 onwards, it was compulsory to date documents (at school, including homework) with Roman numerals to indicate how many years had passed from the March. The idea of rebirth had to get instilled into the minds of new generations of students to convince them that fascism was a special outcome of the "revolution" and the start up for the construction of an imperial Italy. This is why school textbooks contained continuous references to the <<new fascist era>> both in religious subjects of ideological communication and surprisingly even arithmetic.

Texts attempted to maintain a contradictory equilibrium in revolutionary and subversive exaltation – dear to squad actionists – and the reestablishment and normalisation of order – preferred by the strong powered bourgeois class. An inseparable couple is expressed in the stories: the subversive and heroic force of the squad actionists next to the wise choice of the King not to sign for the country's siege. This way, authors were able to represent the new regime as a kingdom of order, even at the time of its violent installation.

All the chronicles about the March that are found in fascist school books contributed to describe a close-to-legendary epic. This epic included heroic figures such as the quadrumvirates, the Duce, the self-organized teams of military power made up by young people and people returning from the great war, dressed with thrown together uniforms and filled with a crusader spirit. These stories were often told by amazed children who admired their older brothers or fathers and who also dreamed of joining the march. Violent actions were also mentioned and represented by the truncheon, the verses of Asvero Gravelli or the “wearing” of fascist weapons of punishment with pride as if they were the carnival costume of Sganapino (an Italian carnival costume).

The cult of fascist martyrs was a key point to the regime’s mythology and even at school, it became as a religious liturgy. Many textbooks explained the devotion to the hero who sacrificed his own life for fascism and donated his blood to “fertilize” the rebirth of the nation. This devotion is also shown by the stories of the Risorgimento martyrs and especially by those of the Great War.

Since the two dates are so close (October 28th and November 4th), very soon celebrations that remembered those who died in the war and in the so-called “fascist revolution” intentionally fused. Internal enemies were in front of the heroes and martyrs: these were the <<subversives>>, <<communist savages>>, <<communists>> or <<socialists>>, seen as those responsible for the chaos in the nation after the war. They were described as filled with anti-national spite and always ready for disorder, riots, tormenting the officials and scoffing at the war mutilates, who they had put themselves against. In school books and public narration, the <<reds>> were always said to be the first to attack unannounced (therefore the fascist were always seen as second to attack and as a form of defence). These set-ups at school were aimed at showing a real anthropological difference making <<subversives>> seem like inhuman people.

This school myth disappeared after the fall of the regime. However, from 1945 fascist management was not yet purged and fascists were not removed from positions both in schools and in Italian society. Thus, most authors from textbooks who had forged texts about the March on Rome were put to cover important roles in the schools of the republic. There was a kind of amnesia regarding the ventennio era of fascist government in Italy, especially in textbooks, where mentioning fascism was taboo and therefore a reworked discussion and critique of fascist mythologies was not done. Fascism was included in secondary school syllabuses only from the sixties onwards. Thanks to the protests and initiatives from 1968 up to the seventies, historical fascism started being studied, debated and researched in schools.

By Gianluca Gabrielli
(Landis, Macerata University)

Tomorrow, wearing a uniform!
..a school diary from the thirties.

13. Copy and complete with the correct numbers: The March on Rome was on October....., 19.... (Bonomi, Year 3, 1940).

And Benito Mussolini started the titanic struggle of renovating Italy. (Bertolini, Il libro della terza classe, 1930)

Read and write the number you find printed in bold in digits:

Nineteen-twenty-two is the year the <<March on Rome>> was accomplished by Benito Mussolini, as the head of his <<Blackshirts>>. (Bonomi, Year 3, 1940)

Fascist Squad Action Quarrels and the March on Rome by Mario Isnenghi

The following passage is taken from a volume by Mario Isnenghi about the history of places of public life in Italy from the middle of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century. The first is a quotation taken from Italo Balbo, a fascist chief from Ferrara. In his diary, in 1922, he writes about the link between the elements of continuity and breakage in the ways of the fascist squad action quarrels compared to the conflict among classes and the role taken by powerful groups and security forces.

Isnenghi thinks that the taking of power consists in the mixture of populism and subversive action with the diplomatic work going on in the corridors of the ministries. The March on Rome is probably the last manifestation of subversism which now however represents the first great parade of the system. In the new regime, the unscrupulous exaltation of those who presented themselves as part of the anti-system movement left spaces for laundering in the ministerial system.

Mussolini deviated the development of the occurring. He gave the young fighters what they were looking for: a radical denial of the present. As well as the revolutionary event, he also gave them a positive illusion: a regime of young people, Vittorio Veneto's Italy in power and the Fascist state.

Isnenghi cites this extract taken from Italo Balbo's diary as an example of the ambivalent identity of fascism in the taking of power: on one side a <<denial of the actual present>> and on the other, a <<positive illusion>>. If it weren't for this coexistence, fascism could almost be reduced to a simple change in the holding of power within the same class of management. After the March on Rome, when fascism came back into the logic of the ministry and the parliamentary dirty business, it did not lose the power accumulated over four years of mass illegal action in the provinces. In response to these acts, the police had often not intervened, while many of the army's great sectors has collaborated, judges often closed an eye, and the political patronage often financed the squad action teams. It is also true to say that even during the previous century, the army had often been used to break up class conflict or to take workers from one region to another to cover for the workers on strike. The novelty in the post war period – according to Isnenghi- was the <<great widening in the space and time of these violent forms of 'direct action' and the participation in the social war>>. People from the radicalized middle class and the bourgeois class, such as young Balbo, participated more and more in these acts. Young, penniless people found themselves as leaders of these wars and were forced to decide, choose, act, kill or have killed. It was possible for them to quickly pass from the punitive campaigns in the provinces to the ones in the ministry and to go from setting fire to a cooperative to the attack of an embassy.

The patroness of the squad action teams worshipped at Monteleone calabro (from 1928 Vico Valentia). The statue, made by artist Giuseppe Malecore, disappeared at the fall of fascism. (da Franzinelli, Squadristi, cit.)

Franzinelli's studies on Squad Action Quarrels

Mimmo Franzinelli studied fascist squad action by working on documents belonging to the police of that time which are now available in the Central Archive in Rome and in the archives of the Central police Stations in different cities. The path of the exhibition on the fascist seizure of power owes a lot to the testimonials included in its volume. According to the author, these attempted to be a first step in widening the knowledge by joining different researchers' forces. To realize the daily extent of fascist violence, a few pages of the interesting chronicles of episodes which happened day by day can be read in the appendix. The following introduction passage, for example, is a three-day chronicle taken randomly (8-10th April, 1921) from the cited source.

On Socialist Defeat

The irreversible and relatively fast socialist defeat in the summer of 1920 was caused by the efficacy of the rivalry tactics and the internal weaknesses of the Italian Socialist Party that was not able to impose itself with its revolutionary methods. The truncheon, rather than striking randomly in the crowd, chose its target among the representatives of the socialist association: union leaders, mayors, council members, province councilmen, and deputies. The vertical structure of the union, was amended by competitive bids, as the leaders were cut off, destroying the socialist Party. The socialist masses drifted and some of them were put in new union positions created by squad commanders. These commanders themselves were protagonists of the <<national union>> (for example in the Parma area, the ex soldier Alcide Aime, and in the area of Ferrara the ex official of the assault infantrymen).

A violence which was favourable to state institutions was implemented between politics and the union actions because the public forces and magistrates were not able to control the reactionary brutality (persistent and collective) shown.

Chronicle of three randomly chosen days

8-10th April, 1921

8 Inauguration of the squad action political campaign. In Reggio Emilia, the fascists assaulted a train which had left wing workers on it. The people responded and wounded the young Pier Luigi Davolio to death. The immediate retaliation set fire to the Chamber of work and destroyed the headquarters of the social reformist newspaper <<La Giustizia (The Justice)>>, the book shop, and the socialist club. In Rivarolo (CR), as response to the cut down of the fascist people's vineyards by union members, Farinacci's squad action teams destroyed the cooperative. In Padova, the Chamber of work was burned down and a protest demonstration occurred:

-The headquarters of the Association of fighters in Trezzo d'Adda (MI) was burned down by socialists.

-A communist was killed in Padova.

-The labour exchange office in Jolanda di Savoia (FE) was set on fire and the municipal administrators were forced to resign.

-Offensive squad action quarrels in Arezzo. The headquarters of the Chamber of work, of FIOM and of some communist clubs were destroyed and an anti-fascist person was killed.

-The fascist party of Umbertide (PE) was made and the Chamber of work was destroyed.

-Emidio Agostinone, a socialist representative, was beat up and kicked out of Catignano (PE).

9-10 *Three socialist workers were killed in Ragusa.* In Piazza San Giovanni, Filippo Pennavaria's squad action teams attacked a socialist manifestation attended by the Honourable Vacirca with fire arms. They caused the death of Rosario Occhipinti, Carmelo Vitale and Rosario Gurriei. The next day, the fascists from Comiso and Vittoria showed up invading the town hall and destroying the <<communist>> union's locations in the outskirts, the Chamber of work and the PSI.

10 *A fascist martyr.* The twenty-four year old worker Arturo Breviglieri – fugitive for politic homicide- was wounded to death during a punishment expedition in Pontelagoscuro (FE). His fellows decided to militarily occupy the town and set fire to the Chamber of work. The <<subversives>> were forced to march next to the coffin and kiss the corpse's hands.

-Anti-fascist locations in the province of Bologna were invaded. Left-wing organizations in Toscanella were destroyed and the union, proletarian club and communist sections in Mordano, birth town of the fascist leader Grandi, were set on fire.

-Squad action quarrels in Veneto. The Chamber of work and the farmer's union were burned down in Ariano Polesine (RO). Four hundred fascists destroyed colonial houses and beat up <<subversives>> in Mossano (VI). In Venice, squad action quarrels broke up Honourable Elia Musatti's (<<millionaire member of parliament>>) and destroyed left wing associations.

-Destructive march in Pavia. The foundation of fascist in Mezzana Bigli was followed by the destruction of the local Society of mutual aid and left wing organizations in Garlasco, Lomello, Tromello, San Giorgio, Valle Lomellina and Ottobiano. The brothers Cesare and Mario Forni led the expedition.

-Raid in a working-class neighbourhood in Arezzo. In the evening, fascists broke into the Santo Spirito district looking for <<red guards>>. Once they arrived in Piazzetta San Giacomo, they started firing against the citizens, killing the young Nello Ercolani and wounding his girlfriend as well as 5 other people.

-Sant'Angelo in Colle's (SI) mixed trade unions' authorities break up due to squad action quarrels.

-Fascist offense in San Severo (FG). Fascist teams coming from Cerignola took over the town hall by force. A later assault to a left wing association caused a Disperata truck driver severe wounding. Twenty-six year old Raffaele La Serpe died after 3 days of agony.

Giulia Albanese and the Historical Importance of the March on Rome

Giulia Albanese has written the most recent reconstruction of the fascist seizure of power. In her volume she has given attention to the breakage that the march represented regarding the liberal institution, rather than the elements of continuity as much previous history had done. The idea that the march was after all a "bluff", has often been mentioned in considerations that highlight the similarities with previous liberal institutions. Instead, following in academics', such as Adrian Lyttelton, footsteps, Albanese attributes a strong political impact to the event. She highlights an "originality (historical) of the techniques of conquest of power" while giving strong significance to the beginning of the fascist dictatorship.

The central point of this book is that Mussolini's first rule represents the start of the dictatorship and the end of liberal institutions in Italy. On the days and months straight after the March it was therefore possible to freely threaten the main institution of the State: the Parliament. It was possible to do this without the opposition of the liberal governing board class. Straight after, the Parliament voted, by great majority, for a totally unconstitutional law which institutionalized a private Militia. This voluntary militia was for national security

and responded to the Premier's orders. The Parliament also limited freedom of expression and of press and accepted an electoral law which reformed the Italian representative system and then gave the <<ordinance of constituent power>> to fascism. Even those who did not agree voted for these laws thinking that it would have helped to manage the political situation with the fascists.

The role that violence played in determining the political positions and choices before, during and after the March was given a lot of attention. This way, we wanted to show up to what extent the March was the centre of fascist action starting from inside the parliament, and how it touched and sometimes determined the decisions of the liberal ruling class as well as the antifascist one.

The Fascist Ritual as explained in Schools

Some linguistic and theatrical elements bury their roots in the First World War. Below are some secondary school texts of that time used in classes to explain the origin of these words and gestures of order to students and at the same time to instil the idea of fascism as a real, genuine heir and continuer of the idealization of the war.

L'A Noi!

Yes, it was in February 1918: in those days, Major Freguglia* was looking for a Motto with his officials.

-We don't know what to do with the international word <<hurray>>! We want an Italian motto; something that can enclose our life project in one or two words.

After rummaging, the words were found by Freguglia.

-A noi! (to us) do you like it? Is this not our moment? Who else will always have the glory and the joy to dare to do what's impossible?

The cheering and shouting was so loud to make roof fall in:

-A noi! A noi! A noi!

Singing and drinking went on at the canteen to celebrate the triumph.

The next day at the <<presentatarms>> (presentation of the weapons) command the assault infantrymen shouted the new motto. The effect was surprising.

Being on the wave of innovation, the infantrymen did not stop there. Captain Anchise Pomponi had the great idea of substituting the old <<presentatarms>> with the musket, the striking gesture of showing the dagger while rising it in a closed fist.

Doing this, the Monte Piana company was enthusiastic.

Freguglia immediately authorized the Command of the XXVII army corps and the <<a noi>> and the <<presentatarms of the assault infantrymen>> were officially recognized.

In April the unit was moved to Solzano Veneto, along with the XIII and the VIII for a short while.

Here the enthusiasm and beauty of Freguglia's Assault Infantrymen became contagious and the novelties of the XXVII were immediately adopted.

At this point Colonel Alessi, head of the assault grouping, came to suppress the <<ip ip ip>> (used as an introduction to the motto – for univocal reasons – when the weapons were not shown) suggesting, at that point, the question:

-<<A chi l'onore?>> (to whom the honour?)

-<<A noi!>> (to us)

Cesare Augusto Muggio

*Commander of the XXVII assault unit that became a hero of the Piave river. While the aviators substituted the *hurray* with the *alalà*, the assault infantrymen substituted it with a *noi!* The *alalà* was matched with the *a noi* in Fiume and in the Fascist Revolution.

L'ALALA'

I remember that the original battle** cry was suddenly replaced by me one night in August when I was in the Comina camp waiting for the order to start the third bombing in Pola with my team. I was lying down on the grass under the nose of my AIRCRAFT and I immediately jumped on my feet. My sudden inspiration seemed to please everyone and I proposed that my cry be used by each member of crew above the hell of each attacked fortified town, after the launch of the last bomb, before turning to come back. This was done. Even the pilots, imitating the observer on the nose of the aircraft and the machine gunner in the tower, tried to stand up while keeping the commands under control. I think that even the insensitive moon was touched by that sublime clamour of devoted dying ones.

It was the young cry of Italy.

Gabriele D'Annunzio

***Hurray* preceded by *ip ip ip* was a cry that originated in Russia. The triple *eia* followed by *alalà* was our own cry. L'*eia* is a Latin word of provocation while *alalà* is a cry that Hellenic warriors used to say before battle.

The March on Rome in Fascist Schools

Anthology of the exhibition

A New Era

7. Romolo founded Rome in 753 A.D.; the March on Rome occurred in 1922 A.D. How many years later did it happen?

The Celebration

FLAGS ON THE WINDOWS

-Ma'am,- said Bruno to the teacher while coming into the class – yesterday my dad bought a new, huge flag with a spear on it that looks like it's made of gold. We're going to put it on the balcony tomorrow and it will make the whole street look nice!

-I'm sure. But tomorrow all the balconies and all the windows will have flags. Do you know why?

-Yes ma'am!- said the children jumping to their feet.

The King and the Order

And so the Blackshirts came forward, as a river gushing with faith, rifles and courage, destroying all obstacles.

The ministers were afraid: <<Stop or we'll shoot you with our cannon.>>

<<No way>> said the King. <<I don't want my soldiers to shoot my friend Mussolini, who says: Viva l'Italia (hurray for Italy). I'd rather you went away, and Mussolini came with his fascists. Too many young people have already died singing GIOVINEZZA (youth).

From a notebook in the thirties.

The Construction of the Epic poem

Trains, trucks, cars and motorbikes are full of fascists, however the crowd, made up of the young, elderly and mutilates, is on foot equipped as soldiers with capes, whips and

puttees spotted with arid soil. They speak in different dialects. They sing military hymns. The ones chosen as the most sincere and bold are armed with a rifle, musket, dagger: so nothing. They march day and night, wet from the rain, numb, and threatened by inescapable sanctions.

Italy echoes with the footsteps of the legionaries and with the triple cry : <<Hurray to the King, hurray to Mussolini, hurray to the army>>.

Image: Departure of the squad action soldier.

The Martyrs

Here is the story of Giacomo Schirò which will deeply touch you. He faced God and the country's mad friends.

On June 23rd 1920 a group of subversives attack him. He defended himself like a lion. Fifty three wounds covered the body of this pure hero. The cowards pushed him into a room in the club in order to overpower him. They left him on the ground to die. His eyes, about to close, had one last glare. The flag that the mad men ripped and treaded on was in the room. He dragged himself across the room with great strength, picked up the flag and wrapped it around himself. He died in the folds of the tri-coloured material, while gushes of blood wet the sacred banner in one last act of love.

The <<Subversive>> Enemies

The socialists took advantage of the general awkwardness, distrust and tiredness of the people to spread their poisonous ideas. These men, with neither a God nor a conscience, planned to put out the joy for victory and the love for their country in the Italian people's hearts.

How about the Government? What did the Government do to stop Italy's ruin?

Horrible thing! The Government helped the communists. It was weak and inept. It did not know how to defend itself, inside nor out.

At School and at the Square

Commemoration of the "March on Rome" in Elementary Schools and in Supplementary Courses

The schools of the District celebrated the "March on Rome" according to the instructions given by the Central Direction. After the reading of the message by the His Worship the Prime Minister to all his <<little comrades>>, a teacher or the Director clearly explained what the <<March on Rome>> consisted in. They would also tell the children about the great task carried out by the fascists to validate victory, honour those who fought for the country and elevate the Italian people's character by making them used to discipline and work. These patriotic ceremonies ended with a <<salute to the Flag>> and a chant of patriotic hymns.

Historiographic and Didactic Relevancies

By Loren Mussini (Landis)

The exhibition proposes two parallel paths: one about the factual reality of squad action quarrel violence towards men and things in the achievement of the March on Rome and the other regarding its propagandistic and ideological transfiguration inserted from the start into the school system. The official elaboration contains all the strong elements of fascist mythopoeics: a heroic and patriotic narration of the violent conquest of power, the making of a civil calendar tied to ideological elements thanks to the rituality of the construction of a

laic religion that created the growing regime. In the first route the March on Rome represents a tragic break or irreversible fracture in the liberal institutions rather than their deformation into an authoritarian sense. This seems to be very clear thanks to the particular attention the curator paid to this aspect. The idea of the March was an unedited attempt (which totally worked) to conquest power and it had a devastating impact on weak liberal institutions and a notable attractive force on the King, the military, the bureaucratic-administrative hierarchies, in our country and not only, as shown by Monaco's putsch, attempted by Hitler in November 1923. This was a result of a process started in 1919 (founded by the Fascist Combat and then followed by squad action quarrel violence). Although the March on Rome is not the main component, violence still plays a determining role before, during and after this event. Therefore, Gabrielli's bottom line is that even though the March on Rome is not essentially a cruel event but an exhibition of force or a runway of Blackshirts (2 people died on that day in Genazzo, near Rome in a fire arms fight, a socialist and a fascist, in the whole country about 30 people are registered as having died in the March on Rome), it represents the peak of squad action violence and the beginning of the dictatorship. This is shown by the first panels, particularly the ones regarding weapons and humiliations, the fascist prayer to the truncheon, the plea to the Virgin Mary of the truncheon, protector of fascists and the one showing the castor oil. The care Gabrielli takes in showing the main instruments of violence not only pays attention to squad action symbolic objects but also tries to suggest, especially to teachers, an important reflection on violence.

Besides, as evocative power, fascist "symbolic objects" act as a vehicle for both previous and original fundamental concepts of fascist violence, such as disdain and enemy humiliation. Therefore, on a didactic-educational level it is important to underline that not all violence is the same. The squad action violence inserted in the regime was nationalised and regimented with fascist laws and created more physical and psychological violence whereas the inhumanity of humiliating enemies impacted on a socio-political and moral level. At the base of this, of course, is the hierarchical fact that fascism has men and social classes, intrinsic racism which structures the ideological system and translates into repressive, expulsive and persecuted violence towards everything that is different. Therefore, the outsider becomes isolated, convicted and excluded from the social group as did the socialist, communist, opponent, homosexual and then even Hebrew. Good examples of this innate racism, inborn in fascist ideology, are the racial laws of 1938. I would like to remind you that the most recent historiographic reconstructions show Mussolini's fundamental strategy in regaining fascist uniting power on an internal political level. This was done in order to obtain the ruling class' and Catholics world's consensus in a moment of fascist internal political crisis rather than becoming slaves to the Nazi allies. It is also worth mentioning the regulatory racial laws at school introduced by minister Bottai in September 1938, two months before the general racial regulations. The school legislation, so well done, punctual and rigorous was exactly what made a persecutory legislation and procedure that became a model to Nazism and for the widespread of the Nuremberg laws (1935).

Hence, returning to the coup d'etat, there were more discontinuities than continuities in the suffocating parliamentary institutions. This was also shown by Mussolini's camp speech, given at the Chamber of Deputies on November 16th, 1922 and partly reported on a panel. (On the didactic side, especially for second grade secondary school, it is interesting to analyse the speech's violent and aggressive political language and the rhetoric convincing power filled with essential categories for fascist ideology that are owed to Enrico Corradini's warmonger nationalism. This is shown again by Mussolini's speech on January 3rd, 1925 which sanctions the final move towards the regime.) Another advantage of the exhibition is the interest for military and revolutionary techniques which stand at the base

of the March on Rome. This highlights the great squad action mobilization to make sure to control the most important railway crossroads (Bologna, Verona, Alessandria) and the fundamental quadrumviri role's of De Vecchi, Balbo, De Bono and Bianchi whose operational base was in Perugia. The curator wanted to underline the violent novelty of the new political power that proudly barged into the Italian scene singing the praises of a revolution, of a focused use of the destructive violence necessary to revitalize the nation and to wash away the dishonour tied to the end of WW1 in order to regenerate the lifeless and powerless profile of the Italian political class. An effective didactic path, especially for primary and secondary schools of the first grade, could be to work on the geography of squad action violence (where most socialist trade unions and politics were) to find the mapping of the socialist roots on the territory from the greatest geographic concentrations in our region. Another interesting work path, even for laboratory didactics, is working on the reconstruction of the March by looking at the places: Milan, fundamental point for early fascism where Mussolini awaited the happening of the events, then Bologna and Perugia where the coordination of military squad action occurred and finally Rome which soon became the neuralgic centre of the regime and the organization of the fascist party. The King's severe responsibilities and connivance should also not be ignored since Facta, who had resigned, advised the King not to sign the decree because there had already been secret negotiations with Michele Bianchi, a quadrumviri, to allow fascists to enter into the government. Another possible didactic point is Gabrielli's meaningful panel about the Resistance forms which suggests using a useful approach to history with "ifs" and "buts" to deal with the theme of responsibility, the crucial turning point of individual choice and not giving in to conformism nor to fear. This analyses the topic by looking at the capacity of critical thought and possible forms of resistance or disagreement. For example, in some stations (Civitavecchia, Orte, Avezzano) the army stopped trains to interrupt the March (Di Pierro, 2012). Therefore, the March could have been stopped if the King had signed the decree and if he had not sympathized and collaborated with the State's system, military hierarchy and other entities. In a chapter of his recent book on the March on Rome, Emilio Gentile also mentioned, the success of an insurrection destined to fail: "the measures taken by the government, before allowing the siege, if rigorously applied would have been able to stop the revolt at its start" (Gentile, 2012, p.209). The elaboration of the myth on the March on Rome was very fast and immediately came into the school system and not only. Already the year after, in 1923, the date became an occasion for a school holiday. A cross-analysis of the two paths shows very interesting suggestions on an educational and didactic level. This parallelism immediately demonstrates the fast speed of the ideological transfiguration of the regime with the immediate start of the imposing propaganda machine and the patriotic and nationalistic myth-making. Interesting short circuits can be created in different disciplines. Specifically, all of the fundamental ideological elements of fascist propaganda are present in the school transfiguration of manuals and moments for collective ritual celebration: the fascist revolution was presented as a redemption of the nation compared to the dishonour and chaos that the subversives had brought; Squad action violence was justified as a reaction to the provocation of the subversives, who had a false and instrumental image. The creation of a laic religion followed a civil calendar and liturgy that intentionally identified the martyrs of WW1, the date of November 4th regarding the fascist revolution martyrs and October 28th regarding the hugeness of Imperial Rome, already shown by the fascist symbol of fasces and by translations from the Roman world or the Latin civilization.

Our main task, as educators and teachers, is to show the refined and complex picture at the base of the ideological fascist system along with the persuasive strength of this civil mythology and the great capacity of fascination of the winning patriotic utopia. Therefore, a fascism which was, from the start, not only savagery and violence but made up of cultural

thoughts and politics which were refined, solid, structured, pervasive and at the same time repressive. Deconstructing the fascist mythology with young students means showing them the mechanism behind the quest for consensus and coercive and concealed persuasion, such as how the propaganda machine and the production of myths for collective use worked. As an example, I find the use of fascist slogans like *–Eia, Eia, alalà!* as a cry of war very educationally useful and they make me think of the slogans chanted today in football stadiums or in other places of mass entertainment. I also think about military training for young people and the use of the uniform and of words of honour and how this successfully creates a sense of belonging, unity and power for the group. These elements help young students understand that the focus put on the school system was not casual at that time since the school was the main place for the legitimization of the regime. Similarly, today the school system controls the media and the manipulation of the main channels of information. This includes the sugar-coating of false juvenile myths with vulgar use or oppositely instigates fear and prejudice in order to reinforce insecurity and uncertainty among the young.

The school, was considered for fascism as a fundamental element for social and political control. Along with the police and other repressive organisms, the school was needed for the restructuring of the hierarchical structure of the party's organization; for example, the Opera Nazionale Balilla or the GIL. The school was therefore the main place for the making of consensus towards the regime. On the same topic, it could be interesting to report a piece from the short introduction by Monica Galfrèin in the book by Gianluca Gabrielli and Davide Montino called "The fascist school", which underlines a prevalent tendency in our historiography. This trend is that the Italian school was subdued to fascism in its form alone but not in its substance. The fascism practiced at school was a 'façade' and therefore it was the Achilles heel of an imperfect totalitarianism in the school system where the adjective was used to minimize the Italian case and the role played by schools more than to underline it.

The undervaluing of our totalitarianism and its capacity to affect our collective conscience alludes and minimizes the consequences of the fascism in schools and the Italian society in general, especially in the long run. This is complementary in the myth of Italians who are good people and have hidden the historiographic reconstructions and public celebrations of the terrible things committed by Italians in the colonial wars, the Spanish civil war and finally the Second World War, for decades.

The exhibition therefore highlights the fact that fascism was not pure violence and savagery but the producer of a solid and pervasive culture of strong and refined thought in the construction of ideology and consensus. It was not an authoritarian disguise of the liberal regime, nor an Italian parody of Nazi totalitarianism, but rather both a severe, violent, ruthless, refined, persuasive, and pervasive totalitarianism, that in fact considered schools as vital for the construction of the new model of fascist men. That education and that same school which later made up the schools of republican Italy after the second post-war period, showed continuity with the regime and preserved the fascist characteristics in material culture and in the authoritarian and not equalitarian frame of mind for a long time (until the seventies). These characteristics were: the rigid hierarchical and centralizing structure, the rhetoric and bureaucratic language used in newsletters and ordinances, in the classicist and hardly democratic structure, in the definition of curricula and in the programs which were greatly conditioned by an Italy-centric belief that assumed the superiority of the roman civilization and the Latin language compared to other cultures and languages. In contrast, in spite of all its problems and difficulties, the school today is

possibly the only privileged place for the creation of critical thought and for the concrete experimentation of the multiple of experiences, to put democracy into practice. This is why it is important to study the March on Rome today, ninety years later. Its narration by the regime helps compare and reinforce critical thought in young people by looking at the propaganda instruments and the creation of consensus used to weaken the persuasive force of multimedia instruments that make stereotypes and prejudices that can lead to conformism and uniformity of thoughts and behaviour and to help them think about all the forms of violence and oppression. This is the priority of schools and specifically historical subjects today, when linked to the foundations of the civil community. This is our task, starting from the Exhibition which I think also represents a significant contribution for the construction of Education on Politics.

Bibliography

Emilio Gentile, *E fu subito regime. Il fascismo e la Marcia su Roma*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2012.

Antonio di Pierro, *Il giorno che durò vent'anni*, Milano, Mondadori, 2012.

Songs of the Revolution

Truncheon, Truncheon
you clear up every brain,
the hammer and sickle
will never win over you.

Where was Garibaldi born
where did Corridoni die
deserters nor scoundrels
will ever rule.

Truncheon, Truncheon
you clear up every brain,
each soldier from his grave
will bless your doings.

Hymn to the Truncheon, found in a volume of texts for the third grade of Padellaro (1935).

The House of Fascism

In this satirical cartoon by Scalarini, a famous anti-fascism illustrator, the image of the anti-fascist house assumes the symbolic shapes of death. "Avanti", August 7th, 1924.

Bagnara, 2-12-1935 – to XIV.

The date on this fascist notebook shows place, day, month and year of the Christian era, year of the fascist era.