Living Dictatorship: Everyday Life in Fascist Venice 1929-1940

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Abstract

This PhD thesis analyses the lived, everyday experience of Italian fascism in Venice from 1929-1940 through the examination of a number of collective cultural experiences, encountered by Venetians in their daily lives and over the life-course, in order to reveal how far the fascist regime succeeded in penetrating and appropriating the private spheres and 'collective memory' of Venetian society, as well as to demonstrate the complexities of 'ordinary' people's lived experience of fascism and their responses to the intrusion of the regime and its cultural products into their daily lives. To this end, the thesis is loosely structured according to the chronology of the life-course, with chapters addressing the experience of youth, adolescence and free time; popular celebrations and festivals; the impact of economic autarchy on food, drink, fashion etc.; the experience of death and funeral rituals. Treading a line which seeks to heed Mossean exhortations to examine fascism from the inside as well as out- and to take seriously fascism's own understanding of itself whilst rejecting a reduction of the fascist project to nothing more than spectacle and discourse, this study aims to highlight the intricacies, complexities and potential creativity of life under Mussolini's dictatorship, drawing new attention to the distinction between, on the one hand, the regime's intentions and, on the other, the reception of fascist cultural products by its citizens. Using a theoretical framework informed by the work of Koselleck, Jauss, Said, Hoggart, Chartier and, in particular, Michel de Certeau, the results of this research ultimately reveal the limitations of the regime's reach: the lagunari of the 1930s emerge as 'consumer-producers' who used the fascist cultural products they encountered creatively, absorbing, accepting, modifying or rejecting their messages, mediated as they were through narratives – of the nation, the church and the Serenissima republic – with the potential to both strengthen and weaken their intended meaning, as these mingled and clashed with pre-existing and enduring mentalités.
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Abbreviations

AC Azione Cattolica
ACS Archivio Centrale dello Stato (Rome)
ADN Archivio Diaristico Nazionale (Pieve Santo Stefano, AR.)
AMV Archivio Municipale “la Celestia” di Venezia
AO(I) Africa Orientale (Italiana)
b. Busta
BNC Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale (Florence)
BNM Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana (Venice)
CIGA Compagnia Italiana Grandi Alberghi
CO Carteggio Ordinario
CR Carteggio Riservato
DGPS Divisione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza
DG Direzione Generale
DP Determinazioni Podestarili
E.F. Era Fascista
EOA Ente Opera Assistenziale
FUCI Federazione Universitaria Cattolica Italiana
GDR German Democratic Republic
GIL Gioventù Italiana del Littorio
GUF Gruppo Universitario Fascista
L. Lire
MI Ministero dell’Interno
MRF Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista
MVSN Milizia volontaria per la sicurezza nazionale
n. Number
ONB Opera Nazionale Balilla
OND Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro
ONMI Opera Nazionale per la Maternità e l’Infanzia
OVRA Organizzazione vigilanza repressione antifascismo
PCM Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri
PNF Partito Nazionale Fascista
PPI Partito Popolare Italiano
PSI Partito Socialista Italiano
Quin. Quinquennio
SADE Società Adriatica di Elettricità
SPD Segretaria Particolare del Duce
Trim. Trimestre
Chapter 1

Introduction: Themes and Theory

At around ten o'clock on the evening of 8 November 1935- Angelo Cadel, leader of the Circolo Fascista of the sestiere of Santa Croce in Venice happened across a stranger in Salizzada San Simeon, who, as he would later report to the Venetian Prefecture, "in a clear state of drunkenness was traversing that same street singing the verses, “the red flag will triumph”.¹ Cadel was naturally outraged to hear the words of the Bandiera Rossa, the hymn of the Socialist International, so openly and flagrantly sung in the city’s calli, though to the prefecture functionaries who took down his deposition, it was perhaps not such an irregular event. After all, the historian RJB Bosworth opened a recent article with a description of a similar episode, reconstructed from a confinato report, in which two rural labourers from Maranzana, a village in the province of Alessandria, were sent into internal exile as punishment for having sung the Bandiera Rossa after a drunken evening in the company of friends.² The episode led Bosworth to draw significance from the fact that, eleven years after the advent of fascism, the words to the hymn of the Socialist International were still well known enough to be sung "as a demonstration of (drunken) brotherhood and of implied insult to Fascism" and to argue that the story reveals “a hint of ‘resistance’ or ‘dissent’ and so evidence about the perpetual novelty, inadequacy and superficiality of Fascism”.³

The outcome of the Venetian case, however, was very different to that in Maranzana and, if it does not entirely call Bosworth’s inferences into question, at least demands their qualification. When Cadel challenged the stranger – who subsequently turned out to be Bortolo Pinzoni, an habitually unemployed porter who had decided to celebrate his recent completion of a rare job carrying suitcases from the train station to S. Giacomo dell’Orio for which he was paid L.3 with “a few glasses of wine, which rendered him somewhat tipsy” – the stranger “continued to sing,

¹ "Che in evidente stato di ubriachezza percorreva la stessa strada cantando le strofe "bandiera rossa trionferà. Archivio Centrale dello Stato [henceforth ACS], Ministero dell’Interno [henceforth MI] Divisione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza [henceforth DGPS], 1935, b.7 Report from the Prefecture of Venice, 12 Nov. 1935. The islands of Venice are divided into six districts or sestieri; San Marco, Castello, Cannaregio, Dorsoduro, San Polo and Santa Croce.
³ Bosworth RJB “Everyday Mussolinianism”, p. 25.
adding the words "over the public toilets of the city". Unmoved, Cadel carted off the inebriated Pinzoni to the party circolo for further interrogation and subsequently denounced him to the Venetian prefecture. In his – ultimately successful – defence, Pinzoni declared, “that he had never professed subversive ideas and has never been interested in politics and did not believe he was singing a prohibited song because he had learned these very verses having heard them sung the preceeding 28 October by some fascists who had gathered in Trattoria “Alla Palazzina” near the Ponte delle Guglie, to celebrate the anniversary of the March on Rome”. The prefecture’s investigations revealed that the fascistised verses of The Red Flag "are often sung by local fascists, especially when they meet to celebrate some anniversary” and, that Pinzoni, though his “moral” conduct “leaves somewhat to be desired as he is dedicated to drunkenness”, showed no reason for concern in terms of his political behaviour. In the end, Pinzoni was judged free to go.

The case of Bortolo Pinzoni, particularly when read in conjunction with the Maranzana episode, raises a number of important questions and not only in relation to the place of alcohol and its associated spaces – bars, osterie and trattorie – in the articulation of consent or dissent for the Fascist regime. The case brings issues of intention and reception in the dialectic between individual and regime – the way(s) in which individuals absorbed or ‘received’ the messages which the regime intended to transmit to them – to the fore. What can be inferred from the

5 "Che non ha mai professato idee sovversive e non si è mai occupato di politica e che non credeva di cantare una canzone proibita perché le stesse strofe le aveva apprese per averle sentite cantare il giorno 28 ottobre scorso da alcuni fascisti che si erano riuniti nella Trattoria “Alla Palazzina”, al Ponte delle Guglie, per festeggiare la ricorensa della Marcia su Roma”. Ibid.
6 “Sono cantate spesso dai fascisti locali, specialmente quando si riuniscono per festeggiare qualche ricorrenza.” Ibid.
7 “Lascia a desiderare perché è dedicato all’ubriachezza.” Ibid.
8 In her inquiry into the representations of the imagined Mussolini, Luisa Passerini noted, as part of the construction of the Duce as an exemplar of virile masculinity, the repeated emphasis made to his abstemiousness. Passerini L Mussolini Immaginario: storia di una biografia 1915-1939 Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1991, pp. 122-3. Nevertheless, the osterie and bars of Venice frequently provided the location for clashes – whether violent or verbal – between supporters and opponents of fascism. In Alessandro Casellato’s analysis of the city’s “sestieri popolari” in the interwar years, the osterie of the working class districts of Castello, Cannaregio and around Campo Santa Margherita in San Polo – described by Raffaele Vicentini, who published his diary of his years as a squadrista in Venice from the founding of the Venetian Fascio in 1919 until the ‘March on Rome’ in October 1922 as “the three quarters most intoxicated by bolshevism in the city” (“i tre quartieri della città più intossicati dal bolscevismo”) – emerge among the principal sites of conflict between socialists and fascists; in mid-1922, for example, fascist Blackshirts were known to commandeer the drinking-holes of Via Garibaldi in Castello “to drink and sing war and patriotic songs”. Vicentini R A Il movimento fascista veneto attraverso il diario di uno squadrista Venice, Soc. Acc. Stamperia Zanetti, 1935 p. 113; Casellato A “I sestieri popolari” in Isenghli M & Woolf S eds. Storia di Venezia. L’Ottocento e il Novecento vol 2, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana (Treccani), 2002, pp. 1596-1607. The role of alcohol and its associated locations in the expression of consent/dissent for fascism perhaps deserves greater attention.
ambiguity of the intended and received meaning(s) of Pinzoni's song? Might Pinzoni's successful evasion of punishment also call into question both the impermeability and unidirectionality of the power relationship – Foucault's discipline network⁹ – between state and individual and, in the specific case of Italian fascism, the regime's claim to have created a 'totalitarian' system without alternative sources of authority or loyalty? Was he genuine in his assertion that he wished to appropriate the socialist hymn in order to exalt fascist ends, as he had heard others do? Or was this, as Cadel suspected, a tactic knowingly employed by Pinzoni which would allow him to publicly enounce a prohibited song without censure?¹⁰ The episode certainly highlights the creative and active nature of cultural reception. At the very least, this Venetian episode, as a corollary to Bosworth's, suggests that it is not possible to infer from evidence of the continuance of the 'The Red Flag' lyrics in active memory alone the persistence and pervasion of an alternative socialist narrative in workers' mentalities. Such alternative mental narratives may well have existed, but to uncover these requires a complex set of conceptual tools.

The fascist authorities sought to pervade, regulate and appropriate the everyday lives of its citizens, in its quest to forge the population into 'new Italians'.¹¹ Mussolini identified the liberal government from which he took power in 1922 as politically and socially decadent and as the


¹⁰ The report noted that "in turn, Cadel, confirming the above-stated circumstances, declared that it had been his impression that Pinzoni was singing the communist hymn 'The red flag will triumph' and it was only when he stopped him that he added the words: 'over the toilets of the city' ("II Cadel a sua volta, nel confermare le suesposte circostanze ha dichiarato di aver avuta l'immersione che il Pinzoni cantasse l'inno comunista 'bandiera rossa trionferà' e che solamente quando lo fermò avesse aggiunto le parole: 'sui cessi della città')."

¹¹ Mabel Berezin in her 1997 work, Making the Fascist Self. The Political Culture of Interwar Italy (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1997), asserted that the defining essence of fascism, its so-called 'common denominator', was its rejection of the split between the private and public self. The fascist state, using repeated symbols, rituals and myths that merged the public and private self, sought to create a new political community through a process of total mobilisation, described by Berezin using the anthropological term 'internal colonisation'. This reductionist conclusion, defining the essential nature of fascism as the rejection of the split between public and private is problematic. Of course, in many ways Italian fascism certainly did reject the distinction between the public and the private – but this is not just a preserve of fascist regimes. All regimes, as contemporary criticism in Britain of the so-called 'nanny state' would seem to bear out, seek to some extent to permeate the so-called 'private sphere' of their citizens' lives. The demarcation between our various 'spheres'; our home lives and family relationships, friendships and social networks, our work lives, our political or religious identities and so on is far from absolute and inflexible. Historians working on this field in the case of Nazi Germany have similarly argued that little distinction can be drawn between public and private. See, for example, in the context of gender power relations, Joshi V 'The 'Private' became 'Public': Wives as Denouncers in the Third Reich' Journal of Contemporary History vol. 37.3, 2002, pp. 419-435.
cause of the 'vittoria mutilata' of the Great War and of the nation's moral decline; a situation that could be rectified only by the fascist 'revolution' which would completely rebuild society, create national unity and a new moral order. Italiens at every stage along the life-course felt the influence of the Mussolinian dictatorship, not only in their public roles as students, workers, political or civic actors, but also in aspects of their lives more usually considered to lie within the 'private sphere': free-time and leisure activities, food, clothing, the celebration of significant personal milestones, relationships with friends, family and lovers; all were affected by the presence of dictatorship.

This PhD thesis will analyse the lived, daily experience of dictatorship in fascist Venice during the 1930s through the examination of a number of collective cultural experiences, encountered by Venetians in their everyday lives and over the life-course, in order to reveal how far the fascist regime succeeded in penetrating and appropriating the private spheres and 'collective memory' of Venetian society, as well as to demonstrate the complexities of 'ordinary' people's lived experience of fascism and their responses to the intrusion of the regime and its 'cultural products' into their daily lives. To this end, the thesis is loosely structured according to the chronology of the life-course, with chapters addressing the experience of youth, adolescence and free time; popular celebrations and festivals; the impact of economic autarchy on food, drink, fashion etc; and the experience of death and funereal rituals. This introductory chapter sets out firstly the historiographical and theoretical framework in which this work is situated; critically discusses the sources employed in the research; and finally introduces the three key narratives which this analysis will claim underpinned Venetians' world-views and acted as mediators between regime and individual – the nation, venezianità, and the Catholic church.

Historiography and theoretical framework

The extent to which the fascist regime in Italy actually succeeded in infiltrating the private, daily lives of its citizens remains a matter for debate. Historians of Fascist Italy such as Simona Colarizi, Philip Cannistraro and the enormously influential Renzo De Felice have stressed the...
efficacy of Italian fascism's 'consensus machine', particularly during the first half of the 1930s, coined the 'years of consent'. Renzo De Felice, in his biography of Mussolini of epic proportions and particularly in the polemical Intervista sul fascismo courted controversy with his insistence on repudiating the size and contribution of the anti-fascist resistance and relativising the totalitarian reach and crimes of fascism. In relation to the question of consent, De Felice, appearing to understand consent merely as the absence of organised political dissent, maintained that the fascist regime reached the peak of its popularity between 1929 and 1934: since, he argued, manifestations of worker discontent during this period were, on the whole, small, unorganised and, unsurprisingly, prompted by economic motives, he reached the conclusion that this did not constitute anti-fascist resistance. In a further leap of the imagination he presumed that the apparent lack of active political dissent between 1929 and 1934 signalled the presence of active consent for the regime.

Simona Colarizi, as a pupil of De Felice, sought to prove her teacher's assertions through a study of 'popular opinion' in Italy from 1929 to 1943. Flawed by its defiant reliance upon source material produced by the regime — using the regular reports outlining the current 'public spirit' which filtered up to the Interior ministry from the 'capillary' network of provincial prefects, police chiefs, fascist party secretaries, and both regular informants (fiduciari) and the political police — in an attempt to gain an understanding of the 'informal', personal opinions of Italians towards the fascist project, Colarizi depicted a regime which efficiently maintained consensus through a blend of coercion and repression, propaganda and persuasion, until, quite suddenly it seemed, the introduction of the racial laws in September 1938 sparked widespread indifference if not disapproval among the Italian people.

15 Until De Felice's assertion, the 'high-point' of consent for the regime was often considered to be 1936, coinciding with the Ethiopian War (from October 1935) and the declaration of the Italian empire (May 1936). For a discussion of the historiographical debate see Morgan P "The years of consent? Popular attitudes and forms of resistance to fascism in Italy 1925-40" in Kirk T & McElligott A eds. Opposing Fascism. Community, Authority and Resistance in Europe Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 163-179.
16 Colarizi S L'opinione degli italiani sotto il regime 1929-43.
17 From 1927 the political police was run by a nucleus of Ispettori generali di Pubblica Sicurezza within the Divisione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza e Polizia Politica of the Interior Ministry and later absorbed into OVRA. See Canosa R I servizi segreti del Duce: I persecutori e le vittime Milan, Mondadori, 2000.
18 In a 1994 article discussing methodology and source material for the study of 'popular opinion' in Fascist Italy, Colarizi maintained that the debate relating to the reliability of fascist sources had been already overcome; she
Others, meanwhile, have offered more qualified accounts of the limits of the regime's reach, which move beyond those explanations which prop up the facile 'italiani brava gente' myth by depicting a consenting nation which abruptly withdrew support for fascism to a man, as the 'svolta razzista' of the regime intensified in the late 1930s. For example, Luisa Passerini's investigation of working class memories of fascism in Turin provided a very subtle and human account of the cultural strategies and possibilities for accommodation, acceptance and/or

argued that one, of course, should be aware that one was using sources drawn up by the regime (or, in some cases, by the communist party in exile) to serve very specific ends but, with that proviso in mind, the reports of prefects, police chiefs, party secretaries, political police etc. would actually prove a more valuable comparative source, precisely because of the homogeneity of their 'official' origin. Whilst acknowledging the variety in quality and value of informants' reports — though in comparison to party, MVSN and carabinieri informants, the OVRA informants were considered to be on the whole 'di buon livello' and practically forerunners of modern pollsters — Colarizi maintains that the reliability and value of their information can be accurately evaluated by cross-referencing the margin notes of their reports in order to ascertain how far up the fascist hierarchy their denunciations travelled and, therefore, how seriously their information was taken, as if this were an infallible arbiter of the veracity of their accusations. The fact that such reports not infrequently found their way to Mussolini's desk might well indicate how closely the fascist hierarchy sought to monitor 'popular opinion' and even how seriously informants' information was taken, but it does not make their denunciations any more or less true. Indeed, far from being reconciled, there is much to indicate that analysis based on 'official' sources remains problematic. Inevitably the reports — whether written by prefects, police chiefs or fascist party officials — were coloured by the inherent bias of the individuals writing them, who had their own agendas to pursue and interests to protect. Many of these reports might be expected to present an exaggeratedly positive picture; police chiefs, for example, might wish to play down any signs of non-alignment or dissent in their province, and would certainly wish to present themselves as effective and in control, as might the local fascist federations, whose function it was to ensure stability and consensus. Denunciations, whether made by informants, spies, or 'ordinary' members of the public are particularly problematic. In effect, they amounted to generalised accounts of overheard conversations or snatched glimpses of potentially subversive behaviour. They were submitted by individuals covering the full spectrum of political conviction and social strata. All this makes the credibility of each denunciation extremely difficult to gauge. Also, as Philip Morgan has pointed out, 'professional' informants would be likely to make their reports as 'juicy' as possible as a method of self-preservation, in order to ensure the continuation of a valuable source of income. Though it is possible to use 'official' sources judiciously in order to glean insights into the relatively elusive attitudes of Italians towards fascism — Richard Bosworth's use of confinati records are a case in point — Colarizi's reliance on informants' reports, whose views she accepts as accurately reflecting the views of Italian society in general means that the study that she presents as an account of popular attitudes and behaviour in reality should rather be seen as an account of how these attitudes and behaviour were distilled through the individual perceptions of the informants. See Colarizi S "Metodo e strumenti di rilevamento per un'indagine sull'opinione degli italiani sotto il regime" in Ventesimo secolo, vol. 4.10, 1994, pp. 77-87; Morgan P "The years of consent?" p. 172; Bosworth RJB "War, totalitarianism, and 'deep belief' in Fascist Italy 1935-43" in European History Quarterly vol. 34.4, 2004, pp. 475-505 and "Everyday Mussolinianism: Friends, Family, Locality and Violence in Fascist Italy".

For a discussion, and repudiation, of the 'italiani brava gente' myth which presided over much of the early scholarship on the Italian contribution to the Holocaust (for example, Susan Zuccotti's The Italians and the Holocaust; persecution, rescue and survival London, Halban, 1987 and, though it does seek a more nuanced understanding of Italians' motivations in their responses to the so-called 'Jewish Question' and the Holocaust, also Steinberg J All or Nothing. The Axis and the Holocaust 1941-43 London, Routledge, 1990) and even relatively contemporary representations of the Italian experience of the Second World War in popular culture (the films: Captain Corelli's Mandolin and Mediterraneo), see Doumanis N, Myth and Memory in the Mediterranean; remembering fascism's empire Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997. The recent work by Davide Rodogno, which seeks to provide a comprehensive account of the policy and actions of Italians in the zones of occupation controlled by them during the Second World War, also does much to redress the popular but simplistic notion of Italian leniency towards the Jewish people who came under their authority and refusal to execute actions that would lead to the 'Final Solution; Rodogno D Il nuovo ordine mediterraneo. Le politiche di occupazione dell'Italia fascista in Europa (1940-1943) Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 2003.
criticism of the regime operating among Turinese FIAT workers whilst Victoria De Grazia in her studies of the workings of the fascist Dopolavoro (OND) or after-work leisure organisation, and of women’s experiences of fascism has been at pains to point out the extent to which the fascist authorities, seeking to engender consensus through the OND and by mobilising women as mothers and housewives into the fascist project, were constrained by the need to appropriate pre-existing cultural forms and institutions in order to transmit their propaganda to the population. More recently, Ruth Ben-Ghiat’s sensitive examination of fascism as a modernising project, obsessed with national regeneration and reclamation (bonifica), demonstrated how cultural policy and production bound, simultaneously and inextricably, internal consensus-building with external expansion and conquest. For Ben-Ghiat, intellectuals, harnessed through complex patronage networks to regime officials, played a considerable role in elaborating and sustaining fascism’s modernising vision, but at the same time also had a hand in “unmaking” the fascist model of modernity. In relation to the Venetian, but also national, experiences of fascism, the work of the prolific Mario Isnenghi has vastly and subtly enhanced our understanding of lived fascism, tracing the national and local figures, tropes and lieux de mémoire from Gabriele D’Annunzio to the ‘African dream’ which mediated between population and regime.

In a résumé of the historiography on Italian fascism, the name of Emilio Gentile, also a pupil of De Felice, might more readily be expected to appear alongside those who stress fascism’s ability to manufacture and maintain consensus. The publication of Gentile’s thesis on fascism as political religion, which asserts that the essential character of the Mussolinian regime lay in its ability to ‘sacralise’ politics, certainly did not pass without polemics, dividing those who applauded his “rescu[ing of the] collective rituals of fascist Italy from the narrow logic of the ‘engine of consent’, return[ing] them to their historical context of religious disenchantment inherited from the nineteenth century, and the physical and moral tragedy represented by the

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22 Mario Isnenghi has written (and edited collections) extensively on the fascist ventennio and the Great War and on the experience of these in Venice and the Veneto; see especially L’Italia del Fascio Florence, Giunti, 1996.
First World War" and those who criticised his supposed assumption that Italians 'swallowed' and faithfully practiced this fascist civil religion wholesale. But Gentile's interpretation surely owed its greatest debt to the influence of George Mosse's seminal conclusions on the cults of death and mourning which followed the immense bloodshed of the First World War, or even to Durkheim's categorisations of the ritual and symbolic into the sacred and profane. Whilst the argument that fascism should be seen, and indeed saw itself, as a kind of 'civic religion' capable of 'making Italians' and binding individuals to the nation and to fascism is a compelling one — the regime undoubtedly constructed itself a liturgy based on notions of blood, duty and sacrifice and a cannon of martyrs, heroes, rituals, feast days and sites of worship from the Great War and political violence of the early 1920s — whether or not Italians practiced this religion unequivocally and with genuine enthusiasm is less clear. Crucially, however, Gentile did acknowledge that his thesis applied principally to the intentions behind fascist policies, rather than their reception.

24 Luzzatto S "The Political Culture of Fascist Italy" (review article) in Contemporary European History 8.2, 1999, p. 323. Luzzatto asserted that not only had Gentile placed proper and overdue attention on the symbolic functioning of fascist rituals, on the preoccupation of the fascist regime with the regenerative properties of bloodshed and on the appropriation of time itself but, in so doing, had helped explain (the focus of Luzzatto's own scholarship) how Mussolini's body came to hang upside down in Piazzale Loreto in April 1945. Luzzatto S The Political Culture of Fascist Italy pp. 317-334. Other Italian historians who heaped praise upon Gentile's thesis, whilst expressing their concern in relation to Gentile's much used term of "imperfect totalitarianism" which they believed tended, in a De Felician manner, towards the positive relativisation of Italian fascism in comparison to more 'perfect' versions of totalitarianism such as National-Socialism in Germany, included the historian of religion, Renato Moro. Moro R "Religione e politica nell'età della secularizzazione: riflessioni su di un recente volume di Emilio Gentile" in Storia contemporanea vol. 26.2, April 1995, pp. 255-325.

25 RJB Bosworth, for example, voiced criticism in this regard in "War, totalitarianism, and 'deep belief' in Fascist Italy 1935-43" p. 476. In reality, however, as is argued here, Gentile made explicit that his analysis of fascism as political religion referred to the regime's intention and not necessarily to the population's reaction to fascist liturgy.


27 It might be argued that the quest to 'make Italians' through the institution of a political religion, to borrow the much-appropriated phrase first coined by Massimo D'Azeglio, constituted one of, if not the, principal tasks of the new Italian state since the Risorgimento. See Levra U Fare gli italiani: memoria e celebrazione del Risorgimento Turin, Comitato di Torino dell'Istituto per la storia del Risorgimento Italiana, 1992. It has also been suggested that, in the second post-war period, the memories and myths of the anti-fascist Resistance, which provided the legitimising foundations of the Italian Republic, could be said to have constituted another form of political religion. Stephen Gundle argued that during the 1950s and 1960s many aspects of Resistance memories and myths took on elements of a civic religion, one worshipped principally by the political Left. However, he concluded that this resistance-based civic religion was not officially sanctioned and was relatively soon stripped of meaning and trivialized through the growth of mass commercial culture which accompanied the economic miracle. Gundle S "The 'civic religion' of the Resistance in post-war Italy" in Modern Italy vol. 5.2, 2000, pp. 113-132.

28 For example, in the conclusion to The Sacralisation of Politics, Gentile summarised his argument that fascism "instituted" a political religion which "aimed to create a virile and virtuous citizenry, dedicated body and soul to the nation" [my italics]; using terms, therefore, which relate entirely to the intentions and not the reception of the regime. Furthermore, when, in the final paragraphs, Gentile asked whether or not the fascist secular religion was "the expression of a genuine faith", again he was referring to the fascist producers of the political religion and to whether or not they truly believed in the liturgy and rituals they constructed, not to how far this political religion was
Gentile must also be credited for recognising, unlike De Felice and Colarizi, that the regime's efforts to win over and shape its citizens into model fascists was played out not only, and perhaps not most importantly, in conventional political arenas, but also within the cultural sphere. As such, he has been placed within the 'culturalist' school in the current historiographical debates seeking to define the characteristics of generic fascism. In recent years, some scholars of generic fascism have identified - and sought to nurture - a developing consensus in 'fascist studies' which identifies the 'ideal-type' of fascism as 'palingenetic ultranationalism' and accords primacy to fascist culture, as the means through which the myth of national rebirth and regeneration and the creation of the 'new man' was effected. This 'culturalist' paradigm has been most fiercely defended by Roger Griffin, who lined up the work of a series of illustrious scholars of fascism from Stanley Payne to George Mosse to defend a definition of fascism which privileges an approach based on fascism as ideology rather than as regime, against critics from both the neo-marxian perspective and from the 'realist' camp. Proponents of a culturalist approach to fascism in the Italian case, following either Gentile's or Benjamin's lead of interpreting fascism as, respectively, the sacralisation or aestheticisation of politics, have included US-based historians and social scientists such as Marla Stone with her 1998 work on cultural institutions and production under Mussolini and Simonetta Falasca-

or wasn't genuinely accepted and practiced by the population. See Gentile E. The Sacralisation of Politics in Fascist Italy pp. 153-161.

29 The article in which Roger Griffin set out the stall of what he termed the 'new consensus' in fascist studies provoked no little controversy. Griffin R. "The primacy of Culture: The Current Growth (or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascist Studies", published in the Journal of Contemporary History vol.37.1, Jan. 2002 pp. 21-43. In his assertion that the scholarly consensus was being reached around the notion of fascism as a highly nationalistic political-system based on the notion of the regeneration of the nation (see, for example, p. 28), Griffin was at pains to point out that what drove him, and other scholars of generic fascism, was not a quest to discover the Holy Grail - the essence of fascism; aware that 'essences' are inevitably constructs, he spoke instead in terms of the fascist 'ideal-type'. For a classic account of the nature of European fascism(s) see Woolf S ed. Fascism in Europe London & New York, Methuen, 1981 (first published 1968) and The Nature of Fascism London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1968, whilst an authoritative discussion of the most recent debates can also be found in Robert O. Paxton's latest work, The Anatomy of Fascism, London, Allen Lane, 2004.


32 Of those within what Griffin termed the 'realist' school, he was particularly critical of RJB Bosworth for what he saw as his dismissive attitude towards the culturalist/Mossean school which dominates, according to Bosworth, the study of Italian fascism. Nevertheless, Griffin quite gleefully declared that Bosworth, almost despite himself, has had to admit the legitimacy of the cultural approach given his concurrence with the idea of fascism as a modernising and dynamic phenomenon and with the existence of a peculiarly fascist political culture. Griffin R "The primacy of Culture" pp. 28-9.

33 Walter Benjamin's writings on the relationship between fascism and futurism led him to understand fascism as the 'aestheticisation of politics'. See Benjamin W "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Representation" in Arendt H ed. (Zohn H trans.) Illuminations London, Cape, 1970.
Zamponi who put forward a very post-linguistic turn account of fascist politics as aesthetics in her study of Fascist Spectacle.34

The volume and range of critical voices which spoke out in response to Griffin's contention of the convergence of approaches towards the primacy of culture would seem to weaken his claim that a 'new consensus' is being reached among scholars of fascism.35 Perhaps the most prudent course for scholars of fascism is to tread a path between the two approaches — culturalist and realist — for each have aspects to commend them. It is this kind of balancing act — between culturalism and realism, intention and reception — which this study seeks to perform.

It is undoubtedly crucial, as George Mosse maintained, to examine fascism from the inside; to understand how it understood itself. In so doing, it is difficult to remain unconvinced of the validity of Gentile's model of fascism as civil religion in intent, given the frequency with which the regime conceived of itself as such.36 Examining the fascist project 'in its own terms', as it were, does not necessarily mean, as Bosworth appears to suggest, to take a morally equivocal position or to relativise the dictatorship, the terror and suffering it caused. In any account of the Italian fascist project, whether it emphasises the totalising impact of fascist culture or whether it looks instead to highlight the variety of cultural influences — both competing and complementary — and resultant potential for choice in individual decision-making and action, it must still remain clear that Mussolini's was a violent, brutal dictatorship, both in intent and in effect.37

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34 Stone M S The Patron State. Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998; Falasca-Zamponi S Fascist Spectacle. The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy, Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1997. It is Griffin's opinion that one should not confuse, as he believes Bosworth does, the work of 'empiricists' within the culturalist school, like Gentile and Mosse, who are influenced by the "best" aspects of postmodernism and anthropology with those postmodernists, including Falasca-Zamponi, who after the 'linguistic turn' of the 1990s "abandoned causes for discourses". See Griffin R "The primacy of Culture" p. 29. I myself, would not be quite so dismissive of postmodernist-influenced scholars — for example, Berezin's argument for recognising the central importance of action (as opposed to words and discourse) in fascism is valid whilst the work of Falasca-Zamponi is useful insofar as it reveals the aesthetic narratives and representations which made up the fascist self-identity — though I would certainly reject the reduction of fascism to spectacle alone and would caution against viewing the aesthetic and cultural output of the regime as having been met with widespread and uncritical assimilation by the Italian population.

35 See, for example, the responses to Griffin's article in the Journal of Contemporary History by David Roberts, Alexander De Grand, Mark Antliff and Thomas Linehan, published in the April 2002 (vol. 37.2) issue of the same journal pp. 259-274.

36 Giuseppe Bottai, for example, wrote in 1932 that fascism "was, for my comrades or myself, nothing more than a way of continuing the war, of transforming its values into a civic religion." Gentile E The Sacralisation of Politics in Fascist Italy p. 20.

At the same time, whilst accepting the need to examine fascism from the inside, we must take care not to assume that the entire population, living under the fascist system, understood fascism and their participation in the fascist project in the same way – as the regime and as each other; it is here that this thesis hopes to contribute to the debate. Whilst most scholars surely accept "the need to take fascist ideology seriously", the culturalist approach is often criticised because of its apparent failure to explain satisfactorily how ideology intersected with the functioning of the fascist movement and regime. This may be so, but what is seemingly disregarded in this debate is the question of how fascist ideology intersected, not just with state functioning and structures, but with 'ordinary' Italians' lived experience. Here the distinction between intention and reception is vital. What is needed – and what this study aims to provide – is a holistic approach to the intention and reception of fascist culture, which seeks simultaneously to understand how fascism sought to project its 'revolutionary' ideals onto its citizens through cultural production, often appropriating and twisting cultural products which predated fascism to promote its cause, and also realises that individuals received these cultural products in manifold ways, not least as a result of the ingrained meanings – which, of course, were not immutable but which couldn’t be fundamentally altered in the lifespan of the Mussolinian ventennio – already attached to these cultural products. Furthermore, it was not only in the reception of fascistised cultural products that variety and ambiguity occurred; neither was there uniformity in terms of fascist cultural production in the first place, as local party officials, activists and journalists intervened creatively to reinterpret and re-present the directives emanating from the regime's hierarchy. Our understanding of the intention of fascist ideology and cultural production cannot be complete without attention to how these were received and vice versa.

Underpinning this commitment to the elevation of the reciprocal relationship between intention and reception in the production and consumption of culture is an appreciation of the contribution of historical approaches usually brought collectively under the banner of cultural history or the 'cultural turn'. Informed by the pioneering postwar Marxian scholars advocating a new focus on 'history from below' (E P Thompson, Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart in

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39 For a comprehensive account of the development and concerns of cultural history see the collection of essays edited and introduced by Lynn Hunt, The New Cultural History Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1989. In addition, see also the appraisal of more recent post-structuralist and postmodern directions following the 'cultural turn' in Bonnell V & Hunt L eds. Beyond the Cultural Turn. New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1999.
the lead), by the generational developments of the Annales journal and school, by a Foucauldian rejection of positivism and traditional notions of historical method and insistence on locating power within discourse and by the interlacing of the social science disciplines – history with sociology and later anthropology and literary criticism – historians have rejected the subordination of the cultural to the politico-economic and increasingly turned to sociocultural paradigms as categories equally able to explain historical structures, functions, continuity and change. The debt owed by this study to those cultural historians who have championed the importance of mentalities, of the application of anthropological categories, and of the aesthetics of reception as fruitful historical approaches is immense; for example, Natalie Zemon Davis' application of anthropological concepts including Van Gennep's interpretation of rites de passage to rituals of Early Modern France to recast these not as Bakhtin-esque safety-valves for the maintenance of social order but as building blocks in the construction of communities is reflected in the way in which the role of ritual in community-building and, within this, the significance of notions of rites of passage are addressed in this thesis. Perhaps


41 The origins or first generation of the Annales can be found above all in the inter-war works of Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre and in the journal they co-founded in 1929, the Annales d'histoire économique et sociale (later renamed Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations) in which they forged a remarkably innovative approach which focused on recreating the mentalités or parameters of thought, belief and action of the historical subjects they studied. Following the Second World War, the Annales became known as a 'school' associated with the École des Hautes Études in Paris and entered into its second generation under the direction of Fernand Braudel, proponent of the longue durée, conjunctural medium and short term model of socio-economic analysis. The third generation, associated particularly with Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie is then considered to have given way to a fourth in the late 1970s / early 1980s, centred around the figures of Roger Chartier and Jaques Revel, who sought to take Febvre's 'mental tools' and resite the paradigm of mentalités not merely at the level of superstructure but at the very heart of historical experience. For an account of the development of the Annales generations see Lynn Hunt's introduction to Hunt L ed. The New Cultural History pp. 2-10 and Roger Chartier's own account, "Intellectual History or Sociocultural History? The French Trajectories" in LaCapra D & Kaplan S eds. Modern European Intellectual History. Appraisals and New Perspectives Ithaca & London, Cornell University Press, 1982, pp. 13-46.


43 Here, the most obvious and influential texts to mention are Hayden White's Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe (Baltimore & London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) which privileged the linguistic analysis of historical texts and Clifford Geertz's The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays (New York, Basic Books, 1973) which married anthropological and historical approaches to emphasise the need to decipher the meanings encoded within symbolic and ritual forms. Whilst Geertz's call to decode symbolic meanings undoubtedly has resonance for this work, his seeming insistence that symbolic forms have and had coherent and decipherable meanings, organised systematically, does not allow for the possibility that such intended meanings were received differently, incoherently or even not at all, by the participants/observers.

even more influential for the purposes of this study are the works of Eric Hobsbawm on the 'invention of tradition'\(^{45}\) and Roger Chartier on the absence of necessarily coherent and shared meanings within symbolic actions and, in relation to the impact of texts and reading, on the 'triangular relationship' between the intended text conceived by the author, that printed by the publisher and that received by the reader.\(^{46}\)

In addition, many of the works just mentioned, particularly those early works of Hoggart, Williams and Thompson, which elevated forms of culture previously dismissed as 'popular' and therefore base to worthy objects of historical inquiry, were appropriated in the mid-1960s by the nascent discipline, or intersection of disciplines, of 'cultural studies' developing around a collection of scholars initially grouped within the Centre for Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham.\(^{47}\) The Centre, directed first by Richard Hoggart and later by Stuart Hall, aimed to revise accepted definitions of culture beyond the elite confines of literature, fine art and so on to encompass social and cultural practice and the customs and habits of daily life. Where scholars of cultural studies perhaps begin to diverge from cultural historians is in their choosing to study cultural forms as autonomous ends in themselves rather than for what they reveal more widely

\(^{45}\) Hobsbawm E & Ranger T eds. The Invention of Tradition Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992 (first published 1983). Hobsbawm defines invented traditions as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, thereby automatically implying continuity with the past." (p. 1) Invented traditions do not necessarily bear any real resemblance to historic practices and may make recourse to any era of history. Tradition is differentiated from simple 'custom' through its purpose: while custom implies some kind of continuity and compatibility with past precedents, it is still flexible and open to – albeit limited – innovation because it is driven by pragmatism, the purpose of the rites and rituals of tradition - whether invented or not – is symbolic – seeking to create or reinforce bonds with whichever aspects of the past are deemed appropriate. The invention of tradition may take place in all societies at all times, but Hobsbawm asserts that it is most likely to occur in societies undergoing rapid transformation, as the creation of new social patterns renders obsolete the old symbols, myths and traditions, and demands the creation of new 'traditions'. He identifies three types of invented traditions: those designed to establish or symbolise social cohesion or membership of real or imagined communities; those which seek to establish or legitimise institutions, or authority; and those whose purpose is socialisation – to instil beliefs, value system and conventions of behaviour. Whilst all three of these aims can be identified in the experience of 'fascistised' celebrations and festivals in Venice, it is the last of these – the inculcation of certain values and beliefs – that is of most interest and importance to my research. Importantly, Hobsbawm also points out that the success of invented traditions depends in large part upon the intended audience's willingness to accept these, so that official new holidays, rituals or heroes might fail to capture the public's attention "if they lacked genuine popular resonance." (p. 264) One qualification, however; our reading of de Certeau tells us that even if these ceremonies, heroes and holidays are seemingly embraced by their intended recipients, this does not necessarily mean that they are always understood or 'absorbed' in the way in which their 'inventors' might have hoped.


\(^{47}\) For an 'autobiography' of the development of cultural studies around the pivotal figures of Hoggart and Hall at the University of Birmingham, see the introduction (written principally by Stuart Hall) to the collaborative volume of the Centre's working papers; Hall S et al. eds. Culture, Media, Language. Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79 London, Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, 1980.
in terms of social, political, economic and cultural structures and processes, continuities and ruptures.

This thesis is driven by a fascination with and belief in the value of the history of everyday life. Any study of ‘ordinary’ people and their day-to-day lives cannot ignore Michel de Certeau’s absorbing and persuasive writings on _The Practice of Everyday Life_. His considerations of the ‘tactics’ used by ordinary people to eke out a degree of autonomy in their day-to-day operations (in contrast to Foucault’s assertion of the inevitable dominance and omnipotence of all-pervasive power structures) and of their ‘creativity’ in the face of the dominant cultural products with which they are presented, are highly relevant to this research. De Certeau maintained that ordinary people or ‘consumers’ do not simply absorb, unquestioningly and unaltered, the cultural products with which they are bombarded by the ‘dominant authority’. On the contrary they are “unrecognised producers, poets of their own acts, silent discoverers of their paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality” who construct their own ‘trajectories’ – individual modes of behaviour and practices - using opportunistic, guerrilla-like ‘tactics’, which, at least potentially, allow them to subvert, distort and make their own these cultural products, amounting to, to use de Certeau’s anti-Foucauldian phrase, “the network of an anti-discipline.”

De Certeau’s thesis of the creative productivity of individuals in their everyday lives leads me to regard Venetians not as passive receptacles of the dominant cultural products of the day but rather as consumer-producers who responded creatively to fascist cultural products as these collided with their pre-existing knowledge, prejudices and mentalities. What resulted was a myriad of responses to fascist propaganda as the people of Venice combined what they received with what they already ‘knew’, sometimes to assimilate the propaganda messages unchanged, at other times to subvert and distort them considerably.

49 Ibid p.xviii.
50 De Certeau drew a distinction between ‘tactics’ and ‘strategies;’ strategy refers to a mode of operating used by those with a relative amount of power within a particular spatial or institutional location, whereas tactics are the ‘weapons’ of the weak in so far as these relate to modes of behaviour operated in a sphere where the individual holds no power. Tactics are therefore necessarily flexible as they cannot choose or define the space in which they operate, but must act within a space imposed on them: “The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organised by the law of a foreign power.” Unlike a strategy, a tactic cannot plan a comprehensive scheme of action, but rather must act with opportunism to take advantage of any favourable occasions presented to it and as such requires flexibility to operate, fortuitously, in ‘enemy’ terrain. Ibid. pp. xviii-xx & 34-7.
51 Ibid. p. xv.
There is a great deal that can be learnt from the work of academics on everyday life under various dictatorial regimes – not only from historians working on the ‘totalitarian’ regimes of the early-twentieth century in Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union but also from scholars of the post-1945 period, who, for example, have examined the lived experience of ‘really-existing socialism’ in the GDR. All might be said to share a preoccupation with uncovering “the hidden articulations between the essential political abnormality of dictatorship and the normality, even banality, of everyday life”. Displaying their debt to the advocates of Alltagsgeschichte, such studies reject a view of historical everyday life as an area of passivity and external control where individuals simply ‘swim’ along, reproducing stereotyped patterns of behaviour constrained by given cultural codes in favour of a designation of the everyday as a potentially creative arena where individual actors enjoy a certain degree of choice in determining their behaviour.

The work of Detlev Peukert and Sheila Fitzpatrick on the experiences of everyday life under dictatorship in, respectively, Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union has done much to establish and justify the value of the methodology of the everyday within the social and cultural history of dictatorship. Although the everyday approach, with its inevitable focus on the local and the specific, leads away from grand theories and narratives of ‘Fascism’, as Peukert coherently argued, this does not mean that – in highlighting the contradictions and ambiguities of the lived experience of dictatorship and in clouding the boundaries between consent and dissent, regime-supporter and resister – such an approach seeks to relativise or absolve

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53 Kott S “Everyday Communism” p. 235

54 The methodological sub-discipline of Alltagsgeschichte emerged in certain West German universities, history workshops and schools, parallel to the so-called ‘Bielefeld school’ which came to prominence in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As a foil to the Bielefeld emphasis on macro-structural analysis inspired by US-style social science and anthropology, proponents of Alltagsgeschichte, such as Lüdtke and Kaschuba, directed their attention to qualitative and often micro-focused research into the experiential and subjective nature of ‘ordinary’ people’s lives. The advocates of Alltagsgeschichte identified the everyday as an ideal location for the study of the (re)appropriation of perception, experience and behaviour and how these operate, are guided by or help shape cultural patterns. With their focus on individual habits, attitudes, behaviour and choices, the Alltagsgeschichte studies very often took a micro-cultural approach, but this does not mean that they necessarily neglected the ‘big’ questions of structure and relations between state and society, church and state etc. On the contrary, these micro-histories of everyday life threw much light on the way in which macro-structural conflicts, tensions, continuities and discontinuities related, experientially, to the individual. For a relatively recent summary of the Alltagsgeschichte approach, see: Lüdtke A ed. (Templer W trans.) The History of Everyday Life. Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995, passim.
participation in dictatorial political-systems. On the contrary, the everyday approach, which operates not in the 'black' or 'white' areas of consent and dissent, but principally in that grey zone in between of potentially constantly changing ideas, attitudes and actions which could be directed by a whole range of influences, seeks a more nuanced and complex account of the way in which dictatorship was lived on a day-to-day basis; the spaces available for free expression, the choices, conscious or otherwise, in between active resistance and active support for the regime, and the pre-existing cultural products, habits and belief-systems with which their dictatorial counterparts either merged or collided.55

Sheila Fitzpatrick's work on *Everyday Stalinism* moved the historiographical debate along from one concerned with ‘everyday resistance’ to a focus on the practices of daily life; the modes of behaviour and strategies for survival which allowed individuals to make sense of and cope with extraordinary social and political conditions.56 In her study, which focuses, as does this thesis, upon urban daily life – a world of “crowded communal apartments abandoned wives and husbands, [...] shortages of food and clothing and endless queuing” where, thanks in part to famine and to the hasty replacement of private trade with state distribution, shopping became a “survival skill”57 – Fitzpatrick identifies a strategy, akin to one of de Certeau’s ‘tactics’, employed by ordinary people in order to negotiate the difficulties of distribution and consumption. This strategy, blat (“pull”), signifying the use of contacts and connections and calling-in of favours, worked as a tactic for making do or getting by; individuals might use blat to obtain a promotion, goods, or false documents, procure entrance to university, an apartment or a holiday.58 Fitzpatrick found that although, even for citizens with the choicest blat connections and contacts, queues, rationing and discomfort formed the lived experience of Stalinism, for those lucky enough to have them, personal connections worked to blunt the harshness of daily

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56 In her introduction, Fitzpatrick makes explicit that her understanding of ‘everyday’ referred to everyday interaction with the state; to this end she omits from her study important aspects of daily life such as friendship, love, and private socialising, concentrating instead upon equally significant topics such as education, shopping, travelling, celebrating, the use of humour and jokes, strategies for finding apartments and jobs, marrying, and having children. Fitzpatrick S *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* New York & Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 2.
57 Fitzpatrick S *Everyday Stalinism*. pp. 2-3; 54-8.
58 Fitzpatrick cited a description of blat provided in a letter written by a citizen of Novgorod, Petr Gattsek, to the deputy chairman of Council of Ministers in 1940: “Not to have blat, that’s the same thing as having no civil rights, the same as being deprived of all rights...Come with a request, and they will all be deaf, blind and dumb. If you need ... to buy something in a shop – you need blat. If it’s difficult or impossible for a passenger to get a railroad ticket, then it is simple and easy po blatu. If you live without an apartment, don’t ever go to the housing administration, to the procurator’s, but better to use just a little blat and you will at once get your apartment.” Fitzpatrick S *Everyday Stalinism* p. 62
life and in addition helped subvert the meaning of the Stalinist economy by creating a parallel second economy founded on acquaintance and patronage.59

Historians of Fascist Italy have not been impervious to the 'everyday history' approach, although the historiography in this field might be said to be in its adolescent phase, in comparison to its counterparts on Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Luisa Passerini's previously mentioned study, first published in Italy in 1984 and in English three years later, was path-breaking not only for its subtle interpretation of oral sources but also for its innovative focus on the day-to-day negotiation between regime and individual which made up the lived experience of fascism. *Torino operaia e Fascismo* drew upon Durkheim's approach of reading symbols and 'collective representations', an Annales-esque concern with reconstructing 'mental maps', and Malinowski's anthropological methodology which delineated between individuals' personal beliefs and opinions and their actual behaviour to analyse the testimonies of sixty-seven Turinese working-class men and women, in order to redress the unsatisfactory historiographical accounts which had tended to depict the Italian working-class either as steadfastly opposed and united against fascism or as conferring considerable consent on the regime.60 Passerini succeeded in painting a highly nuanced picture of working-class responses to the regime; a scene in which humour and family, often women, acted as mediators between the individual and the regime.61 The presence of mediators who were able to use bargain and compromise to find a *modus vivendi* with the regime, not unlike Fitzpatrick's identification of *blat*, allowed fascist authority to be simultaneously accepted and modified as it was incorporated into individuals' daily lives. In the present study, the role of mediators will also be placed at centre-stage, although here the mediators in question – which both permitted the infiltration of fascist ideology into daily practices and customs and also, because of their association with alternative and more long-standing sources of authority, inevitably circumscribed the ability of fascist ideas to impact upon everyday habits and world-views – do not take human form, but rather are 'alternative' concepts, institutions and *luoghi comuni*.

60 Passerini L *Torino operaia e Fascismo / Fascism in Popular Memory* pp. 1-2.
61 Such accommodation between individual and regime included, by way of example, the case of Luigia Varusco who found a "mock-compromise" with the fascist restrictions on employment: when her son needed a PNF membership card in order to gain work, she paid for and obtained a receipt for the card, which was enough for her son to take up his employment, but never returned to the party headquarters to collect the membership card. For this and other instances of mediation, see Passerini *Fascism in Popular Memory* p. 139.
Methodology: ‘filling in the blanks’

As Detlev Peukert remarked, an inquiry into the nature of everyday life in what might be considered the extraordinary context of dictatorship is problematic. Not least there is a problem in relation to sources; any study which attempts to understand the contradictions and complexities of the daily experiences of ‘ordinary’ people must be adept at understanding lieux de mémoire, symbols, semiophores and silences, at reading ‘between the lines’ and what David D’Avray, writing in relation to medieval death sermons, succinctly called “the fine art of filling in the blanks”, given the relative absence and silence of source material – official and personal – relating to the daily grind of those leading undistinguished, but not uninteresting, lives. When this is coupled with the presence of dictatorship – with all its attendant difficulties of censorship and propaganda – our ‘reading’ of sources, whether officially produced declarations and documents, press reports shaped by (self)censorship and/or fervent support for the regime, or memoirs, written decades later in a different and perhaps hostile environment, is rendered all the more complex. In order to successfully fill in the ‘blanks’, as it were, between the regime’s

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62 The concept of lieux de mémoire derives from Pierre Nora’s ground-breaking study into the ‘sites’ of French collective memory; the physical locations but also the non-material emblems, symbols and semiophores which made up the republic and nation of France, or rather, given that Nora understood that there existed competing versions of French collective memories, ‘les France’. See Nora P “From Lieux de mémoire to Realms of Memory”, preface to the English language edition of Nora P ed. Realms of Memory. Rethinking the French Past vol. 1 New York, Columbia University Press, 1996 (originally published in French in 7 volumes under the title of Les Lieux de Mémoire, Paris, Gallimard, 1984-1993). The persuasiveness of Nora’s thesis was such that historians of other nationalities have been quick to follow his lead and produce works defining their own national lieux de mémoire: in the case of Italy, it was Mario Isnenghi who ‘Italianised’ the concept with his three volumes on Italy’s luoghi comuni: Isnenghi M ed. I luoghi della memoria: simboli e miti dell’Italia unita 3 vols. Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1996-7. The concept is not, however, without its critics nor its problems; perhaps most seriously, it could be argued that in seeking to produce a collection of national lieux de mémoire and luoghi comuni, historians like Nora and Isnenghi have inevitably intervened – and perhaps overly interfered – in the somewhat arbitrary process of imagining, inventing and creating those entities deemed to be(lcome) lieux de mémoire, but which were perhaps actually only representative of the collective experience of an educated few. What’s more, the national remit thus far posited on the collections of lieux de mémoire either leaves little room for or places artificial boundaries upon those collective memories which transcended and still transcend national borders; the experiences of the First and Second World War, or of the events of 1968 are cases in point. See Magazine Littéraire, n.307, Feb. 1993.

63 The notion of ‘semiophores’ or objects which are invested with meaning(s) as they are produced, circulated and consumed is taken from the concept developed by Krysztof Pomian in Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux Paris, Gallimard, 1987, published in English as (Wiles-Portier E trans.) Collectors and curiosities. Paris and Venice, 1500-1800 Cambridge, Polity, 1990. As Pomian wrote within the context of the history of collections, he draws a distinction between a) a useful object and b) a semiophore, which has no use but is suffused with meaning(s). Though he does allow for a third possibility of c) an object which is simultaneously useful and invested with meaning, he argued that use and meaning are mutually exclusive – as an object is used its ‘meaning’ is weakened and vice versa – and that semiophores fulfil their purpose when they become part of a collection. (See chapter 1.3 Usefulness and meaning.) The present study takes the view that semiophores, i.e. objects which, to the observer, are invested with meaning(s), can equally exist within communities, not just within collections, and that objects can be simultaneously useful and meaningful. In addition, it must be recognised that the meaning(s) with which a given semiophore is invested are subject to variation, according to who observes or consumes them, and to evolution and change over time. An example of such semiophores are the wedding rings described in chapter 4.

intention and the way in which its messages were received and absorbed (or not) into everyday practice, it is necessary to reconstruct the "structures of thought" and "mental tools" of contemporary groups, to borrow Lucien Febvre's terms; in other words, those beliefs, habits and attitudes which allowed individuals to bridge the gap between the cultural producer and consumer, between the cultural product itself and the context in which it was produced, received and recreated. 65 Febvre's analysis, in seeking to prove the importance of mentalités in shaping historical experience, sets cultural production and consumption as oppositional to one another; from de Certeau we know that the two are distinct, but inextricably linked processes. Nevertheless, it is from Febvre, Panofsky and other early proponents of the Annales' approach, that we are reminded that these stores of 'ideas materials' or reserves of internalised principles and beliefs, depending on whether one subscribes to Febvre's more materialist or Panofsky's less tangible metaphor, defined the parameters of what was possible to think or do in contemporary society, and are therefore key to reading both the absences and what is present in the source material relating to the aesthetics of reception in Venetian daily life.

The sources on which the present research is based are essentially written, although some use of photographs, cartoons and other pictorial images is made. The reliance, therefore, on principally intertextual analysis requires that some attention be paid to the problems associated with the use of written texts when trying to recover subjective and experiential aspects of day-to-day life which may or, more likely, may not have been faithfully recorded on paper. What is

65 The notion of 'mental tools' might be considered akin to Carlo Ginzburg's microhistorical recreation of the "cosmos" – the reading material, oral cultural products and other sources of influence which combined to make up an individual's world-view – of a sixteenth century Friulian miller (Ginzburg C Il formaggio e i vermi: Il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500 Torin, Einaudi 1976; published in English as (Tedeschi J & A trans.) The Cheese and the Worms Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1992). The term was first put forward by Lucien Febvre in his examination of the Rabelian world in Le problème de l'incroyance au XVle siècle. La religion de Rabelais Paris, Editions Albin Michel, 1942, published in English as (Gottlieb B trans.) The problem of unbelief in the sixteenth century: the religion of Rabelais Cambridge, Mass. & London, Harvard University Press, 1982. In this work he criticised historians' tendency to project the mentalities of their own age onto the epoch they investigated and identified les outillages mental or mental tools as the beliefs, attitudes and influences peculiar to a given time and space: "Each civilisation has its own mental tools; and furthermore, each epoch of a given civilisation, each bit of progress, be it in techniques or sciences – requires a renewed set of tools, more highly developed for certain needs, less for others. This civilisation, this epoch, is not guaranteed to transmit such mental equipment, integrally, to the civilisations and epochs that will follow; the equipment may undergo mutilations, regressions, deformations of considerable consequence." (p. 141-2) In seeking to uncover the mental tools of fifteenth-century France, Febvre paid particular attention to language. Contemporary to Febvre, Erwin Panofsky worked in a similar vein to unearth what he termed the 'mental habits' of monastic society in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Panofsky's mental habits were less tangible than Febvre's tools and represented the internalisation of a set of principles and beliefs through which an individual understood and made sense of his/her world. In addition, unlike Febvre, Panofsky examined aspects of the process (in this case, the school system) by which such 'habits' or beliefs became inculcated within the individual. Panofsky E Architecture gothique et pensée scolastique Paris, Gallimard, 1970. For an assessment of Febvre and Panofsky's concepts and their contribution to the historiography of mentalités, see Chartier R "Intellectual History or Sociocultural History?" pp. 18-21.
key is that the study: does not take the accounts of events, attitudes and beliefs recorded in official documents, newspapers, or even memoirs at face value, but understands these as layered representations that form part of the creative reciprocal process of cultural production-consumption; that it remains aware of the potential pitfalls present when examining ‘popular culture’ through texts of over privileging and exaggerating the importance of the written word to a culture whose discourses also operated orally, symbolically and performatively as well as textually; in short, that it follows the example set by Richard Hoggart in The Uses of Literacy of maintaining its focus upon “a concern with how texts are stitched into patterns of lived experience”.66 Through Hoggart we are reminded that the text alone cannot signify cultural praxis; it is only when we take into account the way in which readers ‘used’ the texts they read that we can understand the relationship between the cultural forms represented in the text and subjective lived experience.

This focus on the ‘use’ rather than the initial production of texts informed the development of a fresh approach to literary criticism in the early 1970s which came to be known as reception theory. The principal exponent of the need to focus not on the process of the creation of literature, nor on the text itself as a repository of eternal, universal value(s), but on its impact — in short on the aesthetics of reception — was the German scholar, H R Jauss.67 Building upon ideas already floated by Jean Paul Sartre, among others,68 Jauss proposed to place the ‘reader’ at the centre of academic inquiry as well as at the centre of literary construction. Though Jauss did not take his argument — as de Certeau soon would — as far as arguing for the creativity of production and reception within every cultural product, he convincingly demonstrated that reading is a creative practice, in so far as the reader absorbs and responds to a given text comparatively, in relation to the works s/he has already read, so that the author — and the text — cannot escape and indeed are obliged to interact with the reader’s literary frame of reference or, as Jauss, borrowing from Koselleck, eloquently termed it, their “horizons of

66 See Andrew Goodwin’s introduction to Hoggart R The Uses of Literacy p. xiii.
68 Peter Hohendahl, in his account tracing the development of theoretical interest in the aesthetics of reception, observed how Jauss, Wienold and others working on reception theory built upon questions that had been raised by earlier scholars working on ‘reader history’ such as Schückling and Escarpit as well as by Jean Paul Sartre in his work, What is Literature? (London, Methuen, 1988; originally published by Gallimard in Paris in 1948). In this essay Sartre considered the less than straightforward relationship between author and reader and pointed out that, although the author may write with an intended reader in mind, s/he has no control as to whether this intended reader in reality matched the real readership of a given work. See Hohendahl P “Introduction to Reception Aesthetics” in New German Critique n.10 Winter 1977, p. 37.
expectations". Koselleck elaborated the metahistorical categories of both 'spaces of experience' and 'horizons of expectations' in order to denote the spatial and temporal projections both of the past (experience) and into the future (expectations) which inform and help guide individual choices and actions; Jauss, Koselleck's contemporary, then developed these concepts from the perspective of literary history to stress the evolution and mutations of literary reception as the text is successively received and transformed by waves of readers' experiences and expectations. Thus, Jauss' notion of receivers' 'horizons of expectations', which might be considered the literary relative of Febvre's 'mental tools' or Ginzburg's 'cosmos', albeit with a Koselleckian understanding of historical time, is key to the analysis of individuals' assimilation of the ideas which they encountered in their day-to-day experiences and provides part of the theoretical foundations underpinning this study.

Jauss' interests, therefore, lay above all in the aesthetics of literary reception whilst Hoggart, in his focus on the reception of more 'popular' cultural forms, engaged with the 'uses' but not with the initial processes of production of the cultural forms he examined. If cultural exchange is to be understood as a creative, two-way process involving both producers and those conventionally labelled 'consumers', surely both 'sides' of the dialectic must be addressed. It is again to Michel de Certeau whom we can turn for an elaboration of this point. Following the logic of his wider argument of individuals as the 'consumer-producers' of the cultural products thrown at them by the dominant sources of authority within the state and civil society, so too reading is considered an extremely productive practice:

In reality, the activity of reading has on the contrary all the characteristics of a silent production: the drift across the page, the metamorphosis of the text effected by the

69 The example given by Jauss to illustrate this idea of the reciprocal relationship between the author and the reader's horizons of expectations is that of Flaubert's novel, Madame Bovary. Jauss noted how, in 1857, two novels were published, both concerned with the theme of adultery and jealousy; Madame Bovary and Fanny, written by Flaubert's friend, Feydeau. Despite the infamy of the Flaubert obscenity trial, initially the commercial success of Fanny far outstripped that of Madame Bovary; subsequently, of course, Madame Bovary has become accepted as part of the classical cannon of modern European literature whilst Fanny has been all but forgotten. Jauss attributed these differing fates to the ability of Flaubert's novel to significantly impact, in the long term, upon the horizons of expectations of the contemporary readership. He argued that the horizons of expectations of the French reading public in 1857, subdued since the death of Balzac, would have initially found Flaubert's innovative style of "impersonal telling" shocking and difficult to appreciate, especially in comparison to Feydeau's easy confessional tone, reflection of popular ideals and ability to simultaneously provide an erotic and titillating plotline whilst pre-empting the reader's moral outrage. However, over time, as a select group of critical and "knowledgeable" readers declared Flaubert's work a major milestone in the development of the novel, contributing to its growing international success, a new horizon of expectations was formed among the reading public, one which referenced Flaubert's impersonal realism and now made Feydeau's best-seller appear clichéd and old-fashioned. See Jauss H R, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory", pp. 7-38.

wandering eyes of the reader, the improvisation and expectation of meanings inferred from a few words, leaps over written spaces in an ephemeral dance.\textsuperscript{71}

In this way de Certeau saw the text being read as akin to a rented apartment – readers furnish this apartment with their actions and memories, inevitably making changes here and there, stamping their own mark on their living space.\textsuperscript{72} He argued that it is a fundamental misconception – one propagated both by the church and, later, by Enlightenment scholars – that the assimilation of information by the ‘public’ must inevitably mean “becoming similar to” rather than “making something similar to oneself.”\textsuperscript{73} Just because a text cannot be altered physically, it does not necessarily follow that it cannot be changed, fundamentally, even to render it virtually unrecognisable, by the act of reading. As de Certeau pointed out, an author can never be sure that the text s/he has written absolutely conveys the ideas intended, let alone that the reader will ‘read’ the text in the way s/he anticipated.

Who builds this barrier constituting the text as a sort of island that no reader can ever reach? This fiction condemns consumers to subjection because they are always going to be guilty of infidelity or ignorance when confronted by the mute “riches” of the treasury thus set aside. The fiction of the “treasury” hidden in the work, a sort of strong-box full of meaning, is obviously not based on the productivity of the reader, but on the social institution that overdetermines his relationship with the text. […] Readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves.\textsuperscript{74}

Ultimately, then, like Hoggart and Jauss, the questions asked by de Certeau in The Practice of Everyday Life, shift the focus from the original producers of cultural products to the assimilation, absorption or rejection of these by the consumer-producer:

Once the images broadcast by television and the time spent in front of the TV set have been analysed, it remains to be asked what the consumer makes of these images and during these hours. The thousands of people who buy a health magazine, the customers in a supermarket, the practitioners of urban space, the consumers of newspaper stories and legends – what do they make of what they “absorb,” receive and pay for? What do they do with it?\textsuperscript{75}

This thesis wishes to give weight to both the production and the intention underwriting the production as well as the consumption of cultural products; above all, though, it wishes to approach production-consumption, intention-reception as mutually creative dialectical processes, whereby the one responds to and impacts upon the other.

\textsuperscript{71} de Certeau M The Practice of Everyday Life p. xxi.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid. p. xxi-xxii.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid. p. 166.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid. p. 171-4.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. p. 31.
Sources

Perhaps a weakness of de Certeau's argument lies in the fact that unlike Hoggart, his thesis operated almost exclusively at a theoretical level; less attention was paid to an empirical testing of his methodology. This thesis will analyse Venetians' creative consumption of fascistised cultural products through the use of source material which fall broadly into three categories: press reports and features; municipal and governmental archival documents; and private writings, diaries and memoirs.

Journalists “in hobnailed boots”?\textsuperscript{77} The press in fascist Venice

The newspapers and journals of the fascist ventennio were naturally subject to both external and self-censorship. The regime extended its control over the apparatus of mass communication through the Press Office, initially responsible to the Council of Ministers, which morphed in 1935 into the Ministry for Press and Propaganda (extended and renamed as the Ministry for Popular Culture in 1937). Following the establishment of the ministry, newspapers received daily editorial guidelines or \textit{nota di servizio} and journalists were charged with practising \textit{autocensura} to help align their output to the official line.\textsuperscript{78} It would be too simplistic,

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\textsuperscript{76} One exception to this was his exploration of \textit{la perruque} as a tactic employed in everyday life which allows individuals to claim back some degree of power for dominant institutions. The term refers to the practice by which a worker borrows – or steals – time, but not goods, from their employer for their own purposes; in contemporary society this might correspond to employees using their work computer to send personal emails or do internet shopping. The worker does not make any material profit from this enterprise, nor are they stealing any material goods, but \textit{la perruque} is nevertheless a means by which the worker can make a creative choice and subvert, if only temporarily, the power of the dominant authority. See de Certeau \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life} pp. 24-28.

\textsuperscript{77} The expression is Isnenghi’s. Isnenghi M \textit{L’Italia del Fascio} p. 282.

\textsuperscript{78} For example, one such \textit{nota di servizio}, read:

*The Duce’s speech can be commented upon; we will send you the comment. [...]\*

Do not say that the Agnelli son’s mishap took place whilst calling upon Mussolini. [...]\*

Do not concern yourselves in any way with the queues outside shops.

No lampooning and, even more, no campaign against women not wearing nylons.

The editors are invited to carefully scrutinise and, if appropriate, scrap the local gossip news columns which can give rise to rumours. For example, deaths resulting from sudden illness or of unknown causes. Limit the publishing of funeral announcements paid for by Senator Cremonesi to the part relative to the family, omitting the list of those who have joined with the family bereavement [...]\*

Completely ignore anything referring to the inquest into the deaths of the Rosselli brothers.

Do not concern yourselves with France.

Ignore France.

Define Hitler’s speech as historic.

Attack Roosevelt.

Give scarce and ironic attention to Mrs Roosevelt’s trip to England.

Continue to ignore the Pope’s speeches on Germany.

Review the book \textit{Il Catechismo del Fascismo} and comment upon the Party statute.

Do not use the word \textit{stirpe} [stock].

Write articles on the adoption of ‘Tu’.
however, to suggest that journalists on either national or regional papers only and always churned out faithful replications of the regime’s official line, whether diffused through the note di servizio or other methods; as Mario Isnenghi has pointed out, the journalist continued to occupy an ambiguous position which straddled state and civil society. Indeed, this blurring of the public and private roles of the journalist was acknowledged by the regime itself; to this end a Neapolitan journalist, Arturo Assante, asked to clarify and reconcile the public/private nature of journalism for the profession’s 1937-8 annuario, asserted that whilst the journalist remained a private “libero professionista” [free-lancer] and not a functionary or employee of the regime, s/he nevertheless carried out a “public work” which conferred upon them a set of responsibilities and a patriotic “ethical-political mission” of “national passion”. The writings of journalists in newspapers and journals under fascism must therefore be approached as spaces in which fascist ideas were not merely reflected but were constructed, reinterpreted and re-elaborated. Venetian journals, including Il Ventuno, the journal of the local Gruppo Universitario Fascista (GUF), Le Tre Venezie, initially published in 1925 in English under the auspices of the Volpi-led Compagnia Italiana Grandi Alberghi (CIGA), but within a year “Italianised and ‘venetianified’” as the official organ of the Federazione fascista veneziana and the municipally-run Rivista di Venezia, may well have been unremittingly supportive, at times sycophantic, towards the regime, but their writings nevertheless represented the regional component of a fascist discourse; the fruit of a creative process through which individual journalists interpreted and therefore brought to bear their own ideas and world-views, orthodox or not, on the regime’s ideological output. By way of example, the 1929 debates about ‘youth’ in Critica Fascista, the élite journal of the fascist hierarchy, differentiated between “real youth” and “fake youth” and between “young old people” and “old old people”, articulating a conception of

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Publish a boxed note against the use of ‘Lei’.

("Il discorso del Duce può essere commentato; il commento ve lo mandiamo noi. [...] Non si dica che la disgrazia al figlio di Agnelli è avvenuta allo scalo Mussolini.[...] Non occuparsi in alcun modo delle code davanti ai negozi. Nessun trafiletto e tanto meno nessuna campagna contro le donne senza calze. I direttori sono invitati a vagliare attentamente e a cestinare, se del caso, le notizie curiose di cronaca che possono far sorgere dicerie. Ad esempio le morti per malore improvviso e delle quali non si conosce la causa. Nel pubblicare l’annuncio funebre al sen. Cremonesi limitarsi all’elenco di coloro che si sono associati al lutto della famiglia [...] Ignorare completamente tutto quanto si riferisce all’inchiesta per l’uccisione dei fratelli Rosselli. Non interessarsi della Francia. Ignorare la Francia. Definire storico il discorso di Hitler. Attaccare Roosevelt. Scarso e ironico rilievo al viaggio della Signora Roosevelt in Inghilterra, Continuare a ignorare i discorsi del Papa sulla Germania. Fare la recensione del libro Il Catechismo del Fascismo e commentare lo statuto del Partito. Non usare la parola stirpe. Fare degli articoli sull’adozione del “Tu”. Pubblicare in palchetto una nota contro il “Lei”.)

This nota de servizio, for which, regrettably, no date was provided, was found among the papers of Ennio Talamini, which among other writings contained the note di servizio “which arrived daily on editors’ desks” and was reproduced in de Marco M Il Gazzettino. Storia di un quotidiano Venice, Marsilio, 1976, p. 84-5.
the youthful generation as a state of mind or *mentalité*, however, as this metaphysical understanding of spiritual youth was diffused down the command-chain and to the peripheries, the potential for distortion and different understandings was considerable. In the Venetian press, whilst some took on board the complexities of the metaphysical youth debate and recognised a need for dialogue and reciprocity among the generations, for others, the fascist mantra of “make way for the young” (*largo ai giovani*) was ‘understood’ as precisely that; a material polarisation, if not conflict, between those at opposing ends of the life-course.81

The Venetian press was no different from the national model in occupying this ambiguous space between regime hierarchy and ‘ordinary’ citizens, national and local, public and private. The two principal daily newspapers in Venice, the *Gazzetta di Venezia* and the *Gazzettino di Venezia*, were both privately owned; albeit their proprietors and editors were anything but hostile to fascism. The *Gazzetta di Venezia* is generally considered to have been the paper of the Venetian ‘elites’, whilst Venice’s other daily, the *Gazzettino*, was read more widely by the Venetian working class.82 This class-based assessment of the two Venetian dailies’ readership is reflected in the circulation figures of the two papers: whilst the *Gazzettino* from the close of the First World War regularly sold around 130,000-140,000 copies within the entire province of Venice, the *Gazzetta*, in keeping with its focus on the centro storico, had a much smaller (and diminishing) circulation – on average 4,000-6,000 copies daily, rising to 25,000 on Mondays thanks to the sporting coverage. However, by 1940, just two years before it was merged with the *Gazzettino*, the *Gazzetta*’s circulation had dropped to 2,000 copies.83 Both newspapers were broadly supportive of the fascist regime: the *Gazzetta* advocated a more D’Annunzian brand of fascism, exhibiting an almost mystical, spiritual promotion of Adriatic irredentism and expansion, though it remained an uncritical supporter of fascist initiatives in the city as its editor, Gino Damerini, juggled support for the alleato-rivale of fascism and for the political and social élite circle, of which he was a member, centred around Count Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata,

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81 For a discussion of the debates about ‘youth’ in *Critica Fascista* see Passerini L “Youth as a metaphor for social change: Fascist Italy and America in the 1950s” in Levi G & Schmitt JC eds. (Volk C trans.) *A History of Young People in the West. Vol 2 Stormy Evolution to Modern Times* Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1997, pp. 281-316. These different and at times contradictory layers of understanding within the Venetian debates relating to youth and age are discussed in much greater in chapter 2 of this thesis.


The Gazzettino, owned and edited from its foundation in 1887 by Giampietro Talamini until his death in 1934, was more clerical than the Gazzetta but remained nevertheless pro-fascist; the call for the establishment of a Venetian fascio was published in the Gazzettino on 15 April 1919 and the newspaper’s offices in Palazzo Falcon provided the meeting place, days later, for the founding reunion of the Venetian fascio. Although during the 1920s its editor-owner had sought to steer clear of the factionalism of Venetian fascism, the paper maintained a very positive line towards the Duce and the regime. This was strengthened further in 1936 when, after the death of the charismatic elder Talamini in 1934, the editorship of the paper was removed from his son, Ennio, and given over to the ardently fascist Giorgio Pini, veteran editor of the Bologna daily, Il Resto del Carlino, and sub-editor of Il popolo d’Italia. In 1938 the Talamini family were forced to sell the paper; it was bought by a number of holding groups, including that of Giuseppe Volpi.

A slightly more equivocal position with respect to the regime was taken by the weekly Catholic newspaper, la Settimana Religiosa. The Settimana Religiosa, the official publication of the diocese of Venice and the Venetian branch of Azione Cattolica, was inaugurated in 1925 after a series of abortive attempts to set up a weekly paper that would represent the Venetian patriarchy during the early years of the decade. The paper ran until 1945. Edited initially by a priest, from 1928 to 1930 it was directed by a member of the laity, Serafino Audisio; upon

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84 Giuseppe Volpi, born into a Venetian patrician family, made his fortune as an industrialist before turning to politics. Elected president of the Comitato per la mobilitazione industriale during the First World War (during which time he was principally responsible for the industrial development of Porto Marghera, as a centre for chemical and petroleum processing plants, on the mainland across the water from the islands of Venice, in which he was also a major investor), he then formed part of the Italian delegation at both the Treaty of Versailles and the Treaty of Rapallo. In 1921, Volpi was made governor of Tripolitania and between May 1925 and July 1928 acted as Mussolini’s Minister of Finance and presided over the establishment of ‘quota novanta’. Removed from his ministerial post for commenting critically on Mussolinian finance policy, during the 1930s Volpi acted as unofficial ‘doge of Venice’, directing much of the political and economic as well as cultural activity of the city including the Biennale exhibitions and the annual film festival. See Reberschak M ‘Gli uomini capitali: il ‘gruppo veneziano’ (Volpi, Cini e gli altri)” in Isenhengh M & Woolf S eds. Storia di Venezia vol 2, pp. 1255-1311. 

85 There is disagreement within the source material as to the exact date of the founding of the Venetian fascio. Raffaele Vicentini, in his published diary of the early days of fascism, maintained that inaugural appeal for the founding of the fascio was published on 10 March 1919 – thirteen days before the Piazza San Sepolcro rally in Milan. (Vicentini R A Il movimento fascista veneto attraverso il diario di un squadrista Venice, p. 1) However, given that no appeal has been found in the archival copies of that day’s Gazzettino, this study takes 15 April 1919 as the founding-date of the Venetian fascio, in accordance with Giulia Albanese’s account of the early development of Venetian fascism, citing an article entitled “Associazione combattenti” which appeared in the Gazzettino on that day. Albanese G Alle origini del fascismo. La violenza politica a Venezia 1919-1922 Padua, il poligrafo, 2001, p. 25.

86 De Marco M Il Gazzettino. Storia di un quotidiano passim.
Audisio’s death in early 1930 the editorship was taken over by don Alfonso Bisacco. 87 Though the paper inevitably maintained a predominantly positive position towards the policies and ideals of the regime – not least because of the common cause often found between fascist and traditional Catholic values – this support was not unconditional. Driven by a conviction of the centrality of Christian values and teachings to the smooth-functioning of state and society, the *Settimana Religiosa* applauded the 1929 Conciliation between church and state, corporativism, and the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 as initiatives in which the fascist political line converged with the Christian, even adopting a vocabulary similar to that of fascist texts. 88 However, the paper significantly deviated from the 'official' line and took umbrage with the regime in matters where Catholic and fascist Italy did not overlap; the failure to observe the Sunday rest, the persistence of "immoral" balls and dances, some even organised by the fascist authorities, and, more importantly, demographic policies conceived along racial (rather than Christian) lines, were all criticised in the pages of the *Settimana Religiosa*. 89

*Archival records: The memories of the regime*

The 'official' sources used in this study are taken from the collections of the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome and the holdings of the Venetian municipal government in the Archivio municipale “la Celestia” in Venice. Such sources represent the authorised version(s) of the fascist project; the self-conscious fascist forms and cultural products that the regime wished to present to its citizens. To this end, this study makes use of officially-produced sources in order to reveal how, and through which mediating narratives, the fascist authorities intended to suffuse Venetian and religious festivals, eating and drinking practices, clothing fashions and funereal rituals with ‘fascistised’ meaning. In addition, on rare occasion and only with care, these archival records – which, for example, sometimes reproduced letters sent by individuals either to the central or regional fascist authorities 90 – can also bear fruitful insights into the

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88 Giovanni Vian noted the prevalence of terms such as ‘plebiscito’, ‘totalitarismo’ and ‘razza’ in the language adopted by the *Settimana Religiosa*. He does caution, though, that the use of the term ‘razza’ was made with an explicit differentiation from the radicalised use of the term associated with Nazi Germany. Ibid. pp. 86-7.

89 The chapter of this thesis which deals with popular festivals and celebrations demonstrates the limitations of the *Settimana Religiosa*’s support for fascist demographic policies, which, though broadly supportive, did not extend to the advocacy of policies which it saw as informed by racist thinking and dismissed as a “Germanic aberration”. See also Vian G “La stampa cattolica e il fascismo a Venezia negli anni del consenso” pp. 85-115.

90 This was the case with the letter sent by Peppino Ranieri to Achille Starace in 1932 in protest at what he perceived as the usurpation of the rightful role of the squadrista veterans by Giovani Fascisti at the regime’s 10-
collective and individual reception of fascist culture and ideology. However, we must employ
great caution in using such highly selected sources, remembering that any 'nuggets' of
reception found in official sources came to be there via the intervention of a third party; hence
they are more likely to throw up politically involved or committed individuals, whether actively
pro- or anti-fascist, who would be more likely to come to the attention, intentionally or otherwise,
of the authorities. To forget this proviso or to gloss over the difficulties inherent in sources
produced by or for the regime means to run the risk of presenting an unrepresentative account
of the experiences of fascism, which ignores the vast majority of ordinary Italians whose
individual day-to-day lives went unnoticed, but not untouched, by the regime.91 In the end,
given that it is these individuals, who were predominantly not politically active and therefore
figure far less in the archival records, who form the main focus of this study, the principal
benefit of officially-produced sources must remain in their capacity to help us decipher the
evolution and mutations of the regime's intentions.

'Ego-documents'92

By far the most useful source in terms of accessing Venetians' 'reception' of fascist cultural
products are their own writings – in letters, diaries, memoirs and so on. As such, this study
makes wide recourse to the diaries and memoirs of individuals (both children and adults) living

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91 Here, I am thinking particularly of the work of Simona Colarizi, whose unconvincing defence of the use of 'official'
sources, including police, prefects', local party secretaries' and informants' reports in order to gage the evolution of
'popular opinion' and consent towards the regime during the 1930s, is discussed earlier in this introduction (see
footnote 18). On occasion, the use of sources of this type has led other historians to overlook the ambiguities and
nuances of individual beliefs and behaviour, such as in the opening episode of RJB Bosworth's "Everyday
Mussolinianism" which made extensive use of confinati reports, discussed at the beginning of this introduction.
92 The term 'egodocument' was first coined by the Dutch historian, Jaques Presser, in the early 1950s as part of
his officially commissioned study of the experience of Dutch Jews during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands
and was brought into Anglophone historiography by Peter Burke in the mid-1990s. (Burke P "Representations of
the Self from Petrarch to Descartes" in Porter R ed. Rewriting the Self. Histories from the Middle Ages to the
Present London, Routledge, 1996 pp. 17-19.) For the purposes of the present study, documents like diaries,
memos and personal letters, which constitute self-representations are referred to as ego-documents in order to
avoid the potential difficulty associated with alternative labels for this type of sources, such as 'private', given that
essays, school diaries and even memoirs are written for a particular audience or audiences, no matter how limited
this audience may be. Although the potential audience(s) – imagined, intended and actual – of these ego-sources
must be borne in mind, it remains both reasonable and beneficial to distinguish such source material, "in which an
ego intentionally or unintentionally discloses, or hides itself", from the more public and often officially-produced
press reports and governmental/administrative records as a set of sources that afford greater access to the more,
if not exclusively, private spheres of individual lives. For a discussion of definitions and the value of ego-documents
see Dekker R ed. Egodocuments and History. Autobiographical Writing in its Social Context since the Middle
in Venice during the 1930s, many of which are held in the Archivio Diaristico Nazionale in Pieve Santo Stefano, on the Tuscan-Umbrian border. The richly detailed memoirs of, for example, the spirited popolana Rosa De Cilia, who endured material hardship, emotional suffering (including a series of miscarriages) and political violence at first in the newly-constructed residential zone for the Duce’s "young newly-weds with lots of children" on the island of Sant’Elena and later from the sestriere of Cannaregio on the peripheries of the centro storico or the teenage Vana Arnould, who lived near the Ponte de la Comenda in Castello and watched the fortunes of her "middle-class" family dwindle over the course of the decade, provide a fertile repository from which a picture of individuals’ responses to the intrusion of dictatorship into their daily lives can, at least in part, be reconstructed.

One sector of society on which a great deal of historians’ interest has been placed – in terms of the regime’s intentions, if not in relation to their responses to the attention directed towards them by fascism – is that of children. A good deal of research has been carried out into the efforts of Mussolini’s dictatorship through the education system and the Balilla organisation to fashion the young into new model fascists; far less attention has been channeled into an understanding of children’s reaction to the positing of their cohort-group as the vanguard of the fascist ‘revolution’. In part, this relative absence of historiographical material on children’s responses to fascism must be attributed to children’s comparative silence in the sources; little material exists which gives voice to youngsters’ perceptions, attitudes and behaviour, in their

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93 The traditional distinctions of Venetian social strata - patriziato, borghesia and popolano – have been employed throughout this thesis. De Cilia R, (Armani B ed.) Mi chiamo Rosa De Cilia ‘ai suoi comandi’ Archivio Diaristico Nazionale [henceforth ADN] MP/86. Rosa De Cilia grew up in Calle Mora, near the Campiello della Madoneta in Venice in a working-class household (her father worked as a carpenter). In 1926, De Cilia and her family had followed the ‘exodus’ of the ceti popolani from the Venetian centro storico and settled in the newly constructed residential zone on Sant’Elena, but returned to live in Cannaregio from Christmas 1932. The family later moved to the Casa Bianca area of the Lido. De Cilia’s family were convinced anti-fascists; a stance for which they often suffered physically. In her memoirs, De Celia recounted how her brother-in-law Andrì, was killed in 1931 “beaten because he didn’t want to become fascist”; her husband was threatened and humiliated by a group of Blackshirts for failing to display his fascist distintivo on the tenth anniversary of the march on Rome; and how her sixty-eight year old father, a ‘pipinoto’ – a lifelong supporter of the Catholic party of Don Sturzo – was severely beaten by a group of fascists in a bar on the Fondamente Nove (precise date not given) for having ridiculed the caposquadra. Rosa De Cilia (Armani B ed.) Mi chiamo Rosa De Cilia ‘ai suoi comandi’.

94 Arnould V Me g’ha conta la nonna ADN MP/And.

95 Historians who have attempted to map the regime’s policies towards the young include Mario Isnenghi, Maria Teresa Mazzatosta and Tracy Koon: Isnenghi M L’educazione dell’italiano. Il fascismo e l’organizzazione della cultura Bologna, Nuova Capelli, 1979; Mazzatosta TM, Il regime fascista tra educazione e propaganda 1935-43 Bologna, Capelli, 1978; Koon T, Believe Obey Fight. Political Socialisation of Youth in Fascist Italy 1922-43 Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1985. Following this, a handful of historians have begun to address the complexities of children’s reactions to fascism; see, for example, Adolfo Scotto di Luzio’s work, L’appropriazione imperfetta. Editori, biblioteche e libri per ragazzi durante il fascismo Bologna, Il mulino, 1996 and Patrizia Palumbo’s recent essay, “Orphans for the Empire. Colonial Propaganda and Children’s Literature during the Imperial Era” in Palumbo P ed. A Place in the Sun. Africa in Italian colonial culture from post-unification to the present. Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2003, pp. 225-251.
own words. To this end, the inclusion in this study of a collection of essays written in early 1935 by a number of Venetian children of primary-school age, affords a relatively rare, if not entirely unproblematic, opportunity to access the cultural reference points and world-views of Mussolini's intended 'milite dell'idea'.

Of course, like any other source, the use of 'egodocuments' is by no means free from inherent difficulties and caveats. Memoirs, naturally, must be read and deployed in one's research with the constant qualification that they are subject to the conscious and sub-conscious tricks of selective memory and hindsight. Furthermore, it is difficult to read individuals' writings, whether composed contemporaneously or following an interval of time, as representative of the beliefs or experience of a much wider group; but whilst this may limit the extent of the wider generalisations that the historian can draw from their reading of such sources, this is surely also where the strength of 'ego' sources resides, at least within the context of a study of everyday life. What this study wishes to place under the microscope, as it were, are the experiential or subjective aspects of dictatorship; from the moment that the lived experience of dictatorship is understood as subjective, it follows that the focus of this study must be fixed, at least in part, at the level of individuals. It is therefore these egodocuments – the diaries, memoirs, letters and essays – that provide greatest access to the protagonists of this study.

Venice: serenissima or dominante?

Both the time frame and location of this study have been chosen with care. In the first place, the temporal limits of this study – from 1929 until 1940 – can be seen to encompass the period of fascism as regime. By the close of the 1920s many of the features that marked the fascist political system and style of rule had been established. In terms of the structures of power this meant the systematic dismemberment of the liberal state: the removal of political opposition in parliament following the delitto Matteotti and subsequent 'Aventine' secession in 1924 and, two years later, the outlawing of non-fascist trade unions and leggi eccezionali which subordinated

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96 The essays are examined in chapter 2 of this thesis.
97 Most general accounts of Italian fascism accept this chronological demarcation; for example, RJB Bosworth, in his biography of Mussolini, separated chapters on 'The Man of Providence 1926-29' from 'Mussolini in his pomp 1929-32', identifying 'the triumphant deal with the Catholic church' as the principal factor which "seemed to translate Mussolini to a new summit of power" (Bosworth RJB Mussolini p. 241) whilst in his biography of the Duce, Denis Mack Smith had earlier declared 1929 Mussolini's 'Apotheosis' (Mack Smith D Mussolini London, Phoenix, 1998).
the individual to a politicised and state-controlled system of justice. The fascist ‘style’ of rule, meanwhile, was characterised by the establishment of the party institutions which played such an important role in mediating between the hierarchy and individuals’ lived experience of fascism: the ONB in April 1926, ONMI in December of that year, the OND (as an auxiliary organ of the party) in 1927; the beginning of the fascist ‘campaigns’ including the battles for grain (from 1925) and for births (from 1927); and, not least, the 1929 Conciliation regulating church-state relations. Together, the measures consolidated by the end of the decade signalled the formalisation of fascism in praxis. To this end, 1929 has been singled out by many historians, Renzo De Felice and Simona Colarizi at the fore, as the first year of the so-called ‘highpoint’ of the regime; the point at which the majority of Italians of all classes conferred their ‘consent’ upon the fascist regime. These ‘years of consent’ according to De Felice endured until the creation of the Italian empire in 1936 and were based not only on support for the fascist imperialist project but also, he maintained, on a sense of material security – this despite the creeping spread of economic depression in the early 1930s. Colarizi goes perhaps even further in her interpretation of the “svolta dittatoriale” after 1929; for her, it was only after fascism’s total elimination – sometimes physical – of opposition, of the possibility of freedom of expression, and therefore of the existence of anything approximating ‘public opinion’, and simultaneous construction of the apparatus of propaganda and persuasion that the regime could, at the end of the 1920s, maintain its power less through terror and the repression of dissent (though these did remain constant and prominent features of fascist rule) and more through the manufacture and maintenance of consent. Colarizi, who identified the appearance of initial fissures in the ‘consensus machine’ after the 1938 racial laws, took her inquiry into popular opinion up to the fall of fascism in July 1943. This thesis has taken 1940 as the natural end-point of its remit, on the understanding that the impact of total war on individuals’ daily lives was such (particularly in a city so vehemently dedicated to international tourism) that the account of Venetian’s everyday lived experience of the fascist regime during

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98 De Felice R Mussolini. Gli anni del consenso 1929-1936. In Venice, as for much of the peninsula in the early 1930s, ‘material security’ was certainly not a feature of life for most of the popolani of the centro storico. With the traditional artisanal industries of the centro storico in decline and even the largest firms on the island, including the Mulino Stucky and the Cotonificio Veneziano, feeling the impact of economic depression, unemployment in the city rose sharply; in just three years the number of Venetians out of work increased from 4,575 in 1928 to 13,172 in 1931. Fontana G L “L’economia” in Isnenghi M & Woolf S eds. Storia di Venezia vol 2, p. 1463. In 1931, the continual decreasing of salaries led to protests in the city. Magliaretta L “Le qualita della vita. Classi subalterne e ceti emergenti: socializzazione, lavoro e vita quotidiana nel Novecento passato e prossimo” in Franzina E ed. Venezia Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1986, p. 365. For a wider discussion of the economic backdrop of Venice in the 1930s, see chapter 4.

99 Colarizi S “Metodo e strumenti di rilevamento per un’indagine sull’opinione degli italiani sotto il regime” pp. 77-87.
its final war-years would be better served by a separate study. Whilst I would question De Felice and Colarizi's interpretation of the existence of a consensus for fascism, which almost miraculously melted away either after 1938 or with the coming of war in June 1940, in favour of a more subtle understanding of the nature of 'ordinary' Italians' attitudes towards the regime, it is worthwhile taking up this accepted timeframe of 1929-1940 as the period of 'mature' dictatorship, not least in order to better challenge the findings of the proponents of the thesis of consent.

A history of everyday life is necessarily an experiential and subjective history of individuals and as such naturally lends itself to a micro or local study. In the case of this research, the city of Venice (understood as the islands which, from 1926, fell within the jurisdiction of the Venetian comune – besides the Rialtine islands of the centro storico, also the Lido, the Giudecca, Pellestrina, Murano and Burano – although areas on the terraferma, such as the exponentially growing Mestre and Porto Marghera, which also fell within the comune’s remit, will also at times be comparatively addressed) has been selected.100 Of course, the geopolitical, historical, economic, religious and cultural make-up of every city renders each unique – and this is abundantly clear in the case of the unrivalled artistic and architectural patrimony and maze of canals and calli that constitute Venice, capital of the Serenissima republic and empire, mythologised simultaneously as the embodiment of stable civic government and aristocratic hot-bed of moral decadence and frivolity. Given this, it cannot be argued that a study of the intrusion of dictatorship into the daily lives of the inhabitants of Venice can be somehow extrapolated into a theory or model of the everyday experience of dictatorship more generally. Instead, Venice offers us the opportunity to examine the ways in which a very particular confluence of geographical, cultural, historical, political and religious streams served, to borrow Ruth Ben-Ghiat’s phrase, both the “making and the unmaking” of the fascist project.101

In the first place, the internal topography of the Venetian islands dictated an unusually blurred distinction between public and private in Venetians' social relationships. Poorer families would often inhabit the ground floor space – usually humid, dark, airless and susceptible to the

100 Mestre and the mainland areas of Venice are addressed only tangentially in this study because, given the rapid social and economic transformation the area underwent during the early twentieth century, it would not be possible to complete a full inquiry into fascist cultural production and aesthetics of reception in both Mestre and the Venetian centro storico in the space and time limits of a PhD thesis. What’s more, work has already been carried out to examine the complex and changing relationship between the two distinct spheres of the province; see especially Cascarini M Venezia Mestre, Mestre Venezia: Luoghi, parole e percorsi di un’identità Portogruaro, Nuova dimensione, 2002.

101 Ben-Ghiat R Fascist Modernities p.15.
difficulties of *aqua alta* – of a building whose upper floors would be given over to homes for the middle classes.\(^{102}\) In her entertaining and revealing memoir of life as a confirmed member of the Venetian social elite during "the final years of the Lion", Maria Damerini – wife of Gino Damerini, editor of the *Gazzetta di Venezia* – remarked upon the implications of Venice's unique geography of canals, *campi* and *calli* on the social networks and public/private divide in the lives of its inhabitants.\(^{103}\) What prompted this discussion was her recollection of an event which took place in early February 1930 and which had the entire city talking and divided according to *campanile* or local loyalties; a duel between the *Gazzetta's* lawyer, Raffaello Levi, and Commander Augusto Tesi, the result of a supposed encounter at Venice train station bar between Signora Levi and Commander Tesi.

It had all begun sordidly, but with the entrance of well known witnesses into the affair (Professor Francesco Carnelutti, Prince of the Forum with a capital "P", a professor of law at Padua University who had great resonance and a following of fame which extended beyond the border; Admiral Salvatore Denti di Piraino, himself a personality of great lustre; Alessandro Marcello del Majno, in his time a university professor, poet and scientist; the officers Solari; Leone Rocca; Corrado Cini di Pinzano; Lombardi; and the lawyers Brunetta and Radaelli) interest had been reawakened. The city was divided, or rather it had turned, for the most part sympathetically, towards the Venetian of the two. A question of *campanile*.

Besides, in the city, with its numerous cafes (many more than there are now), its obligatory meeting-places, its special formation so that every place can become a stage-set, the utterances of a passer-by in the *Merceria*, easily chanced upon by another passer-by, elbow to elbow, can rapidly spread even a tiny piece of news in any place; a city where everybody, then, knew one another, from the newspaper-seller to the *podestà*, from the boatman to the patrician, from the lace-maker (who, with the pearl-threader and tobacco factory-worker formed the line-up of the Venetian female workforce) to the princess, and which seemed to have been made precisely so that every even private happening, once outside the four walls

\(^{102}\) As one contemporary commentator remarked, "in the peripheries as in the centre, always and everywhere, the patrician's palace is nearby the citizen's residence and the commoner's house" ("alla periferia come al centro, sempre e dovunque, il palazzo del patrizio è vicino al palazzetto del cittadino e alla casa del popolano") Trincanato E R *Venezia minore* (Milan, 1948), cited in Casellato A "I sestieri popolari" p. 1590.

\(^{103}\) Damerini M (Isnenghi M ed.) *Gli ultimi anni del Leone*. Maria Damerini's memoir provides a fascinating and, for the social-cultural historian, very fruitful account of "the public and private life of elite Venice [...] in uniform and in evening dress". The memoir, based on an assiduously kept *aide-mémoire* of people and events written at the time, came to be published in the late 1980s as an unexpected result of conversations between Maria Damerini and Mario Isnenghi, who ultimately edited and provided the introduction for the memoir. Isnenghi recalled in the memoir's introduction: "As she once again put to me how unjust and inexplicable it seemed to her that not one of the many cultural institutions for which her husband had expended so much energy had thought to republish one of his works, it came out little by little and almost by accident that Maria Damerini herself had something of her own tucked away in a drawer. She would talk and remember above all the Venice of the interwar years which remains clearly fixed in her mind, and at a certain point she hinted that during all of those years she had kept a kind of *aide-mémoire* of people and events. Then, at different times, over more than one occasion, that simple confusion of memories took shape, part memoir, part narrative. And it was important to her, because it seemed to her impossible that so many faces and meetings, feelings and actions – so different and almost unthinkable today – should be swept into oblivion in this long post-war period of degeneration and forgetting; but not so important that she didn't show her disappointment when, unexpectedly, it was revealed to be easier to find an editor for Maria than to re-find one for Gino Damerini" See Mario Isnenghi's introduction to *Gli ultimi anni del Leone* p.12.
of the home, became a public event. So it was with the Levi duel: the whole city took an interest.104

Everyday life in Venice under the fascist regime, then, had a peculiarity all of its own. Particularly for those opposed to the regime the narrowness of the city's calli, jumbled buildings and the parochialism of its sestieri, meant that any division between the way one behaved and spoke in public and in private was at best indistinct and ambiguous. Such was the case in the middle-class and "privately antifascist" family of Vana Arnould, who lived near the Ponte della Comenda in Castello. Vana, a teenager in the early 1930s, wrote in her memoir of the impact of the erosion of private space on her family's behaviour.

When the news of the presence of the Nandi family [pro-fascist relatives of the Arnoulds] at a vast rally arrived in Venice, the first to mobilise themselves with a full load of critical indignation was Bianca [Vana's mother]. At this she started shrieking and Lino [Vana's father] ran to close the windows, because it took just the breath of a passing fascist zealot to bring a heap of trouble. Not that he didn't agree with her disapproval, just imagine, but he was more prudent and then he expected nothing more of the Nandi on a political level.105

In Venice, then, our notion of the public sphere must be informed by Habermas' argument of the transformation of the public sphere, as a result of processes of advanced capitalism, modernisation and fascism, whereby the ideal-type public sphere – a location developed by the liberal bourgeoisie of North-western Europe during the eighteenth century where free expression and assembly allowed for the cultivation of an independent 'public opinion' which negotiated the space between the state and society – was co-opted during the twentieth

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104 "Tutto era cominciato in sordina, ma con l'ingresso nella faccenda di testimoni molto noti (il professore Francesco Camelutti, principe del Foro con la "P" maiuscola, professore di Diritto all'Università di Padova con risonanza grandissima e un seguito di fama che andava oltre i confini, l'ammiraglio Salvatore Denti di Piraino, esso stesso personaggio di gran lustro, Alessandro Marcello del Majno, a sua volta professore universitario, poeta e scienziato, gli ufficiali Solari, Leone Rocca, Corrado Cini di Pianzano, Lombardi, gli avvocati Brunetta e Radaelli), l'interesse s'era risvegliato. La città s'era divisa o meglio s'era volta per gran parte, con simpatia, verso il veneziano dei due. Questione di campanile. D'altronde la città con i numerosi caffè (molti più di quanti siano oggi), i suoi ritrovi obbligati, la sua conformazione speciale per cui ogni luogo può diventare un palcoscenico, la frase di un passante in Merceria, facilmente capitata da un altro passante gomito a gomito, può portare rapidamente una notizia anche spicciola in ogni luogo; una città dove tutti, allora, si conoscevano, dal giornalista al podestà, dal barcaiolo al patrizio, dalla merlettaia (che con l'imperaressa la perlaia, la tabacchina, formava la sciera operaia femminile veneziana), alla principessa, pareva fatta apposta perché ogni avvenimento anche privato, appena uscito dai quattro muri dell'abitazione, divenisse un caso pubblico. Così fu del duello Levi: tutta la città se ne interessò." Damerini noted that the duel ended satisfactorily for all; Levi emerged with a light injury (to add to his war wound) and honour intact, whilst Signora Levi divorced her husband and subsequently married Commander Tesi shortly after the duel took place. Damerini M Gli ultimi anni del Leone. p. 52.

105 "Quando la notizia della presenza [de 'i Nandi'] ad una adunata oceanica arrivava a Venezia, la prima a mobilitarsi con tutto il suo carico di indignazione critica era la Bianca. Allora strilleva e Lino correva a chiudere le finestre, perché bastava la soffiata di un passante animato da zelo fascista per passare un sacco di guai. Non che lui non fosse d'accordo nel biasimare, figurarsi, ma era più prudente e poi dei Nandi sul piano politico non si aspettava niente di meglio." Arnould V Me g'ha contà la nonna p. 202.
century as an arena for mass communication and increasingly encroached upon by the state. In Fascist Venice, the conditions for the ideal-type public sphere – freedom of assembly and expression – which would then be able to perform the role of overseeing and encouraging transparency in the workings of the state, were simply not present. The idea of the Venetian ‘public sphere’, then, must be stripped of any connotation of a mediating realm able to hold the government to account and must instead be used to denote the spaces into which the institutions of the state and civil society were able to make their presence and influence felt. What’s more, given the peculiar topography and social networks of the city as well as the regime’s desire to reach into the more ‘private’ realms of home and family, the ‘public’ must be seen to begin on the doorstep and the street, if not even within the home.

Thus, the question of the blurring of the distinction between public and private – or rather the infiltration of the public into the private – was not simply one of physicality. That the inhabitants of the centro storico lived virtually on top of one another had implications not just for the spreading of news, but also for employment strategies, assistance networks, and social boundaries. The historian Marco Fincardi, for example, has spoken of the enduring presence of strong bonds of a patemalistic-corporativistic nature within Venetian society, a legacy of its Serenissima past. These paternalistic relationships, linking the residual patrician and ‘new’ governing elites with local popolani according to sestiere and even campanile, remained well into the twentieth century and could perhaps even be seen to constitute a ‘moral economy’ such as that described for eighteenth-century England by E.P. Thompson. Maria Damerini’s identification of the networks linking newspaper seller to podestà, boatsman to

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107 This mixing of classes, living not just in the same districts or streets but even in the same buildings, led to the development of peculiar social networks in Venice. Leopoldo Magliaretta, for example, noted the increasingly complex stratification of certain trades in the city, especially those linked to the tourist industry, through which a ‘camorra’ controlled access to professional opportunities. Maglieretta identified the gondoliers and boatsmen in particular as occupying a vital mediating role, monitoring and directing access to the money of tourist industry in exchange for a cut of up 30%. Magliaretta “Le qualità della vita” p. 368.

108 The Venetian social and political elite of the 1930s included members of old patrician families, especially the Foscari family, and also the new industrialist entrepreneurs, of whom the prime example must be Giuseppe Volpi. The elaborate social scene of these elites is described by Maria Damerini in her memoir of 1930s Venice: *Gli ultimi anni del Leone*.

patrician, lacemaker to princess testifies to the endurance of such patrician-clientelist networks.¹¹⁰

From the cosmopolitan members of the international set who disembarked their cruise-ships at the city port or even flew into Italy’s first civilian airport built at San Niccolò on the Lido to take their fill of the mix of ‘high’ culture, elegant social events and the latest leisure activities which Venice and especially the Lido had to offer to the far less wealthy Italian families who arrived in droves on the treni popolari, ready to tramp the de rigueur route down to the Piazza via the Rialto and back again, the constant presence of tourists in Venice ensured that the city functioned as a ‘cultural showpiece’ for the Mussolinian regime, both nationally and internationally. That the city was increasingly given over to ‘foreign’ visitors did not, however, please everyone in Venice. Since the turn of the century, the city’s governing and commercial elites had been polarised between those who promoted the idea of Venice as a city-museum, dedicated principally to tourism and those who envisaged a dynamic ‘modern’ Venice, not a theme-park mired in the past, but a city which would build thriving new industrial and commercial enterprises, worthy of its illustrious heritage. The discourse fuelled by Piero Foscari¹¹¹ on the Venetian Consiglio comunale and the challenges laid down by, amongst others, Marinetti’s futurists who infamously launched their 1910 manifesto in the city – literally, from the top of the campanile in St Mark’s square – railing against the decadence of Venice and its reduction to a stage-set for tourists and lovers and calling for a new Venice (though a vision based on the city’s past) which, using the tools of modernity, would once again dominate the

¹¹⁰ Damerini M Gli ultimi anni del Leone. p. 52.
¹¹¹ Piero Foscari might be considered the unofficial ‘Doge’ of Venice of the early twentieth century, whose ducal cap was later taken up by his long-time friend, Giuseppe Volpi, in the 1920s. From the illustrious patrician family, Piero Foscari with his wife, Elisabetta Widmann Rezzonico, herself the last member of a rich patrician clan, remained at the heart of the elite political and social life of the city in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Elected to the Venetian consiglio comunale continually between 1899 and 1919, and a confirmed member of the ‘Venetian group’ (see footnote 113) Foscari was well placed to dominate the debates among the city elite between those who wished for a return to Venice’s traditional insularity and those who instead envisaged a city of dynamic industrial expansion. Foscari placed himself at the head of those calling for a new, dynamic Venice which would embrace the technological and industrial developments of modernity; in 1904, for example, he proposed the vast extension of the city’s port. Foscari also aligned himself with the emerging nationalists and irredentists (particularly of Dalmatia) of the early decades of the twentieth century; he attended the founding conference of the Associazione Nazionalista Italiana (see footnote 126) in 1910 and presided over the 1912 conference, became firm friends with Gabriele D’Annunzio during the latter’s stay at the Casetta Rossa during the Great War and allowed his palace to be used as the operational headquarters for assisting D’Annunzio’s 1919 irredentist expedition to Fiume. The failure to annex Fiume to Italy, confirmed by the Treaty of Rapallo signed by Volpi and bitterly opposed by Foscari, coincided with Foscari’s political decline in Venice, where he died in 1923. Pignatelli G et al eds., Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani vol. 49, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana (Treccani), 1997 pp. 338-340.
Adriatic, “the great Italian lake”112 – was taken up towards the close of the Great War by the group of industrialists orbiting the central figures of Giuseppe Volpi and Vittorio Cini.113 Their plan for the city’s future would allow both visions of Venice to co-exist side by side.

Piloted by the Volpi-Cini led gruppo veneziano in 1917 as the Great War drew to a close, the rapid development of chemical, metallurgical and heavy industrial plants at Porto Marghera, just a short stretch of water away from Venice, on the mainland facing out towards the lagoon grew so exponentially that twenty years later its plants provided employment for 15% of the province, and seemed to answer those who had criticised the city’s failure to embrace modernity.114 The industrial development at Porto Marghera, however, did not prevent the centro storico’s increasing dedication to culture and tourism; indeed the continuity and separation of the ‘two Venices’ – industrial and cultural-touristic – achieved through the transference of industrial development to the mainland, with the consequent ‘exodus’ of Venetian popolani to the newly constructed residential zones in Mestre, leaving the Venetian islands free for the cultural pursuits of international mondanità, was expressly desired by some local elites.115 Neither did the development of chemical, petroleum and metallurgical plants at Porto Marghera do much to alleviate the material suffering being experienced by working-class Venetians, exacerbated by the decline in the traditional industries of the centro storico in the 1920s and early 1930s; the

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113 Vittorio Cini (1885-1977), originally from Ferrara, was the other principal protagonist, along with Volpi, of the collection of industrial entrepreneurs and magnates based in the northeast corner of Italy of the interwar years who came to be known as the ‘Venetian group’. The Venetian group’s investments in hydroelectricity, with the Società Adriatica di Elettricità (SADE), and in high-end tourism through the Compagnia Italiana di Grandi Alberghi (CIGA), which owned the two most luxurious hotels on the Lido, the Excelsior and Des Bains, brought them to particular prominence both nationally and internationally, following the Great War. Cini’s own financial interests, on which he built his fortune, lay mainly in the maritime construction and insurance sector, giving him control over much of the commercial traffic in the eastern Mediterranean; his near hegemonic control over the Venetian maritime industry is demonstrated by the fact that in 1931, Cini occupied positions in thirty-three firms – in eight as president, in one as vice-president and advisor in twenty-four. In terms of Cini’s role in public affairs, in 1934 he became senator (though he very rarely participated in the Senate’s proceedings) and two years later was entrusted with organising the planned 1942 Esposizione Universale in Rome, known as E42. In 1940, with the E42 plans shelved due to the outbreak of war, he became Count Cini de Monselice. See Reberschak M “Gli uomini capitali” pp. 1255-1311.

114 Fontana G L “L’economia” p. 1461.

115 Both Maurizio Reberschak and Giovanni Luigi Fontana noted that this intent to separate the ‘two Venices’ – industrial Venice and cultural-touristic Venice was voiced among many of the Venetian elite in this period. Vittorio Cini, for example, made the suggestion at a sitting of the Consiglio provinciale dell’economia corporativa in 1935 that Marghera, the zone for “that permanently unemployed sector of the worker population” (“quella parte di popolazione operaia permanente disoccupata”), would be able to provide the capital for the revitalisation of the artistic and cultural patrimony of Venice, allowing it to reassert itself as a “scholarly city par excellence” (“città degli studi par eccellenza”). See Reberschak M “L’economia” in ed. E Franzina Venezia p. 298 and Fontana, “L’economia” p. 1468.
majority of the new industrial workforce was drawn not from the Venetians of the centro storico, but selected predominantly from the ranks of peasant men and women who commuted to Porto Marghera from the rural provincial hinterland. As a consequence unemployment in the city rose sharply in the early 1930s.

Thus, whilst wealthy Venetians mingled with Hollywood starlets, minor European aristocrats and moneyed bourgeoisie in the palazzi lining the Grand Canal and tennis courts and private beaches of the Lido, many working-class Venetians faced quite different daily encounters. Damp and unsanitary housing stock, piled one atop the other and separated by canals into which the effluence of the city's inadequate sewerage network poured, coupled with rising unemployment led to widespread poverty (in 1917 30,000 of the city's population of 160,000 lived below the poverty line) and the prevalence of cholera, malaria, typhoid and TB. Social cohesion, dealt a severe blow by the emptying of the city by over 100,000 people following the disastrous defeat at Caporetto, was then complicated by high levels of postwar immigration into the city, including that of Friulian women entering domestic service in the homes of the patrician and middle-classes, who maintained strong links within their own communities but were less integrated into the pre-existing "intense bonds of solidarity and locality". Still, during the biennio rosso fierce and violent encounters between rossi and neri occurred, particularly around the flash-points of Campo Santa Margherita, Via Garibaldi and Venice's popular districts of Castello and Cannaregio. Despite the, at times, intense violence between socialists and...
fascists, the Venetian biennio rosso saw relatively few factory occupations and was even, according to Alessandro Casellato, increasingly characterised by a transference of allegiance from ‘red’ to ‘black’.121 Beyond ‘red’ and black’, the strength of ‘white’ or clerical support was not inconsiderable, though more so in the Venetian province on the mainland and the Veneto region than in the centro storico. Although polarised between those aligned with the moderate anti-socialist ideals of the patriarch and the old Opera dei Congressi, launched in Venice in 1874, and those who fell behind the agrarian Catholic social organisations of the Leghe Bianche and Case Rurali, in the October 1920 elections in Venice the winning coalition by 12,615 votes to the 11,109 of the PSI (who had been the first party in both the city and province since the previous year’s elections) was an alliance of the clerical Partito Popolare Italiana (PPI), liberals and fascists.122

Venice’s past, both recent and remote, helps explain the particular brand of fascism and the positioning adopted by the city’s fascio in the ‘first hour’ of Mussolini’s movement. The ever-present memory of the Serenissima’s empire in the eastern Adriatic and, more recently, the city’s proximity to the front line during the war and the use of Venice as the launch-pad of the Fiume ‘adventure’ in 1919 pushed the city’s first fascists towards a D’Annunzian and irredentist version of ‘adriatic fascism’.123 The Venetian fascio di combattimento, the second to be formed in April 1919 following Mussolini’s rallying call in Piazza San Sepolcro the previous 23 March, was characterised by its commitment to anti-bolshevism, anti-internationalism and above all to a nationalist moral sentiment, arising from the experience of war, of the need to redress Italy’s supposed degeneration; as such the early fascist movement in the laguna centred more upon an urban and (initially) anti-bourgeois vision based on the legacy of Fiume than on the concrete programmes of worker demands and agrarian ideals of the rural fasci.124 The first leader of the Venetian fascio, Piero Marsich, supported D’Annunzio’s irredentist intransigence after the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo; in so doing he took up a position counter to that of Mussolini,

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121 For example, in April 1922 on the ‘red’ island of Murano, home to the city’s glass-blowers, the socialist branch moved, to a man, over to the fascio. (p. 1583.) Notwithstanding this, Casellato affirmed that in a city full of natural ‘hiding-paces’ – shadowy sottoporteghi and “corti sconce” [little known short-cuts] – those who remained socialist or at least anti-fascist in conviction could find refuge and the like-minded without too much difficulty, notably in many of the city’s osterie, the traditional meeting-places of the popolani. Casellato A “I sestieri popolari” pp. 1596-1607.

122 Franzina E ed. Venezia p163


124 Ibid. p. 1315.
and indeed some saw Marsich as a machiavellian pretender to the fascist throne.\textsuperscript{125} However, Marsich's prominence within the national Fascist movement (he sat of the central committee of \textit{Fasci} from October 1919 until March 1922) was short-lived. Mirroring the defeat of 'urban' by 'agrarian' fascism, Marsich's control over the Venetian fascio waned following his unsuccessful opposition to Mussolini's advocacy of the pacification pact and the transformation of the \textit{fasci di combattimento} from an anti-establishment movement of dynamism and violence to a political, parliamentary party in November 1921. However, although Marsich was replaced as leader of the Venetian fascist\textsuperscript{126} by Giovanni Giuriati\textsuperscript{126} and fascism-as-movement was defeated by fascism-as-political-party, and later as-regime, 'fascismo lagunare' nevertheless retained its irredentist character, albeit, following the extension of the hegemonic influence of Volpi and the interests of the industrial and notable elites he represented over the Venetian fascist, divested of its anti-bourgeois tinge.\textsuperscript{127}

Over the course of the fascist ventennio, this relationship of mutual support interlacing the old Venetian elites on the one hand and new fascist leadership on the other continued unabated. For example, the first fascist podestà of Venice, Pietro Orsi, appointed in 1926, came from local noble stock and was already well inserted into the political and cultural life of the city, having briefly acted as parliamentary representative of Venice in 1912-13.\textsuperscript{128} Orsi, as podestà,

\textsuperscript{125} The Treaty of Rapallo, signed in 1920 gave the city of Fiume to Yugoslavia; the refusal of D'Annunzio and his followers to withdraw from the city because of what they saw as the Italian government's mutilation of victory, led to the so-called "natale di sangue". On Christmas Day 1920 Italian troops attacked the Fiume rebels, their compatriots; the attacks prompted violent battles in Venice, amid false rumours of D'Annunzio's death. Luca Pes recounted the first secretary of the Venetian fascist, Giuseppe Lanfranchi's, reports that at this time Marsich hatched a plan of general insurrection in support of Fiume, as well as a secret plot to assassinate Giuseppe Volpi, who had been a signatory of the treaty and was also emerging at the head of the more bourgeois faction of Venetian fascist. The plan, however, was reputedly aborted when Marsich failed to rally sufficient support among his fellow fascist committee members for his plan and when it was opposed by Mussolini. Ibid. pp. 1313-14. See also Albanese G Pietro Marsich Somacampagna, Cierre, 2003.

\textsuperscript{126} Giovanni Giuriati was born in Venice in 1876 into a middle-class and highly patriotic family (both Giuriati's father – a parliamentary deputy – and his grandfather had participated in the 1848 defence of the city against the Austrian siege). From his family Giuriati inherited his guiding principles of the myth of the Risorgimento and irredentism, which would ultimately lead him to adhere to fascism. President of the irredentist organisation, the Associazione Trento e Trieste since 1913, Giuriati rose to the rank of Major during the First World War and was twice awarded the silver medal. Following the war Giuriati joined the Fiume volunteers in September 1919, as D'Annunzio's chief of staff, until December the two partially split as a result of D'Annunzio's abandonment of an agreement Giuriati had brokered with Badoglio and Sforza. Giuriati adhered to the Venetian fascist from its inception and was elected as parliamentary deputy in 1921. Following the March on Rome he served variously as a government minister; ambassador in South America, President of the Camera and – for just a year – Secretary of the PNF. Though he left active national politics in 1934 Giuriati remained a leading figure within the pro-fascist political and social elite circles of Venice throughout the 1930s. Pignatelli G et al eds., \textit{Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani} vol. 57, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana (Treccani), 2001, pp. 120-123.

\textsuperscript{127} Pes L "Il fascismo adriatico" pp. 1335-1347. Marsich's legacy in Venetian fascism remained long after his disappearance from its leadership; following his death in December 1928, his bust was prominently displayed in the Fascist party headquarters at Ca' Farsetti and (from 1935) Ca' Littorio.

\textsuperscript{128} Camurri R "La classe politica nazionalfascista" p. 1403.
governed the city's municipal affairs with two vice-podestà and the consulta municipale, appointed by the Interior Ministry to replace the elected body of the liberal years (the consiglio comunale) and constituted the highest representative of the state in the province, with nominal authority over the PNF federal secretary. Members of the consulta municipale, whose role was essentially advisory, were selected from among the local industrial, commercial and cultural establishment; by way of example, Gino Damerini, Vittorio Cini and Giovanni Giuriati all sat on the consulta municipale during the 1930s. In similar vein, Orsi’s successor as podestà in October 1929, was magistrate Ettore Zorzi, descendant of the Adria branch of the Venetian patrician family tree. Zorzi was himself soon replaced by Venetian- and noble-born Mario Alverà, who as a successful businessman – he was among the first investors in Volpi’s Porto Marghera venture – and elected member (as part of Grimani’s moderate clerical list) of the 1914 consiglio comunale and later (from 1928) sindaco of the PNF’s provincial federation, neatly straddled the mingling worlds of the old Liberal establishment and new fascist political class. As such, Alverà’s leadership, which endured for an unprecedented full two terms until September 1938, was characterized by stability and by the perpetuation of Volpi and the gruppo veneziano’s hegemonic control over the industrial, commercial, political and cultural affairs of the city.

Reconstructing Venetians’ ‘horizons of expectations’

The central premise of this study is that the fascist regime had to make recourse to pre-existing mediators – the already established customs, practices, semiophores and lieux de mémoire which made up Venetians’ ‘horizons of expectations’ – which it sought to ‘fascistise’ and then transmitted to the Venetian population in its quest to infiltrate all aspects of its citizens’ lives and forge the population into ‘new’ men and women, who would both be worthy of and necessitate the ‘restoration’ of Italian imperial greatness. However, these ‘fascistised’ cultural products, precisely because they were mediated through pre-existing ‘mental tools’ could potentially both

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129 The functions of the podestà replaced within a single person (albeit flanked by the advisory consulta) the competencies previously undertaken by the Sindaco, Giunta and Consiglio Comunale of the Liberal period. See Barizza S Il Comune di Venezia 1806-1946: l’istituzione, il territorio, guida-inventario dell’Archivio municipale Venice, Comune, 1987.
132 For example, it was under Alverà’s – and Giorgio Suppiej’s (as PNF federal secretary) – stewardship that the road bridge, connecting Venice with the mainland was finally completed after much wrangling and conflict and opened to great fanfare on 25 April (St Mark’s feast day) 1933.
help and hinder the dissemination of fascist ideology. The tenacity of the alternative ‘meanings’ with which these mediators were imbued and their ability to act as either complementary or rival sources of authority to fascism determined how Venetians received the ‘messages’ of fascistised cultural products. Fascist cultural producers deployed many of these mediating narrative tropes from fascism as the historical heir and restorer of the Roman Empire to fascism as the ahistorical embodiment of modernity; in this study, three narratives or themes stand out in particular for the frequency and profundity with which they were mined by fascism, but also for the potentially ambiguous and manifold nature of their reception.

The nation

The first of the key narratives or ‘mental tools’ which mediated between population and regime was that of the nation. The question of ‘nation-building’ had been a central concern in Italy even before creation of the Italian state in 1861. Following the Risorgimento, the country’s ruling elites turned towards the ‘problem’ of instilling the citizens of the new Italy – who often spoke different regional languages and dialects, experienced vastly differing social and economic frameworks and levels of industrialisation, had diverse customs and traditions and often strong local allegiances – with a particular sense of shared identity and belonging, repeatedly evoking Massimo d’Azeglio’s oft-quoted aphorism on the need to “make Italians”.

Emotive, voluntarist nationalism, the belief in nation-building and regeneration through war and imperialist expansion lay at the heart of the fascist project. Mussolini intended to “make Italians” – or rather to make fascist Italians – through a national political religion which would ‘imagine’ into existence a national community based on duty, self-sacrifice and the glory and purifying effect of violent bloodshed and death for the patria, constructed against a series of external and internal ‘others’.

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133 On fascism’s modernist self-perception as an agent or ‘event’ which transcended historical time, see Fogu C The Historic Imaginary. Politics of History in Fascist Italy Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2003, especially pp. 3-20. See also Ben-Ghiat R Fascist Modernities pp.2-3.
134 Banti A La nazione del Risorgimento: parentela, santità e onore alle origini dell’Italia unita Turin, Einaudi, 2000 passim.
135 In considering the building of the Italian nation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century it is crucial to overcome the stereotypes often employed both by contemporaries and historians that Italians had a ‘weak’ sense of identity and that this was a negative force. Such an approach would seem to accept and even welcome the instilling of a particular brand of nationalism as a vital step in the process of nation-building and also appears to preclude the presence of multiple, contested and perhaps less aggressive national identities within Italy. For a concise discussion of the debates surrounding nationalism, nation-building and shifting identities in Italy, see Foot J Modern Italy Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, pp. 14-18.
In his most famous work, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson made the argument that any community, including the nation-state, has to be 'imagined' into existence; a nation's borders, sovereignty and the sense of commonality felt by the members of a given nation are all subjective constructs. In the imagining of a community and the construction of a shared identity, the importance of 'human pluralism' and the idea of the 'other' - or the enemy (internal or external) against whom we construct our own identity and onto whom we project those characteristics we feel to be the antithesis of our own - is paramount given that we imagine ourselves in relation both to what we are and to what we are not. As Edward Said, in his seminal works, *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, has very persuasively demonstrated, suspicion, distrust and, indeed, hatred of the 'other' has, in no small measure, informed identity construction in Western European imperial nations.

The construction of identity - for identity, whether of Orient or Occident, France or Britain, while obviously a repository of distinct collective experiences, is finally a construction - involves establishing opposites and "others" whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from "us". Each age and society recreates its "Others". Far from a static thing then, identity of self or of "other" is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual, and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies.

For Anderson the 'cultural products' of nationalism, including poetry, prose, song and other art forms, more often aspire to self-sacrifice and love for the *patria* rather than to hatred of the 'other'. Though it is undoubtedly true that ‘positive’ notions of duty and self-sacrifice permeated Italian fascist nationalism in order to imagine a fascist community, this was not at the expense of notions of the 'other'. Of course, a myriad range of 'others' of twentieth-century Italian society can be identified; those that recur most often in this study are the Ethiopians, Eritreans, Somalis and Libyans of AOI and the Turks and Slavs who repeatedly appeared as the 'other' in the construction of Venetian identity.

The absolutely central place of the nation and its attendant ideals of patriotism, imperialism and the exaltation of war within fascism is unquestionable; the centrality of the nation within the

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138 Said E *Orientalism* p. 332.
139 Anderson B *Imagined Communities* p. 149.
140 Though this is not addressed in this thesis, it could also be argued that Italians from the South have been employed as internal others in the making of certain northern-based Italian identities.
fascist project, however, must be understood as part of a much longer national trajectory. It is most often asserted that it was via the irresistible impact of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars, that the concept of the nation and of the fatherland evolved semantically from its seventeenth-century associations relating purely to territory and individual origins to its nineteenth-century connotations of being the legitimiser of the institutions governing collective life and the most important community to which an individual could belong: for the Italian risorgimentalist leaders of the mid-nineteenth century, terms like 'nation state' and 'national assembly' assumed an emotive and legitimatory status, whilst amor di patria and attendant notions of loyalty or betrayal of the fatherland took on new political significance. Once 'invented', the nation was presented as eternal and bound by blood. The notion of the nation as a family or a community of brothers, united and tied by blood and bloodshed to the patria and past, present and future generations of Italians peppered the writings of many Italian risorgimentalist authors of the mid-nineteenth century, including Guerrazzi and D'Azeglio, as Alberto Banti has recently shown. In so doing, Banti repudiated Federico Chabod's assertion that Italian and French nationalism, unlike the Germanic version, conceived of the bond which brought individuals together within the nation in cultural (according to shared language, history and traditions) rather than ethnic terms.

Still, the constructs employed by risorgimentalist novelists to build the ideal of the nation had roots that derive from familiar societal discourses such as those of Christianity and the family. Banti noted how, "glory and suffering, heroism and tragic death appear to be the distinguishing features" of the heroic figures in Guerrazzi and D'Azeglio's historical novels; they are always imbued with youthful, moral, nationalist and military values. He identified these nationalist narratives of death-embracing heroes and heroines as continuations of the traditional Christian discourse surrounding the figures of Jesus, the Virgin Mary and the virgin martyr saints. Thus he made a link between Christ's exemplary sacrifice and the deaths of the Risorgimento novelists' heroes:

141 Chabod F (Salita A & Sestan E eds.) L'idea di nazione Bari, Laterza, 1961 passim; see also Banti A La nazione del Risorgimento pp. 8-9.
142 Banti A La nazione del Risorgimento pp. 9.
143 Chabod F L'idea di nazione; Banti A La nazione del Risorgimento pp. 65-6.
144 "Gloria e dolore, eroismo e morte tragica sembrano i marchi distintivi..." Banti A La nazione del Risorgimento p. 96.
145 Banti noted how the heroes battle courageously but invariably are destined to die; a death which has "a testimonial value offered to contemporaries and descendants" ("un valore di testimonianza offerta ai contemporanei e ai posteri"). The heroines of such novels are depicted as pure; if they are single, they are chaste and if they are married, are good wives and mothers. Like their male counterparts, when cornered or captured by the ubiquitous treacherous villain, the heroines always prefer and indeed welcome death to submission. Ibid p.93.
Like Christ and the martyrs, heroes take on a testimonial function, thanks to their tragic death. [...] Whist in Christology the sacrifice is testament of an ethical "scandal" (the fall into sin), in the case of the narration of the nation, it is testament of an ethical and political "scandal" (the dishonour and division of the nation). As for Jesus Christ and his saints, but on a different level, the death of the hero is the greatest sacrificial suffering, but a suffering which can liberate the entire national community from the state of dishonour and disunity into which it has fallen.146

In the decades following unification and particularly around the turn-of-the-century, as political turbulence and colonial defeat prompted right-wing intellectuals including Corradini, Rocco, Papini and Prezzolini to question the liberal state's ability to "make Italians", nationalism remained a serious political force. Though these intellectuals naturally followed different ideological trajectories, what united them was a belief in the modern project of national regeneration. In the writings and art of both D'Annunzio and the Futurists the theme of the dynamic, reinvigorated and modern nation found recurrent echo. What also characterised much of the emerging nationalists in the early twentieth century was the conviction that the modern Italian character was not sufficiently virile or belligerent enough to be worthy of the history and future of the nation. Enrico Corradini (1865-1931), editor of the nationalist newspaper L'Idea Nazionale (and one-time contributor to the Gazzetta di Venezia) and leading member, alongside Alfredo Rocco, of the Associazione Nazionalista Italiana, founded in 1910, called for the 'remaking' of Italians to render them worthy of the Italian nation. Giuseppe Prezzolini and the "ideologically promiscuous" Giovanni Papini identified the need to educate the bourgeois ruling classes in order to regenerate the patria and save it from the threat from the Left.147

Following the (late) arrival of postcolonial theory among Italian scholars, intense attention has been paid in recent years to the "decolonisation" of Italian historiography dealing with the pre-
colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. In so doing, historians such as Angelo Del Boca, Nicola Labanca, Patrizia Palumbo and Mario Isnenghi have unpicked national colonialist discourses and revealed the extent to which the sogno africano and particularly the myth of Italy's 'civilising mission' shaped the construction of national identities in post-unification as well as fascist Italy. Such discourses, however, were neither presented nor received uniformly. Isnenghi, for his part, identified a “sea” of colonialist literature which flooded post-risorgimentalist bookshops, appropriating and fusing the luoghi comuni of the Italian peasant and soldier in order to extol the virtues of colonialist expansion. This process, he asserted, was part and parcel of post-unification national identity and nation-building in so far as it sought to shape Italians as citizen-soldiers and convince them of the regenerative and redemptive value of war. However, the project was by no means straightforward; the risorgimentalist rhetoric of national independence, irredentism and war in defence of the nation made it difficult to then convince Italians of the virtues of colonial war – by nature offensive and expansionist. Increasingly, in order to overcome such complications, Italian philo-colonialists emphasised the idea of empire as a solution to the 'Southern Question', the notion of Italy's civilising mission to 'save' and 'cultivate' African soil and indigenous population – to this end the technician-civilian steadily replaced the soldier-peasant in colonialist representations – as well as the idea that any colonialist enterprise in Ethiopia would be an exercise in national redemption to avenge the seismic defeat of Italian troops at Adowa in 1896. Palumbo, meanwhile, pointed to the complexities of colonialist representations in children's literature. Whilst most authors of children's books during the fascist ventennio enthusiastically supported the imperialist project in their writings and followed the regime's directions to portray Africa as a place that was, under

148 The scholarship on Italian colonialism during the early years of the Italian republic oscillated between the 'forgetting' of the country's colonial past and subscription to the apologetic thesis of the 'civilising', beneficial effects of colonial rule. Even Benedetto Croce observed, some years after the dismemberment of Italy's empire under the 1947 Treaty of Paris, how the Italian colonies had been “acquired with its blood, and administered and led toward civil European life with its ingenuity and with the expenditure of its relatively meager finances.” (Croce B Discorsi parlamentari Rome, Bardi, 1966 p. 209) The Italian academics who have done most to redress and 'decolonise' the historiography relating to Italy's governance of Eritrea, Libya, Ethiopia and Somalia are, in the first place (chronologically speaking), Giorgio Rochat, with his 1973 work on Il Colonialismo italiano (Turin, Loescher, 1973), swiftly followed by Angelo Del Boca and Nicola Labanca who have written extensively not only on the development and complexities of colonial discourses in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but also on the seeming national reluctance to reassess the colonial past, especially in the light of the rise of postcolonial theory. On the latter, see Angelo Del Boca's contribution to the volume edited by Patrizia Palumbo: Del Boca A "The Myths, Suppressions, Denials and Defaults of Italian Colonialism" in Palumbo P ed. A Place in the Sun. Africa in Italian colonial culture from post-unification to the present, pp. 17-36 (see pp. 20-21 for Croce's observation) and Del Boca A "Il mancato dibattito sul colonialismo" in L'Africa nella coscienza degli italiani: miti, memorie, errori, sconfitti Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1992, pp. 111-127. For both Del Boca and Labanca's interpretations of the Italian colonial project see: Del Boca A Gli italiani in Africa Orientale 4 vols. Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1985-8; Labanca N L'Africa in vetrina: Storia di musei e di esposizioni coloniali in Italia Treviso, Pagus, 1992.


150 Ibid.
Italian influence, becoming less exotic and mysterious and more ploughed and 'civilised', others were more equivocal in their use of the tropes of empire; Amaldo Cipolla's novel, *Balilla regale*, for example, appears to question the usual exaltations of the correctness of the colonial project and to undermine the conventional martial and militaristic spirit and proscribed gender/racial roles normal in such literature. Cipolla's protagonist was a boy of mixed-race – a mediator between coloniser and colonised – whose Italian father fought for the independence, granted by Italy, of the fictitious state of which his mother was Queen and who saved the young heroine not through bravery and military prowess, but through argument and cunning. Furthermore, Palumbo noted, despite the regime's insistence on bombarding Italian children with colonialist discourses, the colonial literature directed at Italian boys and girls enjoyed little success, indicative she believed, of the continued relative autonomy of children's culture and of the "multiple, hegemonic strategies that children of the period employed to negotiate, satirise, and otherwise resist such forms of ideological control."

Thus, fascism's exaltation of the value of the sacrifice of young men in war as a purifying and regenerating agent for the nation and insistence upon a cult of commemorating these secular martyrs as exemplars in order to reinforce nationalist sentiment and infuse Italians with the new fascist identity by reminding people of the honour and grandeur of offering one's body to the patria, must be understood in terms of the continuity of Italian religious, risorgimentalist and colonialist traditions. The efforts of the fascist regime to 'make Italians' must also be understood as an attempt to fashion a particular brand of aggressive nationalism and fascistised national identity within a context of potentially multiple and shifting identities and sentiments of national belonging. It would therefore be misguided to simply equate fascism with nationalism, the regime with the nation, though this was certainly the aim of the architects of the regime. Thus, even the narratives of the nation, palingenetic nationalism and imperialist expansion – among the most fundamental aspects of fascism's self-definition – remained subject to ambiguity, qualification and 'other' alternative discourses.

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151 This conscious progression from images of Africa as dark, fearful and mysterious to ones that envisaged Africa as a place in the process of 'civilisation' was observed also by Adolfo Scotto di Luzio in his nuanced analysis of children's reading habits and the growth of 'popular libraries' during the Fascist period. Scotto di Luzio A *Appropriazione imperfetta* passim.

152 Palumbo P "Orphans for the Empire" pp. 241-244.


154 Palumbo P "Orphans for the Empire" p. 227-228. For example, she noted that the highly gendered discourses of colonialism appear to have had little impact in the minds of Italian girls, if one considers the results of a 1938 survey of young girls aged 6-18 which suggested that the majority lacked interest in domestic work and didn't aspire to family and marriage. Palumbo P "Orphans for the Empire" p. 247.
Historians have, in recent years, begun to pay increasing attention to the relationship between national and regional identities, arising, in part, from the rejection of modernisation theory's assumption that modernity brings the progressive overcoming of local loyalties — *campanilismo* — and increasing transference of allegiance and self-identification from the region to the nation.155 Discarding this presumption of the rise of the nation-state as somehow both inevitable and progressive and as leading inexorably to the dismantling and waning of local identities and loyalties, historians have instead switched their focus to the examination of how regional/local memories and identities have intersected with the process of nation-building, conceiving the connection between the two as one of both potential conflict and concordance.156 Thus, as Alon Confino has shown in his penetrating study of the role of *Heimat* in nation-building in imperial Germany, the relationship between the local or the regional and the national in relation to identity construction is not necessarily always antagonistic; on the contrary, he argued, the immediacy and familiarity of one's 'local' place could constitute a fruitful building block for constructing a national identity insofar as it helps to bridge the gap between the familiar reality of one's habitual surroundings and a more abstract allegiance to an intangible nation.157

The second key mediating narrative identified in this study as constituting a crucial element of Venetians’ 'horizons of expectations' engages with these debates surrounding the meeting of the local and the national as a relationship of conflict or of mutual support. It is that of *venezianità* or the notion of 'Venetian-ness' amalgamated from the symbols, semiophores, myths and memories of Venice, and especially from the Serenissima republic. The memory of the Venetian republic and empire was appropriated by the fascist authorities, acting at times to

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157 For Confino, the power of the *Heimat* imagery lay in the way it allowed individuals to internalise the 'nation' through recognition and identification with the familiar land- and town-scapes which represented the German 'homeland'. Although, inevitably, the process of reconciling local and national memories and identities was also one of forgetting and of conflicts, Confino convincingly argued that, despite these difficulties, the idea of *Heimat* was ultimately successful in holding together the local, regional and national. Confino A *The nation as a local metaphor. Württemberg, imperial Germany and national memory 1871-1918*. Chapel Hill and London, University of North Carolina Press, 1997, passim.
complement and support fascist ideals of Mediterranean imperialism and irredentism and at times as a rival set of lieux de mémoire in the collective memory of Venetians, to dilute and distort the fascist cultural products which made recourse to its symbols, rituals and myth.

As with their recourse to the narrative of the nation, the fascist regime's resort to the memory of the Venetian Republic, embodied in the myth and anti-myth of the Serenissima, was by no means a novel phenomenon. Both myth and anti-myth have been repeatedly re-elaborated, reconstructed, and employed to various ends both before and since the fall of the Republic in 1797 by politicians, painters and poets alike. Of course, the construction over time of both myth and anti-myth has produced infinitely nuanced and intricate versions of these, but to draw a rudimentary distinction between the two strands, the celebratory myth of Venice asserts the city's past glories as the Repubblica Serenissima; a vast imperial and maritime power, and the embodiment of civic values, liberty and wise government. Its antithesis, the anti-myth, which focuses above all but not exclusively on eighteenth-century Venice, identifies the city as an oligarchic hotbed of moral decadence, corruption and espionage, the scene of aristocratic frivolity and infidelity. Mussolini's regime, in its turn, embraced the myth of Venice as Queen of the Adriatic and Aegean seas; the fascist authorities frequently exalted the Serenissima republic and its lieux de mémoire, invoking these as justification for fascist aggression in those areas once controlled by the republic, most notably the Balkan areas of Istria, Dalmatia and Albania, as well as harnessing the 'traditions' of Venice as weapons in its quest to mold the population into new, fascist Italians.

Thus, the deployment of a region's myths and memories to foster a national sense of identity emerges as less paradoxical than might at first appear given that the myth of Venice did, in fact, have a national resonance as one tessera in the Italian mosaic of mille città. Given the relative youth of Italy as a unified nation state, Mussolini had few wholly 'national' myths at his disposal for the purpose of 'making Italians', besides those of the Roman Empire, the Risorgimento, the Great War, and the body of the Duce himself. What's more, the fascists were not the first to

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158 The establishment of the dual mythologisation of the Serenissima has been by no means confined to Venetian commentators. Indeed, the contribution of English artistic and literary figures, including Shakespeare, Turner, Lord Byron and Ruskin, to the propagation of both myth and anti-myth has been considerable. However, it is perhaps in Thomas Mann's masterful Death in Venice (1912, first published in Italian in 1930) that the anti-myth — the notion of Venice as a decadent underminer of bourgeois morals — finds its apotheosis.

159 Two highly influential works have demonstrated how the mythologising and imagination of the figure of Mussolini — both his corporeal and personal attributes — have been repeatedly reconstructed to serve both fascist and anti-fascist end during and after the ventennio. In Mussolini Immaginario, Luisa Passerini unpicked the attitudes, beliefs and fantasies surrounding the Duce; those of his own making and those constructed by others,
locate the memory of the Serenissima within in a national context – Daniele Manin and others had done just the same almost a century earlier in order to stake the city's claim to a leading role in a unified Italy.\textsuperscript{160} Though the Serenissima myth exalted the city's independence, it also affirmed the notion of Venice as "the greatest and purest heir to Rome";\textsuperscript{161} after all, so goes the myth, Venice was founded as the Roman Empire disintegrated and then flourished in the empire's old spheres of influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. To reinforce this supposed continuity, attempts were made throughout the 1930s to bolster the idea of the bond between Venice and Rome; indeed, Venetian popolani encountered intended reminders of the city's romanità on a daily basis, in the "baptism names" given to the new motonavi, introduced in 1935 and equipped with the modern luxuries of a bar and radio, to ferry them between the centro storico and residential areas on the Lido and Punta Sabbioni: Aquileja, Concordia, Altino, and Eraclea. However, although the names of the new ferry boats were consciously chosen to re-evoke "the glorious origins of the Republic of St Mark", how far their meaning was understood by the Venetian passengers who rode them every day can perhaps be questioned.\textsuperscript{162}

Thus, as with the other two key narratives, the deployment of the heroic myths and symbols of the Serenissima in the regime's quest to remold Venetians proved to be both a help and a hindrance.

both supporters and opponents of the regime. Through the imagined body of Mussolini, recurrent fascist narratives – the "religion of suffering" or memory of the dead, the family and the relationship of reciprocal sacrifice between mother and son in particular, and the ideal of the virile italiano nuovo – were given expression. Sergio Luzzatto's masterful examination of Il corpo del duce analysed the evolutions of the "gigantic luogo comune" of Mussolini's dead body from the grim spectacle of the hanging cadaver in Piazzale Loreto through the kidnappings and concealment of the body between neo-fascists and Christian Democrats in the 1950s to the fetishising of Mussolini's tomb at Predappio following his final burial in 1957, in order to access Republican Italy's complex relationship with the fascist past. Passerini L Mussolini Immaginario; Luzzatto S Il corpo del duce: un cadavere tra immaginazione, storia e memoria Turin, Einaudi, 1998, passim.

\textsuperscript{160} See p. 128 of this thesis.
\textsuperscript{161} This according to historian Giuseppe Maranini. See the introduction to Maranini G Costituzione di Venezia dopo la serrata del Maggior Consiglio Florence, 1974 (first published 1931) and Povolo C "The Creation of Venetian Historiography" in Martin J & Romano D eds. Venice Reconsidered. The History and Civilisation of an Italian City-State 1297-1797, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, p. 508.
\textsuperscript{162} "Le gloriose origini della Repubblica di S Marco". The Gazzettino ran an article in its Curiosità storiche veneziane series to explain the significance of the ferryboats' names in response to a reader's letter which hailed these as "well chosen" ("indovinati") though he feared that, "unfortunately, however, these appear to be without meaning for the majority of people" ("purtroppo, però, essi risultano privi di contenuto per la maggioranza del popolo"). The first three names, the paper explained, referred to "the cities on the mainland that contributed most to the populating of the rialtine islands" ("le città di terraferma che maggiormente contribuirono al popolamento delle isole rialtine") whilst Eraclea "was the first capital of the nascent Republic of St Mark and saw the election of the first doge in 727" ("fu la prima capitale della nascente Repubblica di S Marco e vide l'eletzione del primo doge nel 727"). Gazzettino 18 Jul. 1935 Curiosità storiche veneziane – Quattro Nomi. Incidentally, the four motonavi introduced in 1935 still operate the San Marco – Lido – Punta Sabbioni route today.
Notwithstanding the troubled relationship between Holy See and the liberal state after the removal of the papacy's temporal power on the accession of Rome to the new Italian nation in September 1870, the Catholic church and its teachings acted, as it had for centuries, as a major source of authority directing the most important events and 'rites of passage' in the life-courses of Italian citizens. What's more, if fascism is understood as political religion, that is to say if the regime used the trappings of religion in order to construct its 'imagined community' of fascist men and women, the vital role played by the institutions of the church in mediating between population and regime is brought into sharp relief.

The relationship between church and state during the ventennio remained complex and, despite the 1929 Conciliation, vacillated between moments of collaboration and tension. In many ways, the objectives and ideals of fascism and Catholicism coincided; antibolshevism, antiliberalism, social corporativism, the recognition of national and religious traditions and values and so on. Given the coincidence of aims between church and state, the fundamental alignment of the church behind the regime's social policies following the Lateran agreements between Mussolini and Pius XI, prompts little surprise. In Venice both Cardinal La Fontaine and, from 1935, his successor as patriarch, Cardinal Piazza, were quick to cultivate friendships

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163 Following the accession of the papal territories and the transferral, in 1871, of the Italian capital to Rome, Pope Pius IX formalised the papal instructions to all Italian Catholics (99% of the population according to the 1861 census) not to participate in the political life of the nation with the 1874 'non expedit'.


165 The Lateran pact of February 1929 formalised the relationship between church and state; the nation-state of Italy and city-state of the Vatican recognised one another for the first time since Italian unification. The agreement also offered a number of concessions to the church, according it a privileged position within Italian society; for example, religious education was extended, by law, to secondary school level and, importantly, Catholic Action was permitted to continue – as such, it was the only legal non-Fascist organisation that existed in the 'totalitarian' Fascist state.

166 Recent historiography has focussed upon examining the position of the church, and in particular the papacy, with regards to anti-semitism and the Holocaust. For example, following his controversial appraisal of anti-semitism among 'ordinary' Wehrmacht soldiers, whom he labelled Hitler's Willing Executioners, Daniel Goldhagen has since turned his attention to the no less polemical question of the Vatican's response to and role in the Holocaust, publishing his findings in 2002 under the belligerent title, A moral reckoning: the role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and its unfulfilled duty of repair (London, Little, Brown, 2002). Italian scholars have also interested themselves in the topic: see for example the recent work of the esteemed historian of religion and education, Moro R, La Chiesa e lo sterminio degli ebrei (Bologna, Il Mulino, 2002), as well as Sale G Hitler, la Santa Sede e gli ebrei: con documenti dell'Archivio segreto vaticano Milan, Jaca Book, 2004.
with the local fascist authorities and lend their support to fascist initiatives where these coincided with Catholic aims and values.\textsuperscript{167}

However, as an alternative source of loyalty and identity-formation, the local fascist authorities did at times come into conflict with their religious counterparts. A principal focus for conflict between the religious and secular authorities was the question of jurisdiction; areas of society in which the church had traditionally played an important role – the family, education and youth associations, charitable institutions and social assistance – had, under fascism, become sites of state intervention. The catholic lay association, Azione Cattolica (AC), in particular, saw its remit and spheres of action encroached upon by the ONB and GUF; in 1931, when AC found itself temporarily outlawed following the prohibition of all youth organisations outside the framework of the PNF or ONB, the relationship between church and state once again dramatically deteriorated. This national conflict translated into occasionally violent clashes in the regions – including Venice – between Fascists and members of AC and, more rarely, the Federazione Universitaria Cattolica Italiana (FUCI).\textsuperscript{168}

As will be shown, the religious leadership in the diocese was prepared to limit and qualify its support for fascist initiatives if these were seen to deviate from Christian teachings. Furthermore, even when acting to promote the fascist project, the symbols, semiotics and symbols of Catholicism, like those of any other “Western symbolic language”, were potentially flexible and shifting; therefore, it does not necessarily follow that the intended meaning of such symbols and rituals was received clearly.\textsuperscript{169} In this way, the mediating role played by the church in transmitting the sacralised politics of the fascist regime to Venetian citizens was

\textsuperscript{167} The extent of both Cardinal La Fontaine and Cardinal Piazza’s adherence to fascism and fascist ideology is addressed in chapters 5 and 3 of this thesis, respectively. Whilst Cardinal La Fontaine, a fervent patriot, did lend his enthusiastic support to fascist policies which coincided with Catholic aims and values and was an important figure in determining the relationship between church and state (he reportedly played a significant role in the diplomatic negotiations between the Holy See and the Fascist regime leading up to the 1929 Conciliation), he was by no means as ardent and unqualified a fascist supporter as his successor as Patriarch of Venice, Cardinal Piazza. See Tramontin S “Il Cardinal La Fontaine, Patriarca di Venezia e i fascisti dopo la marcia su Roma” in Storia Contemporanea vol. 3, 1979, pp. 481-519 and also Vian G “La stampa cattolica e il fascismo a Venezia negli anni del consenso: “la Settimana Religiosa” di Venezia (1929-38)” passim.


crucial, but not unequivocal; the religious institutions, liturgy and rituals could and very often did act to support and facilitate the infiltration of fascistised cultural products into the daily and life-course experiences of individuals, but they could also act to undermine it.

This thesis, therefore, is concerned to demonstrate the complexities and ambiguities of daily life under dictatorship. In seeking to recast its citizens as new Italians whose regeneration was both required by and itself would require the restoration of national and imperial greatness, the Italian fascist regime employed pre-existing symbols, myths and rituals, borrowed from national risorgimentalist narratives, from the Roman Catholic liturgy and inventory of rituals, and from the vast repository of Venetian rites, festivals and lieux de mémoire. The present research into a series of collective cultural experiences, encountered by Venetians in their everyday lives and over the life-course during the 1930s, exposes the gap between 'intention' and 'reception' in fascist cultural production and consumption but also seeks to recreate the 'mental tools' employed by the regime and by Venetians which could bridge that gap. Chapter 2 considers the experience of young people in Venice during the 1930s, fascist permeation of their 'free' time and their responses to the exaltation of their 'generation' as the vanguard of the fascist 'revolution'. Here it is revealed how the age-related debates in elite fascist circles could be distorted and 'misunderstood' as they filtered from centre to periphery; it is argued also that Venetian children responded in multiple ways and often equivocally to the fascist authorities' attempts to shape them as the regime's "buds in bloom". Chapter 3 examines a series of case studies of popular festivals and celebrations in which the fascist authorities sought to 're-invent tradition' by appropriating pre-existing Venetian or religious symbols and rituals and harnessing them as tools for the promotion of fascist ideals and policies. Taking as case-studies: the festa delle Marie, a medieval Venetian festival revived under fascism as a celebration of marriage; the regime's appropriation of the religious festival of Christmas; and the 1938 commemoration of the First World War Battle of the Piave, which brought together the national and local, the military and religious, the chapter highlights the reciprocity and ambiguity in the production and consumption of these festivals. The fourth chapter narrows its focus to a particular moment in the fascist project; the League of Nation's imposition of economic sanctions on Italy following the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, to examine the way in which the fascist authorities used the imposition sanctions to promote the ideologies of nationalism and autarchy and to generate consent for the regime and explore the effect of the anti-sanctions resistance measures on Venetians' daily lives. Often considered to mark the high-point of popular support for the regime, the picture that emerges from the close reading of the intention behind and reception of
the anti-sanctions resistance directives and propaganda, is complex, characterised in large part by contradiction, confusion and ambiguity. The fifth chapter takes as its subject the final stage of the life-course and analyses the extent of the regime's pervasion of the experience of death and funereal rituals. Given the significance attached by the regime to the notion of death and, in particular, the exaltation of youthful self-sacrifice and bloodshed in war, the chapter analyses Venetians' responses to 'fascistised' death rituals in order to ask how far these fascist – and militaristic – ideals were able to penetrate the civilian experience of death in Venice. Present in all the chapters is the recourse of Mussolini's regime to the mediating narratives of the nation, the church and venezianità, common threads which contributed both to 'make and unmake' the fascist project.

Thus, this thesis seeks to address significant theoretical and conceptual questions with regard to the complex relationship between intention and reception in cultural production and consumption as well as to the place of local and regional histories and memories in imagining a national identity. To achieve this, a theoretical framework of the reciprocity of cultural production / aesthetics of reception has been built, indebted to the approaches developed by de Certeau, Hoggart, Koselleck, Jauss, the Annales school and others. By placing the notions of intention and reception at the centre of this study, the complexities and ambiguities of the relationship between individual and regime and of the lived experience of dictatorship can be revealed.
Contradiction and paradox characterised the Italian Fascist regime's attitude towards age. At one end of the life-course, youth was celebrated as the natural repository of dynamism and virility, ardour and sacrifice, of the values, that is, prized most highly by fascism. At the other, older generations, as veterans of the early blackshirt skirmishes of the biennio rosso, of the ill-fated battles and vittoria mutilata of the Great War, even of the Risorgimentalist campaigns to create a united Italian nation, were feted as the forbearers of the regime. The very term 'veteran' or reduce was suffused with meaning and conferred special status in society to those who bore it during the ventennio: to be a Sansepolcrista, in other words, to have been present at the inaugural fascist rally in Milan's Piazza San Sepolcro on 23 March 1919 meant to be revered as the pinnacle of the hierarchy of fascists 'of the first hour'.

This paradoxical practice of simultaneously exalting both youthful potential and veterans' experience inevitably led, at times, to confusion and conflict. Although the 'youth' that was exalted was perhaps more an idea, a 'spirit' or state of mind than an age-bound cohort group, as fascist ideas and debates about 'youth' were filtered, replayed and re-elaborated across the country, tensions between 'generations' could often arise. In October 1932 a minor crisis flared when Venetian members of the Associazione Nazionale Mutilati e Famiglie Caduti Fascisti expressed their outrage at being left out of the national ceremony to commemorate the

1 As such, the conferring of Sansepolcrista status was not taken lightly; for example, Mario Salvadori wrote to Starace on 18 October 1936 from Venice requesting that his ex-teacher, Giulia Marconi, be posthumously granted the status of Sansepolcrista. Marconi, he asserted, had "sent her adhesion to the rally in Piazza S. Sepolcro", had been fiercely patriotic and was one of the founders of the Venetian fascio. Intransigent, however, the PNF replied to Salvadori, himself a veteran fascist injured in Venice in October 1922, that not having actually been present in person at the rally, Marconi's certification as a Sansepolcrista could not be granted. ACS PNF Serie. 1 b.1188 9.89.13. Given the relative tender age of many 'fascists of the first hour' in 1922, it must be recognised that to be a Sansepolcrista veteran did not necessarily mean to be of advanced age. In 1921, for example, 25% of adherents to the fasci di combattimento were aged under 21. This is also reflected in the relatively young ages of the leaders of the early fascist movement: for example, in 1922 Mussolini was 39, Italo Balbo just 26 and Giuseppe Bottai and Dino Grandi 27, Roberto Farinacci 30, and Cesare Maria De Vecchi, 38.

2 That the category of 'youth' was understood by fascism as a particular attitude or state of mind is argued both by Laura Malvano and Luisa Passerini in their contributions to Giovanni Levi and Jean-Claude Schmitt's collection of essays on the experience of youth in the modern era. It is also echoed in Eric Michaud's evaluation of the Nazi prizing of the young as 'soldiers of an idea' in his contribution to the same collection. See Malvano L "The Myth of Youth in Images: Italian Fascism", Michaud E "Soldiers of an idea: Young people under the Third Reich" and Passerini L "Youth as a metaphor for social change: Fascist Italy and America in the 1950s" in Levi G & Schmitt JC eds. (translated Carol Volk) A History of Young People in the West. Vol 2 pp. 232-256; 257-280; 281-316.
ten-year anniversary of the March on Rome. What particularly angered these Venetian veterans was not just that they had been previously informed by their president that, "by will of the Duce" all veterans would be invited to the ceremony to inaugurate the Mostra del fascismo and the capella votiva in memory of the caduti in the newly constructed Palazzo Littorio in Rome, but above all, the fact that their places had been usurped by Giovani Fascisti. The provincial secretary of the Venetian branch of the veterans' association, Peppino Ranieri, wrote to the national secretary of the PNF, Achille Starace, on 13 October 1932:

Excellency,

It is with a heart full of sorrow that I take up pen to dispatch these lines.

Neither I nor my comrades would ever have imagined, ten years ago now, that our sacrifice would be so soon forgotten and that our place would be entirely taken by Giovani Fascisti.

I believe that no Fascist would have raised an objection if he discovered that ALL THE WAR INJURED FASCISTS on occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Revolution had been invited to Rome and presented to the Duce; all the more as their president, Donna Mezzomo Zanini, two years ago now, said that such was the will of the Duce.

This however will not take place!

Only the provincial delegate and ONE SINGLE WAR INJURED, chosen as escort, to represent all his comrades will make their way to Rome for the ceremonies to be held on 16th of this month.

We know however that such limitations have been relaxed much further for the Giovani Fascisti since even the Sestiere Fascio commanders will assemble in Rome (Venice alone will send more than ten). Moreover, on this occasion in Rome there will also be the members of the federal governing councils, composed for the most part (with a few exceptions) of Fascists who did not even see the shadow of squadrismo.

If we had had a true Fascist War Injured and not a woman at the head of this association, this state of affairs would now be non-existent (and this letter would be superfluous) because he would have been able to make the right person take note not to commit the mistake of forgetting those who, for the Fascist Revolution, whose tenth anniversary we now celebrate, gave the best years of their youth, not even sparing their own blood and who still carry the signs of such sacrifices for the greatness of Italy and of Fascism imprinted indelibly on their own flesh.

Romanly,

Peppino Ranieri³

³ "Eccellenza,
È con l'animo pieno d'amarezza che prendo la penna per varare queste righe.
Thus, the Venetian squadrista veterans, who bore on their bodies the physical proof of their long-term adherence to the fascist cause, conveyed their dismay that their age and experience was to be sidelined in preference of inexperienced youth. At the same time, however, in his remonstrances to the Fascist Party hierarchy, Ranieri could not but acknowledge the intrinsic value of youth as he pointed to his own and his fellow veterans’ sacrifice of “the best years of their youth” for the sake of fascism.

In focussing upon young Venetians’ lived experience of fascism, this chapter examines two distinct yet closely related aspects; in the first place it considers fascist attitudes towards youth and the potentially conflictual generational dynamics engendered by fascist ideals relating to ‘age’, as illustrated in Peppino Ranieri’s letter and will evaluate the extent to which Venetian adolescents’ daily life and leisure time was infiltrated by fascist policies and ideals. In the second place, the chapter will assess the experience of young people in Venice during the 1930s to discover how and how far the fascist regime was able to penetrate their day-to-day experiences, focusing on young Venetians’ free-time; an area somewhat neglected by historians to date. The chapter will analyse the messages that the regime sought to transmit specifically to youngsters through the party youth groups and institutions, but particularly through comic books including the Gazzettino dei Ragazzi (the weekly children’s comic published in Venice by the Gazzettino di Venezia), the Corriere dei Piccoli; a childhood
institution, and the 'official' comic of fascism, the *Balilla*. However, though the regime used the medium of comics to try to reach young Italians and mould them into young fascists, the success of the regime in this enterprise is questionable. Rooted in a theoretical framework of the aesthetics of reception and the creativity of reading, the chapter will analyse a collection of Venetian children's own writings on the subject of their favourite comic books, in order to determine the extent of Venetian children's assimilation of these fascistised cultural products. Above all, the chapter intends to highlight the variety, ambivalence and ambiguity of young Venetians' responses to the fascist messages transmitted to them through comics.

**Generations in conflict?**

Undoubtedly, the celebration of youth was central to the Italian Fascist regime: the fascist leadership projected their 'revolution' and then their regime as a movement of youth, dynamism and virility; the song chosen as the Fascist hymn, *la Giovinezza*, composed in 1919 as a "goliardic hymn,"⁶ provided the musical expression "of the heroic spirit of the new generation";⁷ whilst young Italians were courted as the vanguard of the fascist revolution – in them above all others, the regime sought to create the *italiano nuovo*, the ideal *uomo* or *donna fascista*, who would forge the new Italy, not least through the sacrifice of their young blood on the battlefield.

Filippi, until the early 1930s. After Spaventa Filippi's death in 1931, Faeti conceded, the *Corriere dei Piccoli* too became a tool of fascist pedagogy and propaganda, under the direction of Franco Bianchi. New characters were created that were "characters perfectly placed to exalt the more evident educational assumptions of the regime" ("personaggi perfettamente in grado di esaltare i più evidenti presupposti educativi del regime"), such as Romolino and Romoletta. Other cartoon characters, however, suggest that the comic's fascistisation was not entirely complete; in particular, Marmittone, a "solemn and irresistible parody of militarism, [a] character who, even when re-examined after years of aggressive and demolitionary satire, still appears as the most coherent and irreducible underhand antagonist of the soldiery stereotypes of any dictatorship" ("solenne e irrestibile parodia del militarismo, personaggio che, anche a rivederlo, dopo anni di satira aggressiva e demolitaria, sembra ancora l'antagonista somione piu coerente e irreducible degli steroptipi soldateschi di ogni ditattura"). Faeti A "Il Corriere dei Piccoli" in Isnenghi M ed. *I luoghi della Memoria: Personaggi e Date dell'Italia Unita*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1997 pp. 151-163.

⁵ The holdings of the *Gazzettino dei Ragazzi* are kept in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice, whilst collections of the *Corriere dei piccoli* and *Il Balilla* are held at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence.

⁶ "Inno goliardico." *La Giovinezza* was composed by Giuseppe Blanc, with lyrics by Salvatore Gotta. As the "fascist hymn" it was to be played "at the beginning of fascist and civil ceremonies (inaugurations of buildings, public works, cultural institutes etc" ("all'inizio delle cerimorie fasciste e civili (inaugurazioni edifici, di opere pubbliche, di istituti di cultura, ecc"). A law published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* on 24 January 1930 regulated the public performance of *La Giovinezza* and the *Marcia Reale*, limiting this to established days of festivity such as 21 April, the 'Birth of Rome' (Natale di Roma), 4 November, anniversary of victory in the war, (Anniversario della vittoria) and 11 November, the King's birthday, (Genetliaco di SM il Re) and also to events held in the presence of the monarch, head of state, member of government or party secretary. Transgression of this law carried a L.3,000 fine. Initially the list of feast days on which it was permissible to publicly perform *La Giovinezza* and the *Marcia Reale* also included the 20 September, "anniversary of the Italian army's entry to Rome", ("anniversario dell'entrata dell'esercito italiano in Roma") but agreement with the Holy See was quickly reached to suppress this feast day. ACS *Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri* (PCM) 1937-9 Fascicolo. 3.3.16 5818.

⁷ "Dell'anima eroica della nuova generazione." Ibid.
The extent to which youth, as a cipher of dynamism and physical strength, was given priority by the regime is demonstrated in an article reflecting upon the impact of this ‘primacy of youth’ on the city of Venice. The article, which appeared in the October 1936 edition of the journal, *Le Tre Venezie*, entitled, “The Regime for today and tomorrow. The Zattere, romantic promenade for lovers in Venice, foundry and training-ground for the most spirited youth”, pondered the apparent transformation of the Zattere, one of the most picturesque locations for a *passeggiata* in Venice, traditionally populated by courting couples and artists, into a place which now seemed to breathe “a different breath, deeper, more robust and suited to that which, in current times, is the physical and spiritual life of a great city which walks in the wake of the Regime” since the foundation there by the local fascist group, in 1928, of a swimming club. The article’s author (Giannino Omero Gallo) lauded the fact that “large gatherings of lively, healthy, typically fascist youth” could now be glimpsed alongside the artists’ easels and Hollywood stars returning from cruise trips to the Orient, engaged in “reasoned training with an exclusive end: the improvement of the race”. The author was in no doubt as to the cause of this transformation of the Venetian landscape: “Fascism has added there, without breaking its line and without corrupting its meaning, the ardent sense of an intense, constructive life in the exaltation of youth and physical force, which is as one with the spiritual, fount of all civilisation and weapon of tomorrow.”

In any assessment of the prizing of youth and the role of generational conflict in fascism, the complexities of defining ‘youth’ as the object of fascist exaltation and of ‘generation’ as a research category cannot be overlooked. Arguably, the idea of youth so frequently celebrated and promoted by the regime was as much a spirit or state of mind as it was an age-bound stage in the life-course. Whilst pointing out that in prizing youth, Mussolini tapped into established ideals of youthful virility and sacrifice already articulated by risorgimentalists and romantics in the nineteenth century, Luisa Passerini has drawn attention to the complexity of fascist debates about youth during the early 1930s. Her appraisal of Bottai (himself just 27 in 1922) and his writings in the fascist journal, *Critica Fascista*, reveals a debate which prized

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8 "Un diverso rispiro, piu largo, piu robusto, piu adesivo a quella che e ai giorni nostri la vita fisica e spirituale di una grande cittad che cammina nel solco del Regime" *Le Tre Venezie*, Oct. 1936, “Il Regime per oggi e per domani. Le Zattere, romantica passeggiata di innamorati a Venezia lucina e palestra della gioventu piu animosa”
9 “Larghe adunate di gioventu vivace, sana, tipicamente fascista [...] un allenamento razionale e una finalit esclusiva: il miglioramento della razza” Ibid.
10 (Il fascismo vi ha aggiunto, senza guastare la linea e senza corromperne il significato, il senso ardent di una vita intensa essaltazione della giovinezza e della forza fisica che e un tutt’uno con quella spirituale, fonte di tutta la civilt e arma di domani.”) Ibid.
youth less as an age-cohort in and of itself and more as a futurist-type attitude or *mentality*; the debates in *Critica Fascista*, for example, distinguished between "real youth" and "fake youth" and between "young old people" and "old old people". In addition, she has convincingly demonstrated how the regime’s ambiguous mystification of ‘youth’ and exaltation of youthful regeneration had the potential to undermine it, as the ‘very young’ criticised the existing leadership and asserted their right to carry out their part in the constant renewal of society.

The place of generational conflict in the establishing and maintenance of the fascist regime also requires qualification. The use of ‘generation’ as a category of historical enquiry has become increasingly popular, though it is, of course, not unproblematic. The work of Passerini, Wohl, Roseman et al, with their emphasis on variation and evolution within a given generation and, above all, their understanding of ‘generation’ as the product of an imagined shared experience or constructed identity helps free ‘generation’ from the problems associated with more reductive age-based or purely lifecycle approaches to the category.

Robert Wohl, for example, in *The Generation of 1914* linked the academic and literary construction of generational theory in the early twentieth century with the post-war construction of the ‘front generation’ as a cohort group whose identity was supposedly forged and bound together through the formative experience of

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11 In part the *Critica Fascista* debates were informed by frustrations related to ambitions and employment – the annoyance, for example, over the high turnover and continual renewal of governmental posts, given to the increasingly young, thereby disrupting usual political career paths – but Bottai’s arguments were also shaped by his conviction that only worthy youth, and not youth per se, should be celebrated. He despaired of the apathy, superficial carelessness and ‘menefreghismo’ which, he believed, characterised some young Italians’ participation in fascist groups and rituals. Reinforcing this belief that ‘youth’ was a state of mind, he claimed that, if they possessed true fascist ‘spirit’ and experience, the old could be young. To this end he wrote in *Critica Fascista* in September 1929; "Youth in the political and national sense means having taken part in the revolution. [...] The young person is he whose age is accompanied by adequate fascist seniority." Cited in Passerini L “Youth as a metaphor for social change: Fascist Italy and America in the 1950s” pp. 292-4. For a discussion of the early 1930s debates among fascist elites about the so-called ‘problema dei giovani’ – the perceived political apathy and careerism of the young – see Koon T *Believe Obey Fight.*

12 Ibid. p. 294.

13 As Mark Roseman has commented, the category of general generation has often been dismissed as “flimsy” in comparison to other historical categories such as ‘class’ or ‘gender’. This dismissal has often arisen because of the risk of opacity and ambiguity in defining ‘generation’, who decides who belongs to a given generation; is generation an age-bound cohort group to which one inevitably and perpetually belongs; is generational conflict born out of friction between groups at different stages in the life-course; or can a given generation only come into being through some collective shared and formative experience? Such questions were also posited earlier by Pierre Nora, in his discussion of generation as a social category which gains prominence thanks particularly to the ‘generation of ‘68’. For a discussion of the theoretical implications of a generational approach to continuity and change in history, see Roseman M “Introduction: generation conflict and German history 1770-1968” in Roseman M ed. *Generations in Conflict. Youth revolt and generation formation in Germany 1770-1968* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp.1-41 and Nora P “Generation” in Nora P ed. *Realms of Memory. Rethinking the French Past* pp. 499-531.

war, despite the great diversity and variation in the reality of war-time experiences. In addition, as a time, following the so-called late-nineteenth-century 'invention of adolescence', when western societies idolised child- and young adulthood, and the period in which some of the most influential theories of generational conflict were being elaborated – by José Ortega y Gasset and, above all, Karl Mannheim – an examination of the experience of everyday life in the mid-twentieth century through the prism of generation seems all the more appropriate.\textsuperscript{16}

Despite Peppino Ranieri's lamentations, the Venetian fascist authorities did not always neglect the old in favour of the young. Enrico Dandolo, the Venetian Doge responsible for the sacking of Constantinople in 1204 during the Fourth Crusade and subsequent enrichment of Venice with, amongst other things, the four bronze horses that sit atop the façade of St Mark's basilica and many of the jewels that adorn the \textit{Pala d'Oro} inside the church, proved an intriguing and multifaceted figure of appropriation for Venetian fascists. His appropriation sheds new light on the complex way in which the youth/age debate was played out in Venice. As an unusually elderly warrior – he was reputedly ninety-four when he set sail for the Holy Land – as well as physically disabled – he was blind – he was somewhat removed from the ideal-type fascist hero who was typically young and virile. However, on the occasion of the 1936 inauguration of the \textit{2nd Marinaretti} legion of the provincial \textit{Balilla} organisation, named after the famous Venetian Doge, the inaugural address given by Port Captain Ginocchietti, Chief of Staff of the Maritime Command for the Upper Adriatic, made a virtue of both Dandolo's age and disability. Addressing the young \textit{Balilla} – "the flowering youth of Venice" – ranged in front of him, he declared that Dandolo's advanced years, "had passed over him in vain. In old-age he found only sagacity, the greatest military experience; his spirit and his body had remained

\textsuperscript{15} Debate has raged following Philippe Ariès' provocative assertion that 'youth', as a distinct and valued life phase, emerged only in the early modern period; in response to this interpretation, Nathalie Zemon Davis, among the fiercest critics of Ariès' thesis, demonstrated how rites of passage associated with youth can be discerned both in Medieval ritual practices and medical and religious texts. Only slightly less controversial was Ariès' thesis that it was in the late nineteenth century that adolescence, as a phase distinct both from adult- and childhood, was invented. Whilst it seems implausible to argue that adolescence did not exist before the late nineteenth century, it is more convincing to argue, as does John Neubauer, that adolescence as a distinct and revered experience "came of age" in \textit{fin-de-siècle} Western societies. See Ariès P \textit{Centuries of Childhood} Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979 (first published 1960), and, for a discussion of the Ariès-Zemon Davis debates and an account of literary preoccupations with adolescence at the turn of the century, see Neubauer J \textit{The Fin-de-Siècle Culture of Adolescence} New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1992.

prodigiously young." What's more, Ginocchietti was at pains to point out that Dandolo's blindness was not brought about "through senile exhaustion"; rather "for him it was a badge of glory, because it was a consequence, according to some of a battle wound, according to others of the torture he had been subjected to by a barbarous emperor of Constantinople when he, the Serenissima's ambassador in that city, had proudly and violently defended the interests of his state and his people against tyranny." In echo of the Critica Fascista debates, Dandolo was declared a "marvelous very young old man." Thus, for Ginocchietti speaking in Venice, as for Bottai writing in Rome, the youthful generation that was to be lauded was a metaphysical spirit or state of mind rather than either a material age-bound cohort group or stage in the life-course.

The complex relationship between old and young emerges also from the behaviour and writings of Venetian university students, perhaps better placed than most to articulate their perception of the interaction and points of commonality and conflict among different 'generations'. Within the city's student community, the Venetian branch of the Fascist organisation for university students, the Gruppo Universitario Fascista (GUF), played an active role outside the lecture theatre, seeking to shape the young men into the regime's future ideologues. The Venetian GUF organised free-time activities for its student members; visits to the luoghi comuni of the Great War, such as the Redipuglia military cemetery in Friuli or the ossuary at Monte Grappa, taking advantage of the special prices offered by the Fascist treni popolari, tours of naval cantieri as well as weekly meetings, conferences and film screenings on a variety of topics dear to the regime, including "colonial propaganda".

Some Venetian students did indeed modify their own leisure-time behaviour, habits and relationships, to bring these into line with the ethos of the fascist regime, and called upon their peers to do likewise. The authors of il Ventuno, the official journal of the Venetian GUF, used

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17 "Erano passati invano su di lui. Dalla vecchiaia trovava soltanto la saggezza, l'altissima esperienza militare; il suo animo, il suo fisico erano rimasti prodigiosamente giovani." Reported in Gazzetta 19 Oct. 1936 "La consegna del gonfalone alla nova legione Marinara".
18 "Per stanchezza senile [...] era per lui un titolo di gloria, perchè conseguenza – secondo taluni – di una ferita riportata combatendo, secondo altri dalle torture alle quali lo aveva sottoposto un barbaro imperatore di Costantinopoli, quando egli, ambasciatore della Serenissima in quella città, aveva fieramente e violentamente difeso di fronte al trianno gli interessi del suo stato e del suo popolo". Gazzetta 19 Oct. 1936 "La consegna del gonfalone alla nova legione Marinara".
19 "Meraviglioso giovanissimo vecchio". Ibid.
20 "Propaganda coloniale." Details of the trips and activities organised by the Venetian GUF can be found in ACS PNF Servizi vari, Serie I b, 1183.
21 Il Ventuno began as the literary and artistic journal of the "Cenacolo" letterario-artistico of the same name in February 1932. Within a year, the group and journal were brought under the control of the Venetian GUF and from March 1933, il Ventuno was adopted as the official periodical of the GUF of Venice to reflect "our young fascist
the pages of their magazine to rail against the 'bourgeois' pastimes of adolescents of previous
generations and celebrate what they perceived to be the rejection of old habits and means of
forming relationships through the salotto, the caffè and the university. In January 1934 the
Ventuno ran an article rejoicing in the death of the salotto and the new, modern ways in which
young people experienced their first encounters with love and romance. According to the
journal, "now truly new and healthy boys and girls no longer have to make recourse to the
stupid subterfuge of the salotto for their ingenuous games of first love". Instead, adolescents,
embracing the technological advances of the age, "write love-letters with portable typewriters
and make dates with a telephone call; girls go ski-ing without their aunts' tutelage and if they
arrive home an hour late they don't have to make up too many lies, [meanwhile] Don Juans no
longer lie in wait on gilded armchairs, ready to attack, rather they set their ambush on the
motorway, swift to help a lady-driver with a breakdown." Two months later, the journal turned its attention to that "deep-rooted and inherent Venetian climate that gives the city its typical drowsy, drifting physiognomy"; the caffè di piazza. The new generation, according to Galeazzo Biadene, author of the article, shunned the archetypal bourgeois practice of frequenting luxurious caffè di piazza where "the Sir commendatore, [...] the lively widow, [...] the two ugly sisters, unmarried despite their dowry and assiduous daily visit to the most renowned caffè in the city, [...] the worldly dandy with his wallet full of complimentary writings and scantily-dressed ladies, [...] the honest pensioner who in the caffè has found comfort and recompense for old-age [and] the nobleman," all engaged in superficial displays of the latest fashions, their cultural acumen, wealth and privilege.

If these changes in adolescents' modes of behaviour and relationships could be ascribed as
much to developments in technology and personal freedoms, resulting partly from the
experience of the Great War, affecting everyday life in much of Western Europe and the US in this period, as it could to the anti-bourgeois stance of the fascist regime, the article which appeared in the February 1934 edition of the journal demonstrates unequivocally the relationship between changes in adolescent behaviour and the regime. Entitled “Yesterday and Today”, the article charted the transformation of the typical student of the liberal era — “with cap decorated with useless thingummyjigs, tie flapping in the wind and other similar characteristics of dress, who took orders from the dress-maker’s apprentice and got drunk on graduation-day” — into one who embodied the ideals of fascism: “the functional student, conscious of his own possibilities and responsibilities, who loves competition and the active, practical life.”

Despite this apparent development in the character of young Italian university students, for Franco Pasinetti, the article’s author, the relationship between Italian youth and older generations was more complex than the simple assumption of the ‘primacy of youth’. For Pasinetti, the relationship between younger and older generations of Italians must be based on mutual respect and comprehension; the ideal of ‘largo ai giovani’ — the fascist motto commanding Italians to ‘make way for the young’ — had been superseded by the notion of the need for collaboration between the generations. To this end, Pasinetti asserted:

It is a great, reciprocal joy for a twenty-year-old and a fifty-year-old to find themselves in agreement; but where this agreement is based on current terms and, therefore, on essential understanding for the young man, who views the possibility of feeling understood with enthusiasm.

Today, therefore, the young man has several responsibilities; he is able to make himself conspicuous and to attain meaningful relationships with certain elderly men who have understood the spirit of today’s youth, raised in a fascist climate.

Thus Pasinetti contradicted the allegations voiced by Ranieri, the provincial secretary of the Associazione Nazionale Mutilati e Famiglie Caduti Fascisti, which opened this chapter, that those old veterans who had risked their lives for the fascist cause in the early days of the movement had now been forgotten and discarded by the regime. He made clear that young fascists need to prove their worth, as the older generation had already done through their

26 “Col berretto decorato di inutili aggeggi, con la cravatta a vento e altri consimili caratteristiche del vestire, che seguiva la sartina e il giorno della laurea prendeva la sbornia [...] lo studente funzionale conscio delle proprie possibilità e delle proprie responsabilità, che ama la gara, la vita agile e pratica.” Il Ventuno Feb. 1934 “ieri e oggi”.
27 “È una grande gioia reciproca per un ventenne e un cinquantenne trovarsi d’accordo; ma ove questo accordo si basi sui termini attuali e quindi di essenziale comprensione per il giovane che vede con entusiasmo la possibilità di sentirsi compreso. [...] Oggi il giovane ha dunque parecchie responsabilità; e gli si dà il modo di mettersi in prima inca (?) e di ottenere anche non indifferenti rapporti con qualche anziano che della gioventù odierna, sorta in clima fascista, ha compreso lo spirito.” Ibid.
efforts and sacrifice during the Great War and Fascist 'revolution'. Interestingly, for Pasinetti, one of the founders of the *Ventuno* journal when it was above all an outlet for young cultural commentators and artists rather than the GUF's mouthpiece, this proof of the worthiness of the younger generation to be considered the vanguard of fascist society need not necessarily be attained through war and bloodshed, but might also be realised through cultural and artistic endeavour. He commented that the up-coming *Littoriali* in Florence would provide the perfect opportunity for young Italians to demonstrate their fascist credentials:

At the *Littoriali* [...] the young people who will participate in the Florence meetings will have the means to demonstrate the constructive function of those who, having been unable to participate in the War and in the Revolution, today, thanks to the sporting and artistic competitions, are able to give proof of their worth.²⁹

In 1931, at a time of elevated tension between fascist and Catholic youth organisations, the extra-curricula pastimes of the members of the Venetian GUF included visits to the local Catholic students' group headquarters to ascertain the group's loyalty to the regime; visits which on occasion ended in violence.³⁰ On 26 May 1931 Guido Giacomini, *segretario politico* of the Venetian GUF, felt compelled to write to Carlo Scorza, then the GUF national general secretary, to report the violent scuffles that had broken out between fascist and Catholic students. The previous night, twenty or so members of the Venetian GUF had turned up at the FUCI headquarters “to ensure that Mussolini’s portrait had been displayed, as had been promised during a preceding visit the week before”.³¹ It did not take long for the inspection to descend into violence; following “some thoughtless phrases regarding Fascism on the part of some FUCI members”, the fascist students “descended to violent means smashing up the headquarters and beating several people”.³² Giacomini defended the young Venetian fascists’ violent behaviour as a “natural [...] thing” given the impertinence of the young Catholics who, “to the question as to why they had not displayed the portrait of Benito Mussolini, responded with a shout of ‘long live the Pope’ and the following phrases: we’ll defend ourselves with all means;

²⁸ The *Littoriali* competition was the annually held national competition in the arts, culture and sport, designed to showcase the most promising university students. See Koon T *Believe, Obey, Fight*, Chapter 6 “The ‘new imperial climate’”.
²⁹ “Ai Littoriali [...] si darà modo ai giovani che parteciperanno ai convegni di Firenze di dimostrare la funzione costruttiva di quelli che non avendo potuto partecipare alla Guerra e alla Rivoluzione sono messi in grado oggi in virtù delle gare sportive e artistiche, di dare prova del loro valore.” *Il Ventuno* Feb. 1934 “ieri e oggi”.
³⁰ For a discussion of the relationship between Venetian Fascist organisations and Catholic associations – *Azione Cattolica* and the *Federazione Universitaria Cattolica Italiana* (FUCI) and that between the fascist state and the Catholic church more generally, see pp. 57-9 of the introduction to this thesis.
³¹ “Per assicurarsi che fosse stato posto il ritratto di Mussolini, come da promessa avuta in una precedente visita nella settimana scorsa.” ACS PNF b. 1183.
³² “Alcune frasi poco riguardose nei riguardi del Fascismo da parte di alcuni appartenenti alla FUCI [...] scesero a vie di fatto fracassando il locale e bastonando parecchia gente.” Ibid.
and we’ll never cede at any cost”.

It seems that Giacomini needn’t have worried about the reaction of the national GUF leaders to their young members’ violence; Scorza’s limited response to Giacomini’s report noted only that “the position of fascist university students must be inspired by the most faithful interpretation of the Duce’s thought.”

Italian students, of course, did not always behave as ‘model’ fascists. Even the young student leaders of the local GUF branch on occasion found it difficult to meet the expectations of the fascist hierarchy, whilst maintaining the level of their studies at the same time. In June 1932 both Starace and Poli, the secretary and deputy-secretary of the PNF respectively, reprimanded Guido Giacomini for his failure to participate in a GUF pilgrimage to Caprera. Giacomini sought to excuse his absence by highlighting the difficulties of reconciling his fascist duties with his academic work. Having dispatched an apologetic telegram to Starace, Giacomini wrote to vice-secretary Poli seeking to justify his absence at the Caprera pilgrimage:

Dear Poli,

I received your letter which contained a masked reprimand for my absence from Caprera,-

You would have every right to recall me to my duty but I beg you to consider that my absence was due to the fact that, having decided to graduate in July without deferment, the dates of the Caprera ceremony were exam days for me......

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33 Cosa [...] naturale [...] alla domanda di perché non avessero esposto il ritratto di Benito Mussolini, risposero col grido di vivi il Papa e con le seguenti frasi: ci difenderemo con tutti i mezzi; e non cederemo a nessun costo.” ACS PNF b1183. The response of local religious leaders to the violence was swift; the regional bishopric sent a letter of protest to the Duce in June, declaring that “we saw young Catholics often designated as enemies. Then, in various cities and villages, Venice among them, there followed speeches exciting against young Catholics, particularly university students. In certain places armed groups then appeared who, in these cities and villages, by nightfall amid often blasphemous and obscene songs graffittied churches, insulted and beat youngsters. They took the buildings and headquarters of the associations and parochial oratories by assault, smashing furniture, shredding images of the pope, arriving also at breaking crucifixes, in most places rendering the surveillance of the Public Safety authorities and the Carabinieri futile or almost negligible” (“vedemmo sovente designati i giovani cattolici come nemici, poi si succedettero in varie città, tra esse Venezia, eccitanti discorsi contro i giovani cattolici e in particolare contro gli universitari. Apparvero poi in alcuni luoghi squadre armate che di notte nelle città e nei paesi, tra cante sovente blasfemi e osceni, imbrattarono Chiese, insultarono e percossero giovani, presero d’assalto gli edifici e le sedi delle associazioni e degli oratori parrocchiali, fracassandovi mobili, stracciando le immagini del Papa e giungendo a infrangiare Crocefissi, resa vana in piu luoghi, o quasi irrisoria, la vigilanza della Pubblica Sicurezza e dei Carabinieri. Il popolo rimase sinistramente impressionato di queste squadre così violente ”) Reproduced in Tramontin S Cattolici, popolari e fascisti nel Veneto pp. 284-5.
34 “La posizione degli universitari fascisti deve essere ispirata alla più fedele interpretazione del pensiero del Duce.” ACS PNF b1183.
35 “Caro Poli, ho ricevuto la tua lettera che contiene un larvato rimprovero per la mia assenza a Caprera,-
Avresti perfettamente ragione di richiamarmi al dovere ma ti prego di considerare che la mia assenza è dovuta al fatto che avendo deciso improrogabilmente di laurearmi a Luglio, i giorni della cerimonia a Caprera erano per me giorni di esame.....” ACS PNF Servizi vari, Serie I b. 362.
Still, the leaders of the Venetian GUF were evidently well aware of their exalted position within the fascist hierarchy; indeed they were, on occasion, able to take advantage of this to atone for their own shortcomings. In the presentation of the GUF’s yearly accounts for 1929, the Venetian student leaders attempted to justify their excessive spending by use of fascism’s idealisation of youth. The report explained that the L.50,000 attributed to the Casa dello Studente in the yearly accounts represented “the basic minimum to create, if not a real, proper casa dello Studente, at least a university canteen in which university students might consume their own meals, composed of sufficient healthy foods at a fair price”. Anticipating the PNF’s likely questioning of the amount, the report’s author reminded its governing body of their centrality, as young Italians, to the regime:

Only by working in this way will the Venetian GUF be rendered praiseworthy towards its members, who constitute the exuberant and generous reserves of the Fascist Revolution.

Evidently the Venetian student leaders were well aware of the currency carried by their ‘youth’.

Thus, in the elite world of the regime’s ideologues, the ‘primacy of youth’ envisaged a hierarchy based not on age but on political worth; the youthful generation to be exalted was one that was young – fascist – in spirit, not necessarily in years. As this complex debate spread, however, it was subject to mutations and new understandings, which often transferred the dividing line between young and old from political allegiance to one’s position along the life-course. In Venice, for example, whilst Captain Ginocchietti and Franco Pasinetti grasped the idea of youth as a metaphysical state of mind, lauded the achievements of ‘young old men’ and called for Italian youth to prove their worth, Peppino Ranieri ‘understood’ the fascist rhetoric as the forgetting of the contribution made by his generation to the regime’s success. Whether or not this was a ‘tactic’ to excuse their spendthrift ways, the student leaders of the Venetian GUF made recourse to what they saw as the inherent ‘value’ of their youth. Thus, although the regime intended to put forward a new concept of youthfulness based on fascist ‘spirit’ and participation, in the end it was very often received as a material and conflictual positing of the generations; young vs. old.

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36 “Il minimo indispensabile per creare, se non una vera e propria casa dello studente, almeno una mensa Universitaria in cui gli Universitari possa consumare i propri pasti, composti di cibi sani e sufficienti ad un prezzo equo.” ACS PNF Servizi vari, Serie I b. 1183.

37 “Soltanto così operando il GUF Veneziano si sarà reso benemerito verso i suoi organizzati, che costituiscono la riserva esuberante e generosa della Rivoluzione Fascista.” Ibid.
The experience of childhood under the regime

From early in the Fascist ventennio the Italian education system had been recognised as providing one of the clearest opportunities for the ‘political socialisation’ of young Italians; school teachers, syllabi, text books and ceremonies were harnessed by the Fascist regime as tools in creating and consolidating consent for its policies and for the subordination of the individual within the regime hierarchy. To this end, the regime paid great attention to education provision, from Giovanni Gentile’s 1923 measures which placed the education system upon authoritarian and elitist foundations and culminating in Bottai’s Carta della Scuola of 1939, effectively a statement of fascist educational principles which geared the national education system towards the production of “many labourers but few doctors” and reflected the imperial, racist mindset of the fascist regime.38

Whilst historians of Fascist Italy have often focused upon the ‘fascistisation’ of the Italian education system and its propaganda value in terms of inculcating young Italians with fascist ideology, far less attention has been paid to young people’s free time and the way in which childhood games, pastimes and relationships were influenced and changed by the fascist regime. Victoria De Grazia, in The Culture of Consent, considered the regime’s attempts to influence Italians’ recreational activities through the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro, demonstrating the limitations of the fascist authorities’ attempts to organise consensus in this

38 Giovanni Gentile’s 1923 reforms provided the foundation stones for the fascist educational system (even though some contemporaries found his reforms lacking in fascist spirit and indeed in some ways they were not a radical departure from liberal pre-fascist education policies) in the sense that they provided an authoritarian and elitist base for the system. An emphasis on patriotic (and racial) nationalism and militarism would be added later. Under Gentile, primary schooling was decreed obligatory for all Italian children (up to the age of 14), while secondary schools were rigidly streamed and segregated and universities reserved only for the lucky few. A distinction—and division—between urban and rural schools was also made. For example, licei femminili were instituted, thus segregating girls and boys, and consigning women to an education deemed appropriate by fascists—singing, embroidery, dance and ‘women’s work’ rather than, say, Latin, Greek and philosophy. In terms of administrative reform, Gentile introduced a typically fascist hierarchical system with the creation of a provveditore for each of the 19 administrative regions, who were nominated by the minister to direct head-teachers and teachers on pedagogic, and later on political, matters. Gentile’s reforms also abandoned liberal Italy’s principle of secular education; article 3 of the Royal Decree no. 2185 of 10 October 1923 declared that “the teaching of Christian doctrine in accordance with the Catholic faith shall form the foundation and capstone of elementary education in all grades.” Michele Sarfatti, in his work, Gli ebrei nell’Italia fascista, argues that early fascist policies such as these, which destroyed post-risorgimento secular ideals by favouring Catholicism, amount to the ‘persecution of religious equality’ and prove fascism’s anti-Jewish stance from the start. See Sarfatti M, Gli ebrei nell’Italia fascista: una comunità tra persecuzione e rinascita Turin, Einaudi, 2000, especially chapter 3. Bottai’s carta envisaged the school pupil as a ‘citizen soldier’ partly through the compulsory 2-year Scuola del Lavoro, supposed to generate social cohesion through the dignity of labour. For a full discussion of fascist secondary education see Koon T, Believe, Obey, Fight chapter 2 or Isnenghi M L’educazione dell’italiano. Il fascismo e l’organizzazione della cultura.
way, reliant as they were on appropriating pre-existing and competing cultural forms and institutions. De Grazia's work, however, focused on adults, not children.

One of the most comprehensive works to analyse the fate of children and adolescents under fascism is that written by American sociologist Tracy Koon. In Believe Obey Fight. Political Socialisation of Youth in Fascist Italy 1922-43, Koon examined young Italians' 'political socialisation' – i.e. the process by which attitudes, values and beliefs relating to a political system are formed – through not only the education system but also the fascist youth groups and university organisations. She demonstrated how, over the course of the ventennio, school curricula, text books and youth group manuals became increasingly steeped in fascist propaganda, particularly during the period she termed the 'new imperial climate' following the Italian conquest of Ethiopia in May 1936. More problematic however, is Koon's faithful adherence to the thesis of young Italians' 'long journey' towards antifascism – the idea that Italian youth became increasingly disillusioned with the regime over the course of the 1930s, and, as a relatively unified cohort-group, moved inexorably towards dissent and anti-fascism – articulated initially by Ruggero Zangrandi in his 1947 generational account of the growth of opposition to the fascist regime. Such accounts proposing a transition from the early 1930s 'years of consent' towards societal disapproval and distancing from the regime by the end of the decade found their greatest champion in Renzo De Felice and have been echoed in the works of historians such as Simona Colarizzi in her study of public opinion and Maria Teresa

39 De Grazia V The Culture of Consent. Mass organisation of leisure in Fascist Italy passim.
40 Koon identified an evolution of increased anti-fascism among young Italians which she divided into four periods: the initial squadrista period up to 1925, characterised by fascism's struggle to install itself as the governing regime, which saw a high degree of political involvement among the young; a second period of consolidation from 1925 to the early 1930s, when young Italians' propensity for involvement with the fascist regime is lower and those who become active within the party organisations do so principally because they are motivated by professional ambition. The third stage is identified as fascism's attempts to recreate the original élan of the movement in order to mobilise Italian youth behind the regime – this stage, she said, was characterised by the tendency of politically involved young Italians to deviate away from the regime – the so-called 'problema dei giovani' of the early 1930s. Finally, the fourth period, coinciding with the Spanish Civil War, the introduction of the racial laws in 1938, the axis alliance with Germany and the outbreak of World War II, was distinguished by a growing realisation among young Italians that the regime has not fulfilled its promises to them and that it cannot be changed from within. During this period, the minority of Italian young people who were politically active gravitated towards total rejection and active opposition to the regime. Koon did, of course, recognise that within these four broad stages, individual young Italians were presented with a variety of options in terms of their behaviour towards the fascist regime, and argued that two personal variables affected each individuals choice of attitude towards the regime – the individual's propensity for involvement and interest in 'politics' and their degree of acceptance or belief in the system. Koon T Believe, Obey, Fight, chapter 1.

75
Mazzatosta with regard to school teachers. Whilst seeking to map out neat categories of time
to delineate the limits of consent and dissent for the regime is a tempting and, to a degree,
useful pursuit, such rigidly temporal categories cannot adequately explain the complexities and
fluctuations in the responses of any group of Italians, young or old, to the regime. More recent
studies, such as Luca La Rovere’s analysis of the GUF, have, inspired by Emilio Gentile’s
understanding of fascism’s sacralisation of politics, emphasised both the totalising intentions of
the regime’s youth policies and young Italians’ continued enthusiastic support for a project
which exalted them as the elite vanguard. Though La Rovere’s account does much to dispel
the ‘long journey’ myth, it still leaves little room for what Ruth Ben Ghiat has termed the
‘ambiguities’ and ‘ambivalences’ of life under dictatorship.

In Venice, as throughout the peninsula, the fascist authorities sought to regulate and control
children’s leisure time and private lives. Children were pressured to join fascist youth groups,
which existed to manage youngsters’ out-of-school activities from the age of 6 to 21. Fascist
youth policy evolved over the course of the ventennio, shaped in part by friction between the
Ministry for National Education which controlled the Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB) created in
1926 and the PNF which enjoyed direct control over the university groups and the Fasci
giovanili for working class and rural young men. From 1937, however the disparate fascist
youth and university groups came under the unified control of a newly created institution – the
Gioventù Italiana del Littorio (GIL). The youth organisations were schematised according to
gender and age: male and female children became Figli and Figlie della Lupa at the age of six.
Boys and girls then followed separate paths. Young boys enrolled as Balilla from the age of 8 to
10, as Balilla moschettieri from 11 to 12, became Avanguardisti between the ages of 13 to 14,
then Avanguardisti moschettieri from 15 to 17. At 18 those who went straight into employment
were expected to enrol as Giovani Fascisti, whilst those who went on to university could join the

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42 See De Felice R Mussolini. Gli anni del consenso 1929-1936; Colarizi S L’Opinione degli italiani sotto il regime
1929-1943; Mazzatosta TM, Il regime fascista tra educazione e propaganda 1935-43.
43 See La Rovere L Storia dei GUF. Organizzazione, politica e miti della gioventù universitaria fascista 1919-1943
Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 2003 and Ruth Ben Ghiat’s review of La Rovere’s book in the Journal of Modern Italian
44 Enrolment in the fascist youth groups did not become compulsory until 1939; in practice, however, the regime
placed enormous political, social and economic pressure on both children and parents to join local ONB
organisations. For example, from 1928 awarding bodies of academic scholarships and prizes had to give
preference to ONB members, who also were entitled to vastly reduced-cost travel and leisure time activities. In
addition, the process of enrolling in the ONB was a negative one, in the sense that schools sent ONB application
forms directly to children’s homes; parents had to provide written explanations if they chose not to enrol their
children, rather than take positive action to include their children in the organisation. Koon T Believe, Obey, Fight
pp. 95-6.
local GUF, until the age of 21, when all became eligible to join the local Fascio. For young girls, the path was less elaborate: Between the ages of 8 and 14 they could enrol as *Piccole Italiane*, then as *Giovani Italiane* from 15 to 17, and as *Giovani Fasciste* at 18, until they too, at the age of 21, became eligible to enrol in the *Fascio femminile*. Participation in the youth groups of the ONB (or the GIL from 1937) depended on both age and gender: membership decreased as children got older and boys were more likely to join than girls, most probably a reflection of the influence of school attendance in guiding the decision to enrol. The Veneto region as a whole, and the province of Venice in particular, had a relatively low ONB membership, especially in comparison with other urban zones in the north and centre. Nevertheless, the number of Venetian children enrolled in the various political youth groups was considerable; by December 1940, in the province of Venice, out of a total population of 645,443, there were 148,606 youngsters enrolled in the various fascist youth groups, 109,944 of whom were described as being "uniformed".

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46 For a schematisation of the fascist youth groups see Koon *Believe, Obey, Fight* p. 149.
47 Koon puts forward this equation of fascist youth group membership and continued attendance at school from the analysis of comprehensive statistical data. The number of boys and girls enrolled nationally in 1936 in the various ONB organisations according to both age group and percentage of their presence in the population was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth group</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balilla (age 8-14)</td>
<td>74.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avanguardisti (age 15-17)</td>
<td>75.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giovani Fascisti (age 18-21)</td>
<td>53.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piccole Italiane (age 8-14)</td>
<td>66.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giovani Italiane (age 15-17)</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giovani Fasciste (age 18-21)</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


48 In a PNF report of 1939 ranking the Italian provinces according to GIL membership, Koon noted that Venice was one of only a "handful" of northern cities which figured in the bottom half of the league table, a position she ascribed to its location as a "border area [...] where fascism was traditionally weak and Catholic Action traditionally strong". In 1932 within the Veneto region, 2,671 boys enrolled in the Balilla per 100,000 inhabitants, compared with 3,967 in Piedmont, 4,337 in Liguria, 3,641 in Lombardy, 2,332 in Trentino, 6,223 in Venezia-Giulia, 3,676 in Emilia and 3,791 in Tuscany. Koon T *Believe, Obey, Fight* pp. 181-3.

49 "In divisa." This includes, therefore, the territory around Mestre on the mainland, as well as the various islands of Venice. These figures were reported to the PNF in Rome in the *Situazione politica ed economica delle provincie* report sent in preparation for the second *Mostra Della Rivoluzione*, due to be staged in 1942. The full break-down of membership in the various GIL organisations in December 1940 was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Giovani Fascisti</th>
<th>Iscritti</th>
<th>In divisa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22,274</td>
<td>9,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avanguardisti</td>
<td>20,665</td>
<td>8,305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balilla</td>
<td>36,998</td>
<td>24,740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giovani Fasciste</td>
<td>9,479</td>
<td>9,114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giovani Italiane</td>
<td>7,534</td>
<td>6,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piccole Italiane</td>
<td>24,653</td>
<td>24,365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figli/e della Lupa</td>
<td>27,003</td>
<td>27,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totale</strong></td>
<td><strong>148,606</strong></td>
<td><strong>109,944</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to the youth groups, other institutions of a perhaps more ostensibly charitable nature, usually managed by the Fascio femminile, existed to occupy children at times when their parents would have been working. For example, recreatori fascisti were entrusted with the care of predominantly working-class children in the hours immediately after school, thus subtracting yet more ‘private’ time from their daily lives. According to the Rivista di Venezia, the recreatori fascisti “continue and complete the schools’ work, whose hours are limited from 8.30 to 12.30, rescuing little ones in the long afternoons from the inauspicious influence of the street and the tedium of segregation within the family, where too often they vegetate in restricted and unhealthy environments.”\(^5\)0 The 100 recreatori fascisti working in the province of Venice were charged with caring for the “the moral and physical education” of 4,000 school children, achieved through “an appropriate programme of conversation and reading, pedagogic cinematography, walks, visits to monuments and museums, trips to the beach, hygienic gymnastics, singing, etc”.\(^5\)1 Considered particularly beneficial was the Recreatorio estivo on the Lido which allowed local children “to benefit from the sea air on our enchanted beach.”\(^5\)2 Besides spending after-school hours with the recreatori fascisti on educational trips or visits to the beaches of the Lido, during the summer holidays many Venetian children were also sent away from the city to the healthier atmosphere of the colonie estive in the surrounding countryside and mountains. Run either by the provincial E.O.A (Ente Opera Assistenziale) or the Fascio femminile, the colonie estive were effectively fascist holiday camps for the children of working class city families; for example, in the summer of 1936, the PNF, following agreement with the Federazione Nazionale Fascista della Gente del Mare, sent seventy children of fishermen from Venice, Pellestrina and Chioggia to E.O.A.-run colonie on the mainland.\(^5\)3

Young Venetians, then, certainly found themselves bombarded with ‘suggestions’ as to how they ought to spend their leisure time. At the same time, traditional children’s pastimes were infused with fascist ‘messages’ and propaganda. As so often seems the case in terms of the

\(^{50}\) “Continuano e completano l’opera della scuola, il cui orario è limitato dalle 8.30 alle 12 e mezza, sottraendo nel lungo pomeriggio i piccoli all’influenza nefasta della strada e al tedio della segregazione in famiglia, dove troppo spesso si vegeta in ambienti ristretti e malsani.” Rivista di Venezia, Mar. 1931, “La scuola comunale a Venezia nel 1930” pp. 112-20.

\(^{51}\) “L’educazione morale e fisica [...] un adatto programma di conversazioni e letture, di cinematografie istruttive, di passeggiate, di visite a monumenti e a musei, di gite sulla spiaggia, di ginnastica igienica, canto ecc.” Ibid.

\(^{52}\) “Di fruire della cura marina sulla nostra spiaggia incantata.” Ibid.

\(^{53}\) ACS, PNF Servizi Varì, Serie I b. 1187.
gap between the regime’s intention and the population’s actual experience, the Fascist authorities’ attempts to infiltrate and regulate youngsters’ free time resulted in a kind of paradox: on the one hand, fascist policies towards the young sought to transform the experience of childhood, understood from the late nineteenth century as a distinct life-phase identified with innocence, purity and unsullied by the adult world, into a novel encounter dedicated to regimen and discipline. On the other hand, in seeking to impose their view of the ideal childhood, the fascist regime inevitably had to make recourse to ‘traditional’ childhood pastimes – games, fairy tales and comics – as the media for transmitting fascist ideals to the very young. The employment of such media, already in possession of its own repository of myths, structures, and associations, familiar to Italian children, served inevitably to cloud and distort the reception of fascism’s messages by young Venetians.

The Fascist ideal of childhood was one in which children would, in effect, behave as little adults. With the institution of the *Figli* and *Figlie della Lupa* in 1935, infants as young as six, “little children who yesterday still cowered in their mothers’ arms, the same ones who yesterday listened, terrified and fascinated, to old fairy-tales which told of ogres and witches, who were afraid of the dark and many other such foolish things,” were corralled and ranked into military style formations; the very shout of “*Figli della Lupa*”, now enough to prompt “hundreds of bold little faces [to] lift up at that shout, hundreds of little hands to stretch out in the fascist salute”.

With pride, it was announced that “the fact of being enrolled in the ranks of the *Balilla*” had given six-year-old Italians “a new boldness and has definitively buried that not so distant past amongst the clutter of useless things.” For a few, initiation into the ranks of fascism could not start soon enough. In February 1936 the *Corriere dei Piccoli* ran an article publicising the decision of one, ardently fascist, new father to enrol his new-born son, Italo, in the ONB, thereby completing “the triad of baptisms” which would render “little Italo a perfect Italian”.

54 Whilst one should avoid over-eulogising the experience of childhood in the early twentieth century and should, of course, draw distinctions between the childhood experienced by children of very wealthy or even middle-class families and that experienced by those born into the *classe popolari*, compelling arguments have been made with regard to the idolisation of childhood and adolescence as a period of innocence and noble potential at the turn of the century. See, for example, the introduction of Neubauer J., *The Fin-de-Siecle Culture of Adolescence.*

55 “Bimbi che ieri ancora si accoccolavano fra le braccia della mamma, quegli stessi che ieri ascoltavano atteriti e affascinati, le vecchie fiabe dove si parlava di orchi e di streghe, che avevano paura del buio e di tante altre sciocchissime cose.” Il *Balilla* 10 Jan. 1935 p. 3.

56 “Centinaia di visetti arditi [di] levarsi a quel grido, centinaia di piccole mani tendersi al saluto fascista.” Ibid.

57 “Il fatto di essere inquadrati nei ranghi dell’Opera Balilla […] una baldanza nuova e abbia sepolto definitivamente quel passato non lontano, fra il ciarpame delle cose inutili.” Ibid.

and the religious ceremony that ensured his status as a Christian.) Thus, with the “fascist baptism” – during which Italo’s father proudly received his son’s Balilla *tezzer" and *medaglione* and, on his son’s behalf, swore “in the name of God and Italy [...] to execute the orders of the *Duce* and to serve with all my force and, if necessary, with my blood, the cause of the fascist revolution” – Italians could take their place in the regime “from the first moments of life”.

Though this case does not appear representative of conventional practice, the delight with which the *Corriere* upheld this prototype fascist baptism, suggests that, at least in terms of intention, in the new regime even the *giovanissimi* were to be mobilised.

*Children’s comics in the ‘time of Mussolini’*

One of the ways that the fascist regime conveyed its propaganda to its youngest citizens was via the medium of children’s comic books, although it was not until 1938 that the Ministry for Popular Culture passed a decree regulating – and restricting – the content of children’s magazines. Comics, it now asserted, “must be worthy of the ‘time of Mussolini’”;

they should exalt the Italian race and Italian heroism and be divested of what was considered to be their overly foreign influence. The reforms decreed: the prohibition of ‘foreign material’ and stories and illustrations inspired by foreign productions, except for Walt Disney creations, considered to have “cultural and moral value”; illustrations should be reduced to less than half a page in order to allow more room for text, both of which should be carried out by writers and artists, not “ill-prepared dilettantes”; comics should, above all, have an educative function, exalting Italian military heroism, the Italian race and Italy’s past and present history; “adventure” could still have its place in comics, but only without its current criminal, paradoxical, “disturbing” and morally equivocal elements; and finally somatic characters should be “notably” Italian.

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59 *Nel nome di Dio e dell’Italia [...] di eseguire gli ordini del Duce e di servire con tutte le mie forze e se è necessario col mio sangue in causa della Rivoluzione fascista [...] fino dai primi istanti di vita.* *Corriere dei Piccoli* 16 Feb. 1936 p. 3.

60 *Dovranno essere degni del “tempo di Mussolini”* *Gazzetta* 13 Nov. 1938.

61 *Tenebrosa [...]spiccatamente.* *Ibid.* The first comics in Italy to introduce the infamous Walt Disney character Mickey Mouse, or *Topolino*, were published in 1932 by the Nerbini publishing house; the franchise was taken over in 1935 by Mondadori subsidiary, API. David Forgacs has suggested that the exception made to the prohibition of ‘foreign’ cartoon figures for Walt Disney creations, an exception which remained in force until 1941 and the USA’s entry to the war, was due in part to the popularity of Disney with the Italian public, but above all to the negotiating powers of Arnoldo Mondadori and his son Alberto, renowned for their ability to find accommodation with the regime’s censorship regulations. *Forgacs D Italian Culture in the Industrial Era 1880 – 1980. Cultural industries, politics and the public.* Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1990 pp. 57-8; 62-3.
regime, then, clearly recognised the vital importance of comics as potential tools in its quest to model and mobilise young Italians.

Both pre-existing titles such as the *Corriere dei Piccoli* and the Venetian *Gazzettino dei Ragazzi* as well as the new magazines introduced during the *ventennio*, including the official children's paper of the ONB, *il Balilla*, were mobilised in the regime's efforts to mould young Italians to grow up as ideal fascist men and women, to be the advance guard of the Fascist cause. The children's comics published a mixture of conventional fairy tales, cartoon strips, crosswords and puzzles as well as articles, stories and photographs which highlighted the regime's achievements, promoted the perennial fascist ideals of nationalism, heroism and war and emphasised the crucial role that their audience – Italian children – could and should play to ensure the continuance and completion of the ‘fascist revolution’. To this end, for example, in the final two months of 1934, the avid young readers of the *Corriere dei Piccoli* were able to read stories that were not necessarily intended to be read literally, but provided idealised, exemplary fascist stereotypes: “How Tonello helped the March on Rome”62 (by stealing the keys to the village Socialist HQ and locking all the socialists inside for the night); cartoons recounting the “fascistisation" of a statute of the first *Balilla* and the visit to Italy of a cartoon figure bearing a remarkable resemblance to Adolf Hitler; a play featuring a brother and sister who, before leaving the house to attend a fascist *adunata* dressed in the *Balilla* and *Piccola Italiana* uniforms hand-made for them by their mother, salute the portrait of their father, killed in the trenches; the tale of Tenente Grifeo di Patanna, part of the Corriere’s *Eroi della nuova Italia* series; articles lauding the advances and achievements of Italian aviation; as well as poems composed in ode to il Duce and the motto of fascist youth, *Credere, obbedire, combattere*.63

Although each of the comics emphasised the crucial role that both boys and girls had to play in the construction and maintenance of the regime, the proscribed tasks and spheres of girls and boys were often made distinct. Italian girls were informed of their historic role in the “Piccole Italiane” pages of the *Balilla* dedicated especially to them. In these pages, Italian girls received advice from ‘Mamma Serena’ and ‘Zia Titti’ about “home economics, domestic tasks and hygiene”; the tasks and duties that, as future housewives and mothers, awaited them.64 “The page of the *piccola italiana*” on 31 January 1935, for example, figured Zia Titti eulogising the

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64 “Economia domestica, sui lavori donnechici e sull'igiene.” *Balilla* 22 Nov. 1934 p. 10.
'home', the space where "women, single or married, find their natural domain". Beneath cartoons of piccole italiane sewing, caring for their younger siblings and watering the garden, the article asserted that as women, even if forced by circumstance to be active outside the home, "it is towards the domestic hearth that we must constantly direct our thoughts" because it is only within the home that women can employ "those simple and great feminine virtues" on which "the happiness and prosperity of the family" depends. Thus the article firmly reminded piccole italiane that, despite the reality of the public nature of their role (parading in adunate, performing charitable works etc.), under fascism their future remained firmly centred around the family hearth: here they were instructed to use their "feminine virtues" – affection, economic prudence, "order, sense of peace, cleanliness and harmony" – to carry out their proscribed duties, as mothers to prepare "the new generations, physically and morally healthy" and as housewives, given that "to make the home prettier, more comfortable and elegant is precisely one of the feminine duties". Ultimately, therefore, within the fascist regime theirs was to be a supporting role; Zia Titti instructed the piccole italiane to "pour out those treasures of affection, which illuminate, sustain and often provide men with the motivation to face the most arduous trials, to fight and to win."

The young girls' appointed role was further reinforced through photographs and cartoon strips which featured Piccole Italiane performing the duties assigned to Fascist girls, whether parading at an adunata or carrying out household chores. One such cartoon strip, which appeared in the Balilla on 20 September 1934, depicted the morning activities of the idealised piccola italiana, Mariella, and her little – Balilla – brother [see figure 1]. The day began with prayers, immediately after which they, "to maintain their bodies elastic / do various gymnastic exercises". Following this, Mariella set about the task of bathing her little brother. Thus, the cartoon asserted the importance of religious observance, physical exercise and household duties, all integral components of the Fascist female ideal. The piccola italiana, however, did not only play a private role, contained within the confines of the family household. As a young fascist, she was also expected to engage in the public achievements of fascism, as the cartoon published in the first edition of 1935 demonstrates [see figure 2]. Here, just before the clock

66 "È al focolare domestico, che noi dobbiamo rivolgere il nostro pensiero costante [...] quelle semplici e grandi virtù femminili [...] la felicità e la prosperità della famiglia." Ibid.
67 "Virtù femminili [...] ordine, senso di pace, pulizia e armonia [...] fisicamente e moralmente sane, le nuove generazioni [...] rendere la casa più bella, più comoda, più elegante, è proprio un dei compiti femminili." Ibid.
68 "Prodigare quei tesori di affetto, che illuminano e che sostengono, e che danno spesso ragione all'uomo, di affrontare le prove più ardue, di combattere e di vincere." Ibid.
69 "Per mantenersi nel fisico elastici / fanno diversi esercizi ginnastici." Balilla 20 Sept. 1934 p. 5.
struck midnight to signal the new year, the *piccola italiana* embarked upon a magical tour of Fascist Italy, “to visit the great novelties / that the New Year already prepares”. Mariella marvelled at the sight of “Case Balilla, campsites, cruises [...] cradles, kitchens, fascist epiphany” as well as “grain a plenty that will shine under the Italian sun”. The cartoon ended with the *piccola italiana* toasting the beginning of the New Year “whilst her brothers, perfect *balilla*, briskly present their muskets.”70 In addition to the acknowledgement of the public role young girls had to play, on occasion *piccole italiane* were presented more favourably than their male counterparts. On 26 September 1935 the *pagina della piccola italiana* featured “a studious *balilla* and a *piccola italiana*, a little less studious than him” attempting to draw the borders of Italy on a map.71 Whilst the *balilla* struggled to remember the rhyme that spells out the traditional confines of Italy, the *piccola italiana*, beginning with the first lines of the rhyme but then improvising her own version, proudly asserted:

Alps to the north...the sea all around... [...]  
but Italy doesn't have borders  
as she knows how to surpass mountains  
and is queen of the sea...  
Therefore, it's pointless to study:  
as Italy doesn't have borders! [...]  
But what mountains, what sea  
could Italy not traverse  
to create her tomorrow  
to fulfill her destiny?”72

The *balilla* concurred with the *piccola italiana* as they concluded in unison: “For Italy and Mussolini, no, there are no borders!”73

Following Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935, the *Gazzettino dei Ragazzi* was eager to inform its young female readers of the kind of tasks they could perform in order to fulfil their

70 “Per visitare le gran novità / che l'Anno Nuovo prepara di già [...] Case Balilla, campeggi, crociere, [...] culle, cucine, befana fascista [...] gran copia di grano che brillerà sotto il Sole Italiano [...] mentre i fratelli, balilla perfetti, / svelti presentano i loro moschetti.” *Il Balilla* 3 Jan 1935 p. 4.
72 Alpi al Nord ... intorno il mare ..... [...]  
ma l'Italia non confina  
ché sa i monti valicare  
e del mare essa è regina...  
Dunque è inutile studiare:  
ché l'Italia non confina! [...]  
Ma che monti, ma che mare  
da cui Italia non sconfini,  
per creare il suo domani  
per compire i suoi destini? Ibid.
73 “Per l'Italia e Mussolini / non vi sono, no, confini.” Ibid.
LA PICCOLA ITALIANA

1. Appena cheg di buon mattina, appena il sole splende, si alza... Il sole splende nel suo palco, il sole splende nel suo palco...

2. Per ascoltare nel vivo parlato della famiglia, si prepara... Che cosa si prepara in casa? Si prepara la colazione, si prepara la colazione...

3. Chi è il tesoro condotte la liettia? Si leggono... Chi è il tesoro condotte la liettia? Si leggono...

4. Ma il tesoro che sia la liettia, ha una meraviglia... Ha una meraviglia...

5. In volto... In volto...

6. Ma non torno alla quale trovano... Non torno alla quale trovano...
Figure 2: II Balilla 3 January 1935 p. 4.
duty as patriots and fascists. On 19 April 1936, both the front and back pages of the Gazzettino carried full-page photographs of Italian girls engaged in patriotic feminine tasks [see figs. 3 & 4]; nursing and sewing flags. To further reinforce this message of female patriotic duty, within the comic itself there appeared an article recounting an episode that reportedly took place in one of the sestiere fascist headquarters in Venice. A group of piccole italiane, curious to see "the new portraits of the King and Duce" and other innovations of the recently refurbished party headquarters, came across an ornately framed photograph of an unfamiliar man, dressed in the uniform and medals of the Fascist militia. Surprised by their leader, the girls clamoured to know the identity of the soldier. The man, they learned, was Ettore Boschi, "a Sansepolcrista. [...] He is a heroic soldier of the Libyan war and the great victorious war. Now he's a volunteer in East Africa, fighting with the heroic Blackshirts of the 28 October division." The piccole italiane responded to this news in the manner of concerned mothers; "their little hands touched and caressed the portrait [...and] they pledged to become the 'godmothers' of the far-away combatant".

Italian boys too could find continual reminders within the pages of the Gazzettino dei Ragazzi, the Corriere dei Piccoli and the Balilla of the role in society accorded to them by the fascist regime. The pages of these comics were replete with stories recounting the heroic deeds of Italians fighting the wars of the Risorgimento and the Great War, photographs of Balilla presenting their arms or practicing combat manoeuvres [see figure 6], tales of fearless Balilla who dreamt of fighting for fascism as well as accounts of 'real-life' heroic Balilla diving into rivers to save the lives of small children and the like. Italian boys, in short, ought to behave as soldiers; they should be courageous, disciplined, heroic and ready, once their time came, to die for their country and for fascism. To this end, the Balilla regularly carried articles announcing the awarding of medals – the Croce al merito – to individual ONB members, including many from Venice. These Balilla were invariably lauded for their soldierly conduct. In addition, though, other less belligerent qualities were occasionally singled out for praise:

Caniatu Lanfranco & Matusalem (deceased)
Resident in Venice. Enrolled since 1930. – Always very quick and ready in carrying out all his duties as a Balilla, son and student: kind and generous with his comrades; affectionate;

74 Gazzettino dei Ragazzi 19 Apr. 1936 pp.1 & 12.
76 "Le manine toccano il ritratto, l'accarezzano [...e] s'impegnano a diventare le 'madrine' del combattente lontano" Ibid.
77 See, for example, Il Balilla 22 Nov. 1934 p. 11.
Figure 3: Gazzettino dei Ragazzi 19 April 1936 p. 1.
Caption: "In our little girls' games lives the same sentiment that today vibrates in the hearts of all the women of Italy" ("Nei giochi delle nostre bimbe prende vita lo stesso sentimento che oggi vibra nel cuore di tutte le donne d'Italia").

Figure 4: Gazzettino dei Ragazzi 19 April 1936 p. 12.
Caption: "The work most welcomed by Italian girls" ("Il più gradito lavoro per una bimba italiana")
obedient to superiors, inspires full confidence as a soldier devoted to the Fatherland and the Duce.

Marcato Luigi, of Antonio
Resident in Chioggia. Enrolled since 1931. - Demonstrates great activity and ability in propaganda work towards the enrollment of his peers in the Fascist organisation and he emerges as a scholar for his diligence, conduct and school marks.

Longo Antonio, of Alfredo
Resident in Venice, Enrolled since 1931. Singular example of discipline, attachment to the Organisation and of comprehension of all his duties as a Balilla. At school, also, he is at the top of his studies.78

The space within these comics devoted to cartoons, stories, articles, photographs and drawings dedicated to the exaltation of heroism, violence, war and, indeed, death is remarkable.79 Stories of fantastic individual heroics during the Great War were very much the order of the day: The Corriere dei Piccoli regularly published tales of Great War heroism in its long-running Eroi della Grande Guerra series. The Balilla, for example, published the tale of “The last weapon”, recounting the brave deeds of a one-legged soldier, Toti, who “wanted to fight against the enemy, and wanted, he used to say, a little place under the fire of the machine guns.”80

Granted his wish to fight on the front line, Toti participated in an attack:

Finally the order to attack is given .... The machine guns call out their rosary of death and Toti is there, crutch in one hand, rifle in the other, running, hopping to be at the head of them all.

Now and then he stops. Is he tired? But no, he only wants to take just aim to fire at the enemy. A bullet hits him, but he doesn’t stop... he runs, runs, shouting: - Forward Bersaglieri, long live Trieste! He is wounded once again but doesn’t fall as though a superhuman vitality sustains him. But a third fatal bullet sends him crashing into the barbed wire. He rises up once again, but death seizes him with its hooked hand. His comrades overtake him in a victorious charge against the enemy. Toti cannot advance further. He

78 “Caniato Lanfranco, fu Matusalem
Residente in Venezia. Iscritto dal 1930. - Prontissimo sempre nell’adempimento di tutti i suoi doveri di Balilla, di figlio, di scolaro; gentile e generoso coi camerati; affezionato, obbediente ai superiori, dà sicuro affidamento di militte devoto alla Patria ed al Duce

Marcato Luigi, di Antonio
Residente in Chioggia. C.S. Iscritto dal 1931. - Dimostra grande attività ed abilità nell’opera di propaganda per l’iscrizione dei suoi compagni all’Organizzazione fascista e come scolaro emerge per diligenza, condotta e profitto.

Longo Antonio, di Alfredo.

79 Violent and heroic death, and the ideal of war more generally figured as important narratives in fascist discourse. For a more detailed account of the way in which these ideas and tropes were mediated between individual and regime see chapter 5 of this thesis.

searches around himself for his rifle in order to fire his last shot. He cannot find it. So he grasps his crutch, raises it, a resplendent weapon of victory, and launches it towards the fleeing enemy. How he would like launch his heart against them.81

The wars of the Risorgimento also provided a rich vein of tales of violent, heroic, patriotic sacrifice for the fascist authorities to mine as propaganda.82 The story entitled "The death of a hero", published in the Balilla on 22 November 1934 sought to transmit the values of nationalism, war, sacrifice and, above all, a 'good fascist death'83 to its young readers. The story recounted the deaths of Luciano Manara, Emilio Dandolo and other risorgimentalist fighters in an attack on the Aurelian walls of Rome in 1849. The context of the narrated deaths – in the defence of the Roman Republic proclaimed in February 1849 following the flight of Pope Pius IX to Gaeta under the protection of Ferdinand II, King of the Two Sicilies – lends the story an anti-papal and anti-French tone; it was the intervention of French troops in June 1849 which brought about the end of the democratic Republic the following month. Mortally wounded by a bullet to the stomach, the representation of Manara's last moments reflected the ideal fascist death; despite terrible physical suffering, the dying man's thoughts are of his fellow combatants, family, country and of God, and he welcomes death with courage and resignation.

- I'm dead! exclaimed Luciano, turning his eyes to Emilio. – I recommend my children to you. A doctor hastened over; Manara saw him pale and understood that it was all over for him. [...] His pulse could hardly be felt any longer, his countenance was profoundly altered. [...] He must have suffered horribly. Emilio Dandolo bent towards his ear and murmured:

- Think of the Lord!
- I'm thinking of him and how! – the moribund replied. And he signaled to a capuchin monk to draw nearer.

Dandolo tried to console his friend, the latter interrupted him to talk of his children.
- Accustom them to the love of God and of Fatherland!

Then he called close to him a soldier who was in his battle order, whom he'd sometimes treated a little harshly.

Will you forgive me? – He asked him, smiling.

81 "Finalmente è dato l'ordine dell'Attacco.... Le mitragilatrici sgranano il loro rosario di morte e Toti è là, la stampella in una mano, il fucile nell'altra, che corre saltellando per essere in capo a tutti. Tratto tratto si ferma. È stanco? Ma no, solo vuol prendere la mira giusta per sparare sul nemico. Un proiettile lo colpisce, ma egli non si arresta...Corre corre, gridando: - Avanti, bersaglieri, viva Trieste! È ferito ancora, ma non cade se una vitalità sovrannana lo sorreggesse. Ma una terza palla micidiale lo fa stramazzare fra i retecolati. Si solleva ancora, ma la morte lo afferra con la sua mano adunca. I compagni lo sorpassano in una carica vittoriosa contro il nemico. Toti non può più avanzare. Cerca intorno a sà il fucile per sparare l'ultimo colpo. Non lo trova. Allora afferra la stampella, la leva, arma fulgida di vittoria, e la lancia contro il nemico in fuga. Come vorrebbe lanciarvi contro il suo cuore." Balilla 4 Oct. 1934 La ultima arma p. 11.
82 For a discussion on the ways in which fascism appropriated the myths, figures and ideals of the Risorgimento see pp. 49-51 of the introduction.
83 "Il morte di un prode." For a discussion of the fascist concept of a 'good death' see chapter 5 of this thesis.
Subsequently, he asked Dandolo for news of Morosini, reported to have been taken prisoner.

Then, turned to Bertani, he exclaimed:
- Make me die soon, I suffer too much!

These were his last words. He was transported to a room to the right of the main altar, dressed in his uniform.

Next to Luciano Manara was Garibaldi’s Negro, Anghiar.

Those two dead bodies were very beautiful, of such a different beauty. [...] The same day as Manara’s death, a letter from his wife arrived which contained these words: “Do not think of me, do not think of your children, think of the fatherland.”

It was not only on future battlefields, however, that young Fascists were expected to endure physical pain and suffering, but also in their daily lives and it is perhaps this that sets these comics of the fascist era apart from their counterparts in liberal Italy. Departing from the regime’s more usual exaltation of technological innovation and progress, the Balilla reported both fictional and non-fictional stories in praise of young Fascist boys and girls who demonstrated their adherence to fascism by tolerating extreme pain, having refused anaesthetics during medical operations. On 18 October 1934 the Balilla reported the ‘real-life’ case of Giovane Italiana Lina Valli, who “subjected to an operation for chronic stomatitis refused the ether drug and submitted to the operation under local anaesthetic without emitting a single moan, saying that a Giovane Italiana in year XII must know how to suffer in silence in order to accustom herself with discipline to the sacred duties of women.”

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84 “Sono morto! Esclamò Luciano, volgendo gli occhi a Emilio. – Ti raccomando i miei figli. Un medico accorse; Manara lo vide impallidire e comprese che tutto era finito per lui. [...] Il suo polso quasi più non si sentiva, il suo volto profondamente alterato... Doveva soffrire orribilmente. Emilio Dandolo si curvò al suo orecchio e mormorò: – Pensa al Signore!”

85 “Sottoposta ad operazione per stomatoidite cronica rifiutò la narcosi eterea e si sottomise all’atto operativo compiuto in anestesia locale senza emettere un gemito, dicendo che una Giovane Italiana nell’anno XII deve saper soffrire in silenzio per abituarsi con disciplina ai sacri doveri della donna.”
story, published in January 1935 took up the theme of young fascists' ability to bear extreme pain. In the tale, a young Blackshirt awoke in an operating theatre, about to be treated for a broken leg, incurred whilst saving a young girl's life. Having first, of course, spared a thought for his concerned mother, the Camicia Nera refused the anaesthetic offered him because, he said, “I am not afraid of suffering”. The young Fascist's bravery drew admiration from his doctor:

- I see, I see, young lad! – exclaimed the doctor, who hid his comotion by increasing the pitch of his voice. – You mean that to carry out a heroic act it's a question of a moment, whilst to freely accept suffering takes perhaps more courage than to throw oneself under a bus. Did you hear, sister, these young lads of today? They knock spots off the soldiers in the trenches. But tell me, are you sure that you won't move? Because, watch that I'm going to hurt you and you must stay still and not shout too loudly, otherwise you'll make me lose my composure.
- I won't shout, doctor.
- We'll see, we'll see! – and, ably, the doctor, helped by the nun, began the painful operation which took place in the most absolute silence.

From time to time the nun watched the young lad who, with eyes closed and lips sealed, seemed not to feel pain. But large beads of sweat fell from his forehead, which the sister piously dried.

- Gosh, what a good young lad! – exclaimed the doctor when he had finished.
- Are you a Balilla?
- Avanguardista! – Aldo responded, opening his eyes.
- And how could you say that the world doesn't belong to these young lads of Mussolini?
Aldo smiled and a drop of blood trickled from his lip, the only sign of pain which his clenched teeth had let slip in the strain.86

With the outbreak of the Abyssinian war in October 1935 the children's papers found a new source on which to draw inspiration for its comic strips, stories, puzzles and games, as well as

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86 * - Non ho paura di soffrire [...] 
- Ho capito, ho capito, ragazzaccio – esclamò il dottore che nascondeva la sua commozione con l’alzare sempre più la voce. – Vuoi dire che per compiere un atto eroico è questione di un momento, mentre per accettare la sofferenza liberamente ci vuole forse più coraggio che buttarsi sotto un autobus. Ha sentito, suora, questi ragazzi d’oggi? Danno dei punti ai soldati nelle trincee. Ma dimmi un po’, sei sicuro di non muoverli? Perché guarda che ti farò male e tu devi stare fermo e non gridare tanto forte, se no mi fai perdere la calma.
- Non gridero, dottore.
- Vedremo, vedremo! – e abilmente il medico, aiutato dalla suora cominciò la dolorosa operazione che si svolse nel silenzio più assoluto.

Di tanto in tanto la suora guardava il ragazzo che con gli occhi chiusi e le labbra serrate sembrava non sentire dolore. Ma dalla fronte cadevano grosse gocce di sudore che la suora pietosamente asciugava.
- Perdiana, che bravu ragazzol – esclamò il medico quando ebbe finito.
- Sei un Balilla tu?
- Avanguardista! – rispose Aldo aprendo gli occhi.
- E come volete che il mondo non sia di questi ragazzi di Mussolini?
Aldo sorrise e dal labbro gemette una goccia di sangue, unico segno di dolore che i denti serrati nello sforzo avessero lasciato sfuggire.* Balilla 3 Jan. 1935 p. 6.
a renewed impetus to expound imperialist rhetoric based on racial superiority. From November 1935 the *Gazzettino dei Ragazzi* frequently devoted its front pages to dramatic and fantastical illustrations which professed to recreate battle scenes from the war with captions lauding the troops and “Italy, the liberator and bringer of civilisation”. Cartoons appeared in the *Corriere dei Piccoli* featuring Venturino, the cartoon *balilla*, training *ascari* troops or flying his plane over dominated AOI territory in order to “send a tricolour salute to every admirer / and a provocative salute to his barbarous besieger” or recurrent characters, Zimbo and Bomba, expressing their outrage at Ethiopia's continued practice of slavery and outwitting foolish and crudely-drawn Ethiopians seeking to capture an Italian flag. Even crossword puzzles were infused with the imperialist spirit. For example, the clues in the *Gazzettino dei Ragazzi's* crossword on 10 November 1935 included: 4 down, “In Abyssinia: there has been much talk of it in recent days”; 5 down, “The population of the Ethiopian region of which Gondar is the capital”; 8 down, “Mana population of Africa.” Less than a month later, the comic published one of its regular *Signora Grammatica* pieces, a series which explained the finer points of Italian grammar to the young readers of the *Gazzettino*. This time, the example employed to explain the use of the constructions *di cui* and *del quale*, was that of *Africa Orientale Italiana*:

Many of our courageous soldiers have departed for East Africa – the teacher explains...
- My older brother has departed too – interrupts Giovannino – now he’s in a country what [che] I can’t remember the name anymore...
- In a country whose [*di cui*] name or of which [*del quale*] I no longer remember the name – the teacher corrected. – Giovannino, if you didn't forget so easily the teachings of that respectable lady named Grammatica, it would not befall you to mangle our beautiful language in such a way. Those valorous ones who have departed, amongst whom is also Giovannino’s brother, are there fighting, risking their lives, to open a path among the barbarians for our language, our civilisation, for the greatness of Italy. One day, you, my...
children, will certainly be able to imitate their sublime example; but for now it is necessary that you learn well the language, so rich and harmonious, of our beautiful Fatherland.92

The children's magazines were also used to diffuse practical information about what young Italians should do in the event of an attack on Italian soil, thus serving to mobilise even the youngest generation of Italians into a general state of war-readiness. All three comics, for example, employed informative articles and even cartoon strips on the subject of gas masks in order to educate children in their use and the array of potentially poisonous chemicals that they guarded against.93 The Corriere dei piccoli spared no punches, recognising that "today all ‘the

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91 The caption of figure 5 reads: "On the Somali front, in the area around Schiffave, some Italian tanks, supported by bombers, routed the Abyssinians, conquering some important positions to consolidate our lines. (Image: Nano Mori)" ("Sul fronte somala, nella zona di Schiffave, alcuni carri armati italiani, appoggiati da aeroplani di bombardamento, hanno sbaragliato gli abissini conquistando alcuni posizioni importanti per il consolidamento delle nostre linee (immagine: Nano Mori)").

92 "Molti dei nostri coraggiosi soldati sono partiti per l’Africa Orientale – spiega la signora maestra... – Anche il mio fratello maggiore è partito – interrompe Giovannino – ora si trova in un paese “che” non ricordo più il nome... – ... in un paese di cui o del quale non ricordo più il nome – corregge la signora maestra. – Se tu Giovannino non dimenticassi così facilmente gli insegnamenti di quella rispettabile signora che si chiama Grammatica, non ti accadrebbe di storpiare in tal modo la nostra bella lingua. Quei valorosi che sono partiti, fra i quali si trova anche il fratello di Giovannino, sono là che combattono arrischiando la loro vita per aprire fra i barbari una via alla nostra lingua, alla nostra civiltà, alla grandezza d’Italia. Voi un giorno, ragazzi miei, saprete certamente imitare il loro sublime esempio; ma è necessario per ora che imparate bene la lingua così ricca e armoniosa della nostra bella Patria." Gazzettino dei Ragazzi 1 Dec. 1935 p. 4.

93 See, for example, Balilla 3 Jan. 1935 p. 3 or Corriere dei piccoli 17 Mar. 1935 p. 3.
children of Italy call themselves Balilla'. And, therefore, they can – indeed they must – be treated as little men, who are perfectly at ease with certain topics, previously believed to be reserved to adults. It informed its young readers "if, one day we should be at war, aeroplanes, which now we so like to hear roaring and see twisting about in the sky, will be transformed into terrible instruments of destruction and death." The article went on to describe various poisonous gasses that could be used as weapons against the Italian people and urged the youngsters to practice regularly using their gas masks.

The orientalist discourse of the children's comics, which constructed Ethiopians as the 'other', in contrast to the modernising and civilising white Italians, was complicated by the need to reconcile Ethiopian Christianity with their 'otherness'. The comics did not universally condemn the Ethiopian population as barbarous; in fact, distinction was made between 'good' – usually Christian and often children – Ethiopians, presented as eager to receive Italian 'civilisation' and 'bad' intransigent Ethiopians, resistant both to Italy's military campaign and 'civilising' influence, committed to "primitive" practices in their lifestyles. The regime could not, after all, dismiss Ethiopians as universally barbarous, given the presence of Christianity and of the ascari troops fighting alongside Italian soldiers. Thus, the trope of the 'good Abyssinian' who recognised the civilising mission of Fascist Italy and obeyed his new masters, often to the point of death, underscored stories in the Gazzettino dei Ragazzi such as "little slave Abai" or "The rebels' ambush" about Hassan, "a little ascaro", which ran in November 1935 and June 1936 respectively.

These stories of boys and girls and of wild beasts, of war and journeys in our African lands, are all true and serve to show young Italian boys and girls what life is like in Italy's overseas countries where our little black and brown friends have learned Italian and to love the tricolour with the same fervid faith as Mussolini's proud Balilla.

94 "Oggi tutti 'i bimbi d'Italia si chiaman Balilla'. E, quindi, si può, anzi si deve trattarli come ometti, i quali i certi argomenti, che già si credevano riservati ai grandi, si trovano perfettamente a posto. [...] Se un giorno dovessimo essere in guerra, gli aeroplani, che ora piace tanto sentir rombare e veder volteggiare nel cielo, saranno trasformati in terribile strumenti di distruzione e di morte. Corriere dei piccoli 17 Mar. 1935 p. 3.

95 That Ethiopia represented one of the oldest Christian civilisations of the world was, of course, problematic for the Italian fascists who wished to portray its society as primitive as a means of justifying their colonial ambitions there. An explanation as to the ways in which this 'problem' might be overcome can perhaps be inferred from the Gazzettino's account of the development of medicine and medical knowledge in Ethiopia. Though introduced to Ethiopia 'centuries ago' by the Arabic world, the article asserted that Ethiopian medical practices had since become tainted by superstition, rendering Ethiopian medicine 'more witchcraft than science'. However, the continued Italian domination of the people and lands of Ethiopia proceeded hand in hand with "the domination of medical ignorance." Gazzetta 5 May 1936. For a discussion of the role of the 'Other' and of colonialism in identity construction see pp. 48-53 of the introduction.

96 Ascari troops were the soldiers from North and East Africa who fought for Italy.


98 Queste storie di ragazzi e di belve, di guerra e di viaggi nelle nostre terre africane, sono tutte vere e serviranno a mostrare ai ragazzi italiani la vita nei paesi dell'Italia d'oltremare, dove i piccoli amici neri o bruni hanno imparato
Photographs and illustrations (figures 7 & 8) singled out church leaders and school children "liberated from slavery" as a civilised elite who recognised the virtues of Italian colonial rule. The idea of innocent children freed, paradoxically, by falling under Italian dominion was particularly prevalent: the Corriere dei Piccoli, for example, on 9 February 1936, featured a cartoon depicting two Italian girls, Trilli and Trulli, who, on seeing a group of Ethiopian children kept in captivity as slaves, contrived to free the children by playing a gramophone recording of A noi, Savoia, thus fooling the apparently dim-witted slave masters into rushing off to fight...
imaginary approaching Italian troops, leaving Trilli and Trulli to first feed and then educate the freed slave children.\textsuperscript{100}

The more negative construction of Ethiopian stereotypes focussed on presenting an uncivilised people who engaged principally in slavery, cannibalism and similarly “primitive” practices. Articles in the Gazzettino derided Ethiopian bread as inedible and Ethiopian medicine as based more on witchcraft than science.\textsuperscript{101} In particular, though, the practice of slavery was used to demonstrate first the supposed barbarity of the Ethiopians and, consequently, the value and importance of Italy’s ‘civilising mission’. Such propaganda highlighting the civilising effect of the Italian intervention in Ethiopia intensified particularly in early 1936, as it became increasingly clear that the war was nearing its victorious close.

The apogee of this dual construction of Ethiopians as unintelligent and unmodernised, but receptive to the Italian civilising mission, was reached with the mobilisation of Topolino, perhaps the best loved of the Gazzettino’s cartoon characters.\textsuperscript{102} The cartoon mouse, a Venetian version of the popular Disney character, regularly starred in a series of comic strips in the Gazzettino dei Ragazzi, each following a similar theme involving Topolino, ill in bed, being visited by a succession of doctors, called in by his anxious wife, each of whom is dispatched by the wary mouse in some humorous fashion. Three cartoons in the series, published in December 1935, featured Topolino being visited by an Ethiopian doctor. [See figs. 9 & 10] These cartoon strips represented the Ethiopian with crudely drawn racial characteristics and showed Topolino and his children (but not his wife) reacting to the doctor’s appearance in a suitably patriotic fashion. The first in the series, “Topolino and the Abyssinian doctor” figured Topolino’s long-suffering wife, Topolina, calling as usual for a doctor to cure her husband. This time, on the advice of a cousin of wealthy appearance – and implied suspect patriotism – she called the Abyssinian who “has even cured the Negus of a potato in the brain.”\textsuperscript{103} On seeing the doctor, “a subject of the Negus”, Topolino was horrified and, with the aid of his children, chased the Ethiopian from the house to shouts of “Long live Italy” and “Down with the Negus! Up with us!”\textsuperscript{104} The final episode, “Topolino makes the Abyssinian doctor repent”, found Topolino still fuming over the ‘violation’ of his house by the Ethiopian and planning his vendetta.

\textsuperscript{100} Corriere dei Piccoli 9 Feb. 1936 p. 12.
\textsuperscript{101} Gazzettino dei Ragazzi 19 Apr. 1936 p. 3 & 5 May 1936 p. 3.
\textsuperscript{102} From the children’s essays that will be discussed later in this chapter, Topolino emerged as the favourite cartoon character by far.
\textsuperscript{103} “Ha curato anche il negus di una patata che aveva dentro il cervello.” Gazzettino dei Ragazzi 8 Dec. 1935 p. 6.
\textsuperscript{104} “Un suddito del negus [...] Viva l’Italia [...] Abbassò il negus! Avanti noi!” Ibid.
To enact his revenge, Topolino made appeal to a judge, who ordered the arrest of the Abyssinian (caught whilst playing cards with a group of disreputable characters) and threw him in prison – on what grounds is not addressed. The incarcerated Abyssinian, shown speaking and writing in broken Italian, now repentant, wrote to Topolino to ask his forgiveness "given that he knows they have good hearts in Italy". The mouse promptly demonstrated his – and by extension, his country’s – supposed capacity for mercy and humanity by arranging for the doctor’s liberation. The strip ended with the "shamed Abyssinian" fleeing back "to his little village".\footnote{Poichè sa che in Italia il cuore han buono [...] abissino scornato [...] al suo paesello. Gazzettino dei Ragazzi 22 Dec. 1935 p. 6.} Thus, the cartoon strip succeeded in addressing and presenting to its young audience two of the principal arguments used by the Fascist regime to justify their imperial ambitions; the primitiveness of the Ethiopians and the civility, humanity and, by extension, racial superiority, of the Italians, as well the response expected of the Italian people – old or young – to the war; fierce nationalism.

The \textit{Corriere} also made recourse to negative, crude stereotyping; in 1936 the comic suggested children’s games based on Fascist Italy’s new status as an imperial power which represented Ethiopians not as fellow Christians, but as primitive ‘natives’. One suggestion of a “little Italian game” was named “the Abyssinian and the aeroplane”.\footnote{Giocchetto italiano [...] l’Abissino e l’aeroplano. Corriere dei Piccoli 2 Feb. 1936 p. 8.} Children, it suggested, should cut out a cardboard “Abyssinian head”, painted black, and mount it on a cube with counterweights so that the head would oscillate when pushed lightly. Then, in order to “make the game more fun”, the instructions advised children to glue marbles, inside matchboxes, behind the cut-outs of the Abyssinian’s eyes. This way, “the oscillation will prompt the balls to move around and the Abyssinian’s face will seem to roll its eyes, terrified, as if it had heard a storm of aeroplanes.”\footnote{Testa di abissino [...] rendere il giuoco più divertente [...] l’oscillazione imprimerà alle palline degli spostamenti e la faccia dell’abissino sembrerà girare gli occhi, spaventata, come se sentisse uno stormo di aeroplani. Ibid.} Two weeks later, at the height of \textit{Carnevale} celebrations, the \textit{Corriere} ran an article suggesting new ideas for carnival \textit{mascherine} for “modern young girls and boys”, well versed, according to Rada, the author, in “war and assault tactics [and] fire arms [...] always enthusiastic for the heroic.”\footnote{Fanciulli moderni [...] tattiche di guerra, di assalti, di armi da fuoco [...] entusiasti sempre per ciò che è eroico. Il Corriere dei Piccoli 16 Feb. 1936 p. 8.} Costumes befitting these children of the fascist era included that of the \textit{dubat}: “body naked down to the belt, white burnous around the waist, turban on head” or
Topolino e il medico abissino

Figure 9: Il Gazzettino dei Ragazzi 8 December 1935 p. 6.
Topolino fa pentire il medico abissino

Figure 10: Il Gazzettino dei Ragazzi 22 December 1935 p. 6.
the ascaro: "the uniform of the regular coloured troops; khaki and fez together". Finding military accessories, it was noted, should present few problems: "There's no need to spend a thing on the weapons as every young boy owns a regulation rifle." For young girls, Rada suggested that Italian mothers should follow her own example, recalling the occasion she dressed-up a child "as a little Negro girl":

A dark knitted garment fitted down to the ankle, a ring of bananas at the waist made with a linseed paste, red coral necklaces around the neck and glass trinkets on the arms; varnished nails, henna colouring on the face. The little girl was brunette: her extra dark eyes flashed and her red mouth, made larger with eye-shadow, displayed a circle of perfect little white teeth. A great success: at the time they nicknamed her 'Josephine Baker' such was the resemblance.

The Gazzettino, Corriere and Balilla packed their pages with tales and 'factual' accounts of glorious moments in Italian history, often tailored to represent and propagandise ideals dear to fascism. The historical myths most favoured and exploited by the fascist regime as antecedents and legitimators of themselves – the Roman empire, the Risorgimento and the Great War – repeatedly appeared in the pages of the children's magazines. The myth of ancient Rome, for example, provided the setting for the long-running series in the Corriere, "The Roman eagle" whilst to celebrate the twelfth anniversary of the March on Rome, the Balilla magazine interspersed photographs of real-life Balilla and a military adunata in the capital with reproductions of Roman statues.

The Risorgimento, as we have seen, supplied a wealth of heroes, battles and myths on which the fascist regime could draw in order to assert its belief in the regenerative and purifying effects of violent struggle and war. The fascist regime also sought to present itself – as opposed to liberal Italy – as both the direct heir and continuation of the Risorgimento movement.

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109 "Corpo nudo sino alla cintola, sciamma candido intorno alla vita, turbante in testa [...] il costume delle truppe regolare di colore: insieme kaki e fez." Ibid. Concerned, no doubt, for maintaining propriety, Rada added that "naturally one cannot leave the child naked: a high-necked, long-sleeved bodice of very dark brown will give the illusion of dark skin. For the face and legs, mothers know what they should do with a special mixture of nut oil, which also gives the gloss that black people have." ("naturalmente non si può denudare il bimbo: un corsetto di lana marrone scurissimo dal collo alto e dalle maniche lunghe dà l'illusione della pelle scura. Per il viso e le gambe le mamme sanno ciò che debbono fare con una mistura speciale d'olio di noce, il quale dà anche la lucentezza che è dei negri.") Ibid.

110 Per le armi non c'è da spendere che ogni fanciullo possiede il fucile di prammatica [...] da negretta [...] Un maglione scuro aderente sino alle caviglie, un giro di banane alla cintura ottenuto con un imposto di semi di lino, collane di corallo rosso al collo e ninnoli di vetro alle braccia; unghie laccate, coloritura d'henné al viso. La bambina era bruna: gli occhi nerosissimi, solforgaravano e la bocca rossa, allargato dal bistro, mostrava una chiocciola di dentini perfetti e candidi. Un successo: allora la soprannominarono "Josephine Baker", tant'era la somiglianza." Ibid.

111 "L'Alquila Romana." This serialised story appeared in the Corriere dei Piccoli from the first edition of 1935. The story proved very popular with Venetian children; see essays discussed later in the chapter.

and ideals. One tale entitled "Red shirt and black shirt", narrated the story of Stefano, an "old garibaldino", and his grandson, Mario, who "was enraptured by his grandfather's tales [...] and so grew up full of ardour, faith and love for the Fatherland." Nonno Stefano kept two red shirts from his Garibaldian days in a display cabinet, one of which still bore the bloodstain from a bullet wound he had sustained during the battle of Mentana. The story told how, during the "days of the first fascist songs [when] the fearless notes of youth melted in the air: Youth, youth, springtime of beauty," the impoverished Mario dreamed fervently of owning a black shirt, so that he too could take part in "the occasional punitive expedition" with "those ardent phalanxes of youth". His grandfather took out the red shirt still in pristine condition and gave it to his grandson, insisting that he dye it black, and use it "for the same glorious end as this red one served me in my youth". Mario did so, but during one punitive expedition to "drive out the red scoundrels in a nearby village who, without scruples, had abandoned fields full of grain", the young blackshirt was wounded and brought home by his companions "between life and death", a red stain visible on his black shoulder. When Mario awoke, several days later, he found the Duce already installed in Rome. In a rocking chair lay, as if forgotten, Mario's black shirt, red with blood.

The garibaldino took it religiously, approached the old sideboard and placed the black shirt next to the old red shirt. Those two shirts so [stained with blood], together now told an ardent poem of faith, sacrifice and glory.

In fascist terms, this story would seem to have it all: ardent youth, violent struggle, the symbolism of blood, the glorification of sacrifice and suffering, and the equation of the values of the Risorgimento with those of the political religion of fascism. What's more, the tale posited an idealised relationship between young and old; free of the tensions between the status of experienced veteran and dynamic, regenerative youth, articulated in Peppino Ranieri's letter,

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113 "Sentusiasmava ai racconti del nonno [...] e così cresceva pieno di ardore, di fede, di amore verso la Patria." Balilla 3 Oct. 1935 "Camicia rossa e camicia nera" p. 3.

114 Once again, the narrative contains hints of anti-French and anti-papal sentiment. French troops defeated Garibaldi's forces in November 1867 at Mentana, in the last of the major Risorgimento battles which aimed to join 'Roma Capitale' to the nascent Italian nation. Rome would eventually be ceded to Italy by Pope Pius IX on 20 September 1870 following only brief but symbolic skirmishes between Italian and papal troops.


116 "Per lo stesso scopo gloriose come servi a me questa rossa nella mia giovinezza." Balilla 3 Oct. 1935 p. 3.

117 "Scovare la canaglia rossa d'un paese vicino che, senza scrupoli, aveva abbandonato i campi pieni di grana [...] tra la vita e la morte [...] In una seggola giaceva, come dimenticata, la Camicia Nera di Mario, rosso di sangue. Il garibaldino la prese religiosamente, s'avvicinò alla vecchia credenza e pose la camicia nera accanto alla vecchia camicia rossa. Quelle due camicie così [macchiate di sangue], dicevano ormai tutto un ardente poema di fede, di sacrificio, di gloria." Ibid.
discussed at this chapter's opening. Instead, it is more reminiscent of the idea of mutual respect and understanding between the generations put forward by Franco Pasinetti in *il Ventuno*.

It was not only the triple myths of Rome, the *Risorgimento* and the Great War that were employed to teach nationalist and fascist values to young Italians. Venetian history also provided a rich font on which the magazine authors could draw, particularly in terms of seeking to spread the cause of irredentism. Those promoting the idea of the Mediterranean as the *Mare Nostrum* and, especially, the eastern Adriatic as unredeemed lands rightfully part of the Italian nation/empire, were able to adapt and mythologise the history of the *Serenissima* empire to this end. An article which appeared in the *Balilla* in September 1934 relating the history of Capodistria, traced a direct line from the city's Roman origins, through its incorporation into the Venetian empire, ending in Capodistria's accession to Italy at the close of the First World War. The timing of the article's publication coincided, it said, with a period of growing concern for Istria among Italians, given that "the noble province of our eastern border celebrated (a rare event) a thousand years of friendship with Venice, a thousand years, that is, of unconditional loyalty to the Republic of St Mark." To celebrate this anniversary, two events had been planned, with one single aim: "to re-evvoke the traditions of patriotic and civic nobility of the strong citizenry." Both commemorative events recalled episodes from the city's irredentist past under Austrian rule. One; a reunion of ex-pupils of the R. Liceo Ginnasio "Combi", named after Carlo Combi, a leader of the Istrian irredentist movement, reportedly "the first secondary school in Italy" and as such a "seed-bed of patriots and illustrious citizens." The second event was the inauguration of the national monument to the "great martyr", Nazario Sauro, a Capodistrian captured and hanged by the Austrians in 1916 for having enrolled and fought in the Italian army.

In summarising the history of Capodistria, the article invariably described the city's experience of Italian domination as being times of economic prosperity and social and cultural progress; phases of 'foreign' domination or self-rule were either glossed over or condemned as periods of misery and regression. Founded, according to (Roman) legend, "on the rocks formed by the fall of Minerva's shield into the waters of the Adriatic", as part of the Roman Empire, the article

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119 "Rievocare le tradizioni di nobilità patriottica e civile della forte cittadina." Ibid.
120 "La prima scuola medi dell'Italia [...] semenzario di patrioti e illustri cittadini." Ibid.
asserted that Capodistria enjoyed “a florid and prosperous period”. After the fall of Rome, this was followed by what was described as a bleak time, when the city was subjected to “many governments and governors”, beset by “disasters caused by the feudal administration”, and was even compelled in 932 to negotiate with the nascent Venetian republic in order to ensure its protection against pirates. The glory-days of Capodistria were reached only with Venetian domination:

Subsequently entrusting itself completely to the arms of the Serenissima, it found itself favoured and its loyalty and affection compensated by the latter. Under Venetian dominion, Capodistria was adorned with palaces, churches, monuments and all the best Venetian artists of the Renaissance left some of their most celebrated works in the Istrian capital.

Ceded to Austria in the early nineteenth century, following “the Bonaparte iniquity”, the story of Capodistria is naturally one of disquiet; “insurrections and outcries disturbed the proverbial quiet of the little squares, [whilst] the furious population blamed the nobles for having betrayed the cause.” The occupied population, according to the article, dedicated themselves to resistance:

At the time there were conspiracies of patriots and many public demonstrations. Foreign oppression weighed on the citizens’ spirits, who disdainfully refused any benefit astutely offered them by the Austrians.

Other episodes of Italian history were also exploited as fascist propaganda. The Balilla waxed lyrical about the achievements of Amerigo Vespucci, identifying a direct link between the explorer and Mussolini;

The history of Great Men contains some curious correspondences, and, just as Benito Mussolini could not remain either an obscure artisan or a humble teacher: so Amerigo Vespucci could not waste his existence in trade. God mapped out a shining end for these Giants of history from the day they were born. Victors and Condottieri, they were meant to be: and they were!

121 “Sullo scoglio formato dallo scudo di Minevra caduto sulle acque dell’Adriatico [...] un periodo di floridezza e prosperità.” Il Balilla 6 Sept. 34 p. 10.
122 “Più governi e governatori [...] disastri cagionale della amministrazione feudale [...] Datasi poi completamente in braccio alla Serenissima, si vide da questa favorita e compensata per la fedeltà e per l'affetto. Sotto il dominio veneziano, Capodistria fu abbellita con palazzi, chiese, monumenti e tutti i migliori artisti veneti del Rinascimento hanno lasciato nella capitale istriana alcuni fra i loro celebri lavori.” Ibid.
123 “L'iniquo Bonaparte [...] sollevazioni e clamori turbarono la proverbiale quiete delle piazette, [mentre] il popolo furibondo incolpeva i nobili di aver tradito la causa [...] Cospirazioni di patrioti e molte dimostrazioni pubbliche s'ebbero allora. L'oppressione straniera gravava sugli animi dei cittadini, che rifiutavano sdegnosamente ogni beneficio astutamente offerto dall'Austria.” Ibid.
The article also reminded its young readers that they themselves, as Italians, were the descendents of explorers like Vespucci and Christopher Columbus, duty-bound, therefore, to emulate the glories and heroics of their ancestors:

Proud to feel ourselves the true, legitimate heirs of such Italian glory, we romanly salute the two great spectres of Vespucci and Columbus who rise as giants on the American continent, higher than any monument, higher than any skyscraper, and we send them our most powerful ALALa!  

The fascist regime, then, aimed to leave Italian boys and girls in little doubt of the distinct roles that were expected of them. Children of the 1930s were targeted by the regime (as the future protagonists of the fascist 'revolution'), and bombarded with propagandistic messages exalting the values of nationalism, violent struggle and war. The regime sought to permeate every aspect of children’s lives, not only the lucrative (in terms of the opportunity it afforded the authorities to ‘politically socialise’ or shape children’s world views) area of the education system, but also the free-time and leisure activities of Italian youngsters, a space more usually considered to form part of the ‘private’ sphere rather than the object of state concern. After-school and holiday activities, which focussed on ‘moral and physical’ development, were organised by local fascist groups. Even children’s cartoons and comic books were mobilised as media for the transmission of fascist ‘messages’ to young Venetians, who, by the mid 1930s, had little or no memory of anything other than fascist rule.

However, this is not to say, of course, that Venetian youngsters absorbed and accepted these ‘messages’ unquestioningly and unaltered. Following from the understanding of the act of reading as a productive, rather than passive, undertaking, an action which cannot be controlled or constrained by the author and which results in infinitely diverse understandings or appropriations of the text by its readers, as recipients (in both its literal and metaphorical senses) of the dominant cultural products of the day, young Venetians – like all readers – responded creatively to fascist cultural products as these collided with their pre-existing knowledge, prejudices and mentalities. This multiplicity in children’s reception of the fascist

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125 "Orgogliosi di sentirci i veri, i legittimi eredi di tanta Gloria Italiana, salutiamo romanamente le due Grandi Ombre del Vespucci e del Colombo, che si ergono giganti sul Continente Americano, al disopra di ogni monumento, al disopra di ogni grattacielo, ed inviamo Loro il nostro piu poderoso ALALa!" Ibid. The article contains echoes of a sense of Italian superiority over modern American consumerism which often recurs in the children's comics.
126 Adolfo Scotto di Luzio, in his examination of children's literature and, in particular, the biblioteche popolari under the fascist regime, reached a similar conclusion as to the "imperfect appropriation" of fascist ideals by young Italian readers. Scotto di Luzio's study reveals the intervention of the fascist regime to push literature which reflected and promoted proscribed gender roles and patriotic colonial identities, especially through the establishment of 'popular
messages directed towards them can be illustrated through the examination of a collection of essays written by Venetian children of primary school age as part of the Premio da Ponte competition.

Youthful reception: the Premio da Ponte essays

On 22 January 1935, forty-seven nine- and ten-year-old students from throughout the islands of Venice congregated in the “Armando Diaz” primary school to participate in an annual essay-writing competition, the Premio da Ponte. The Premio da Ponte competition, organised by the Venetian comune, was staged each year in a different primary school in the city. Children who had completed their third year of primary school within the previous two years were eligible for the competition and from these, each school nominated two students who would compete in the three-hour test of their composition skills. Two prizes of savings books were given for the best essays – to one male and one female student – although it became increasingly common over the 1930s to award additional ‘runner-up’ prizes to a handful of the next best essays. The presiding commissione of judges was made up of three figures – the direttore of the primary school hosting the competition and two further teachers from the same school, nominated by the direttore – who marked all the essays and chose the winners. Each year a different theme was chosen; in 1935, the children were asked to write a composition entitled “The comic I most willingly read”.

These essays afford a fascinating glimpse into Venetian children’s lives; as first-hand accounts, written by children who had lived their whole lives under fascism, they allow access to the opinions, attitudes and mentalities of a comprehensive cross-section of young Venetians. Of libraries – the largest and most successful being the Venetian biblioteca popolare instituted in 1925 by Maria Pezzè Pascolato, whose funeral is examined in chapter 5 of this thesis. At the same time, however, he contended that the regime was not entirely successful in its endeavours to infiltrate the ‘private’ sphere of reading and thereby integrate young Italians into the new state, as youngsters’ reading-habits proved stubbornly out of sync with those desired by the regime. Scotto di Luzio A L’appropriazione imperfetta. Editori, biblioteche e libri per ragazzi durante il fascismo.

127 The archive material relating to the Premio da Ponte and the essays examined in this chapter can be found in the Archivio Municipale “la Celestia” di Venezia (AMV) in Venice, Quinquennio (Quin.) 1931-5, IX-IV-8. Unfortunately, the archive material does not reveal when the prize was established, although the first reference to the premio appears in documents relating to the quinquennio 1920-5. It is possible to surmise that the Premio da Ponte might have been established as part of a bequest by the Da Ponte family, as was the case with the Premio da Maria, also referred to in the archival files. The Premio da Maria was set up as a bequest to be given each year to a young girl of primary school-leaving age, “worthy in terms of school marks, good conduct and disadvantaged living conditions” (“meritevole per profitto, buona condotta, e per condizioni disagiate”).

128 “Il giornalino che leggo piu volontieri”.
course, the forty-seven essays do not constitute an entirely neutral or random sample of children's thoughts. Although the children entering the Premio da Ponte competition came from every sestiere of the comune of Venice, the competition was open only to pupils who attended the municipal schools; students at religious schools were thus excluded from taking part. Furthermore, the students selected by each school to compete were, naturally, those considered by their teachers to be the brightest in their years; only those students who had passed “the final exam of the lower elementary course, gaining ‘excellent’ in at least five subjects and not less than ‘good’ in the others,” could be put forward. It might even be expected that teachers would put forward their most politicised students, in the expectation that they would be more likely to write the ‘right’ things; if this were the case, though, the distinct apoliticism and ambivalence of the majority of essays would emerge as all the more damning of the efficacy of efforts to fascistise youth. Nevertheless, the essays offer access to the ‘voices’ of working- and lower-middle-class children – a group whose stories and beliefs are not so readily available to historians as those of other sectors of society – and the range and diversity of attitudes and beliefs revealed by the essays is indeed remarkable.

A complete set of essays exists for the competition held in January 1935 on the theme of the children's favourite comic books. This is a particularly rich theme as it allows us to directly compare the ‘intention’, the cultural products or propaganda conveyed by the regime through comics like the Gazzettino dei Ragazzi and the Corriere dei Piccoli, examined earlier in this chapter with the ‘reception’ of these, as described by the children in the Premio da Ponte essays. Even if it is not possible to infer from these essays a definitive and categorical account of exactly what the children thought of the fascist regime and its ideals – it is essential to remember, after all, that these essays were written consciously for a particular audience (the judges) with a particular end in mind (winning the prize) – it is certainly possible to deduce the way in which these children represented their opinions on fascism and the ideals of nationalism, 

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129 As well as the six sestieri of the main islands of Venice, this also included the Lido, Giudecca and Murano.
130 “L'esame di compimento del Corso elementare inferiore riportando l'ottimo in almeno 5 materie e non meno di buono nelle altre.” AMV Quin. 1931-5 IX-IV-8.
131 Unfortunately, there are no archival records of the Premio da Ponte essays from competitions staged in other years during the 1930s. Any records that do exist for these years show only the names of the winners or, at best, the theme that the children were required to address. It is especially unfortunate, for example, that the pupils' essays from the 1938 competition have not survived – the essay title set that year was: “The attractions of the principal cities which foreigners prefer to visit when they come to stay in Italy's fair land” (“le attrative delle principali città che gli stranieri preferiscono visitare, quando vengono a soggiornare sul bel suolo d'Italia”). It would be fascinating to discover the young pupil's feelings towards Venice (which surely many of them would have written about) and other Italian cities as well as their understandings of how Fascist Italy presented itself and interacted with external, 'foreign' elements. AMV Quin. 1936-40 IX-IV-8.
war and sacrifice and the way and extent to which official fascist ‘messages’ were modified and appropriated into people’s everyday beliefs and world view. The essays go a long way in terms of revealing the limitations of the fascist authorities’ ability to penetrate the private sphere of Venetian society and to infiltrate popular mentalités – that amalgam of values, customs and beliefs, deeply rooted in generations of Venetian culture and common experience, highlighting their resilience and complexity.

The *Premio da Ponte* essays demonstrate the inability of the fascist regime to successfully transmit its ideological concerns, wholesale, into the minds of the young Venetians. Fifteen of the forty-seven essay-writers in their compositions justifying their choice of favourite comic books made absolutely no reference either to fascism, Mussolini or even the Balilla organisation or to recurring fascist narratives and lieux de mémoire such as the Great War, nationalism, militarism and imperialism. Despite the cramming of the pages of magazines like the *Gazzettino*, the *Corriere* and the *Balilla*, with stories and images exalting fascist values, 32% of the Venetian boys and girls, participating in a competition organised by the municipal authorities, declared that their reading of these fascistised comics focussed on the “many nice fairy-tales of good and bad children”132 and “drawings, illustrated stories, games and even things to make”133 with no mention of articles with a political content, implied or explicit. Furthermore, an additional fourteen essays, though they mentioned as favourites stories that lauded ideals dear to fascism such as war and militarism or the Roman empire, did not directly refer to fascist groups or the Duce by name. This takes to 62% the proportion of essayists who made no direct reference to fascism in their compositions. Of the eighteen youngsters (38%) who did refer to fascism in their essays, five of these commented only upon the *Balilla* organisation, usually by reference to the cartoon characters, ‘Venturino’ the *Balilla* and ‘Lucio l’Avanguardista’ or the “heroic acts carried out by some valorous *balilla*”134 that regularly featured in the *Gazzettino*. The majority of Venetian children justified their choice of comic and their favourite elements within that comic above all according to their emotional and imaginative impact:

On Tuesdays, if during the week I’ve deserved it, my dear mummy buys me the ‘*gazzettino dei ragazzi*’. This is the only journal that I willingly read. There are stories which move you

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to tears, others that make you laugh until fit to burst. [...] I have a world of fun reading all the nice, good things which are objects of delight for us children.

This is why I willingly read this comic; and the week always seems increasingly long to me, having to await the fatal day.

[The Corriere dei Piccoli] is very entertaining and many times when I've finished reading it I withdraw to corner of the room to fantasise. I seem to be in a machine flying over China, but all of a sudden a noisy bang is heard. I shout out in fright and come to, fortunately it was only a cursed hallucination. At first I make two or three laps of the bedroom and then, not knowing what to do, I take up the paper again and start reading the page reserved for the Heroes.\textsuperscript{135}

A more detailed analysis of the essays reveals significant differences between the various comic books, and the reasons behind the children's preferences. In their essays, the children referred to a variety of magazines; though the Gazzettino dei Ragazzi, the Corriere dei Piccoli and the Ballila proved the most popular, other comics, from the colonialist spirit of Jumbo and L'Avventuroso to the journal aimed at shaping little girls for their "future lives as housewives,"\textsuperscript{136} Modellina, also figured as particular favourites. By far the clear favourite of comic books among the Venetian youngsters was the Corriere dei Piccoli. Of fifty-two preferences expressed [some children expressed a preference for more than one comic], twenty-six (50%) chose the Corriere. The reasons given by children for reading the Corriere and the aspects of the magazine they chose to highlight demonstrate the relative imperviousness of the Corriere's readers to the fascist cultural products it purveyed. Forty-six percent of Corriere readers made no reference to fascism or fascist 'ideals' in their essays; when what could be considered fascist values were mentioned, this was much more likely to be in reference to "the life of a hero

\textsuperscript{135}"Il martedì, se tutta la settimana me lo son meritato, la mia cara mamma mi compra il "gazzettino dei ragazzi". Questo è l'unico giornalino cui io leggo volentieri. Vi sono racconti, che fanno commuovere fino a piangere, altri che fanno ridere a crepapelle. [...] Io mi ci diverto mezzo mondo nel leggere tutte queste cose belle e buone, che sono letizia di noi bimbi. Ecco perché io leggo volentieri questo giornalino; e mi pare sempre più lunga la settimana, nel dover aspettare il giorno fatale.

[Il Corriere dei piccoli] è molto divertente e tante volte quando ho finito di leggere mi ritiro in un cantuccio a far fantasie. Mi sembra di essere in un apparecchio e volare sopra la Cina, ma a un tratto si sente uno scoppio frfraroso. Io lancio un gridò di spavento e rinveno, per fortuna non era che una maledetta allucinazione. Prima faccio due tre giri per la cameretta e poi non sapendo cosa fare ripiglio il giornale e comincio a leggere la pagina riservata agli Eroi." AMV Quin. 1931-5 IX-IV-8. Essays by Giovanni Pillissimi, Scuola A Diaz & Angelo Busa, Scuola S Samuele.

\textsuperscript{136}"Futura vita di massaia." AMV Quin. 1931-5 IX-IV-8. Anonymous essay, no. 32.
of the Great War" (31%) than a direct reference to Mussolini or fascism itself (12%).\textsuperscript{137} The 
Gazzettino, on the other hand, prompted a relatively high proportion of its fans to justify their 
preference according to its ‘fascist’ content. Of the eight youngsters (15%) who declared the 
locally produced Gazzettino dei Ragazzi to be their favourite, only two (or 25%) made no 
mention of fascism, whereas the other six justified their choice due to the militarist, nationalist 
or explicitly fascist content of the magazine.

There are even tasks of the Fascist Regime and teachings of the Duce. In the holidays 
there were also lessons that you had to do.

There are also acts of heroism of Balilla and Piccole Italiane. I remember the one of Antonio 
Rossi who, seeing a little girl who'd fallen into a river, risking his life, flung himself into the 
river and saved her.\textsuperscript{138}

This was not always the case, however. One student admitted that although the Gazzettino 
contained articles relating to fascism, the parts s/he really enjoyed the most were the fairy-tales 
and cartoons:

It talks about the Duce, the King, how you should behave at the table and lots of other 
interesting things.

But, to tell the truth, I like reading more the little fables of ‘Posapiano’, ‘Topolini teach 
tselves’, ‘Blackbeard’ etc than the other nicer things.\textsuperscript{139}

Thus, the reader identified fascism as belonging to the group of subjects that s/he felt s/he 
ought to know and be interested in; what s/he really wanted to learn about, however, were the 
more perennial childish preoccupations of fairy-tales and fictional characters.

The third most popular children's magazine was the Balilla, the official comic of the fascist 
regime. It is little surprising that of the five young Venetians who proclaimed the Balilla as their 
favourite, every one made reference to Mussolini or the achievements of fascism. Their 
reasons for choosing the Balilla were less attributed to the stories or cartoons within the comic, 
but were invariably ideologically motivated. One student asserted that “this comic was desired

\textsuperscript{137} “La vita di un Eroe della Grande Guerra.” AMV Quin. 1931-5 IX-IV-8. Essay by Giorgio Vecchiato, Scuola 
Diedo.

\textsuperscript{138} “Ci sono perfino compiti del Regime Fascista e istituzioni del Duce. Nelle vacanze c'erano anche le lezioni che 
si dovevano fare.
Ci sono anche eroismi di Balilla e Piccole Italiane. Ricordo quello di Antonio Rossi, che vedendo caduta in un 
fiume una bambina piccola arrischando la vita si gettò nel fiume e la salvò.” AMV Quin. 1931-5 IX-IV-8.
Anonymous essay no. 18.

\textsuperscript{139} “Parla del Duce, del Re, come si deve stare a tavola e altre cose molte interessanti.
Però dico la verità che mi piace leggere di più quelle favolette di ‘Posapiano’ ‘Topolini si istuiscono’ di ‘Barbanero’ 
by His Excellency the Hon. Ricci, who thought to found it in order to temper not only Italian children's muscles but also their spirit to the fascist climate, whilst another proclaimed,

I read many comics but my favourite is the Balilla. This was decreed by our Duce, who wants every little boy and young lad in Italy to read his journal.

For some children the choice of the Balilla was not taken entirely individually, but was instigated by adult influence:

I can be difficult in choosing comics for little ones! But when Mr. Giorgio Bressan, director of the 'Armando Diaz' elementary school for boys, had several of Mr. Aldo Bonfanti's pupils called to his office and said: "Go, children, you should subscribe to the comic 'Balilla'. It is rich with illustrations, stories and heroic facts. And what's more it's a gift. To subscribe you pay a paltry sum. Annual subscription costs L.15, half-yearly L.8." I was inflamed with the desire to possess a little treasure like the 'Balilla'. In fact, after having recounted everything to my father, I insisted that he should subscribe me and I won him over. I subscribed and now finally I can read the desired comic all in one go. I want no other comic than the 'Balilla', rich with poems and pranks. The principal performers in the charming weekly are: Saputino, Filomeno, Rosina, Stan, Oli etc.

Long live the 'Balilla', the Duce and Mr. Director who gave me the joy of reading such a nice paper.

It is noteworthy that the five Venetian youngsters who expressed a preference for the Balilla, along with a child who declared the fascist Gente Nostra to be his favourite comic, did relatively badly in the Premio da Ponte competition. The winners of the competition, Giorgio Vecchiato and Anna Maria Paoli both gave the Corriere dei Piccoli as their favourite comic book and neither referred to Mussolini, the Balilla organisation or to fascism in their essays. Furthermore, the additional twelve runners-up, singled out for a L.15 prize apiece, all listed their favourite comics as one of the Corriere, the Gazzettino or Rin-tin-tin. Those children who preferred the Balilla, on the other hand, received comparatively low marks (between 6 – 6½ out of 10) and in two cases had great swathes of their essays marked as irrelevant, with large red question

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141 "Io ne leggo molti giornalini ma il preferito è il Balilla. Esso è stato decretato dal nostro Duce, il quale vuole che ogni bambino e ragazzo d'Italia legga il suo giornale." AMV Quin. 1931-5 IX-IV-8. Anonymous essay no. 25.

marks or lines running through the text. For example, one young *Balilla* reader began his essay, "The comic I most willingly read is called 'the *Balilla*', and continued:

It makes me remember all the nice and good works that the *Duce* does. The battle for grain, because Italy's land didn't produce bread. Oh *Balilla*, honour the bread that costs sweat from the brow of our fascist workers! The land reclamations, Littoria, its symbol is a *fascio* that arises from the marsh. The very beautiful city of Sabaudia, Pontinia which recalls the Pontine needle. Thinking of these three great cities it's as if I can see workers in boots reclaiming them with a portrait of the *Duce* at their head. The work of the marine [sic] and mountain holiday camps for suffering *Balilla*. I, as a *Balilla*, always pray to Lord that he keep the *Duce* healthy.143

The preceding paragraph had been marked with an enormous question mark [figure 11], whilst the following paragraph, which went on to talk of the ONMI, instituted, "so that mothers educate their *Balilla* children well because one fine day they will have to be able, courageous and good soldiers of Italy, as was the first *Balilla* and asserted that "if there hadn't been the Duce to govern the Italian people, Italy would be once more in ruins", had been dissected by a long red line marked through the text [figure 12].144 Certainly the ardent *Balilla* fan had decidedly digressed from the proscribed theme of the essay, which one assumes was the reason for the teacher's crossings-out and his low score. But it is nevertheless interesting that those children expressing the most ardent and orthodox opinions in support of fascism consistently failed to impress the examiners.

One serialised story, which appeared in the *Corriere dei Piccoli* in early 1935, particularly caught the imagination of several of the young Venetians. The first episode in the "The Roman eagle" serial was published on 6 January 1935 – just a couple of weeks before the children sat down to write their competition essays. "The Roman Eagle", set in Ancient Rome, recounted the tale of a young Roman boy who set out on an arduous quest to clear his dead father's name, accused of having betrayed his legion in battle. The story resounded with the exaltation of 'fascist' values: for example, the ideals of the *patria* and of the glory of death in battle are

143 "Il giornalino che leggo più volentieri è intitolato 'Il Balilla' [...] Esso mi fa ricordare tutte le opere belle e buone che fa il Duce. La battaglia del grano, perché il tereno d'Italia non produceva pane. O Balilla onorate il pane esso costa il sudore della fronte ai nostri lavoratori fascist! Le bonifiche, Littoria il suo simbolo è di un fascio che sorge nella palude. La bellissima città di Sabaudia, Pontinia che ricorda l'Ago Pontino. Pensando a queste tre grandiose città mi sembra di vedere i lavoratori con gli stivali che le bonificano con in testa il ritratto del Duce. L'opera delle colonie marine e montane per rinforzare i balilla che soffrono. Io, come balilla prego sempre il Signore perché mantenga sano il Duce." AMV Quin. 1931-5 IX-IV-8. Anonymous essay no. 37.

144 "Perché le mamme educino bene i loro figliuoli Balilla perché un bel giorno devono essere bravi, coraggiosi e buoni soldati d'Italia, come fu il primo Balilla [...] se non ci fosse il Duce che governasse il popolo Italiano l'Italia sarebbe ancora un'altra volta in rovina." AMV Quin. 1931-5 IX-IV-8. Anonymous essay no. 37.
articulated as the young boy, Lucio, informed his grandfather of his father's death (concealing, though, his reported treachery).

- What's wrong, Lucio?

At this, with a supreme act of will, the young lad managed to tell the old man the heroic falsehood.
- My father has fallen in battle.

And he threw himself at the feet of his grandfather.

Tito Claudio Leto remained upright with his spent eyes, dilated in an immobile stare which lasted a moment, then without bending he stretched out his hand imperiously.
- Get up.

His voice was very hard. And the boy, lifting his head, saw something inflexible in his face and arose, little by little, watching the venerable old man, whose white hair, disarranged by a puff of wind, appeared luminous.
- Remember: the Claudi do not cry if one of their own falls in battle.

Lucio repeated: - They don't cry...
- Now give me your hand and lead me to Larario: our suffering must be silent around the joy of the fatherland.

The young lad halted the quiver which was shaking him, gave his hand to his grandfather and guided him, whilst the slaves called the whole family to assembly.

The venerable old man said:
- Tullia, and you Claudia and Tulliola, bow down before the altar, invoke the Gods that they worthily welcome into the underworld Manlio Claudio, fallen for Rome.

The women's heart-breaking cries were followed by the many laments and cries of the female slaves who beat their cheeks, pulled out their hair and threw themselves to the ground.
- No! - shouted the old man: - no tears for my heroic son! Call for his spirit and render funeral honours unto it.145

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145 - Che hai Lucio?
Allora in una forza di volontà supremo, il giovanetto riuscì a dire al vecchio l’eroico menzogna.
- Mio padre è caduto in battaglia.
E s’abbatté ai piedi dell’avo.
Tito Claudio Leto rimase dritto con gli occhi spenti, dilatati in una fissità immobile che durò un attimo; poi senza curvarsi tese la mano in avanti imperiosamente.
- Alzati
La sua voce era durissima. E il ragazzo, sollevando il capo vide su quel viso qualcosa d’inflessibile e sorse a poco a poco, mirando il vegliardo che sembrava avere luce nei capelli bianchi scomposti da un refolo di vento. Ricordati: i Claudi non piangono se uno di loro cade in battaglia.
Lucio ripetè: - Non piangono...
Ora dammi la mano e conducimi al Larario: il nostro dolore deve tacere dinanzi alla gioia della patria.
Il fanciullo frenò il tremore che lo scoteva, porse la mano all’avo e lo guidò mentre gli schiavi chiamavano a raduno tutta la famiglia.
Il vegliardo disse:
- Tullia, e voi Claudia e Tulliola, chinateli all’ara, invocate i Mani che accolgono degnamente nell’oltretomba Manlio Claudio, caduto per Roma.
Un grido lacerante di donna, poi molti lamenti e grida delle schiave che si battevano la gote e si strappavano i capelli e si gettavano a terra.
The messages of nationalism, duty and self-sacrifice contained in the *Aquila Romana* story were not lost on the Venetian children. The competition winner, Giorgio Vecchiato, understood the "very nice novel" [which he incidentally mistitled as *L'Aquila lontana*] in terms of duty and betrayal of the patria:

This novel tells an interesting story from the times of Julius Caesar, who, having gone to fight against many peoples, enemies of Rome, was betrayed by one of his soldiers: by the patrician Manlio Claudio, from the noble family of the Claudi, who took the roman eagle to the enemy.146

Maria de Spirit, one of the runners-up from *Scuola SS Apostoli* agreed: "It is the tale of a Roman who betrayed his Fatherland in order not to be killed and took the silver eagle, which was the Romans' symbol, to the enemy"147 Some of the children believed that the story they were being told was real: "It's about Roman history,"148 according to Maria Brusani, whilst another youngster asserted that the story "teaches a lot, especially to me, as I'm in the IV class and study Roman history."149 What the youngsters 'learned' from the Roman narrative, however, was not necessarily overtly fascist; the values mediated to the Venetian children even through the trope of the Roman empire, so favoured by the regime, could remain largely neutral and unpolticised:

From the heroism of the Romans in long ago times [...] we learn their good virtues. They were hard-working, honest, full of heroism, simple and they kept their word.150

The young Venetians who demonstrated their patriotism in their essays did not always direct these sentiments towards the exaltation of fascism and Mussolini. One youngster in particular linked his nationalism and understanding of the Great War, as gleaned from the *Pagina dei Ragazzi*, to the monarchy:

For the anniversary of the birth of Victor Emmanuel III and the death of Victor Emmanuel II, this paper narrated some episodes of [the life of] the soldier-King and also from when he was a young boy.

Oh, what a courageous soldier our King was!
For that reason he was called the Victorious King.

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147 " È il racconto di un romano che tradì la sua Patria per non essere ucciso e portò fra i nemici l' aquila d' argento, che era il simbolo dei romani." AMV Quin. 1931-5 IX-IV-8. Essay by Maria de Spirit, Scuola SS Apostoli.


He dressed in green-gray, the uniform of the humble footsoldier, and he would go into the hospitals to comfort the poor patients.\textsuperscript{151}

Although only sixteen of the essays gave the name of the author and a further two referred to their gender within their compositions, it is nevertheless possible to draw a number of conclusions about the differences between the free-time reading habits and interests of Venetian boys and girls. In the first place, the magazines read by boys and girls differed slightly. Although the favourite comics, the \emph{Corriere dei Piccoli} and the \emph{Gazzettino dei Ragazzi}, were read equally by both genders,\textsuperscript{152} boys were more likely than girls to read comics such as \emph{Rin-tin-tin}, \emph{Jumbo} and \emph{Il monello} which consisted largely of jungle and colonial adventure stories, whilst \emph{Modellina}, for example, was a strictly female preserve:

My mummy subscribed me [to \emph{Modellina}] so that I would learn to sew and cook, because there’s always room to teach cooking and also she wants me to become a good little housewife.

In this she is right, because when I’m older I’ll be good for nothing.

There’s a proverb which says:

\begin{quote}
Those who can’t do, can’t command.
\end{quote}

This proverb speaks the truth, I’d like all my classmates to buy this comic because it could teach them something useful for their future lives as housewives.\textsuperscript{153}

In terms of their reasons for preferring a particular comic, however, there was little difference between the boys and girls. A similar proportion of male and female readers made no mention of fascist ideals in their essays (four girls and three boys) and, although the boys were a little more likely to make reference to the First World War, in total the girls were only marginally less likely to justify their choice of reading material by reference to fascist ideals and \textit{lieux de mémoire}.\textsuperscript{154} Indeed, some of the most vehemently nationalistic assertions came from girls. Maria de Spirit wrote in her essay of how her father would bring the \emph{Corriere dei Piccoli} home

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{151} "Per la ricorrenza della nascita di Vittorio Emanuele III e la morte di Vittorio Emanuele II, questo giornale narrava degli episodi del Re soldato e anche quand’era fanciullo. Oh! Che coraggioso soldato fu il nostro Re! Però è chiamato Re Vittorioso Vestiva il grigio-verde, la divisa dell’umile fante, e andava negli ospedali, a confortare i poveri ammalati." AMV Quin. 1931-5 IX-IV-8. Anonymous essay no. 8.
  \item \textsuperscript{152} The \emph{Corriere dei piccoli} was preferred by 5 boys and 7 girls, whilst 1 boy and 1 girl expressed a preference for the \emph{Gazzettino dei Ragazzi}.
  \item \textsuperscript{153} "La mamma mi ha abbonata [a Modellina], perché impari a cucire, a cucinare, perché c’è anche un po’ di spazio per insegnare a cucinare e anche vuole che diventi una brava donna di casa. In questo, essa ha ragione, perché da grande non saprò fare nulla di buona. C’è il proverbio che dice: Chi non sa fare, non sa comandare.
Questo proverbio dice il vero, io vorrei che tutte le mie compagne comprassero questo giornalino perché potrebbe insegnar loro qualche cosa di utile per la futura vita di massaia." AMV Quin. 1931-5 IX-IV-8. Anonymous essay no. 32.
  \item \textsuperscript{154} In the essays, girls made 9 references to fascist ideals, boys, 10.
\end{itemize}
for her every Friday. The ardour of Maria's patriotism is evident from her description of the way in which she read the comic.

When I am alone in my bedroom I read the patriotic facts which are written behind the front page. Weeks ago now, I read the fact of an Alpine soldier who before dying incited his companions to the attack, shouting "Forward Savoy". Reading this, I thought about how much blood our soldiers have spilled in order to liberate Italy.

The fact which moved me was that of a lady from the Red Cross. She always lived among the soldiers, when one day the 'Spanish flu' struck her. This lady was buried in the RediPuglia cemetery and, on her humble tomb, there was affixed the following sentence; "Death seized you among us, rest with us, sister". This reading made me cry and in my heart I felt the enthusiasm and readiness to offer my own blood for the Fatherland too.155

Thus, these essays highlight the complexity and limitations of the fascist regime's ability to infiltrate the private lives of children. Sixty-two percent of the essayists made no direct reference to fascism and, indeed, those that referred most insistently and admiringly to Mussolini and the regime fared poorly in the competition. Despite the 'fascistised' content of long-running comics such as the Gazzettino dei Ragazzi and the Corriere dei Piccoli, the young Venetian readers of these comics cited a liking for the more apolitical fairy-tales populated with witches and ogres alongside the stories and articles lauding war heroes and explicitly fascist ideals in their reasons for favouring these magazines. What's more, although the choice of certain comics followed proscribed gender stereotypes, little difference can be discerned in the reasons given for preferring the most popular, 'unisex' magazines according to gender – similar proportions of boys and girls expressed themselves in apolitical, patriotic and fascist terms.

Another source fruitful in reconstructing the reception and limited success of the regime's messages are the memoirs of Venetians held in the Archivio Diaristico Nazionale in Pieve Santo Stefano in Tuscany.156 The memoirs illustrate the diversity of the experience of childhood in 1930s Italy and the complexity of the relationship between this experience and eventual feelings of consent or dissent towards the regime. It is crucial, for example, to remember that

155 "Quando sono sola, in camera mia, leggo i fatti patriottici, che sono scritti dietro la prima facciata. Settimane or sono, ho letto il fatto di un alpino che prima di morire incitava ancora i suoi compagni all'assalto gridando, "Avanti Savoia". Leggendo questo, pensavo a quante sangue hanno versato i nostri soldati per liberare l'Italia. Il fatto che mi comosse, fu quello di una dama della Croce Rossa. Ella viveva sempre in mezzo ai soldati, quando un giorno la "Spagnola" la colpi. Questa dama fu seppolta nel cimitero di RediPuglia e nella sua umile tomba vi è infissa la seguente frase "Morte fra noi ti colse, resta con noi sorella". Questa lettura mi fece piangere e nel mio cuore sentivo l'entusiasmo e la prontezza di offrire anch'io il mio sangue per la Patria." AMV Quin. 1931-5 IX-IV-8. Essay by Maria de Spirit, Scuola SS Apostoli.

156 Of course, these memoirs recalling childhood under the fascist regime were written some time after the events they describe and, as such, the authors' 'memories' of their childhood have inevitably been modified and reconstructed by subsequent experiences.
the actions and choices of children, like adults, could be motivated by a number of different, sometimes competing, impulses. In this way Antonio Baldo recalled his time spent in the various fascist youth groups.

I participated unenthusiastically in the Balilla meetings. A few years later I was passed to the Balilla Moschettieri. I was more at ease in that role as they gave us a musket, a smaller but perfect replica of the real weapon.157

His ‘enjoyment’ of participating in the ONB organisation was based upon the opportunity it afforded him to carry a realistic-looking weapon and, as he later attested, on the chances it gave him to leave the creeping industrial sprawl of Marghera and spend time in the countryside on Balilla spring and summer walks.158

Vana Amould, in her memoir, Me g’ha contà la nonna, recalled her childhood summers spent on the beaches of the Lido, and the “immutable rite” of the hiring a capanna in zona C (“the other side of the Excelsior Hotel”), the cost shared among her extended family. Amould also recalled the common practice of Venetian youngsters passing their free time during the summer months by diving off bridges into canals; a practice that had been vetoed by the regime.

Sometimes, usually in the late afternoon, a loud confused clamour of voices, splashes and shouts recalled us to the window; grandma and grandchildren leaned out, all three squashed together, to watch the show: bridge-diving. Four or five white, thin little boys, between eight and twelve years old, with costumes similar to old underpants held up with a string, made exhibitions of themselves throwing themselves from the parapet of the Ponte de la Comenda. […] In this incessant toing and froing of little boys from the parapet to the water to the bank, however, there was always on of them on the alert: the enemy could appear at any moment. The enemy was the municipal policeman and swimming in the canals was forbidden. Grandma explained to us that the prohibition was fascist, that before, in the good times of democracy, when, for example, her father was assessore, all the tosetti—little boys—bathed in the canal, that it was precisely in the canal that little Venetians learned to swim and nobody ever died doing that—just look at her.159

158 Ibid.
159 "Talvolta di solito nel tardo pomeriggio, un vocio alto e confuso, tonfi e grida ci richiamavano alla finestra; nonna e nipoti vi si precipitavano, pigiandosi in tre, ad assistere allo spettacolo: i tuffi dal ponte. Quattro o cinque ragazzetti, bianchi e magri, dagli otto a dodici anni, con costumi simili vecchie mutande tenute su da uno spago, si esibivano buttandosi dalla spalletta del Ponte de la Comenda. […] In questo incessante via vai dei ragazzini dalla spalletta all’acqua alla riva, però c’era sempre qualcuno di loro all’erta: il nemico poteva apparire da un momento all’altro. Il nemico era il vigile e fare i bagni in canale era proibito. La nonna ci spiegava che il divieto era fascista, che prima, ai bei tempi della democrazia quando per esempio suo padre era assessore, il bagno in canale lo facevano tutti i tosetti, i ragazzini, ché era proprio in canale che i piccoli veneziani imparavano a nuotare e che per questo — bastava guardare a lei — non era mai morto nessuno." ADN MP/And Amould Vana "Me g’ha contà la nonna" chapter 25.
Should this episode simply be read as another example of childish dare-devilry or could it be that the act of diving off bridges, in defiance of the ‘fascist prohibition’, might be considered a form of opposition to the regime itself? Biancamaria Mazzoleni told a similar story of childhood defiance to the regime.

For me suffering has always had a particular smell: my girlhood sufferings smelt of orange-flavoured cod liver oil, that most disgusting oily liquid that the fascist regime imposed, I don’t know why, on every child. It is one of the violences, in peacetime, that I, seven-years-old, felt unjust, like the obligatory Saturday rallies. I didn’t like the uniform: black woollen skirt, little white quilted blouse and, on the head, a little black silk cap. I felt like I belonged to an army of little black and white rabbits.160

It is doubtless telling that all these memoirs which tell a common story of childhood defiance or distaste towards fascism were written at varying lengths of time after the fascist ventennio. Such universal disdain and dissent for fascism is certainly at odds with the contemporaneously-recorded childhood experiences represented in the school diary of Diego Squarcialupi, written during the period he lived in Venice in the early 1940s.161 Originally from Pola on the Istrian coast, Squarcialupi and his family lived in several corners of the Italian empire, as they followed his father’s – a naval officer – commissions. The family settled in Venice between 1940 and 1942, where Diego attended the Liceo classico ‘Foscarini’. His ‘diary notebooks’ from this period offer a fascinating insight not only into the young Squarcialupi’s schooling in this period, but also into the ways in which he spent his free time. As the child of an officer in the navy during wartime, it is perhaps not surprising that Diego’s favourite games and pastimes, aside from football, took a bellicose form; he collected scrap metal, constructed model aeroplanes and recreated famous battles with lead toy soldiers.162 The level of detail and technical knowledge in Squarcialupi’s imaginative battles is considerable, though again this is perhaps to be expected of the child of a combatant during wartime.163 Nevertheless, the penetration of all

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160 “Il dolore ha avuto sempre per me un suo odore particolare: i miei dolori di bambina sapevano di olio di fegato di merluzzo all’arancia, quello schifosissimo liquido oleoso che il regime fascista imponeva, non so perché, a tutti i bambini. È una delle violenze che, in epoca di pace, io settenne sentivo ingiuste come le adunate obbligatorie del Sabato. Non mi piaceva la divisa: gonna nera di lana, camicetta bianca di picche e, in testa, un berrettino di seta nera. Mi sembrava di appartenere a un esercito di coniglietti bianchi e neri.” ADN Mazzoleni Biancamaria “// tempo delle Margheritd’, chapter: “Ricordi d’infanzia”.

161 As such, Squarcialupi’s diary falls just outside the temporal remit of this thesis. However, it was thought opportune to refer here to his diary because of the rich point of contrast it offers to the other memorialistic accounts included.

162 See, for example, ADN/94 Diego Squarcialupo Quaderno dei diari 23 Oct. 1940 and 29 Jan.1940.

163 For example: “With a few spools of thread I improvised some deadly ....... 8 millimetre cannons and I loaded my tank so as to bring down the redskins. At the shout of “Alarm!” the battle begins. The tank advances alone ahead of the infantry. But at around two centimetres from the enemy soldiers, the tank’s springs were released sending it into the air; in the descent to earth the tank kills two redskins. The infantry and the cavalry, following the tank-driver’s example, advance firing their rifles and sending their adversaries into disorganized flight. The great battle is won by the Italians who fought with great valour” (“Con qualche rocchetto di filo ho improvvisato dei
things belligerent into even simple, seemingly mundane tasks in Squarcialupi's daily life is striking; bath-time, for example represented an ideal opportunity for the fantastical recreation of a battle at sea.\footnote{Ibid. 19 Nov. 1940.} What emerges most strongly from Squarcialupi's diary is the consciousness of his decision and efforts to bring the paraphernalia of war into his daily life; thus, according to the natural associations of Squarcialupi's imagination, even the detritus of lunch, served as belligerent apparatus.

In conclusion, this chapter has sought to illustrate the ways in which and the extent to which the fascist regime touched and shaped the private lives of the youngest generation of Italian society during the 1930s. As the "weapon of tomorrow", young Italians were accorded a fêted position, not always without controversy, within the fascist hierarchy; both the face and mirror of a self-proclaimed youthful and dynamic nation. The upper echelons of the fascist hierarchy recognized that the youthful generation that was to be lauded represented more a metaphysical spirit or \textit{mentality}, based in part on the shared formative experience of the on-going fascist 'revolution', than either a material age-bound cohort group or stage in the life-course. However, the way in which this elite debate was diffused down the command-chain and to the peripheries could vary enormously; in Venice, some, like Captain Ginocchietti and the highly educated Pasinetti, took on board the complexities of the metaphysical youth debate and recognized a need for dialogue and reciprocity among the generations, whilst for many, not least Peppino Ranieri, the fascist 'primacy of youth' was reduced to a material polarization, if not conflict, between those at opposing ends of the lifecycle. Whether or not this was the intention of the regime's elites, for many local fascists and the wider population, the youth question was understood in terms of age, not metaphysics.

As such, the regime recognized the need to 'fascistise' the experience of childhood – not only the crucial sphere of education, but also the free time and leisure activities of young Italians. To this end youth groups, after-school and holiday activities were established by the Fascist Party in order to extend the regime's influence and control over youngsters' private lives. Comic books and children's magazines were harnessed as vital propaganda tools; through the

micidiali cannoni da......8 millimetri ed ho caricato il mio carro armato per abbattere i pellirosse. Al grido di "Allarmi" la battaglia incomincia. Il carro armato si avanza da solo prima della fanteria. Ma a circa due centimetri dai soldati nemici la molla del carro armato scatta facendolo andare per aria; nel ricadere il carro armato uccide due pellirosse. La fanteria e la cavalleria, seguendo l'esempio del carrista avanzano sparando col fucile e mettendo in fuga disordinata gli avversari. La gran battaglia è vinta dagli italiani che hanno combattuto con molto valore". Ibid. 23 Oct. 1940.

\footnote{Ibid. 23 Oct. 1940.}
articles, stories and even puzzles and games which filled the pages of popular titles such as the Corriere dei Piccoli, the Gazzettino dei Ragazzi and, of course, the official fascist comic, il Balilla, 'messages' were transmitted to the young readers highlighting the ideals and lieux de mémoire dear to fascism – nationalism, violence, war and death and the triple myths of the Roman empire, the Risorgimento and the Great War. With the onset of the Ethiopian war in October 1935, the comics became media for the promotion of the war, portraying Ethiopia as a primitive nation, in need of the paternalistic, civilizing influence of Fascist Italy.

These fascist 'messages', however, were by no means transmitted entirely successfully, without alteration, to the young Venetian readers of the Corriere, the Gazzettino and the Balilla. The forty-seven essays written by nine- and ten-year old girls and boys living throughout the sestieri of Venice reveal a diversity and complexity of responses to the content of the comics. Ultimately the essays highlight the limitations and superficiality of the regime's ability to penetrate the private spheres of the children's lives; the majority of children made no mention of fascism nor its ideals in justifying their choice of favourite comic book. In addition, although there is evidence to suggest that adolescents' modes of behaviour and relationships altered as a result of the influence of the fascist regime, the memoirs of Venetians who were children during the 1930s, as well as evidence from members of the local fascist students' group provide valuable reminders of the multiplicity of motivations shaping individual's behaviour, choices and understandings of the relationship between generations.
Chapter 3

Commemorating the Serenissima: Popular festivals and collective memory in 1930s Venice

On the evening of the third Saturday in August 1935, the Venetian Ufficio turismo organised, as it did every year, a lavish festa notturna; an extravagant spectacle, considered “one of the most beautiful traditional Venetian festivals”,¹ the highlight of which was the procession of an enormous floating stage with orchestra and singers down the Grand Canal, lined with palazzi illuminated especially for the occasion. Spectators ranged from crowds of popolani crammed along every riva and sbocco around the Rialto to “the cream of the Venetian patrician class” and other VIPs – the following year, for example, distinguished guests included the Duke of Genoa, the Count of Paris, Princess Francesca of Greece, the German propaganda minister, Goebbels, and Italian Minister of Popular Culture, Dino Alfieri – who gathered at the balcony of Count Volpi’s palace at San Benedetto to enjoy an uninterrupted view of the proceedings, whilst the orchestral concert was broadcast on national radio.² Besides the spectacle of music and lights, the festa notturna also featured a competition open to all Venetians with prizes on offer for the most beautifully decorated boat. Entrants were entirely free in their choice of theme and many groups and individuals competed enthusiastically year after year.³ In the 1935 competition as usual the majority of boats which entered – and won – were decorated along “typically Venetian” themes, re-evoking scenes of everyday Venetian life and lieux de mémoire; campi complete with well in the middle and fishermen sitting around repairing their nets.

² “Il fiore del patriziato veneziano.” The 1936 festival was intended to be broadcast on US as well as national radio, although these plans were thwarted when the original festival had to be postponed by a week because of unfavourable weather. Gazzetta 31 Aug. 1936.
³ A number of groups and individuals, very often from the island of Murano, repeatedly entered the competition – and often won prizes – in successive years during the 1930s. These included, for example, the “Sozia del ventisinque” group, Eugenio & Mario Ferro, Francesco Scarpa & Giovanni Ferro and Ernesto Urbani, all from Murano. From 1937 the dopolavoristico “Giardinetti” di Murano also entered. The competition rules stated that: “In the decoration of boats, preferably in character with the environment and light construction, the competitors are free to choose the theme and colours of the illuminations.” (“Nell’addobbo delle barche, possibilmente di carattere ambientale e di leggera costruzione, i concorrenti sono liberi nella scelta del soggetto e dei colori dell’illuminazione.”) Gazzetta 18 Aug. 1936. The triumvirate of judges included Prof. Italico Brass, the ‘brains’ behind the festival, with two others, usually representatives from the Dopolavoro provinciale and the Ufficio turismo.
gondolas emerging from under bridges, patrician ladies in eighteenth-century costume and masks. 4 One boat, however, departed significantly from the usual prize-winning formulae — a boat entered by a competitor named Lorenzo Manzini entitled “Fascist Italy conquers the world”. 5 Manzini’s creation featured “[the figure of] Italia at the centre, upon a coach drawn by a dragon: at the stern Victory held out her laurel crown,” 6 and was awarded a ‘consolation prize’, presumably in approval and recognition of the actuality of its theme. In a similar vein, the following year, just three months after the declaration of the Italian empire in East Africa, one boat in particular stood out from the more conventional representations of romantic or Venetian themes for its allusion to contemporary events: a boat designed by Giuseppe Soccimarro entitled “Tigrai”, described in the Gazzetta as a “pleasant [...] depiction [of] an Abyssinian angel with an authentic Negro, leaping about like a grasshopper.” 7 The regime’s intention to ‘fascistise’ popular festivals in Italy, from above — as it were - has been documented by historians. 8 But this description of the festa notturna boat decorating competition hints at the ways in which many ‘ordinary’ people — the supposed ‘recipients’ of the ‘messages’ transmitted through politicised festivals — appropriated, rearticulated and reinterpreted fascist messages in turn, using the symbols and rituals of the festa. The reciprocity and ambiguity of the relationships between ritual organisers, participants and spectators and between intention and reception, is perhaps less well explored. 9

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4 The winners of the competition included: in 1935; 1st prize to the Sozia del 25 for ‘I foghi’ [fireworks in Venetian dialect], 2nd prize to Tullio Tuffolo for ‘Tra il profumo delle rose’, a pergola of roses and multicoloured lights, 3rd prize to a boat depicting children enthralled by a puppet show designed by Ernesto Urban, and 4th prize to Girolamo Fusar for his depiction of a couple of lovers in costume. In 1936 the winners were: in 1st place, the Sozia del 25 with ‘Ragnatela’; in 2nd place, Emilio Vistosi’s ‘Fantasia’; in 3rd place, ‘Veneziana’ by Eugenio & Mario Ferro; and in 4th place, ‘Festa delle lucciole’ by Francesco Scarpa & Giovanni Ferro. See, for example, the Gazzettino 25 Aug. 1935 and Gazzetta 31 Aug. 1936.


7 “Allegra, [...] raffigurante un angelo abissino con un negro autentico saltabecante.” Ibid.


9 For the purposes of this study, I am using a definition of the category of ‘ritual’ borrowed from David Kertzer, which itself builds upon the model set out by Emile Durkheim. Whilst Durkheim identified ritual action with the sacred sphere (in contrast to the profane), Kertzer argues that Durkheim’s religious definition can be extrapolated so that ritual action is associated not merely with the worship of a God or sacred entity, but is the symbolic means through which people worship their own society and mutual dependency. Indeed, the division between the sacred and profane in ritual is not only artificial, but is also unhelpful; in reality, in ritual the religious and the secular are blurred. To this end, a working definition of ritual action might be: “symbolic behaviour that is socially standardised and repetitive.” Kertzer DI Ritual, Politics, and Power New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1988, p. 9. Durkheim E The Elementary Forms of Religious Life; see especially p. xlii. I would add to this the very important proviso that the meaning(s) of a given ritual are multiple and equivocal.
The relationship between *venezianità* – a sense of ‘Venetian-ness’ drawn from the symbols, myths and history of Venice – and fascism is complex. To address this intricate connection this chapter will map the contours of popular celebrations in Venice staged by the fascist authorities, in part through the ‘thick description’ of three case studies of festivals held in Venice during the 1930s, in order to reveal the ways in which fascism sought to appropriate, subvert and, indeed, produce new ‘memories’ of both the Venetian republic and the more recent history of the region, in its efforts to create a new Italian identity. The first case study is the *festa delle Marie*, a festival that was once part of the Venetian republic’s calendar of celebrations, held in remembrance of the legendary rescue of a number of kidnapped Venetian brides and the massacre of their aggressors, which was re-instituted for two years during the mid-1930s as a festival of marriage; the second is the Venetian manifestation of the annual (religious) festival of Christmas; and the third is the 1938 celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the First World War Battle of the Piave – fought – and won – along the banks of the River Piave, not far from Venice and also in the Venetian *laguna* itself. Each case study has been chosen as an exemplar of the meeting of the local, the sacred, the nationalist and/or the military with the fascist. The chapter will highlight the persistence of Venetian, religious and militaristic rites and ceremonial forms and the complexity of the two-way relationship between intention and reception, participant and observer in these apparently ‘fascistised’ festivals.

It is often asserted that political rites – both in their purpose and effect – serve to reinforce power, aid citizens’ identification with that power and thereby engender consensus. This is argued comprehensively, for example, by David Kertzer in his anthropological study of political ritual, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*. Kertzer argued that political leaders ‘sacralise’ their power through the use of symbolic and ritual forms – despite and even because of the ambiguity and multiple layers of meaning in a given rite or symbol – in order to legitimise their rule. In relation to Fascist Italy, Emilio Gentile has famously defined fascism as the “sacralisation of politics”.

Ritual action, according to Kertzer, reassures participants and observers of the continuity of past, present and future. If the fascist regime in Italy intended their project as the establishment of a secular religion, the picture of the Italian population’s relationship with this political religion, however, is more complex; whilst the intention of much fascist ritual was to reinforce a sense of

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10 Though Gentile is often criticised for presenting a totalising interpretation of fascism as an all-pervasive political religion, he does acknowledge that his thesis applies principally to the intention behind fascist ideology/policy and not, necessarily, their reception; see pp. 13-14 of the introduction to this thesis. Gentile E *The Sacralisation of Politics in Fascist Italy*.
continuity with select aspects of national history – the Great War, the Risorgimento, and the Roman Empire – other ritual elements were intended to herald a break with the past.11

Although Kertzer does acknowledge the potentially delegitimising role of ritual, the ambiguity of ritual meaning(s) and the part ritual can play in bringing about change, rather than always reinforcing social cohesion, he does not sufficiently address the idea of reciprocity and equivocality between intention and reception, participant and observer. If, as de Certeau has argued, consumers respond to the cultural products transmitted to them with creativity and should rather be considered consumer-producers in recognition of the active, productive nature of cultural consumption, it follows that the distinction often made between participants and observers in the analysis of ritual and symbolic action is not clear-cut.12 Participants are not necessarily only those who create, organise or perform a given ritual, but can also include those who witness it from the outside (the supposed observers).13 The complexity of the participant/observer distinction is furthered when one also takes into account the representation(s) of a given ritual; the journalist writing an article describing the spectacle, the radio commentator or camera-operator for the Istituto Luce14 recording the events, or the ‘ordinary’ person in the crowd recounting the festivities in that day's diary entry represent ‘observer-participants’ in so far as they consume, observe, contribute to and represent the ritual, participants, spectators and, indeed, themselves. If the ritual observer can also be considered a participant, it follows that the division between intention and reception is also clouded; ‘reception’ is not simply a passive act – it too is a creative, productive practice. Thus, although it is important to distinguish between the intention of the fascist regime and the

11 Claudio Fogu made this point convincingly in his examination of the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of Garibaldi’s death in 1932, which centred around the exhumation of the remains of Anita Garibaldi in Genoa, their ceremonial transferal and reburial in a specially commissioned tomb on the Gianicolo hill in Rome. Described as “the regime’s first elaborate attempt to foster the development of a ‘fascist’ consciousness of the recent national past”, Fogu demonstrated how the ritual and ceremonial forms of the exhumation of Anita Garibaldi’s body were designed to emphasise the distance between past and present; the Genoese funeral cortege in horse-drawn carriages was a “moving museum”, carrying red-shirted Garibaldis displayed as “living relics” and kept separate from the marching Blackshirts and Great War veterans. The only ritual in Genoa – a silent military call to attention – acted as a ‘homage’ by the Fascist present to the Garibaldian past. In contrast, the Roman ritual and ceremony represented the antithesis of the Genoese nineteenth-century-esque mournful reconstruction; thousands of fascists were called upon to join the procession at different stages, from different directions, to give the impression of an unstoppable flow of fascists and to present fascism as a dynamic movement, in the present, with Mussolini at its centre. The historic past having been recognised and saluted separately in Genoa, the aim of the Roman rituals, then, was to emphasise the present and future. Claudio Fogu “Fascism and Historic Representation: The 1932 Garibaldian Celebrations” in Journal of Contemporary History vol. 3, 1996, pp. 317-345.

12 For a much fuller discussion of de Certeau’s interpretation of the relationship between the production and consumption or reception of ‘cultural products’, see pp. 20-1 & 28-9 of the introduction to this thesis.

13 Mabel Berezin articulates this point in Making the Fascist Self. The Political Culture of Interwar Italy p. 20.

14 The Istituto Luce (L’Unione Cinematografica Educativa) was the fascist organisation, inaugurated in 1924, to house the blossoming national cinema industry, under the control of the regime.
message it wished to convey through the staging of a particular festival on the one hand, and the reception and absorption of this message by the audience, on the other, it is vital that this process is not viewed simply as a one-way street. Instead, it is perhaps more useful to see this transmission of information and ideas as a 'conversation' between 'coloniser' and 'colonised', to use Jean and John Comaroff's metaphor. In attempting to diffuse fascist ideas throughout Italian society through the use of popular festivals, the regime could only make use of symbols and rites whose messages would be effectively understood by the population. It therefore did not have a free reign in its actions and had to employ pre-existing symbols, semiophores, myths and rituals - effectively Venetians' 'mental tools' - borrowed from the Roman Catholic liturgy and inventory of rituals, from national ceremonial forms developed since the Risorgimento through the reinvention of earlier traditions, and from the vast repository of Venetian rites, festivals and lieux de mémoire. By the same token, it was inevitable that the absorption of these messages by the Venetian populace would be influenced and perhaps diluted or distorted by their own pre-conceived understandings of those symbols, myths and rituals.

Any consideration of the intention and reception of popular festivals in 1930s Venice must take into account the social and cultural peculiarity of the lagoon city in relation to other Italian regions. Venice is unique in many ways; in the first place, its architectural and artistic patrimony and the unique character of its canals, campi and calli has, for centuries, ensured an extremely high presence of tourists, from all over the world, in the city. Because of the large presence of

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16 The concept of ‘mental tools’ as the equipment with which people reconcile ‘new’ information, beliefs, images and other cultural products with their ‘old’ ready-formed mentalité or world-view, was first put forward by Lucien Febvre and is discussed in detail in pp. 25-6 of the introduction. See also Febvre L (Gottlieb B trans.) The problem of unbelief in the sixteenth century: the religion of Rabelais, passim.

17 Ilaria Porciani, for example, has examined the military parades and other ritual forms which made up the festa dello Statuto in post-Risorgimento Italy and has demonstrated how, whilst the often highly militarised character of the ceremonial rites of this late nineteenth-century festival could be seen as symptomatic of the contemporary secularisation of Italian society – a state founded by the army in war – the roots of the ‘reinvented’ rituals of the festa dello Statuto were self-consciously traced by contemporaries to the races and tournaments of the Middle Ages and even to the giochi ginnici and circus spectacles of the patriotic festivals of Ancient Rome. See Ilaria Porciani La festa della nazione: rappresentazione dello Stato e spazi sociali nell’Italia unita Bologna, Il Mulino, 1997, especially chapter II: Spettacolo in alta uniforme.

18 This point is also made by Stefano Cavazza. He commented that, as a ‘free-time’ activity, participation in popular festivals was not, on the whole, imposed upon the population; the OND, therefore, was compelled to take into account popular preferences when (re)creating festivals and rites. On the other hand, he argued that, paradoxically, precisely because of their recreational nature, popular festivals constituted “a more subtle ideological vehicle for propaganda, albeit more suited to the diffusion of values than of political messages.” (“Un veicolo ideologico più sottile della propaganda, sebbene più adatto a diffondere valori che messaggi politici.”) Cavazza S Piccole patrie p. 8.
'outsiders', Venice – during the fascist era and both before and since – played the role of citta-vetrina. The city acted, in part, as a cultural showpiece for the regime; in other words, Venice manifested the international face of fascism, presenting the image that Mussolini wished to display to the world. In addition, the early twentieth century marked the peak of Venice's reign as one of the most important destinations of mondanità. During this time, the grand Venetian palaces and luxurious hotels, particularly on the Lido, played seasonal host to a cosmopolitan high-society crowd composed of Hollywood starlets and wealthy European aristocrats and bourgeoisie, seeking to meet their demands for both traditional 'high' cultural forms as well as the latest leisure activities and pastimes; bathing, golf, tennis, cinema, flying, fashion and so on. Furthermore, in the 1930s opportunities increased for less wealthy Italian and foreign tourists to visit the city, thanks especially to the institution of the fascist treni popolari, which allowed working class Italian families from all over the peninsula to spend a day visiting the city's museums and traipsing the seldom-deviated path that leads from the station to Piazza San Marco, via the Rialto. It follows, therefore, that the messages transmitted through certain festivals were intended perhaps as much (if not more) for international visitors, for journalists and for the directors and camera-operators of the Luce film company, as they were for 'ordinary' Venetians. It also follows that at least in the case of festivals and spectacles intended for the consumption of the Venetian patrician and bourgeois classes and foreign visitors to the city, the primacy of tourism over fascism ensured a sense of continuity from the Venetian summer seasons of Liberal Italy to those of the fascist era, as well as the preservation of their essentially Venetian flavour.

This is not to say, however, that this concept of the city-museum, devoted to satisfying its more and less cosmopolitan visitors' requirements of a blend of history, the arts and more modern

19 Stefania Longo has demonstrated how the institution in 1931 of the popular trains – emblems of fascist modernity – constituted a major boost to mass tourism in Venice, most welcome given the threat posed by the Depression to the city and its usual constituency of elite visitors. Longo S “Culture, tourism and Fascism in Venice 1919-45” pp. 57-9. It must be pointed out, though, that the treni popolari were by no means an invention of fascism. Similar cut-price and specially timetabled trains were operating already in the late nineteenth century.

20 Marco Fincardi has argued that ‘the city at times of festival, rather than serving the customs of the population, is a product of the sophisticated tourist machine which attracts the international beau monde, at the same time satisfying the local elite, by placing continuous rituals of social distinction at their disposition’ and that little thought was given by festival organisers as to how these would be received by the Venetian popular classes. (La città in festa, più che servire a uso della popolazione, è un prodotto della sofisticata macchina turistica che attrae il bel mondo internazionale, soddisfacendo allo stesso tempo l’élite locale, col metterle a disposizione continui rituali di distinzione sociale”) Fincardi M “Gli ‘anni ruggenti’ dell’antico leone” pp. 445-474.

21 The argument for continuity, albeit laced with some fascist impact, in the Venetian tourist industry and seasonal programme between the Liberal and Fascist eras is made convincingly by RJB Bosworth in his article, “Venice between Fascism and international tourism, 1911-45” pp. 5-23. The Venetian municipal authorities' and business leaders' over-riding concern with increasing tourism and, thereby, profits is also made by Stefania Longo in her recent PhD thesis, “Culture, tourism and Fascism in Venice 1919-45”, passim.
pleasures, was universally embraced by Venetians, nor that there did not exist a parallel Venice, which derided the city's reduction to a tourists' theme-park and was committed to reinvigorating and emphasising its modernity. From the early twentieth century the Venetian ruling elites, dominated by local politician Piero Foscari and encouraged by the words of Gabriele D'Annunzio and the actions of Filippo Marinetti and the futurists, sought to represent Venice as a dynamic modern city worthy of the twentieth century, highlighting the technological developments, civil airport, the commercial activity of the port and rising industrial plants at Marghera as evidence of the city's potential to once again become a dominant force in the Adriatic. In addition, whilst it undoubtedly holds true that the annual festivals lifted from the traditions of the Serenissima Republic to fill the city's summer season were directed towards international-set visitors and local social elites and towards the pursuit of profit, a number of festivals held in Venice during the 1930s, often outside the conventional dates of the tourist high-season, were indeed focussed for the consumption of the local population. The festivals considered in this study fall into this latter category.

The 'peculiarity' of Venice is significant also in terms of the way in which the memory of the Venetian republic and empire, la Serenissima – a crucial facet of Venetians' world-views – was appropriated by the fascist authorities. Of course, the fascist regime's recourse to the memory of the Venetian Republic, embodied in the myth and anti-myth of the Serenissima, was by no means a novel phenomenon. Over the course of the nineteenth century, during much of which the city, following its 'inglorious' capitulation to Napoleon's forces on the “tremendo dodese de magio” [12 May] 1797, was reduced to a dominion of the Austro-Hungarian empire, political figures and historians drew upon and embellished myth and anti-myth. One of the

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22 In Il Fuoco (1900) and La Nave (1908) D'Annunzio augured the revival of a second "grande Venezia", that would be founded on the city's glorious warrior and maritime past, whilst in 1910 the futurists launched their manifesto in Venice which railed against the decadence of the city and called for a new Venice which, using the tools of modernity, would once again dominate the Adriatic, "grande lago italiano". For a discussion of the relationship between myth and modernity in representations of Venice in the early twentieth century, and also for the discussions relating to tourist/industrial Venice, see Marco Fincardi “Gli ‘anni ruggenti’ dell’antico leone” pp. 445-474. See also pp. 41-3 of this thesis.

23 An appraisal of what constituted the myth and anti-myth of the Serenissima can be found on pp. 54-6 of this thesis.

24 Claudio Povolo has traced the evolution of the historiography of the Venetian Republic during the nineteenth century, beginning with the highly critical Histoire de la République de Venise (1819) by Napoleonist, Pierre Daru, which probed the nature of Venetian sovereignty and the relationship between the patrician classes and the occupied territories, deriding the notion of benevolent Venetian rule. Daru's critical work sparked a backlash of histories defending the old myths of Venetian paternalism and good government and of the loyalty and affection of her colonial subjects to the Serenissima. Following Italian unification, the model of Venetian wise government was employed to justify Venice's prominent position among her "sister cities", to reassert her claim to contemporary dominance of the Mediterranean (Vincenzo Marchesi’s Le origini e le cause della rovina della Repubblica veneta
most striking examples of the redeployment of the myth of the Serenissima can be found in Venice’s contribution to the revolutionary spirit sweeping Europe in 1848. The popular insurrection against Venice’s Austrian rulers and temporary proclamation of the ‘second’ Venetian republic was consciously presented by its Italian nationalist leader, Daniele Manin, as both revolution and restoration. Manin, in his proclamation to the defiant crowd on 22 March 1848, emphasised his conviction that the revolutionary events underway represented the end of “Venezia caduta” and its replacement with “Venezia risorta”; a ‘republic’, however, that whilst acknowledging its debt of continuity to the Serenissima, would form part of the new embryonic Italian nation.

It is not enough to have demolished the old government; we must likewise substitute a new one and the most suitable seems to be that of the Republic, which remembers its past glories, improved by present liberties. By this we do not mean already to separate ourselves from our Italian brothers, but on the contrary we will form one of those centres that must contribute to the subsequent and gradual fusing of this Italy in a single whole. Therefore, long live the republic! Long live liberty! Long live St Mark!25

Under Mussolini’s rule, this invocation of local place and memory as a tool in the construction of a national identity was continued.26 The idea of the pertinence of the lieux de mémoire, symbols and semiophones of the Serenissima Republic and Empire as justification not only for fascist irredentist and imperialist claims in the Eastern Adriatic lands once controlled by Venice but also for the fascist regime’s style of rule was articulated in historian Giuseppe Maranini’s 1931 contribution to Venice’s mythologisation, Costituzione di Venezia dopo la serrata del Maggior Consiglio. The study of Venice, Maranini concluded, was “no sterile task for bookworms”, given the timeless lessons of statecraft that it could yield. The secret to the longevity and might of the Serenissima lay in the sagacity and, above all, sheer volontà of its ruling class, not a world away from fascism’s self-representation as a movement of dynamism and will:

Venice’s aristocracy had an uncompromising awareness of the nature of its state. When it became necessary, with prudent industry the aristocrats proclaimed and defended their

1889) and, later, to argue the cause for a strong state (Antonio Battistella La repubblica di Venezia, 1921). See Claudio Povolo “The Creation of Venetian Historiography” pp. 491-519.
26 For a discussion of the way in which local loyalty could act as a complement, and not a rival, to sentiments of national allegiance see Confino A The nation as a local metaphor pp.3-10 as well as p. 54 of chapter 1 of this thesis.
state's principles, transforming an unwitting, spontaneous creation of historical accident into a self aware, thoughtful manifestation of the human will. It was thanks to this that the Republic of Venice did not follow the fate of all other Italian communes.27

The most potent semiophore of the Serenissima – the winged lion of St Mark, holding the open book of the evangelist – was harnessed by the fascist authorities as a means of asserting their claim to the legacy of Venetian dominance particularly but not only in the recently redeemed and still 'unredeemed' areas of the Eastern Adriatic. During the early 1930s, the marble statues of the lion which were traditionally to be found on columns in the central piazzas of cities brought under Venetian rule found themselves contested objects; at the end of 1932 a spate of episodes of vandalism or destruction of the marble lions occurred in Trau, Nona and other towns along the Dalmatian coast, decried by the Venetian press as a systematic "St Mark's lion-hunt".28 The response of the local and national authorities was swift: the "mutilated" lions of Trau were brought back to Venice and installed at the head of the new road bridge linking the city to the mainland, inaugurated on the feast day of St Mark, 25 April 1933,29 whilst the Venetian branch of the Sindacati Fascisti dei Trasporti Terrestri e Navigazioni Interni requested permission to donate a copy of the Trau lions to decorate the new Palazzo Littorio in Rome.30

Indeed, the Venetian podestà, Mario Alvera, noted that while "numerous Italian cities, particularly those which had linked with Venice, are requesting images of the symbolic lion to decorate or to substitute the marble statues cut away at the time of the French Revolution, [...] such requests have become more fervent following the recent destruction of Venetian lions."31 To this end, replacement lions were sent to Belluno and Bergamo. In addition, new statues were dispatched to internal and external Italian colonies which had never formed part of the Serenissima's empire; the show-city of Littorio, constructed on reclaimed marshland outside Rome, received a "statue of the lion supported on a tall column of Istrian stone" while the

29 Gazzettino 26 Apr. 1933.
30 ACS PNF Servizi vari, Serie 1 b. 1184 9.98.9; letter sent from the Sindacati Fascisti dei Trasporti Terrestri e Navigazioni Interni to PNF headquarters, dated 22 Jan. 1933.
31 "Sono numerose le città italiane, quelle specialmente che ebbero legami con Venezia, che richiedono l'immagine del simbolico leone per adornarsene o per sostituire i marmi scalpellati al tempo della Rivoluzione francese, [...] tali richieste sono dovute più fervide in seguito a recenti distruzioni di leoni Veneti." AMV Determinazioni Podestarii [henceforth DP] 1934 Trim. 2; Publication of summary of "L'Amministrazione del commune di Venezia dal 15 luglio 1930-VIII al 15 luglio 1934-XII" p. 53-4.
Libyan city of Bingazi was donated a bronze lion “in order to grant the wish of General Graziani, who wanted it – a symbol of Italian might – to flank the Roman wolf.”

On 18 October 1936, in a further arresting example of fascist appropriation of the symbols of the Serenissima, a ceremony took place in Piazza San Marco to celebrate the inauguration of the 2nd Marinaretti legion of the provincial Balilla organisation, which was to be named after perhaps the most famous of Venetian doges, Enrico Dandolo, the blind nonagenarian who led Venice’s army in the Fourth Crusade and the sacking of Constantinople in 1204 and, according to the local ONB hierarchy, was the “conqueror of the first Italian colonial empire”. The commemorative / inauguration rituals saw the blessing of the new legion’s standard, “[which] in form resembles that of the Serenissima; only, instead of being vermilion in colour, is deep blue,” in the presence of “the magnificent vision of the flowering youth of Venice, enrolled into vibrant legions of Balilla Marinaretti, Avanguardisti, Figil della lupa, Giovani and Piccole Italiane”, lined up in the Piazza to spell out the word ‘Duce’ in their contrasting uniforms. During the ceremony, the young Venetians listened as the Chief of Staff of the Maritime Command for the Upper Adriatic, Port Captain Ginocchietti, told them;

Today the Italian people of whom you are the seeds in bloom can worthily remember the precursors and champions of that imperial idea which has been most usefully realised here in our land for the progress of human civilisation.

The re-evocation of the great Venetian Doge has not, therefore, the character of a melancholic remembrance of the heroic times that once were, but instead demonstrates that, by the will of God, Italy and Empire constitute the terms of an eternal, fatal, unbreechable binomial.

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33 “Conquistatore del primo impero coloniale italiano.” The president of the provincial ONB asserted Dandolo’s place as imperialist pioneer in a letter to the Venetian prefect, reproduced in the raccomandata sent on 30 September 1936 from the Venetian prefecture to the president of the Council of Ministers in Rome, requesting that the Minister for National Education preside over the commemoration/inauguration. Despite the ‘nulla osta’ of Mussolini with regards to the minister’s attendance at the ceremony to record “that illustrious Italian” (“quell’illustre italiano”), in the event, no government minister attended the ceremony. Raccomandata (30 Sept. 1936), Appunto per il Duce (7 Oct. 1936) and telegram from the Undersecretary of State to the President of the Council of Ministers, Medici, to the Venetian Prefect (7 Oct. 1936); ACS PCM, Fascicolo 14.2 n. 7736.

34 “[che] assomiglia, nella forma, a quello della Serenissima; solo che anzi che essere vermiglio è di colore blu carico [...] la visione magnifica della fiorente giovinezza veneziana, che inquadrava in vibranti legioni, balilla, marinaretti, avanguardisti, figli della lupa, Giovani e Piccole Italiane.” Gazzetta 19 Oct. 1936 “La consegna del gonfalone alla nova legione Marinarare”.

35 “Il popolo italiano di cui voi siete i rigogliosi germogli può quindi degnamente ricordare oggi i precursori e gli assertori di quella idea imperiale che qui sulla nostra terra ha trovato le realizzazioni più gioevoli per il progresso della civiltà umana. La rievocazione del grande Doge veneziano non ha perciò il carattere di un malinconico ricordo dei tempi eroici che furono, ma dimostra invece che per volere di Dio Italia ed Impero costituiscono i termini di un binomio eterno, fatale, insenidibile.” Ibid.
The semiophores and myths of Venice, then, were deployed by the regime to foster a national sense of identity and allegiance to Rome; the Serenissima, according to the summary of fascist doctrine, the 1940 Dictionary of Politics, was “permeated with instinctive and uncorrupted romanità.” However, whilst it was not paradoxical that the fascist authorities upheld – in the names of Balilla divisions, Militia legions and statue lions – the myth of the Venetian Republic and its ruling patrician classes as the heir to Rome and the model of a strong, secure state, with valid political institutions and wise and benevolent rulers, the deployment of this regional myth to national ends could act both as complement and as rival to the fascist project.

The recourse to ‘tradition’ in modern Venice was considerable. Whilst the festivals directed at the Venetian and tourist elites were in the main organised by the Venetian tourism office and CIGA (Compagnia Italiana Grandi Alberghi), the city’s more ‘popular’ festivals tended to be organised by the local Dopolavoro organisation. The Venetian OND revived or ‘continued’ ancient customs of the Republic, albeit injected with a fascist twist: the thirteenth-century physical trials between castellani and nicolotti, the Guerra dei pugni, and the forze di Ercole of the arsenalotti became warrior rituals tied to the fascist exaltation of the regenerative value of war; the bocolo – a bunch of roses traditionally presented by young men to favoured girls on

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36 “Compenetrati di istintiva e incorrotta romanità.” The Dictionary of Politics acknowledged that the city was not founded by Rome nor in Roman times, but nevertheless insisted upon its romanità given that it was populated by people “fleeing the foreign tyranny” who were the heirs, therefore, of the “national tradition consecrated by Rome”. Dizionario di Politica vol. 1 Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1940, pp. 596-599.

37 The OND, which grew organically and in hybrid fashion from the fascist syndicalist movements in the years immediately following the march on Rome, functioned at different times, according to De Grazia’s authoritative study, as a state agency, fascist corporatist recreational hall and auxiliary wing of the PNF. Its ambiguous position, which juggled political, social and cultural aims allowed it to act as a mediating institution between state and civil society, intended to foster and consolidate consent for the regime. Ultimately, however, De Grazia’s research reveals how the activities of the dopolavoro were constructed as much from ‘below’ as from the top down, which, in combination with the OND’s inevitable recourse to pre-existing cultural forms, helps account for the limitations of the organisation’s success in engendering consensus. De Grazia V The Culture of Consent, passim. Regardless of the limits of the OND’s consensus-building abilities, enormous numbers of Italian adults were mobilised within its ranks. In Venice, both white- and blue-collar workers were pushed to organise their free-time activities and clubs within the framework of the provincial OND. Fincardi has pointed out that it was only the leisure activities and festive occasions of elite society that were not brought under the umbrella of the dopolavoro organisation, but were left to the Volpi-led CIGA. Nevertheless, the close collaboration between the OND, CIGA and Venetian Ufficio Turismo meant that ‘ordinary’ Venetians were, on heavily-regulated and circumscribed occasions, allowed limited access to the luxurious festivities of the elites. For example, the Dopolavoro femminile acquired six capanne [luxurious beach huts] on the exclusive beaches of the Lido. Fincardi M “Gli ‘anni ruggenti’ dell’antico leone.” p. 459

38 The link between the physical trials of the Republic and the martial spirit of the population was made by Manlio Dazzi in his 1937 study of Feste e Costumi di Venezia: Dazzi catalogued the marked presence of “gymnastic exercises” (“esercizi ginnici”) in the festivals and pastimes of Venetians – besides those of the castellani, nicolotti and arsenalotti, he noted also bull and bear hunting (presumably on terraferma) as well as the, rather unpalatable to contemporary ears, l’ammazzar la gatta – all of which he asserted “preserved a disposition towards the hardships and skills of war among the people and nobility” (“conservarono al popolo e ai nobili l’attitudine alle
the feast day of St Mark – during the 1930s could be found for sale by *crocerossine*, *Giovani Italiane* and *Avanguardisti* in support of the anti-tuberculosis campaign, part of the regime’s demographic policies; whilst in 1938 it was proposed that the *Regata storica reale*, a relatively recently invented tradition dating from 1899, be renamed the *Regata imperiale* in recognition of Fascist Italy’s new status thanks to the regime’s conquests in East Africa. Whilst in 1938 it was proposed that the *Regata storica reale*, a relatively recently invented tradition dating from 1899, be renamed the *Regata imperiale* in recognition of Fascist Italy’s new status thanks to the regime’s conquests in East Africa.40 Venice’s most famous festival, carnevale, received particular attention from the fascist authorities. The observation of carnival in urban Italy had been in decline since the late eighteenth century, though it enjoyed a limited revival, principally as a tourist attraction, in the decades following unification.41 Marco Fincardi, in his examination of continuity and transformation in Venetian festivals during the early twentieth century, has shown how, following the loss and privations of the Great War, the social conflicts of the *biennio rosso* and early years of the dictatorship, the wearing of masks – perceived as a potential cover for subversive acts – was prohibited.

The purging of carnival, however, was confined to the predominantly popular and public manifestations of the festival. Throughout the *ventennio* the patrician bourgeois and fascist élites of Venice continued to gather, in elaborate masks and costumes for the carnival balls; events, which, on occasion, allowed them to mix with their less privileged fellow citizens. Maria Damerini, in her memoir, recalled both the glamour of these annual events, and also the opportunities that the Venetian carnival celebrations provided for inter-class interaction. Her understanding of carnival is reminiscent less of a Bakhtinesque theory of carnival as a safety-fatiche e alle bravure della guerra*). Dazzi M *Feste e Costumi di Venezia* Venezia, Zanetti, 1937, p. 7. See also Fincardi M *I fasti della “tradizione”* p. 1486.

39 The *Gazzetta* reported, on the feast day of St Mark (25 April) in 1936, that the selling of the ‘flower of St Mark’ in aid of the anti-tuberculosis campaign, was being organised by the local *sestieri* fascist groups. *Gazzetta* 26 April 1936 p. 4. See also Fincardi M *I fasti della “tradizione”* p. 1487.

40 The *vice-podestà* Sandro Brass, nephew of Italico, made the suggestion in his after dinner speech at the traditional ‘disnar’ preceding the 1938 regatta. Brass announced “We will ask that from now on the regata no longer be called historic – a name which, fundamentally, has no reason for being – but imperial” (“Noi chiederemo che d’ora in poi la regata non si chiami più storica – nome che non ha in fondo più ragione d’essere – ma Imperiale”). It was reported that the suggestion to bring into line “historic events and therefore also the sovereign manifestation of the Venetian people, with the spirit of the new times, the times of Mussolini” was “warmly acclaimed by all the participants at the banquet, and the enthusiastic applause lasted a long time” (“eventi storici e quindi anche la manifestazione sovrana del popolo di Venezia, allo spirito dei nuovi tempi, dei tempi di Mussolini […] calorosamente acclamata da tutti i partecipanti al banchetto; e le acclamazioni durano a lungo entusiastiche”). *Gazzetta* 1 Sept. 38.

valve or controlled outlet for social tensions than it is of Nathalie Zemon Davis' interpretation of such rituals as essential components of community-building.42

During carnival, however, the number of parties multiplied, sometimes costumed but especially en têle.

One went to the Cavalchina [at the Fenice theatre in Venice] in domino [caped garment worn at a masquerade] or rather the domino awaited in the boxes or barcacce (two or three boxes, joined together, with the light dividing walls removed). Sparkling wine in the boxes, kept frozen in silver buckets, served by the house staff of whoever arranged the box or barcacce for himself and invited friends; dinners served in the Sale Apollinee (the Fenice's private rooms). One danced on the stage to alternately arranged orchestras, one went from box to box visiting friends, moretta [harlequin mask] covering the face, or with a bautta [black mantle with hood worn as mask] underneath the hood of the domino or beneath a tricorno [three cornered hat]. Piquant jokes and quips, the odd indiscretion, the odd amorous or malign touch: the mask assured anonymity, so to speak.

Everyone went to the Cavalchina: literary figures, artists, patricians, bourgeois and commoners. The mixing of people with other classes, the possibility of enjoying the great festivals of the city elbow to elbow (Carnival, the regattas, the Redentore, the feast day of St Mark, the Salute), the clear awareness that the very wealthy derived their pleasure from easing the life and well-being of those less well-off, and even the very constitution of the city which abolished precise boundaries, at all times made for the natural acceptance of hierarchies and assuaged and softened discrepancies in level without excessive sophism. It was this that allowed Venice over the centuries to be the Serenissima that it was; it was this that in the 1930s allowed it to be the same.43

As Fincardi has noted, in the early 1930s the folklore section of the Venetian OND sought to restore carnival as a 'popular' yet controlled celebration. In 1933, the OND's carnival programme went so far as to bring masks into Piazza San Marco itself as part of a line-up, prepared in the Dopolavoro headquarters and during sabati fascisti, which improbably posited such benign spectacles as the descent of a masked puppet from the campanile and Moorish

42 See Bakhtin M (Iswolsky H trans.) Rabelais and his World, especially chapter 3. For Nathalie Zemon Davis' alternative but not entirely oppositional account, see Zemon Davis N “The Reasons of Misrule”, passim.
43 "Durante il carnevale del resto si moltiplicavano le feste, anche in costume ma specialmente en têle.
Alla "Cavalchina" si andava in domino o meglio i domino aspettavano nei palchi, ovvero nelle barcacce (due o tre palchi, uniti, tolte le leggere pareti). Spumante, nei palchi, tenuto gelato nei secchi d'argento, servito dal personale di casa di chi fissava il palco o la barcaccia per sé e per gli amici che invitava; cene servite nelle Sale Apollinee (Ridotto della Fenice). Si ballava in palcoscenico con orchestre alternate, si visitavano gli amici di palco in palco, con la moretta sul volto, o con la bautta, sotto al cappuccio del domino o sotto un tricorno. Scherzi e battuti piccanti, qualche indiscrezione, qualche freccia amorosa o maligna: la maschera assicurava l'anonimo, per modo di dire.
Tutti andavano alla Cavalchina: letterati, artisti, patrizi, borghesi e popolani. Il mescolarsi del popolo alle altre classi, la possibilità di godere gomito a gomito nelle gran feste delle città (Carnevale, Regate, Redentore, San Marco, La Salute), la precisa coscienza che il piacere dei molto ricchi fosse fonte di facilità di vita e di benessere a chi meno possedeva, e anche la formazione stessa della città, che abolisce i confini precisi, fecero in ogni tempo accettare con naturalizza e senza spreco di sofismi le gerarchie, e addolcire e smussare i dislivelli. Questo permise a Venezia d'essere nei secoli quella Serenissima che fu; questo le permise negli anni '30 di esserlo ancora." Damerini M (Isnenghi M ed.) Gli ultimi anni del Leone pp. 87-8. The cavalchina was the carnival ball held annually at the Fenice theatre.
dances alongside the more belligerent rituals of the ‘trials of Hercules’ and jousting tournaments. However, whether because of the economic priorities of the Depression years or because of concerns for public order, the elaborately organised carnival festivities of 1933 were not repeated. What’s more, by no means all branches of authority shared the folklore section of the OND’s enthusiasm for the revival of the street-based Venetian carnival. In January 1936, shortly before the start of the carnival season, the Questura issued a decree which forbade “in the streets, the Piazza and other open spaces, the use of masks and fancy-dress with the exception of those costumes permitted, Pierrot – Cirillino etc., and those which do not include the use of face masks, but on condition that the face is not painted so as to render it unrecognisable.” Further exception was made for those attending “public dances”, though the decree warned that any unsanctioned balls or parties could be stopped, “for reasons of public order”. The threat to “public order” caused by unlicensed parties was not the only consideration of the Questura; the decree was unequivocal in dictating the kinds of costumes considered unacceptable above all others;

Fancy dress alluding to political figures and parties, which causes religious offence or is contrary to public morality and, in short, all fancy dress which in any way might perturb public order is forbidden.

At the simple invitation of state officials, Carabinieri and police agents, masked persons must immediately remove their masks for identification; failure to comply will lead to arrest.

The subversive potential of carnevale, then, was not perceived by all to have been eradicated through the Dopolavoro’s interventions. The first of the three festivals examined as case studies in this chapter, on the other hand, the festa delle Marie, was more ideally suited to appropriation by the fascist authorities.

44 See Fincardi M “I fasti della tradizione.” pp. 1499-1500.
45 “Nelle vie, Piazza e altri luoghi all’aperto, l’uso delle maschere ed i travestimenti fatta eccezione di quelli consentiti con abiti di Pierrot – Cirillino ecc. e di tutti quelli che non comportano l’uso delle maschere al volto a condizioni che il viso non sia dipinto in modo da renderlo iriconoscibile.” The decree was reproduced in the Gazzetta on 18 Jan. 1936.
46 “Pubbliche feste da ballo [...] per ragioni di ordine pubblico.” Ibid.
47 “Sono vietati i travestimenti allusivi a persone ed a partiti politici, quelli che recano offesa alla religione o sono contrari al buon costume ed infine tutti i travestimenti che in qualsiasi modo possono produrre turbamento all’ordine pubblico. Al semplice invito dei Funzionari, Carabinieri ed Agenti della Forza Pubblica, le persone mascherate dovranno subito togliersi la maschera per la loro identificazione, procedendosi al loro fermo in caso di rifiuto.” Ibid.
The festa delle Marie

In 1934 the Venetian Dopolavoro resolved to re-institute the “ancient Venetian custom” of the festa delle Marie – a medieval festival, apparently last held in 1379 and renowned for its increasingly excessive ostentation and cost, which supposedly remembered the legendary, heroic and bloody rescue of young Venetian brides, kidnapped by ‘Slavic’ pirates from the church of San Pietro di Castello on their wedding day. On Saturday 3 February 1934, coinciding as closely as possible with the religious festival of the purification of the Madonna, a procession of twelve gondolas left the Palazzo della Pescheria (the dopolavoro headquarters in Venice) carrying the twelve "smiling" Marie and their bridegrooms, closely followed by boats containing local dignitaries. The corteo proceeded, with great pomp and ceremony, down the Grand Canal, headed towards the church of San Pietro. Having arrived outside the church, after a slight detour forced by the inclement February weather – the bora was blowing fiercely from the Lido – the bridal couples descended from their gondolas, as elegantly as they could given the biting wind blustering around them, and entered the church for the wedding ceremony. The wedding rite was attended by relatives and friends of the couples as well as the ‘great and the good’ of Venetian fascism. After the ceremony, the couples returned to

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48 Gazzetta 3 Feb. 1934. Though the festival had not been staged in its entirety for over half a millennium it had remained present in Venetian ‘collective memory’ – it was immortalised, for example, in the irreverent, populist nineteenth-century poetry of Carlo Gozzi. Additionally, elements of its ritual were incorporated into other Venetian festivals; indeed, the celebrations for the start of Carnival in February 2003 included the procession of Marie statues around Piazza San Marco.

49 Though the legend states that the Venetian brides were kidnapped from S Pietro di Castello, the medieval festivities commemorating their rescue took place in and around the church of S Maria Formosa. The ‘true’ origins of the festival remain relatively obscure; this is a theme that will be discussed later in the chapter.

50 2 February is the day when the Catholic Church celebrates the presentation of the Virgin Mary, as a child, in the temple. Hence, the festa delle Marie was a fascist festival superimposed on a semi-secular Venetian festival, on top of a Roman Catholic festival.

51 The Gazzetta even drew significance from the inclement weather, finding in the easterly wind the echo of the pirates of the festival’s origin-myth: “The weather certainly did not favour the performance of the festival. The cold, strong wind, which for three days has blown here from the Balkans, appeared as though it too wished to bring a commemorative note, recalling the violence of the pirates from the other shore” (“II tempo non ha favorito certo lo svolgimento della festa. Il vento freddo e gagliardo, che da tre giorni ci viene dai Balcani, sembrava voler portare anch’esso una nota commemorativa, ricordando le violenze dei pirati dall’altra sponda”). Gazzetta 4 Feb. 1934 “L’esultazione veneziana e fascista della nuzialità”.

52 The Gazzetta showed much appreciation for the brides’ ability to maintain their elegant demeanour whilst negotiating their disembarkation from the gondolas, made particularly tricky by the fierce bora wind blowing from the ‘East’: “The brides, so graceful in their simple, elegant white wedding dresses peeping out from underneath capes and mantles, are able to resist the temptation to run for cover and make their entrance into church in solemn, orderly procession” (“Le spose, graziosissime nei loro semplici ed eleganti abiti nuziali candidi, che spuntan di sotto ai mantelli e ai cappotti, sanno resistere alla tentazione di correre a rifugiarsì al riparo e fanno il loro ingresso in chiesa in corteo solenne e ordinato”). Ibid. Fortunately, the following year, the festa was “blessed by a shining sun” (“benedetta da un sole raggiante”). Gazzetta 3 Feb 1935 “L’antica festa delle ‘Marie’ rivive sotto il segno del Littorio”.

53 On both sides of the nave the seats were reserved for the “authorities”; the prefect, high-ranking military officers, Avv. Suppiej, the federal secretary of the Venetian Fascio, the procurator general, the trustees of the Fascio.
their gondolas and continued in procession to Piazza San Marco, where they first received the blessing of Patriarch La Fontaine, and then continued on to the basilica to pray at the altar of the Nicopeja Virgin. Finally, the newly-wed couples returned, along with family, friends, and the ever-present fascist officials, to their own sestieri to celebrate the wedding breakfast in a local restaurant or even, in the case of the couples from Castello, in the local fascist group headquarters. The festa was repeated only once more, the following year.

The local newspaper and journal accounts of the festa delle Marie link it explicitly, as it was intended to be, with fascist policies of assistance and especially with the demographic campaign exalting matrimony and motherhood. Not only did the couples marrying as part of the festa receive the wedding dress, groom's suit, wedding rings, ceremony and reception free of charge, they were also given the very practical gifts of two beds with mattresses, a dresser with table and chairs for the kitchen, a full dining service, six towels, a woven blanket and thirty

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54 The icon of the Vergine Nicopeja was reputedly drawn by St Luke and was brought to Venice and placed in the basilica from Constantinople, as part of the bounty accumulated in the sacking of the city in 1204, during the fourth Crusade. Since then, the Nicopeja Madonna "is highly venerated by Venetians, who turned to her halo in the moments of gravest doubt for the health of the city and even turned faithfully to her protection during the Great War, dedicating the votive temple on the Lido to her name" ("è veneratissima dai veneziani che ricorsero al suo cinto nei momenti più dubbi per la salute della città, ed anche alla cui protezione si rivolsero fiduciosi nella grande guerra, dedicando al suo nome il Tempio Votivo del Lido").

55 After 1935, there is complete silence about the festival in the archival and press sources I have examined. Somewhat infuriatingly, therefore, I have been unable to discover why the festa delle Marie ended, almost as abruptly as it had started. The records of the podestà reveal that the Venetian Dopolavoro twice sent written requests, in late 1933 and 1934, to ask the comune to contribute towards the 'dowries' of the Marie; both years the comune acquiesced to the OND's request, noting in 1934 the "first-rate success" ("ottima riuscita") of the previous festival. In late 1935, no mention is made in the podestà's records, suggesting that no request for funds came from the OND. AMV DP 1933 Trim IV. n. 74138 & 1934 Trim IV. n. 68947. Here, however, the trail goes cold, although one might conjecture that the coming of the Ethiopian War in October 1935 and subsequent calls for autarchy might have prompted the Dopolavoro to shelve any plans to re-stage the festival a third time. The historian of Venice, Silvio Tramontin, who in the 1960s wrote an article on the medieval festa delle Marie, suggested that the reason for its return to obscurity was perhaps because of "the wars and also perhaps because it was by now little felt by the people" ("le guerre e forse anche perché ormai poco sentito dal popolo"). Tramontin S "Una pagina di folklore religioso veneziano antico: La festa de "Le Marie"" in La religiosità popolare nella valle padana. Atti del il convegno di studi sul folklore padano, Modena 19-21 marzo 1965 Modena, ENAL, 1966 p.417.

56 For a survey which examines the evolution of both fascist welfare policies directed at workers, such as the social insurance scheme, as well as pronatalist policies targeted particularly at Italian women, as part of the demographic campaign, see Maria Sophia Quine's Italy's social revolution. Charity and welfare from Liberalism to Fascism Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002. Quine traced the influences and origins of fascist policy in the concerns with social assistance and eugenics during the Liberal era, ideas which found greater expression under the Mussolinian regime. Ultimately, however, Quine demonstrated the incompleteness, despite intentions, of fascism's "social revolution", as she revealed a public 'welfare system' which relied, built upon, amalgamated and duplicated private, religious structures of social assistance.
metres of cloth in order to begin furnishing the new marital home.57 These gifts were donated by various organisations and figures including the podestà, the comune, the PNF federal secretary, the president of the Ente Opera Assistenziali, the provincial OND, the Unione Fascista dei Commercianti and CIGA “in a real competition of generosity between economic organisation and trade unions.”58 The couples chosen to take part in the ceremony were selected “among the poorest and most worthy;”59 a list of the professions of the male halves of the twelve “coppie del popolo” chosen for the 1934 festa reveals three carpenters, three labourers, a barber, a mechanic, an industrial worker, a terrazaio, a delivery man and a street trader, the majority of whom hailed from the predominantly working-class sestieri of Cannaregio, Castello and Santa Croce.60 The focus on social assistance and the providing of what essentially amounted to a dowry by the Venetian fascist elites to couples representing the ‘deserving poor’ hints at the enduring presence of paternalistic relations in Venice between patriziato and popolani.

In re-staging what was held to be Venice’s festival of marriage, the fascist authorities sought to use the authority and legitimacy of such an ‘ancient’ custom to disseminate and strengthen its own ideology on marriage and procreation. Since Mussolini’s Ascension Day speech in 1927, in which he declared that, “If we decrease, signori, we won’t make an empire, we’ll become a colony!”61 Italian women were to be co-opted into mass-procreation as part of the demographic

57 Gazzetta 1 Feb. 1935.
58 “In una vera gara di generosità tra organizzazioni economiche e sindacali cittadine.” Viviani C “La Festa delle Marie nella storia e nell’arte (con.ill)” in Rivista di Venezia, Jan. 1934, p. 12. The podestà’s records, in determining the comune’s donation of L.300 to each couple, noted that, “other fascist organizations will make their own contribution, offering the wedding breakfast and furniture for the bridal room.” AMV DP 1933 Trim IV. n. 74138 & 1934 Trim IV. n. 68947.
59 “Fra le più povere e le più meritevoli.” Ibid. The podestà described them as the “most needy and virtuous” (“più bisognose e virtuose”); AMV DP 1933 Trim IV. n. 74138.
60 The twelve “coppie del popolo”, including their year of birth, sestiere of origin and the profession of the male half of the couples, chosen to take part in the 1934 festa delle Marie were: Irma Da Riol 1913 (Giudecca) & Alberto Fusero 1902 (Giudecca, motorista); Irma Bosceriol 1916 (S Marco) & Eugenio Zambon 1910 (S Croce, falegname); Francesca Capudora 1911 (Carmini) & Aldo Bon 1911 (Cannaregio, barbiere); Maria Ferro 1911 (S Croce) & Marco Sarantoni 1906 (S Croce, operaio); Maria Varasori 1913 (Cannaregio) & Vittorio Prez 1908 (Cannaregio, terrazzio); Gemma Schianini 1912 (S Croce) & Umberto Rumor 1908 (S Polo, bracciatrice); Ellesabetta Torri 1910 (Cannaregio) & Giovanni Vianello 1903 (Cannaregio, falegname) Costanza Gavignan 1908 (Cannaregio) & Giovanni Gnutt 1909 (Cannaregio, bracciatrice); Gemma Rossi 1910 (Lido) & Carlo Alber 1906 (Lido, fattorino); Beatrice Scarp 1911 (Castello) & Mario Costantitini 1907 (Dorsoduro, falegname); Giustina Vicenzotto 1908 (Castello) & Ferruccio Buchi 1903 (Castello, bracciatrice); Giovanna Bernardi 1911 (Castello) & Luigi Nordo 1907 (Castello, venditore ambulante). Gazzetta 2 Feb. 1934. The names, ages and professions of the couples chosen to marry in the festa delle Marie of 1935 are not known, though their sestiere of origin is. Again, the couples were drawn predominantly from the poorer districts of the city: 3 from Cannaregio; 2 from Castello; 2 from San Polo; 2 from Dorsoduro; 1 from the Giudecca; and 1 from Santa Croce. Gazzetta 1 Feb. 35.
campaign, used as justification for imperialist expansion. The direct connection between the re-instituted "Venetian festival of marriage" and the fascist regime's demographic policies was made explicitly and repeatedly in the newspaper and journal articles describing the festival. The headline on the Gazzetta's page dedicated to Cronaca della città on 4 February 1934 read: "The Venetian and fascist exaltation of marriage. The ancient festival of the 'Marie' lives again after six centuries under the sign of the Littorio," and continued:

In one of the most famous and most ancient of the traditional festivals of republican Venice the provincial Dopolavoro has justly thought to recognize an venerable precedent of Mussolinian and fascist policy in support of marriage and the birthrate: the festa delle Marie. And yesterday, perhaps a millennium since that far-off February morning, during which the Venetian brides gathered in front of the church of Castello to receive their marriage blessing, were suddenly attacked, seized and abducted by Narentine pirates and then, thanks to the prompt adroitness of the people in arms, commanded by the Doge, were liberated and avenged with the blood of the scoundrel abductors, yesterday the very ancient nuptial celebration was re-established in all its luminous significance of the vitality and youthfulness of the stock, with a popular festival filled with gentility and poetry.

The festa, it was asserted, would serve as an exemplar above all to Venetian women, to remind them to fulfill their duty as women, assigned to them by fascism;

The intimate festival of the heart, the ritual of the most cherished affections, will for many be rendered sweeter and dearer because with the ceremony that will crown with heavenly benediction the formation of the new families, Italy will be given twelve new mothers, who will teach their children love for the Fatherland and devotion towards the King and the Duce, ensuring that they know and remember the generous gesture with which the provincial Dopolavoro, faithful instrument of the Regime, wished to celebrate and support the creation of their family.

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61 "Se si diminuisce, signori, non si fa l'impero, si diventa una colonia." Ascension Day speech made to the Camera dei deputati on 26 May 1927. Reproduced in Mussolini B, (Susmel E & D eds.), Opera Omnia vol. 22 Florence, La Fenice, 1951, p. 367. The demographic campaign, officially launched with the infamous Ascension Day speech sought to justify Italian imperialist expansion by arguing that Italy's expanding birth rate - yet to be created - warranted larger territories; hence Mussolini's claim that Italy must expand or explode. For an authoritative discussion of fascist demographic policies see De Grazia V How fascism ruled women. Italy, 1922-1945 Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1992, chapter 3 "Motherhood", pp. 41-76.

62 Gazzetta 1 Feb. 1935 "La Festa della nuzialità veneziana".

63 "L'esultazione veneziana e fascista della nuzialità. L'antichissima festa delle "Marie" rivive dopo sei secoli sotto il segno del Littorio"

64 "L'intima festa del cuore, il rito degli affetti più cari, saranno per tanti resi più dolci e più cari perché con la cerimonia che coronerà con la benedizione del cielo la formazione delle nuove famiglie verranno date all'Italia dodici nuove mamme, le quali educeranno i loro figliuoli all'amore della Patria e alla devozione verso il Re ed il Duce, facendo loro conoscere e ricordare il generoso gesto col quale il Dopolavoro provinciale, strumento fedele del Regime, ha voluto festeggiare e favorire il formarsi delle loro famiglie." Gazzetta 2 Feb. 1934.
The protagonists of the festival also highlighted the ritual's compliance with the emergent racial character of fascist demographic policy. Comm. Dugnani, secretary of the *Dopolavoro provinciale* and therefore responsible for the festa's revival, spelled out to the “nervous” brides and grooms in a speech two days before the ceremony, the message that the festival “fits into all those actions which the Regime, inspired by the Duce is carrying out for the defence of our race and the demographic increase of our country.”65 The podestà, in deliberating the comune's contribution of L.3,600 in “wedding gifts” of L.300 per couple for the 1934 festa, judged it opportune “to adhere to this initiative which pays homage to the Fascist Government's directives in favour of the demographic campaign.”66 The following year, Alvera displayed no hesitation in acquiescing to the Dopolavoro's renewed request for an identical contribution, notwithstanding the accumulated deficit of L.35,000 in the authority's festivals budget, "given the first-rate success of the previous ceremony, whose aims of demographic propaganda fully justify this new expense."67 Significantly, this message also was echoed by the priest who officiated at the wedding ceremony. In his sermon the presiding minister, Monsignor Cottin, archpriest of Castello, pronounced a vision of marriage and procreation in which religion and patriotism were fused:

With this tradition, which has been happily reinstated today, the Venetian Republic wished to exalt the social character of marriage, whose principal aim is to give gallant sons to the racial stock and to the grandeur of the Fatherland: today, with the same concept the exaltation of marriage is carried out by a government that wishes to improve the destiny of the Italian people, making the growth and well-being of the population one of the fundamental points of its policy. [...] Exalt marriage to the children who will come, you will be blessed by God if you adhere strictly to three basic tenets, non-adherence to which will lead you to ruin: and that is educating your children in the love of God, the love of the family and the love of the Fatherland, which we desire great and glorious.68

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65 “Si innesti in tutta quell'azione che il Regime, illuminato dal Duce va svolgendo per la difesa della nostra razza e per l'incremento demografico del nostro Paese.” *Gazzetta* 2 Feb. 1934.
66 “Grazie dotali [...] di aderire a tale iniziativa in omaggio alle direttive del Governo Fascista per l'incremento della campagna demografica.” AMV DP 1933 Trim IV. n. 74138.
67 “Data l'ottima riuscita della cerimonia precedente, le cui finalità di propaganda demografica pienamente fustigano la nuova spesa.” AMV DP 1934 Trim IV. n. 68947. The deficit in the comune's festival budget of L.35,000 was attributed to the chronic underfunding of the comune's programme of official festivities in preceding years. In February 1934, the podestà allotted L. 221,700 to cover the costs of staging the city's annual season of festivals, which included the "traditional" programme of the Redentore, the festa notturna mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the *Regata di Murano* and the *Regata Storica Reale* on the Grand Canal, and, on the Lido, the *festa della luce* and *festa della frutta*, as well as two novel additions to the calendar; a *Mostra Canina* in the *Giardinetto Reale* and *Mostra dei Fiori e Piante* to be held under the portici of the Palazzo Ducale in April. AMV DP 1934. Trim 1. n. 8870.
68 "La Repubblica veneta ha voluto esaltare con la tradizione che oggi è stata ripresa felicemente, il carattere sociale del matrimonio, il quale ha lo scopo preciso di dare figli gagliardi alla stirpe ed alla grandezza della Patria: con lo stesso concetto oggi l'esaltazione del matrimonio viene fatta da un governo che, come il nostro vuole migliorare le sorti del popolo italiano, facendo del suo incremento e del suo benessere uno dei capisaldi della sua politica. [...] Esaltate il matrimonio nei figli che veranno, voi sarete benedetti da Dio mantenendovi fessi a tre
The following year the Monsignor returned to the theme of procreation, as he implored the newly-wed couples to have many children:

To those who would fear difficulties of a financial nature deriving from the bearing of numerous children, we can well reassure you that Divine Providence abandons no-one, but in fact devotes itself to supporting families which grow numerous, today especially, under the paternal impulse of the National Government which, with such sound, just intentions, guides the destiny of our Fatherland.69

To reinforce this point, as the couples filed out of the church to the tune of the bridal march, the priest handed them gifts of a book with "artistic leather binding" containing rules for raising a good family and a L.1,000 bond-certificate from the National Institute of Insurers.70

The Venetian fascist and religious authorities, then, found themselves in agreement over the issue of procreation; by having many children these Venetian coppie del popolo would fulfil not only their duty to God, by upholding the value of the family, but would also carry out their duty for the patria – by increasing the Italian "stock". The festa delle Marie seemingly lent itself particularly well to the promotion of the racial element of the demographic campaign; the idea of the need to ‘defend the race’.71 The concept of ‘defending the race’ surely requires an enemy – or ‘other’ – against whom the race must be defended; by attaching demographic policy to a Venetian legend which told of the barbarity but ultimate defeat of ‘Slavic’ pirates, the Venetian fascist authorities provided the population with a (not so) subtle reminder of the kinds of dangers that needed to be defended against.

The collaboration of the local religious authorities in this reinvention of Venetian tradition, which witnessed the convergence of fascist aims with their own long-standing promotion of ‘family values’, is striking. The festa della Marie took place on the day of an important Roman Catholic festival – the purification of the Madonna – had as its central focus a religious ritual – the wedding ceremony – and was played out in the most important religious locations of the city –

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69 "A coloro che avesse a temere le difficoltà di ordine finanziario derivanti da una numerosa figliolanza, si può ben assicurare che la Divina Provvidenza non abbandona alcuno, anzi si prodiga sempre in favore delle famiglie che crescono numerose, oggi specialmente, sotto l’impulso paterno del Governo Nazionale che con così sanie giusti propositi, guida i destini della nostra Patria.” Reported in the Gazzetta 3 Feb. 1935 “L’antica festa delle ‘Marie’ rivive sotto il segno del Littorio”.

70 Ibid.

71 The integrity of eugenic concepts of the degeneration and subsequent need to defend the race within the demographic campaign is discussed in Quine M S “From Malthus to Mussolini: The Italian Eugenics movement and Fascist population policy 1890-1938” PhD Thesis, University of London, 1990.
the old cathedral of San Pietro di Castello, the patriarch's headquarters and, of course, the basilica of San Marco. Religious approval of the festival was reinforced in the weekly newspaper of the Venetian Catholic authorities, the Settimana Religiosa, which endorsed the reprisal of the 'festival of marriage' as a ritual with both "religious and civic importance", though the paper unsurprisingly placed greatest emphasis on its spiritual meaning; "the sanctity of the bond of marriage exalted by Our Lord Jesus Christ."72

Secular luoghi comuni symbolising Venice and the Serenissima republic – such as the gondola procession down the Grand Canal - were introduced into the festival ritual to evoke a sense and the authority of the 'past', even though they had not featured in the medieval festival. Indeed, the rituals that made up the 1934 and 1935 festivals appear to depart significantly from those of the 'original' tenth-century celebration. Historians of the medieval festival disagree about aspects of the origin-myth and evolution of the festa delle Marie’s rituals, but all agree that the festival was originally dedicated to the Virgin Mary, not to the celebration of marriage.73

The extravagant medieval festivities spanned a number of days at the end of January and early February from the anniversary of the transportation of the body of St Mark from Alexandria to Venice (31 January) to the feast day of the purification of the Virgin (2 February), and combined lavish feasting with religious ceremonial and large processions involving armed men, young children bearing silver crosses, musicians and priests dressed as the Madonna and Angel Gabriel.74 The Marie – who represented the Virgin Mary, not the kidnapped Venetian brides – venerated in the medieval festival were not actually human, but were elaborately carved and richly dressed wooden statues.75 The origin-myth of the festa delle Marie, the legend of the heroic rescue of the Venetian brides held captive by Slavic pirates, appears to have been grafted onto the Marian festival later, perhaps even after it had ceased to be celebrated, with the incorporation of rituals such as the Doge's attendance at Vespers each 1 February in the church of Santa Maria Formosa – the parish from which the majority of the heroic rescuers

72 "Religiosa e civile importanza [...] a santità del vincolo matrimoniale innalzato da N S Gesù Cristo." La Settimana Religiosa 8 Feb. 1934 "La festa delle "Marie"".
73 The rituals of the medieval festa delle Marie have been repeatedly retold and re-elaborated over the centuries. The most recent attempts by historians to reconstruct the festival are those of Silvio Tramontin and Lina Urban. See Tramontin S “Una pagina di folklore religioso veneziano antico: La festa de “Le Marie”” and Urban L Tra sacro e profano. Le festa delle Marie Venice, Centro internazionale della grafica, 1988.
75 Urban L Tra sacro e profano. Le festa delle Marie p. 33; Tramontin S “Una pagina di folklore religioso veneziano antico: La festa de “Le Marie”” pp. 405, 409-16. Tramontin spent some time discussing whether or not the Marie of the medieval festivals were always statues, or whether indeed they were later substituted by live Marie. He noted that only from approximately 1400 – and therefore after the festa had ceased to be celebrated – did the Venetian chronicles refer to the Marie as real people, leading him to conclude that the Marie were never real.
supposedly came — and the practice of distributing clothes and wine for the dowries of the poor young girls of the parish. Thus, it is argued, the festival increasingly became ‘remembered’ as a festival of marriage because of these additions, the blurring of symbolic meanings and perhaps also because, as a period of lavish celebration and feasting, it provided an ideal opportunity for couples to meet and, eventually, wed. It seems extremely doubtful, though, that at any point the medieval festa delle Marie included a wedding ceremony or the representation of a marriage as part of its ritual. Despite this, both the organisers and commentators of the 1930s reprisal of the festival reworked the ‘memory’ of the medieval festa, conveniently ‘forgetting’ the lavish feasting, drinking and be-costumed priests — hardly in keeping with the new model of the austere and abstemious fascist Italian — and re-invented the festival with the addition of the wedding ceremony. Thus, the medieval tradition of the festa delle Marie was recast as a festival of marriage and its return under fascism was presented as a seamless continuation of the ancient festival. In his 1937 resumed of Feste e Costumi di Venezia, Manlio Dazzi declared of the medieval festa; “each year twelve poor girls, dressed and adorned by patrician families, processed to S Pietro di Castello to be married [...]. The festival ceased in 1379, but was recently resumed because of its place among the most ancient festivals which exalt marriage in official civic and traditional fashion.” The newspaper and journal articles referred insistently to the ‘traditional’ nature of the 1934-5 feste; the Gazzetta, for example, considered that the festival’s popularity with the local population was due to its being “particularly in harmony with our best traditions.” All unanimously asserted that the

76 Lina Urban suggested that the lavish celebrations of the festa della Marie provided the impetus for the attack by Triestine pirates, attracted by the enormous potential bounty presented by the statues’ rich adornments, rather than the other way round. Urban L Tra sacro e profano. Le festa delle Marie p. 37. Tramontin instead dismissed altogether any link between the festival dedicated to the Virgin Mary and the tale of the kidnapped brides in the medieval festival, maintaining that it was only subsequently, after the festival had ceased to be observed, that the two merged within local ‘memory’. Tramontin S "Una pagina di folklore religioso veneziano antico: La festa de "Le Marie" pp. 409-16.

77 This, at least, was Tramontin’s theory. He remarked that “the festival must certainly have been an occasion for falling in love (there was almost a public display of vanity by the city’s women) and of future nuptials. This is why Venetian women considered it a little as their festival” (“la festa doveva essere certamente occasione di innamoramenti (c’era quasi una esibizione pubblica della vanità delle donne della città) e di nozze future. Ecco perché le veneziane la consideravano un po’ la loro festa”). Tramontin S "Una pagina di folklore religioso veneziano antico: La festa de "Le Marie" pp. 409.

78 “Ogni anno 12 ragazze del popolo, vestite e ornate da famiglie patrizie, andavano processionalmente a sposarsi a S. Pietro di Castello [...] La festa cessò nel 1379, ma fu recentemente ripresa perché fra le più antiche che esaltì in modo civico ufficiale e tradizionale il matrimonio.” Dazzi M Feste e Costumi di Venezia p. 4

79 “Particolarmente intonata alle nostre migliori tradizioni.” Even the brides’ wedding outfits were completed by “the traditional Venetian shawl [...] accompanied by an admonition to maintain in the family the tradition of this ornament which has always been the prime complement to pure Venetian beauty” (“il tradizionale scialla veneziano [...] accompagnato con un monito a conservare intatta nella famiglia la tradizione di questo ornamento che è sempre stato il complemento primo della più pura bellezza veneziana”). Gazzetta 4 Feb. 1934. For the first re-enactment of the festa delle Marie in 1934, the Gazzettino ran one of its occasional “curiosità storiche veneziane” series of articles describing its medieval pre-cursor in great detail, but omitting to mention the
newly reinstated \textit{festa delle Marie} picked up exactly where its forbearer had left off in the tenth century; this was particularly echoed in the \textit{Rivista di Venezia} which published an article in January 1934 recounting the legendary origins and subsequent evolution of the medieval festival’s rituals, and unequivocally proclaimed that the modern festival represented a return, not to “its later form of a simple celebration of an old tradition, but to the full range of its primary significance of a festival of marriage”:\textsuperscript{80}

Across the centuries, the wisdom of the ancient Venetians re-entwines with the clear vision which Benito Mussolini, \textit{Duce} of the new Italy, has of the importance of the demographic problem in all its complexity, as the basis for the strengthening of the Nation, and to the fecund impetus which he wanted given to marriage, promoting it in every way, as president of the moral health of the people.\textsuperscript{81}

What is important here is not so much whether or not or how far the \textit{festa delle Marie} deviated from the ritual forms of its medieval ancestor. Rather, what is significant is that the regime – the festival’s organisers and its champions and observers in the press – felt compelled to present the revived and fascistised “festival of marriage” as the faithful continuation of the traditions of the \textit{Serenissima}. The myth of the longevity and imperial greatness of the Venetian republic appeared as a font of legitimacy for the Mussolinian regime – which for all its rhetoric of novelty and revolution looked to the past as much as it did to the future – helping fascism to present itself as restoring the ‘true’ values and glory of the nation, following the parenthesis of foreign dominion and liberal rule.

The need of the ‘new’ regime to make recourse to ‘old’ mediatory narratives – the easily recognisable symbols and rites of the \textit{Serenissima} Republic or the Catholic church – which were already imbued with authority and meaning and formed constituent elements in Venetians’ ‘cosmos’, when re-inventing its traditions in no way provided the fascist authorities with an unproblematic set of cultural and ritual forms which could be successfully appropriated to disseminate fascist ideals and values.\textsuperscript{82} Whilst the reconfiguring of the \textit{festa delle Marie} did

\textsuperscript{80} “Non nella sua ultima forma di semplice celebrazione di una vecchia tradizione, ma in tutta l’ampiezza del suo primitivo significato, di festa della nuzialità.” \textit{Rivista di Venezia} Jan. 1934 p.3.

\textsuperscript{81} “Attraverso i secoli la saggezza degli antichi veneziani si riallaccia alla chiara visione che Benito Mussolini, Duce dell’Italia nuova, ha dell’importanza del problema demografico nel suo complesso, come base del potenziamento della Nazione, e al fecondo impulso ch’Egli ha voluto fosse dato alla nuzialità, favorendola in ogni modo, quale presedio della sanità morale del popolo.” Ibid.

\textsuperscript{82} The limiting impact upon the dissemination of fascist propaganda of the inevitable recourse to pre-fascist or alternative, often competing, cultural forms was convincingly demonstrated by Victoria de Grazia in her study of the national \textit{dopolavoro} organization. De Grazia V \textit{The Culture of Consent} passim.
permit the association of the ‘memory’ of the Venetian republic and Christian values of the family and procreation within marriage with fascist ideas about demography and race, the fact that the regime had to employ rituals, semiophores and lieux de mémoire that belonged to ‘other’, sometimes supportive, sometimes rival sources of authority left it unable to control how their message would be received by the population.\(^8\) If the intention of the newly reinstated spectacle – to transmit fascist ideology on marriage, demography and race to the Venetian populace – was made clear by the organisers of the festa delle Marie, what, then, can be said of the representation of its reception?

Unsurprisingly (and perhaps unconvincingly) the newspaper accounts suggested that the festa was extremely popular and warmly welcomed by the Venetian people. The Gazzetta described the “throng of people” at every stage of the festival’s proceedings: the couples leaving the Dopolavoro headquarters to begin their gondola trip to church were met by a “multitude of women of the people and also from the bourgeoisie”\(^8\) when the strong winds forced the procession to change its route, thereby missing out the Rialto bridge, there were “loud protestations” from the crowds that had gathered there; whilst the campo outside the church in Castello was “extremely crowded”, requiring carabinieri and policemen to hold back “the curious, who might overwhelm the ‘Marie’ in the impetuosity of their enthusiasm.”\(^8\) The “crowds” of onlookers were not just that; the distinction between observer and participant in the festival was blurred in the newspaper representations. Outside the palazzo della Pescheria, the bridal couples, “greeted by warm applause”, threw confetti over the crowd who reciprocated with a shower of flowers and cries of “long live the bride and groom.”\(^8\) Following the ceremony the newly-weds were once again “greeted by the applause and emotional, joyful well-wishes of the people.”\(^8\) Thus, the crowds which reportedly filled every bridge, vaporetto pontoon, riva and fondamenta, every space providing a view of the procession route, were depicted not only as spectators, but also as performers in the unfolding spectacle.

\(^{83}\) The persistence in Venice of the saying “Maria de tola” which derived from the medieval festa and was used to refer to “una donna in crisi” – the ‘crisis woman’ that fascist propaganda of the 1930s decried as decadent and sterile – is one example of the way in which the regime’s appropriation of the festa delle Marie met with conflicting ideas and memories. Urban L. Tra sacro e profano. p38.


\(^{85}\) “Alte proteste [...] affollatissimo [...] i curiosi che vorebbero travolgere nell’impeto del loro entusiasmo le ‘Marie’” Ibid.

\(^{86}\) “Accolte da calorose acclamazioni [...] viva i sposi.” Gazzetta 4 Feb. 1934.

\(^{87}\) “Accolte del plauso e dalle espressioni di simpatia commossa e festosa del popolo.” Ibid.
Of course, simply because the Gazzetta and the Gazzettino – two newspapers whose level of identification with the regime was considerable⁸⁸ – represented the festa delle Marie as a popular event, attracting large crowds of spectators, it does not necessarily follow that this was actually the case. The fact that, for whatever reason, the festival was abandoned after just two years, would perhaps call into question either its efficacy or popularity. The Settimana Religiosa, for example, which whilst maintaining, inevitably, a positive position towards fascism and some level of identification with fascist aims and values, was certainly not as closely allied to the regime as the two secular Venetian daily papers,⁸⁹ used similar categories as the Gazzetta and Gazzettino in its account of the festa delle Marie but to sketch a somewhat different scene. Whilst the paper referred to the “immense crowd crammed into the vast temple,” no mention whatsoever was made to any spectators lining the procession route or crowding outside the church.⁹⁰ Photographs of the festa, published in the Gazzettino Illustrato in both 1934 and 1935, [figures 1, 2 & 3] would seem to corroborate the Settimana Religiosa’s more conservative account of the festival’s popularity.⁹¹ Although the photographs showing the 12 Marie and their bridegrooms lining the courtyard staircase of the Dopolavoro headquarters and the couples disembarking their ceremonial gondolas in Piazza San Marco, reveal the presence of a respectable number of onlookers and well-wishers, the images hardly back up the Gazzetta and Gazzettino’s assertions of “an imposing mass of people” packing the entire route of the procession.⁹² The two Venetian dailies, then, appear to have exaggerated the popularity – at least that expressed physically – of the festa delle Marie among the local population.

⁸⁸ See the discussion of the level of the Gazzetta and Gazzettino’s identification with the regime in the introduction to this thesis, pp. 29-33.
⁸⁹ For the position of la Settimana Religiosa towards the regime see Vian G “La stampa cattolica e il fascismo a Venezia negli anni del consenso: “la Settimana Religiosa” di Venezia (1929-38)” pp. 85-115.
⁹⁰ “Immensa folla che gremiva il vasto Tempio.” Settimana Religiosa 8 Feb. 1934.
⁹² “Un imponente massa di popolo” Gazzetta 4 Feb. 1934 “L’esultazione veneziana e fascista della nuzialità”. Anecdotally, a number of Venetian professors and doctoral students have remarked to me that Venetians would be most unlikely to venture outdoors any longer than necessary in such bitter weather as brought by the fierce bora wind!
L’unicissimo rito nuziale delle dodici Marie ripristinato a Venezia sotto gli auspici del Regime.
LA FESTA DELLE MARIE A VENEZIA

Figure 2: Il Gazzettino Illustrato 11 February 1934 p. 4
La tradizionale festa nuziale delle Marie svoltasi a Venezia: le coppie scendono a S. Marco per recarsi a rendere omaggio a S. E. il Cardinale La Fontaine.

Figure 3: Gazzettino Illustrato 11 February 1935 p. 1.
Christmas

The ambiguities created by the fascist appropriation of enduring symbols and rites are discernable in the changing customs and mores of the religious festival of Christmas during the 1930s. From December 1933, the fascist government decreed that throughout the nation the 24 of the month – Christmas Eve – would henceforth be known as the Giornata della Madre e del Fanciullo (day of the mother and child). Obviously, staging the fascist celebration of maternity and infancy the day before the Christian world celebrated the birth of Jesus was no accident, and the connection between the two festivals was spelled out clearly by the Gazzetta to its readers in that year's Christmas Eve edition:

The day of the mother and the child is a brand new ritual which the Fascist government has inserted into the millenary rite commemorating the Christian story, which began with the enigma of a humble child in the arms of a humble mother. As with all rituals, this gives a solid external form to a sentiment. A sentiment with which civilisation honours the cult of maternity and infancy, [...] a ritual of education and faith, destined to consecrate in the customs of our people the future of the race and the sanctity of the family, of which the mother and child are the most potent symbols.93

The Venetian manifestation of the Giornata della Madre e del Fanciullo incorporated a number of events; at the most important of these, the basilica of San Marco played host to an annual mass baptism of around twenty-five to forty newborn children. The baptisms layered fascist personnel and practices over established religious rites; Giovani Fasciste were invested as godmothers to the infants and presented the babies' mothers with a cradle donated by the Fascist Federation and "a baby's outfit they made themselves."94 Later in the day an additional ceremony was held, in the Ateneo Veneto or some other location imbued with venezianità, to hand out cash prizes to particularly prolific Venetian mothers or newly-weds.95 Christmas Eve, now 'mother and child's day', was to be given over to the celebration of fascist female duty;

93 "La Giornata della Madre e del Fanciullo' è un novissimo rite che il Governo Fascista innesta sul rito millenario commemorante la Redazione Cristiana, inizialasi con il vaglio di un umile Fanciullo tra le braccia di un umile Madre. Come tutti i riti, essa deve dare ferma figura esteriore a un sentimento. E un sentimento di cui la civiltà si onora il culto della maternità e del fanciullo […] un rito d’educazione e di fede, destinato a consacrare nel costume del nostro popolo, l’avvenire della stirpe, la santità del nucleo familiare, di cui la madre e il fanciullo sono il simbolo più suggestivo. “Gazzetta" 24 Dec. 1933 “Oggi l’Italia esalta la madre e il fanciullo, simbolo della forza e della continuità della razza”
94 "Un corredino confezionato da loro." Gazzetta 21 Dec. 1935 “Come verrà celebrata a Venezia la Giornata della Madre e del bambino”
95 In 1935, for example, prizes were awarded for “nuzialità, di natalità and per l’allevamento igienico dei bambini” Those rewarded in Venice were: Vittoria Pravato, Rosa Gavagnin, Sigra. Luraschi, Anita Vagnotti, Maria Povoledo, and Ida Zavagno; each received a marriage prize of L.500 whilst a further nine Venetian women received ‘marriage subsidies’; fifty-two Venetian women were awarded between L.200-500 as birth prizes, whilst an additional fifty received L.100 each in recognition of the ‘hygienic upbringing’ of their offspring. Ibid.
patriotic procreation and the raising of young, fascist Italians. The 1936 celebration, which according to the Gazzetta, in just three years "has now become an amiable tradition," was exalted as,

a rite which seems to flower from the very roots of life to bless the fertility of the race, strengthened by the sanctity of the family, adherence to the laws of nature and religion, from the will of the man which Heaven has given to Italy for the ever increasing greatness of her healthy, young and strong people.96

By the end of the decade, the annual Venetian celebrations also included a special film-show in Teatro Malibran in front of “an imposing crowd of mothers and children.” The films documented the opera of works to aid maternity and infancy carried out by the regime, demonstrating "the constant and assiduous care with which the race is strengthened at its very source for the ever greater development of imperial Italy."97

The representations of the Giornata della Madre e del Fanciullo in the Gazzetta and the Gazzettino linked the celebration in no uncertain terms with the promotion of ‘family values’, the work of ONMI (Opera Nazionale per la Maternità e l’Infanzia98) which aimed to wrest control of social assistance from the church for the state, the demographic policies of the regime and, ultimately, ideals of nationalism and the ‘defence of the race’.99 As with the festa delle Marie, in their invention of this tradition the fascist authorities raided the symbols and rites of Catholicism, already instantly recognisable and invested with authority. And, as with the festa delle Marie, the central ritual of the Giornata della Madre e del Fanciullo was a key ritual of the

96 “E ormai divenuta una tradizione gentile [...] un rito che sembra fiorire dalle radici della vita per benedire la fecondità della stirpe potenziata dalla santità della famiglia, dall'obbedienza alle leggi della natura e della religione, dalla volontà dell'uomo che il Cielo ha dato all'Italia per la sempre maggior grandezza del suo popolo, sano, giovane e forte.” Gazzetta 25 Dec. 1936 “35 figli del popolo ricevono il battesimo e il dono della culla e del corredo”.

97 “Una folia imponente di madri e di bimbi [...] la cura costante ed assidua con cui è potenziata la razza alle sue fonti medesime per il sempre maggiore sviluppo dell’Italia imperiale.” Gazzetta 24 Dec. 1939.

98 The Opera Nazionale per la Maternità ed Infanzia was the social/heath care organisation, instituted in December 1925, to oversee all aspects of pre- and post-natal policy as well as state child-care provision, playing a pivotal role in Mussolini’s demographic campaign. See Quine M S Italy’s social revolution, chapter 5, pp. 129-172. The ONMI provided – or at least aimed to provide – paediatric and mothers’ medical clinics, social services, mothers’ kitchens to hand out essential foodstuffs, crèches etc. Additionally, ONMI conceived propaganda as an integral part of its mission, aiming to play an “educative” or “persuasive” role to promote fecundity among Italian women, exemplified by the Opera’s breast-feeding campaign to persuade Italian women to “offer their breasts to the nation” and produce healthy, virile children for the Fatherland (Quine M S Italy’s social revolution p. 135). By 1938 ONMI boasted 3,500 maternal clinics, 4,400 infant clinics, 1,300 kitchens and 190 complete Case della Madre e del Bambino – the latter being institutions designed to bring, most visibly, the healthcare, social assistance and propaganda initiatives of the Opera under one roof in each locality. (Quine M S “From Malthus to Mussolini” p. 104.) However, plagued above all by financial instability and, to a perhaps lesser degree, corrupt implementation, in 1937 the ONMI was forced to bring the “fecund decade” to an inglorious end, having failed either to increase birthrates or reduce infant mortality.

life-course. Like marriage, the ceremony of baptism figures as a ‘rite of aggregation’ among the schemata of rites of passage catalogued by the anthropologist Van Gennep a century ago; a ritual aimed at strengthening shared identity and a sense of communality between participants and observers.\textsuperscript{100}

Albeit motivated in part by the desire to secularise, fascistise and modernise the institutions of charitable and social assistance, the elements of continuity from the liberal era in the personnel and ritual actions of the Giornata della Madre e del Fanciullo are remarkable. Women who once would have carried out charitable acts under the auspices of the church or the enduring paternalistic capillary networks based around Venetian campi and sestieri now completed virtually identical tasks under the banner of fascism.\textsuperscript{101} Since April 1933, the vice-presidency of the local ONMI had been assigned to the trustees of the provincial Fascio femminile – in Venice the newly appointed leader of the city’s Fascist women’s organisation and, by default, of the ONMI was Countess Vendramina Marcello, descendant of one of the more illustrious patrician families of the Serenissima republic. Countess Marcello’s role as head of both the Fascio femminile and ONMI was essentially one of co-ordinating fascist social assistance and education. She was said to represent “the most active moral and regenerative force, inasmuch as the family is born and formed by her. [...] Hence she was] called by the Regime to collaborate, with her spiritual forces, in defence of the race.”\textsuperscript{102} Her duties encompassed the overseeing of ONMI’s children’s holiday camps, nurseries, maternal refectories, case delle madre e dei bambini and local centres providing low-cost health and social services as well as a “more silent and feminine” assignment: “continual propaganda among the Giovani Fasciste, education of their maternal instinct, incitement towards work.”\textsuperscript{103} The implementation of this ‘propaganda’ took the form of acts of social assistance: Giovani Fasciste knitted baby outfits for “children born into poor homes” under the watchful eye of the Countess, to be distributed each 24 December, during the ritual baptism of numerous “children of the common people” in the

\textsuperscript{100} Van Gennep A (Vizedom M B & Caffee G L trans.) The Rites of Passage, especially chapter 1.

\textsuperscript{101} Marco Fincardi has argued convincingly for the continuance of paternalistic-corporatistic relationships and networks in Venice, dating from the days of the Serenissima, well into the twentieth century. Fincardi M “Gli ‘anni ruggenti’ dell’antico leone.” pp. 445-474.

\textsuperscript{102} “La più fattitiva forza morale e rigeneratrice, giacchè da lei nasce e si costituisce la famiglia [...] chiamata dal Regime a collaborare anche con le sue forze spirituali alla difesa della razza.” Le Tre Venezie Dec. 1935 p. 592.

\textsuperscript{103} “Più silenziosa, più femminile [...] la propaganda continua tra le giovane fasciste, l’educazione del loro senso materno, l’incitamento al lavoro.”Ibid.
basilica d’oro and parish churches of Venice. Following the inauguration of the Italian empire, the racial component – the notion of the need to defend the race through demography - of the mass baptisms of the Giornata della Madre e del Fanciullo became increasingly pronounced. Le Tre Venezie, for example, in its December 1936 edition on the fourth ‘Day of the Mother and Child’, reproduced in bold capitals one of the Duce’s quotations;

WE MUST HONOUR THE MOTHER AND CHILD BECAUSE THIS MEANS TO HONOUR THE SUPREME VIRTUES OF THE STOCK. MUSSOLINI.


105 Mussolini announced the creation of the Italian empire on 9 May 1936, following the conquest of Abyssinia (Ethiopia), now renamed AOI – Africa Orientale Italiana.

106 ‘BISOGNA ONORARE LA MADRE E IL BAMBINO PERCHÉ CIÒ SIGNIFICA ONORARE I VALORI SUPREMI DELLA STIRPE. MUSSOLINI’ Le Tre Venezie Dec.1936 “Nel primo anno dell’Impero l’Italia celebra la quarta giornata della Madre e del Fanciullo”.
The previous years' concern for all "children of the common people" living in poverty was now qualified, if not replaced, with the idea of the 'deserving poor', whose merit must be assessed in more eugenicist terms:

Therefore the nature of ONMI's activity is not of beneficence and charity, but of assistance which aims to perfect and develop the physical conditions more favourable to the strengthening of the race, to promote and reward the birth-rate and the hygienic upbringing of children, inspiring an ever more vivid sense of posterity.\(^{107}\)

The efforts of the fascist authorities to promote the *Giornata della Madre e dell'Fanciullo* was directed not just at adults – particularly women – but also at children. As one half of the pair being celebrated, youngsters' support for the festival was solicited in part through film projections and comic books. For example, the most popular national children's comic, the *Corriere dei Piccoli*, in 1934 published an explanation of the *Giornata*'s aims which focused on the charitable nature of the event.

Nowadays every year in Italy one day is dedicated to the mother and child: this is the 24 December, Christmas Eve. It was chosen well, because there is nothing sadder than thinking of certain poor children, for whom the festival of Christmas is staged without a single gift. For this reason, for years, beneficent initiatives have sought to alleviate this poverty and charitably provide presents for those children whose parents are not able to make extraordinary purchases on this day of celebration. And the number of poor youngsters who receive these presents grows ever greater as do the number of contented little hearts.\(^{108}\)

Once again, there was a felicitous collaboration between fascist and religious authorities in celebrating the *Giornata della Madre e del Fanciullo*, as, once more, fascist policies on family demography found accordance with the aims of the Church. The *Settimana Religiosa* informed its readers that, "ever since His Excellency the Head of Government announced this civil celebration on the eve of the greatest festival of the Church, we have given him our prompt and

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\(^{107}\) "Il carattere dunque dell'attivita dell'ONMI non e di beneficenza e di carita, ma di assistenza che tende a perfezionare e sviluppare le condizioni fisiche piu favorevoli al potenziamento della razza, a favorire e premiare la natalita e l'allevamento igienico del bambino, ispirando un senso sempre piu vivo della discendenza." *Le Tre Venezie* Dec. 1936 "Nel primo anno dell'Impero l'Italia celebra la quarta giornata della Madre e del Fanciullo".

\(^{108}\) "Ogni anno ora in Italia una giornata è dedicata alla mamma e al bambino: è la giornata del 24 dicembre, la vigilia di natale. È stata scelta bene, perché non vi è nulla di più triste che pensare a certi bimbi poveri, per i quali la festa del Natale non è allestita di alcun dono. Così da anni si cerca di alleviare con iniziative benefiche queste miserie e si provvede caritatevolmente a far dei ragali a quei bimbi i cui genitori non sono in condizioni di fare compere straordinarie in questo giorno di festa. E il numero di fanciulli poveri che ricevano questi regali diventa sempre maggiore e sempre più numerosi sono i cuoricini contenti." *Corriere dei Piccoli* 23 Dec. 1934 "La mamma e il bimbo" p. 3.
fervent consent."109 The churches of Venice, including the most important holy site, St Mark’s basilica, were the location for this fascist celebration which took the form of a religious ritual and took place on a day already prominent in the religious calendar. However, despite this level of collaboration between church and state, the Venetian religious authorities were not entirely unequivocal in their support of the fascist initiative. The Settimana Religiosa was quick to remind its readers where their ultimate allegiance should lie; Christmas, as the church’s festival of the family, should be recorded above all for “its religious constitution and purpose”:

Full and cordial participation in the events which the Government and Regime have prepared for the day of the mother and child must not cause Catholics to forget their particularly religious character which prompts them to participate in this happy national initiative.

If, as is legitimate, in the civil sphere the civil aspects of this event are insisted upon, it is just and legitimate to recall, in the religious sphere, the religious precepts which constitute the most robust and fertile bond of the family.110

In addition, apparently concerned that the Giornata della Madre e del Fanciullo celebrations and associated pro-natalist policies represented the alignment of Italian fascism with the eugenicist ideals of the National Socialist regime recently installed in Germany, the paper went on to warn that Italy must guard against “certain Germanic aberrations”; those “dangerous deviations” which result from conceiving of the family “exclusively from the point of view of demographic growth and the strength of the race.”111 Thus, whilst lending its support to the new festival exalting fecundity and the family, the Venetian religious authorities advocated and promoted a religious rather than racial-biological concept of the ‘family’. As a mediatory narrative for the transmission of fascist demographic policy, the church, its values and its rites did not always constitute an unambiguously supportive ‘tool’.

By 1936, on the occasion of the “[by now] purely Italian festival of the Mother and child” the Settimana Religiosa displayed a new willingness to accept a ‘nationalist’ conception (alongside

110 “Alla sua costituzione e ai suoi fini religiosi […] La partecipazione piena e cordiale alle manifestazioni che il Governo e il Regime hanno preparato per la giornata della madre e del fanciullo non deve far dimenticare ai cattolici il particolare carattere religioso che li fa compartecipi di questa felice iniziativa nazionale.
Se nel campo civile, si insiste, ed è legittimo, sugli aspetti civili di questa manifestazione, è giusto e legittimo che nel campo religioso si richiamino i precetti religiosi che formano il più saldo e il più fecondo vincolo della famiglia.” Ibid.
111 “Certe aberrazioni germaniche […] pericolose deviazioni […] esclusivamente dal punto di vista dell’incremento demografico e della potenza della razza.” Ibid. This not entirely unqualified level of support given by the Venetian religious authorities to the regime chimes with Giovanni Vian’s findings in his review of the Settimana Religiosa during the ‘years of consent’. Vian G “La stampa cattolica e il fascismo a Venezia negli anni del consenso: “la Settimana Religiosa” di Venezia (1929-38)”, pp. 85-115.
its own religious conception) of the demographic campaign.\textsuperscript{112} Having affirmed that those couples who "voluntarily leave the bridal bed barren, [...] who deprecate and limit births, who deliberately render God's blessing infertile," cannot consider themselves truly Christian, the article took a decidedly sacro-nationalistic turn.\textsuperscript{113} It criticised Great Britain and the US – "protestant countries" – for their decreasing birth rates, falling in inverse proportions to their economic growth; "money is not enough to make Nations rich and powerful. When peoples decline, nations fall. Just now we have heard voices raised in England against the danger which the decreasing birthrate brings to the structure of the immense British Empire."\textsuperscript{114} Italy, on the other hand, "celebrating, with Christmas, the festival of the Mother and child, demonstrates its wish to root the family to its perennially fertile Christian source and in this way works for the health and prosperity of its people and the imperial potency of Rome."\textsuperscript{115}

How well the fascist regime's exhortations through the Giornata della Madre e Fanciullo and other policies to have more children and thereby increase the potentiality of the nation were received by Venetians is, of course, difficult to determine. Certainly, the birth rate in Venice failed to rise and in fact declined during the first half of the 1930s, mirroring the trend in the country as a whole and central-northern urban Italy in particular.\textsuperscript{116} The picture painted by the memoirs of Venetians from the 1930s held in the Archivio Diaristico Nazionale suggests that fascist pro-natalist propaganda, including the day of the Mother and Child, had little effect on the size of Venetian families. Vana Arnold recalled her mother and aunt's severe disapproval at the news that their brother's wife, Ella, was expecting their third child in 1933;

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\textsuperscript{112} "Festa schiattamente italiana del Madre e del fanciullo" Settimana Religiosa 20 Dec. 1936 "Fecundità perenne".
\textsuperscript{113} "Volontariamente isterliscono il loro talamo, [...] che deprecano e limitano le nascite, che rendono deliberatamente infeconda la benedizione di Dio." Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} "Paesi protestanti [...] Il denaro non basta a far riche e potenti le Nazioni. Quando i popoli declinano le nazioni crollano. Abbiamo udito proprio adesso in Inghilterra alzare la voce contro il pericolo che per la descrescenza delle nascite viene alla compagine dell'"immenso Impero Britannico." Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} "Celebrando col Natale la festa della Madre e del fanciullo mostra di voler radicata la famiglia alle sue sorgenti cristiane perennemente feconde e lavora così per la sanità e prosperità del suo popolo e per la potenza imperiale di Roma." Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} The number of (live) births in the city in 1930 was 3055; in 1931, 2776; 1932, 2798; 1933, 2548; and in 1934, 2798. Illegitimate births also lightly increased, from 291 in 1930 to 319 in 1934. These statistics are drawn from the Bolletino Mensile dell'Ufficio di Statistica del Comune di Venezia, Venice, 1930-4. With the exception of a small baby boom following the First World War, since the turn of the century the Italian birthrate had been in decline, albeit unevenly. From a national rate of 29.9 births per 1,000 inhabitants in 1921-5, the birthrate had dropped to 23.4 in 1936-1940. The decline in the birthrate was most pronounced in the relatively industrialized, urban areas of northern and central Italy and among white-collar workers (according to the 1931 census, the families of professionals and office workers averaged approx. two children) leading Victoria de Grazia to talk of "Italy's two fertility regimes"; the continuation of 'traditional' birthing strategies in rural areas, particularly in the South and on the islands contrasted with an increasing drive to control fertility in the urban centre-north. According to de Grazia, the existence of this urban/rural dichotomy in relation to fertility and procreation helps account for the duality in fascist demographic policy. National statistics taken from de Grazia V \textit{How fascism ruled women} pp. 45-7.
\end{flushright}
The Venetian relatives, worried when they found out that the family was about to be enlarged, began to demonstrate their disapproval at the husband and wife's lack of foresight; the most critical were Bianca and Edda, [Vana's mother and aunt] who with one little girl apiece, considered the only child the unsurpassed model in terms of procreation. They had the delicacy to say to Ella; “better an illness than a pregnancy”.

Vana's uncle, Aldo, an engineer, had married the Austrian-born Ella, who brought a previous, illegitimate child to the relationship, in 1929. The family's reaction to the marriage had been negative – not because of the illegitimacy of Ella's first-born, which passed without comment, but because of Ella's lack of qualifications and profession and, above all, because “Aldo would find himself straight away having two mouths to feed”. That Bianca and Edda's censure of the arrival of another "mouth to feed" was founded on financial concerns, despite their relatively comfortable economic position, suggests one reason why the Venetian fascist authorities' promotion of increased births may not have been met with universal enthusiasm. The experience of Rosa De Cilia, of far more modest means than the Arnoulds, would appear to bear this out. In 1926 De Cilia and her family had followed the 'exodus' of the ceti popolani from the Venetian centro storico and settled in the newly constructed residential zone on Sant'Elena, inhabited by "only young newly-weds who had lots of children (as the Duce of fascism ordered one to do)." Nevertheless, the spirited De Cilia recalled the conscious lack of attention she paid to Mussolini's exhortations on fecundity, as well as the pain of enduring a series of miscarriages, stillbirths and infant-deaths;

117 "I parenti veneziani, quando vennero a sapere che la famiglia stava per ingrandirsi, preoccupati, cominciarono a manifestare la loro disapprovazione per l'imprevidenza dei coniugi; soprattutto critiche erano la Bianca e la Edda, che con una bambina ciascuna, consideravano modello insuperato in fatto di procreazione il figlio unico. Ebbero la delicatazza di dire alla Ella “meglio una malattia che una gravidanza”." ADN MP/And Arnould V Me g'ha contà la nonna p.218

118 Nor does it seem to be the case that the Arnould's hostility to their new sister-in-law was prompted by any residual anti-Austrian sentiment left over from the 'memory' of Austrian rule over the city until 1866; at least, this is not mentioned as a possible cause and Vana Arnould sought the source of their resentment elsewhere. As she remarked in her memoir; "The emphasis of the comments, however, concerned more the fact that Aldo would find himself straight way having two mouths to feed with his modest salary as a young railway engineer than the fact that the bride wasn't chaste. And then the lamentations grew louder when it was considered that Aldo was a graduate. The sisters would have expected at least a teacher as sister-in-law." ("L’accento dei commenti, però, verteva più sul fatto che Aldo si sarebbe trovato da subito a dover sfamare due bocche col suo modesto stipendio di giovane ingegnere delle ferrovie che sul fatto che la sposa non era illibata. E i lamenti poi si facevano alti quando si considerava che Aldo era un laureato. Le sorelle si sarebbero aspettate come cognata almeno una professoressa.") Ibid. p. 165.

119 Whilst Uncle Aldo worked as a railway engineer, Vana's father, Lino, owned property and a series of tabbacherie on the mainland. However, mounting debts over the decade forced Lino Arnould to sell off his property and businesses one by one. He subsequently became the FIAT representative in Venice, though he eventually lost this position due to his refusal to join the fascist party, leading Vana to label her father "privately antifascist". Ibid.

120 "Solo sposini giovani e con tanti figli (come ordinava di fare il Duce del fascismo)." ADN MP/86 De Cilia R, (Armani B ed.) Mi chiamo Rosa De Cilia 'ai suoi comandi' p. 49.
Not because I wanted to take heed of the “Duce’s orders”, but because we wanted to give a little brother to Bruna, who was always asking us for one, I had a little girl in 1928, whom we called Maria, and another in 1930 whom we called Milena, but both died because they were born to me premature and, being born in winter in a house without heating, lived just a few hours and, in the little white box made by my dad, were buried in the cemetery on San Michele.121

These two examples, though they illustrate quite different experiences of procreation, both attest to the difficulties of speaking about the extent of the regime’s reach or indeed of choice at all in influencing individuals’ childbearing practices in such straightened circumstances. Vana Arnould’s middle-class family’s preoccupation with the economic cost of child-bearing and Rosa De Cilia’s emotive illustration of the practical obstacles, not to say emotional and physical turmoil, involved in keeping infants alive, let alone healthy and virile, amidst the unsanitary and poverty-stricken surroundings of the Venetian case popolari, lend credence to Giuseppe Bottai’s own analysis that the failure of fascism’s “fecund decade” must be ascribed to the elevated levels of economic privation in Italian society.122 In a city experiencing the spiralling decline of its traditional industries the primacy of economic considerations over ideological conviction in the ‘decisions’ of lower middle- and working-class Venetians relating to reproduction would scarcely surprise.123

The fascist day of the mother and child, parachuted-in on top of the religious celebration of the eve of Jesus’ birth was not the only aspect of the celebration of Christmas that was represented as a portent of fascist meaning. Although, according to the Gazzetta, this was a festival celebrated at home, privately, with family and friends, the rituals of the Christmas festival were far from immune to fascist influence. Even Christmas dinner was, in a certain way, ‘fascistised’. Though the actual contents of the Venetian Christmas feast – according to the Gazzetta, fish soup to start, followed by boiled or roasted eel, with cauliflower and other vegetables, then almond cake or nougat & sweet mustard, polished off with, if one could afford it, a slice of panettone and a glass of moscato124 – do not seem to have significantly altered

121 “Non perché lo volessi dare retta agli “ordini del Duce” ma perché volevamo dare un fratellino alla Bruna, che sempre ce lo chiedeva, ebbe una bambina nel 1928, che chiamammo Maria, ed un’altra nel 1930 che chiamammo Milena, ma entrambi morirono perché mi nacquero premature e nascendo d’inverno con la casa senza riscaldamento, vissero solo qualche ora e nella cassetta bianca fatta da mio papa, furono sepolte in cimitero di San Michele.” Ibid. p.30
122 Bottai’s solution to this, however, lay in the pursuit of an even more severe set of ‘welfare’ provisions that would give greater rewards to large, enthusiastically procreating families, and penalize the relatively child-less. Quine M S “From Malthus to Mussolini” p. 247.
124 Gazzetta 25 Dec. 1930 “Giornata di follia e di compere”.
over the course of the 1930s, the cultural and political significance attached to these foods and
drink certainly did. With the onset of the “economic siege”, the paper’s term for the sanctions
placed on Italy in November 1935 by the League of Nations as punishment for Italy’s invasion
of Ethiopia, the Gazzetta reassessed the food eaten at Christmas and imbued the dishes with
national-fascist meaning. The paper argued that, rather than lamenting the unavailability of non-
Italian goods and the changes wrought by the sanctions to the Christmas menu, Venetians
should welcome the return to “local produce” and “the offerings of our soil”, in place of the
Russian caviar, English mustard and Burgundy wines, swept off the dinner table by the
sanctions.

What delicacy has ever procured our detachment from foreign products in our Christmas
and New Year feasts? Nothing at all: no more salmon from the Rhine, no more British
liquors and no more pineapples from English colonies, instead the tasty fish of our seas,
home-bred meats, the game from our woods and our valleys, the fragrant vegetables of
our gardens, home-brand sweets, the wines from our grapes blessed by the resplendent
Italian sun, the fruit of our orchards and our colonies.125

The Christmas rite that came under greatest attack from the fascist authorities, however, was
another. During the 1930s a national battle was waged between the “Mediterranean”
Christmas crib and the foreign pretender, the Christmas tree, played out in the pages of the
Gazzetta as well as in the children’s press.126 At the beginning of the 1930s the Venetian daily
presented the Christmas tree as a positive, if more recent, addition to family homes at
Christmas time;

In many family homes there was a crib, where, immutable for centuries, the sweet mystery
of the nativity is perpetuated; or a tree lit up with coloured candles, speckled with
decorations, stars, silver windmills, and laden with sweets and toys.127

The description of the “traditional” Christmas fair in Campo San Bartolomeo echoed this view:

On one side of the campo which echoes with the unflagging calls of the vendors, three or
four green pine trees stood tall, giving you the idea of mountains and snow, which seem to
be waiting for the client willing to adorn them with the traditional sparkling coverings, and to

125 “Prodotti nostri [...] le offerte del nostro suolo. [...] Che cosa di prelibato ha tolto mai alle nostre cene di Natale
o di San Silvestro il nostro distacco dai prodotti stranieri? Niente di niente: non più salmone del Reno, non più
pasticcini di Strasburgo, non più liquori britannici e non più ananas delle colonie inglesi, ma il saporito pesce dei
nostri mari, ma le carni dei nostri allevamenti, ma la selvaggina dei nostri boschi e delle nostre valli, la fragrante
verdura dei nostri orti, i dolci di marca nostrana, i vini delle nostre uve benedette dal fulgido sole italiano, le frutta
dei nostri broli e delle nostre colonie.” Gazzetta 2 Jan. 1936 “L’assedio economico e le feste”.
126 The commencement of fascist hostilities towards the Christmas tree, declared from the mid-1930s onwards, is
mentioned also by Stefano in Piccole patrie p.120.
127 “In parecchie famiglie c’era il presepe, dove da secoli sotto specie immutabili si perpetua il mistero soave della
Natività; o l’albero infiammato di candeline colorate, screziato di festoni, di stelle, di girandole argentee, carico di
dolci e di balocchi.” Gazzetta 2 Dec. 1930.
hang from their resinous branches the sweet surprises for broods of children, awaiting the tangible gifts of the baby Jesus.¹²⁸

By Christmas 1935, however, the Gazzetta reported that Christmas trees, now considered undesirable by the fascist regime because of their "Nordic" origins (mistakenly attributed to the UK), had all but disappeared from Venetian homes, to be replaced by more and more "traditionally Italian" – and by extension fascist – cribs.

And at cribs large and small, displayed in very many homes, a ray of joy appeared on the faces of our little ones who, in their contemplation, found a sense of greater happiness in their little hearts.¹²⁹

The Gazzettino dei Ragazzi, the Gazzettino's weekly comic for children, joined the campaign to promote the Christmas crib in place of the tree, as did the Balilla, the comic of the ONB. On 20 December 1934, the Balilla dedicated a full page to the promotion of the crib, or presepe, inserting two young Balilla moschettieri into their depiction of the familiar nativity scene [figure 5]. The crib, the comic declared in rhyme, was "a custom ours and true / that does not copy a foreign fashion".¹³⁰ The following week the campaign for the crib was reinforced through the regular comic strip, la piccola italiana [figure 6]. The Gazzettino's endorsement of the crib, however, inadvertently hinted at its only partial presence in children's experience of Christmas. On 29 December 1935 the comic published the story of "Il fuoco natalizio," which interwove the story of Joseph's visit to collect fire from the shepherds shortly after Jesus' birth with the 'tradition' of constructing Christmas cribs. The article told of how, "once upon a time," rich noblemen would compete to produce the most beautiful crib, but also how "the people too made and make cribs, which is a fine and dear Italian tradition and must be preferred to the tree, used in northern countries."¹³¹ The article continued, describing the simple composition of

¹²⁸ "Ad un lato del campo echeggiante degli istancabili richiami dei venditori, si alzano tre o quattro verdi pini, che ti danno idea di montagne e di neve, che pare attendano il cliente desideroso di adornarli con la scintillanti laminarie tradizionali, e di appendere ai loro rami resinosi le dolci sorprese per le nidiate di fanciulli, aspettanti i doni tangibili del Bambino Gesù." Gazzetta 23 Dec. 1932.
¹²⁹ "E nei Presepi piccoli e grandi, allestiti in moltissime famiglie e apparso un raggio di gioia sui volti dei nostri piccoli che hanno trovato nella loro contemplazione un senso di maggior contento per i loro piccoli cuori." Both the Gazzetta and the Gazzettino also reported crowds of people queuing to visit the cribs displayed in churches throughout Venice, but particularly the crib in the church of S Francesco della Vigna and the one constructed by the 'Artingianelli' on display in the ex-orfanatrofio dei Gesuati on the Zattere. Gazzetta 26 Dec.1935 "La solennità di natale".
¹³⁰ "Un'usanza nostra e vera/che non copia una moda forestiera." Balilla 20 Dec. 1934 "Il Presepe" p. 5.
¹³¹ "Una volta [...] anche il popolo faceva e fa il presepio, ch'è una bella e cara tradizione italiana e deve essere preferito all'albero, in uso nei paesi del nord." Gazzettino dei Ragazzi 29 Dec 1935 "Il fuoco natalizio" p.9.
Ragazzi, ecco un’usanza nostra e vera
che non copia una moda forestiera,
ecce il presepe attorno al Bambinello,
con la capanna, il bove e l’asinello,
la contadina curva sulla fonte,
i pastori che scendono dal monte,
le finestrelle tutte illuminate,
il villano che porta le giuncause,
it tre Re Magi dietro la cometa.
Ecco un’usanza veramente lieta
e al tempo stesso commovente e umana:
Ragazzi, ecco il Natale all’italiana.
1. Tanb' balilla! Marietta ha coniugato il moscino, caviati, prezenti avviso che venne a casa per poi tornar 'indietro, essendo atteso da qualcuno dei Boll.

2. Tanb' presepe Marietta ha comprato un bel presepe, e il resto è facilmente un po' di moscino, ma guarda che il muschio non è a guisa muschio da nessun florina.

3. In tanb' posso si race e cercano con quel' loco che pensav' l' e si ma torna se avvito in gran parte ma per la strada si' dando la luce.

4. In tanb' posso si race e cercano con quel' loco che pensav' l' e si ma torna se avvito in gran parte ma per la strada si' dando la luce.

5. In tanb' posso si race e cercano con quel' loco che pensav' l' e si ma torna se avvito in gran parte ma per la strada si' dando la luce.

6. In tanb' posso si race e cercano con quel' loco che pensav' l' e si ma torna se avvito in gran parte ma per la strada si' dando la luce.

Figure 6: Il Balilla 27 December 1934 p. 4.
the crib; made of "painted card, stripped cork and moss", adorned with shepherd statues costing "a few pence" in a variety of positions; feeding the sheep, making cheese, or fanning the fire.\textsuperscript{132} That the author described, by his own admission, the cribs of his own childhood ("dei miei tempi") with such an air of nostalgia and felt compelled to give Venetian youngsters virtually step-by-step instructions as to how to build a Christmas crib would perhaps suggest that this was a 'tradition' not entirely familiar to youngsters in the 1930s.

The memoirs held in the \textit{Archivio Diaristico Nazionale} present conflicting images in terms of whether Venetians preferred to display Christmas trees or cribs at home. Elsa Santerello, for example, a Venetian who spent much of the 1930s in the Italian colonies in East Africa, described how her family decorated a Christmas tree each year, specifically to serve as a reminder of home.\textsuperscript{133} Others made no mention of a tree, preferring instead the crib: Diego Squarcialupi, a liceo schoolboy in the late 1930s and early 1940s, recounted in his school diary his excitement at participating in a local competition to find the best Christmas crib.

Since I'd made a crib, a special commission came to my house which came to judge the best of the parish, going round from house to house. No doubt I won't net any prize, but there's always a little bit of hope in my heart.\textsuperscript{134}

Not even Christmas, then, was immune from appropriation by the fascist authorities: Christmas eve and the nativity story were co-opted as mediatory narratives to transmit fascist policies on demography and procreation to the Venetian population, particularly women; Christmas dinner became a tool for exalting practices of national consumption and autarchy; and the battle between the Christmas tree, mistakenly attributed as English in origin, and the "Italian" Christmas crib presented Venetian children with a choice which unexpectedly questioned their patriotism and level of identification with the (fascist) nation. As a constituent part of Venetians' 'cosmos' or world-views, though, Christmas and the set of Christian symbols, values and beliefs upholding the ideal of the family conveyed within its rituals did not always represent an unambiguous mediator of fascist ideals and policies. The \textit{Settimana Religiosa}'s insistence on reminding its readers of the festival's religious primacy and in particular its qualification of support only for fascist demographic policies which conceived the family in religious and not racial-biological terms reveals Christmas and the Christian vision of the family to be at best an only partially effective mental tool for the fascist authorities who deployed it. What's more,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{132} "Carta dipinta, scorze di sughero e muschio [...] pochi soldi" Ibid.
\textsuperscript{133} ADN MP/91 Santerello E \textit{Saper sorridere} p.54
\textsuperscript{134} "Siccome io avevo fatto il presepio, è venuto a casa mia un'apposita commissione che veniva a giudicare il migliore della parrocchia, girando di casa in casa. Certo non piglièro nessun premio, ma sempre nel mio cuore c'è una speranza piccolissima." ADN DP/94 Squarcialupi D \textit{Quaderno dei diarii} 7 Jan. 1941.
\end{flushleft}
Venetians' memoirs which make reference to strategies of procreation suggest that many Venetians' 'horizons of expectations', when it came to the reproductive 'choices' they made, were composed far more of economic and affective considerations than of either fascist or religious principles.

**The Battle of the Piave twentieth anniversary celebrations**

The twentieth anniversary of the Italian victory against the Austrians in the First World War Battle of the Piave was celebrated in June 1938 with the highest level of state ceremonial and solemnity, not only on the battlefield around Treviso, but throughout the Veneto – for example, in Padua, where an exhibition, the *Mostra della Vittoria*, was staged, and especially in Venice, the regional capital. The festivities in Venice to celebrate the anniversary of the battle were organised by Italian navy officials and focused, inevitably, on the naval element of the victory and the *Marina Italiana*, with commemorative events ranged over a four-day period. The highlight of the celebrations was to be the ceremonial inauguration of eight naval vessels in the presence of the King, Vittorio Emanuele III.

The celebrations began on Thursday 16 June 1938, with a solemn procession to transport the "glorious flags of the Royal navy, decorated with medals for military valour" from the *sala reale* of the train station to the naval museum at the *Arsenale*, via Piazza San Marco; an occasion which "gave citizens the opportunity to clearly demonstrate once again the fervour of their patriotic spirit." The flags were guarded by representatives of the Italian Army, Navy and Airforce, preceded by the Navy band playing "war hymns" and followed by a *corteo* made up of army infantry, PNF, GiL and veterans' association representatives. Simultaneous to the...
departure of the procession from the train station, “a picturesque spectacle” was being performed in St Mark’s bay. Coinciding with the moment that the flags emerged from the saletta reale, the battery of S Giorgio Maggiore, along with battle cruisers Pola and Gorizia, fired a twenty-one gun-salute, whilst the many naval vessels anchored in the bay “hoist[ed] the gran gala [ship entirely dressed with flags] extending a festive flickering of colour against the blue of the sky” and the tricolour was unfurled on the facades of all the city’s public buildings. In apparent response to these synchronised military-patriotic rites, the Gazzetta reported that along the procession route, “from every parapet, from every window, from every terrace the tricolour flew and from every balcony waving crowds stretched out, often throwing flowers, the glorious symbols representing the valour, sacrifice and the glory of so many sons of Italy immolated for the greatness of the Fatherland.” When the procession finally arrived at the campo dell’Arsenale, the band played the Inno dell Piave and the troops stood to attention as the flags were ceremoniously carried into the naval museum.

Saturday’s celebrations were taken up with the arrival in Venice of King Vittorio Emanuele III, “venerated symbol of the unity of the Fatherland,” in anticipation of the main celebrations of the following day, now described by the Gazzetta not merely as the commemoration of the battle of the Piave but as the “warrior rite in honour of the Heroes of the Sea”. The King, as he was transported in the royal motorboat along the familiar Venetian procession route from the train station down the Grand Canal towards the royal palace, was welcomed by “a great popular demonstration […] which greeted him enthusiastically with shouts of long live the Emperor King! Long live the House of Savoy! […] waving hats and handkerchiefs in the air.” The reported enthusiasm of Venetians for Victor Emmanuel III was impressive. At 7pm, the king came out onto the balcony of the Napoleonic wing of the palace to greet the crowds

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138 “Issano la gran gala distendendo sull’azzurro del cielo tutto un festoso sfarfallio di colori.” Ibid. For a discussion of the significance of ritual action carried out in unison in terms of engendering a sense of shared identity, see Anderson B Imagined Communities, p. 145.

139 “Da ogni poggio, da ogni finestra, da ogni terrazza sventola il tricolore e da ogni balcone si protende la folla che saluta, spesso gettando fiori, le gloriose insegne rappresentanti il valore, il sacrificio e la gloria di tante figli d’Italia immolatisi per la grandezza della Patria.” Gazzetta 17 Jun. 1938 “Le gloriose bande della Marina recate solennemente attraverso la città al Museo Navale con i più alti onori militari e tra imponenti manifestazioni di folla”.

140 It is worth noting that the Arsenale, as the Venetian Republic’s shipyard, embodies more than any other physical site, the city’s historic naval might.

141 “Simbolo venerato dell’unità della Patria.” Gazzettino 19 Jun. 1938 “L’entusiastico saluto della folla veneziana a S M il Re Imperatore”.

142 “Rito guerriero in onore degli Eroi del Mare.” Gazzetta 18 Jun. 1938 “Venezia acclamerà oggi il Re Imperatore. L’ardente vigilia del rito guerriero in onore degli Eroi del Mare”.

143 “Una grande manifestazione popolare […] che lo ha salutato entusiasticamente col grido di viva il Re Imperatore! Viva Casa Savoia! […] agitando in aria cappelli e fazzoletti.” Gazzettino 19 Jun. 1938 “L’entusiastico saluto della folla veneziana a S M il Re Imperatore”.

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gathered in the square below; twice, the Gazzetta reported, he was compelled to return to the balcony in order to satiate the applause and shouts of Viva il Re Imperatore and Viva l'Italia. Even after he retired inside definitively, for the rest of the evening there remained a party atmosphere in the city; “the festive appearance of the city lasted until late into the evening from centre to periphery. All the palaces, headquarters of public and many private institutions, illuminated their facades with reflected light or with electric light-bulbs arranged architectonically, restoring, particularly on the Grand Canal, the incomparable enchantment of the Venetian nocturnal festivals.”

All these celebrations, however, amounted merely to the prelude to the main event, which took place in the late afternoon of Sunday 19 June. The newspapers wrote of the lengthy preparations, the frenzied rush for tickets for the event – demand for which apparently far outstripped supply – and the construction of a special podium to seat the Royal family and highest ranking military and fascist representatives, designed to resemble the command bridge of a warship. Particular praise was reserved for the “incomparable spectacle of force and power” of the many naval warships, which had been arriving in Venice over the course of the weekend, transforming the entire bay from the Giardini to the Punta della Dogana into the “cradle and theatre of Venetian power.”

The celebrations interlaced commemoration of the battle of the Piave with the exaltation of victories of both fascism and the Venetian republic, and centred around the launching of seven new Navy submarines and one torpedo boat. To open the festivities, the King, from his position on the upper turret of the podium/command bridge on the newly-built Riva dell'Impero, watched a march past of “soldiers of yesterday, today and tomorrow”; veterans of the battle of the Piave, the San Marco battalion and the pupils of the local naval college. This rite, in particular,

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144 “L'aspetto festivo della città durò fino a tardissimo sera dal centro alla periferia. Tutti i palazzi, sede di ente pubblici e molti privati, illuminarono le loro facciate a luce riflessa od a lampadine elettriche architetttonicamente disposte, rinnovando, specie nel Canalazzo, l'incomparabile incanto delle feste notturne veneziane.” Gazzetta 19 Jun. 1938 “L'arrivo del Sovrano tra imponenti manifestazioni di popolo”.

145 The Gazzetta told of how the request for tickets was so high, in proportion to the number available, that the organisers had to set up a special office in the prefecture to distribute the thousands of tickets available to Venetians. Gazzetta 19 Jun. 1938 “L'attesa per il rito odierno”. See also Gazzetta 20 Jun. 1938 “Il grandioso rito guerriero nelle acque di Venezia” and the Gazzettino 20 Jun. 1938 “Le bandiere di combattimento consegnate a otto navi da guerra nel Bacino di S. Marco davanti al Re Imperatore”.


147 “Culla e teatro della potenza veneta.” Ibid.


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which sought to fuse past, present and future, appears to fit with Claudio Fogu’s analysis of the regime’s emphasis on the ‘historic imaginary’ – a view of historical, contemporary and future events and of itself as historical agent which did not just seek legitimacy from the past but sought to overcome a materialist concept of time and make the past and future, present.149

As the march-past took place, at the sign of cannon fire from the S Martino torpedo boat, a procession made up of the Sezione della Lega Navale di Venezia, escorted by the ubiquitous Venetian ceremonial gondolas, the Disdottona and the Dodesona, accompanied the flags destined for the new submarines from the sanctuary of Ca’ Littorio, the PNF headquarters, towards the Arsenale. Once at their destination the focal point of the four-day celebrations could take place; the blessing of the flags by the Venetian Patriarch, Cardinal Piazza, and the presentation of these to the submarine commanders via the “gentle hands” of eight Venetian ladies chosen to be ‘godmothers’ to the new vessels. The blessing over, the flags of the latest additions to the Italian navy were raised, to the echoes of another gun-salute, as “a quiver of sincere emotion roused the souls of all present as the symbols of the Fatherland flutter[ed] in the wind and sun which gild[ed] the bay.”150 The ceremony was followed by another march-past of the armed forces and war veterans. The final element of the celebration took the form of a ritual which perhaps echoed the Venetian Republic’s annual custom of the Sposalizio col mare – the marriage with the sea.151 A votive crown of laurel leaves, dedicated to the Caduti del Mare was taken out to the waters close to the Lido and dropped into the sea, whilst the military band intoned the Canzone del Piave.

That the fascist authorities sought to appropriate the twentieth anniversary celebrations of the Battle of the Piave to promote its blend of nationalism, duty, sacrifice and heroism in the name of the patria is evident; the officially sanctioned presence in the numerous march-pasts and parades held during four-day celebrations, alongside Great war veterans and contemporary soldiers and sailors, of divisions of Blackshirts, party representatives, veterans of the fascist wars in Ethiopia and Spain, representatives of the Associazione Famiglie Caduti, Mutilati e Feriti per la Rivoluzione, ‘centurions’ of Arditi, Donne fasciste, Giovane fasciste and even

149 Fogu C The Historic Imaginary, pp. 8-13.
151 Each Ascension day, the Doge with his entourage would ride out to the waters around the Lido in the Bucintoro (the state gondola) and drop a wedding ring into the waters to symbolise Venice’s marriage with the sea. However, it must be acknowledged that the ceremony enacted in 1938 to honour those lost at sea was not peculiar to Venice – a similar ceremony took place on the same day in Civitavecchia, for example.
massaie rurale in costume, demonstrates the regime’s desire to associate itself and its ideals with those of the Grande Guerra (aligning itself also with fellow participants, the monarchy and the church). Indeed it was at the sanctuary of the ‘fallen’ of the Venetian PNF headquarters at Ca’ Littorio - a space dedicated to the memory of people who died for the fascist ‘revolution’ – that the chests containing the flags to be blessed and presented to the Navy’s newest vessels were stored before the ritual.

Undoubtedly the anniversary celebrations provided an ideal opportunity for fascism; the collective memory of the Grande Guerra had become fascism’s most favoured luogo comune – a readily-understood yet complex set of cultural reference points or shorthand which conjured up notions of sacrifice, duty and patriotism.152 Despite the great variety and discrepancies in individuals’ experiences of the war, a sense of shared memory, uniting the ‘generation of 1914’ was imagined and continually re-elaborated over the course of the 1920s and 1930s.153 On the whole, notwithstanding Italian victory, albeit ‘mutilated’, national memory of the Great War during the ventennio, focused, alongside the dichotomy of interventionism/defeatism, on an overriding sense of loss and mourning, with the majority of commemorative rituals taking on a funereal form.154 Though the Piave anniversary ceremony did comprise funereal elements and repeated references to the ‘fallen’, it is telling that its central ritual was, on the contrary, a baptism, complete with priest and godmothers. As a rare victory of the First World War, the Battle of the Piave particularly lent itself to a more celebratory ‘spin’ at the hands of the fascist organisers. The Venetian podestà, Mario Alverà, made explicit the connection that the fascist authorities wished to make between their own ideals and those ‘embodied’ in the Piave victory in a manifesto published for the commemorative celebrations:

Fellow citizens!
In these days the twenty-year anniversary of the Victory lives and beats in the hearts of all Italians present in spirit from the Piave to the sea.
Every celebration desired by the Regime has a profound significance which surpasses the ritual’s limits and presents a people which Fascism has reinforced and recast in one single faith, with the unwavering will to conquer time and touch the pinnacle of destiny.
The Fatherland, fascio of energy and unit of power, assembles her vessels in the places which knew the valor of its sons, calls the dead by name and accepts the word that is both pledge and annunciation: Present!

152 On luoghi comuni see Isnenghi M ed. I luoghi della memoria: simboli e miti dell’Italia unita 3 vols. See also footnote 62 of the introduction to this thesis.
153 See Wohl R The Generation of 1914 passim.
From the banks of the Sacred River, the lagoon’s coast, the Nation proudly salutes the bloody sacrificed of the Victory and in Venice exalts the Heroes of the sea, with a warrior gesture, consigning the flags of combat to eight units of the Royal Navy.

Fellow citizens!

In this solemn hour, dense with immortal remembrances, Venice recalls a page of her resplendent book of history and repeats her recognition and devotion to His Majesty the Emperor King, who with His august presence renders the most coveted honour to the city, and who is the highest expression of the Fatherland.155

Though the celebrations ostensibly commemorated the anniversary of a battle fought twenty years previously, it appears from both the nature of the rituals and the representations of these in the local newspapers that contemporary fascist notions of nationalism, sacrifice and duty – towards the regime – were being celebrated as much as those of the past.156 In the descriptions of the Gazzetta and the Gazzettino, the purpose of festivities is most often expressed generically – not specifically in honour of the ‘fallen’, the veterans or even the victory of the Piave – exalting, in vague terms, “the glory of the Heroes of the sea”.157 The Gazzettino particularly reinforced this notion of a celebration of contemporary glories. For the paper, the imposing warships ranged along St Mark’s bay invoked “a sense of force [...] of sea, of bold [arditi] entreprises, of the power of the Fatherland, of security in its destiny”, whilst the strength expressed in the modern “geometric architecture of the rigging” provided a sharp contrast to the

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155 “Concittadini!
Il Ventennale della Vittoria vive e palpita in questi giorni nel cuore di tutti gli Italiani spiritualmente presenti dal Piave al mare.
Ogni celebrazione voluta dal Regime ha un significato profondo che supera i limiti del rito e presenta un popolo che il Fascismo ha cementato e rifuso in una stessa fede, con la volontà incrollabile di vincere il tempo e di toccare il fastigio dei destini.
La Patria, fascio di energie e unità di potenze, raduna i suoi vessili nei luoghi che conobbero il valore dei suoi figli e chiama i morti col loro nome, e ne raccoglie la parola che è pegno e annunciazione. Presente!
Dagli argini del Fiume Sacro sponde della laguna, la Nazione saluta con fierezza gli sanguinati olocausti della Vittoria ed esalta a Venezia gli Eroi di mare, con gesto guerriero, consegnando ad otto unità della R Marina le bandiere di combattimento.

Concittadini!
In questa solenne ora densa di ricordi imperituri, Venezia rievoca una pagina del fulgido libro della storia e ripete alla Maestà del Re Imperatore che con la Sua presenza Augusta rende alla Città l’onore più ambito e che della Patria è a più alta espressione, la sua riconoscenza e la sua devozione.” Reported in Gazzetta 18 Jun.1938 “Venezia acclamerà oggi il Re Imperatore”.

156 The form of many of the rites and rituals that made up the twentieth anniversary celebrations of the Battle of the Piave lent themselves to the suscitation of nationalist sentiments. The sinking of a crown of laurel leaves into the sea - the final resting place of the Caduti nel Mare - is the maritime equivalent of the ceremonial surrounding the ‘tomb of the unknown soldier’, which, although (and, indeed, precisely because they are) empty or contain non-identified human remains, are “saturated with ghastly national imaginings” according to Benedict Anderson. Furthermore, the constant recourse to music and song - the Inno del Piave, the Marcia Reale, la Giovinezza - in the rituals of the anniversary celebrations recalls Anderson’s assertion that the ‘unisonality’, the shared physical experience of singing or hearing national ‘anthems’ is an important means of fostering common identity and nationalist sentiments. Anderson B Imagined Communities pp. 9 & 145.

"softness" of Venice's historic architecture. Indeed, it was sure that the sight of these ships would suffice to convince the Venetian populace of Italy's return to glory; People walking along the rive, from St Mark's to St Elena, rest, contemplate and are convinced that Italy is great and it is worthwhile being born in this land which, in the very act of birth, bestows a unique and envied noble title. [...] Meanwhile, on the riva constructed whilst the Empire was being founded, as a challenge to those who did not believe in our faith, the scaffolding is being prepared for the fleet that will want to attend Sunday's ceremony. The scaffolding runs the entire length [of the riva], but will not be sufficient to accommodate all, nor could it ever suffice. Because from that riva dell'Impero the whole of Venice, hearts brimming with passion, will participate in the great festival in honour of what was once one of the most formidable instruments that contributed to her rise, and what is one of the most important guarantees that the road to Empire proceeds full steam ahead.

Even when the paper acknowledged that the celebrations were taking place in honour of a past victory, it was almost always employed as an exhortation to contemporary sailors to follow the example of their predecessors;

In recent days fascist Italy has celebrated the anniversary of the battle of the Solstice and the valor of the countless Fallen in battle, proudly honouring their sacred memory, inciting the new generations to virily temper their spirit to the example and sacrifice of the combatants. [...] The Italian Navy, which brought to the Battle of the Piave the contribution of her combatants in green-gray, united with the infantry in the trenches, [...] today, in front of Victor Emanuel III, venerated symbol of the unity of the Fatherland, exalts with deserved pride her own renewed power, and in the offering of the flags of combat to the new iron ships that have entered to form part of the Italian fleet consecrates her oath to renew ardour and heroism, sacrifice and victories.

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158 "Un senso di forza, [...] di mare, di imprese ardite, di potenza della Patria, di sicurezza nei suoi destini [...]architetture geometriche dell'armatura [...] dolcezza." Gazzettino 18 Jun. 1938 "Navi in Bacino".
159 "La gente cammina sulle rive, da San Marco a Sant'Elena, e sosta e contempla, e si convince che l'Italia è grande, e val la pena essere nati su questa terra che dona già nell'atto della nascita un titolo di nobiltà unica e invidiata. [...] Intanto, sulla riva costruita mentre si fondeva l'Impero, come una sfida per chi non sapeva credere sulla nostra fede, si preparano le impalcature per la flotta che vorrà assistere alla cerimonia di domenica. Le impalcature la percorrono interamente nel senso della lunghezza, ma non basterebbero mai bastare. Poiché Venezia intera, dalla sua riva dell'Impero, parteciperebbe col cuore colmo di passione alla gran festa in onore di quello che fu uno dei più formidabili strumenti che contribuirono alla sua ascesa, e che è una delle maggiori garanzie che il cammino dell'Impero procede diritto." Ibid.
160 "L'Italia fascista ha celebrato in quest giorni l'anniversario della battaglia del Solstizio, il valore degli innumerevoli Caduti nella lotta, ne ha onorato con fierezza la sacra memoria, incitando le nuove generazioni a tempreare virilmente lo spirito all esempio ed al sacrificio dei combattenti. [...] La Marina d'Italia, che ha portato nella battaglia del Piave il contributo dei suoi combattenti in grigio verde uniti ai fanti nelle trincee, [...] esalta oggi con giusto orgoglio davanti a Vittorio Emanuele III, simbolo venerato dell'unità della Patria, la propria rinnovata potenza, consacra nell'offerta delle bandiere di combattimento alle nuove ferree navi entrate a far parte della flotta d'Italia il giuramento di rinnovare ardimenti ed eroismi, sacrifici e vittorie." Gazzettino 19 Jun. 1938 "L'odierno rito marinaro a Venezia". It is interesting to note that this article languished on page eight of the newspaper, most probably because of the much more prominent coverage given to the discussion of the Italy v Hungary World Cup match being played the same day.
Notwithstanding the continual references to contemporary Italian greatness under fascism, in the rituals of the celebrations to commemorate the Battle of the Piave repeated recourse was made to the myth of the Serenissima republic as a vast imperial and, especially, maritime power; inherited (or invented) traditions intended to legitimise and strengthen the contemporary messages that the fascist authorities wished to disseminate through the festival. The most explicit link between Venetian military might and contemporary fascist conquests and ambitions was made in the names given to the seven new submarines and torpedo boat, whose inaugural ceremony formed the highlight of the anniversary celebrations. Six of the boats were named after naval heroes of the Serenissima, most of whom distinguished – and sacrificed – themselves in combat with Venice’s eternal enemy, the Turks: the Enrico Dandolo, after the doge of the Fourth Crusade who two years earlier had lent his name to the city’s 2nd Bailla Marinaretti legion; the Marcantonio Bragadin, for the sixteenth-century Venetian general, captured and skinned alive by the Turks, having surrendered Famagosta; the Sebastiano Veniero, named after the Venetian commander at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571; the Lorenzo Marcello, in remembrance of the seventeenth-century admiral who fought for Venice at Vallona and Gallipoli before being mortally wounded at the Battle of the Dardanelles, not, however, before having secured Venetian victory; and the Giacomo Nani, in honour of the Serenissima’s last Provveditore al Mare. The seventh submarine was named after Pier Fortunato Calvi, a Venetian (from Noale, on the terraferma) but also Italian patriot who distinguished himself in the 1848 uprising against Austria, whilst the torpedo boat was named in honour of a fallen Great War hero from Verona, Farinati degli Uberti Tolosetti, a submarine commander awarded the Medaglio d’oro for valour. Thus, Venice’s reputation as a once fearsome marine power was harnessed to lend authority to the contemporary navy’s claims to greatness. It is significant also that a number of these maritime heroes, whose names now adorned the latest additions to the Italian navy’s arsenal, made the ‘ultimate sacrifice’ - of their lives - for the sake of their country; one of the central ideals that fascism wished to transmit to the population. Lest the Venetian (and Italian) people did not immediately take on board the notions of sacrifice, duty, and patriotism with which these names were imbued, this was spelt out to them by Patriarch Cardinal Piazza, who used his sermon during the baptism rite to recount the heroic deeds of

161 Often Venice’s opponents in battle during the hey-day of the republic, the ‘Turks’ represented one of Venice’s ‘Others.’ Hence, the names of the new submarines, or moreover the deeds of their namesakes, provided another subtle reminder for Venetians of the presence (and identity) of an ‘enemy’, against whom Italy and the fascist regime must defend the ‘stirpe’.
162 The heroism of the new navy vessels’ namesakes was reported in the Gazzetta on 20 Jun.1938 “L’attesa per il rito odierno”.
163 Bragadin, Marcello, Calvi, and Farinati degli Uberti Tolosetti. For a discussion of the fascist regime’s preoccupation with heroic, redemptive death and sacrifice in war, see chapter 5.
each boat’s namesake. The theme was also taken up in the newspaper accounts of the anniversary celebrations:

From the hero of Famagosta to the last, the commander of the “Balilla” who, having launched his last torpedo against the enemy, continued to fight until disappearing into the abyss of the Adriatic with his submarine riddled with holes, a continuity in ideals of dedication to the Fatherland unites these glorious names.164

Other aspects of the rituals carried specific reference to Venice and her lieux de mémoire. The ceremonial procession, for example, which brought the flags in their coffers from their holding place in the sanctuary of Ca’ Littorio to the Riva dell’Impero, was presided over by the two ceremonial gondolas belonging to the most important società di canottaggio in Venice, the Disdottona of the Querini society and the Dodesona of the Bucintoro society. Both boats were well-known emblems of the city and were used repeatedly for the “most characteristic” Venetian festivities, such as the festa del Redentore and the Regata Storica.165 The site of the anniversary ceremony also held intrinsic symbolic significance, as Cardinal Piazza reminded the crowd in his sermon:

St Mark’s bay is the same as it was centuries ago, with the same stupendous frame of churches, palaces and islands. But this place is no longer the rallying-point for the triumphant departures or returns of a hundred galleys of the Republic, a forest of yards, sails and flags. Today, from the gurgling water of the bay emerge the shiny colossus of our Navy, whose profiles are hewn against the sky, whilst their thrust-in cannon point at invisible targets in space. But, here, in the fervor of the welcome tribute we can almost see emerging from the shadow of centuries the eight gigantic figures, who, at the call, take their place on these submarines, already set to split the sea’s bosom like sharpened blades.166

In addition, the royal podium and ceremonial stage was positioned on the Riva dell’Impero, the import of whose name was also made clear by the Cardinal.

It is good that the new vessels uphold the banner of St Mark, blowing and trembling alongside the tricolour, almost as if to teach the coming generations the magnificence of a maritime power, which appears to have had no other destiny than to prepare and open the way to the maximum greatness of imperial Italy. It is for this reason that in Venice the riva

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164 “Dall’eroe di Famagosta all’ultimo, il comandante del “Balilla” che lanciato l’ultimo siluro contro il nemico, seguito a combattere finchè scomparve nell’Adriatico, inabissandosi con il suo sommergibile crivellato di colpi, una ideale continuità di dedizione alla Patria unisce quei nomi gloriosi.” Gazzettino 19 Jun. 1938 “L’odierno rito marinario a Venezia”.

165 See coverage of the festa del Redentore (third Sunday in July) and the Regata Storica (first Sunday in September) in the Gazzetta and Gazzettino throughout the 1930s.

166 “Il bacino di San Marco è il medesimo di molti secoli fa, con la stessa stupenda cornice di chiese, di palazzi, di isole. Ma qui non è più il raduno, per la partenza o i ritiurni trionfali, delle cento galee della Repubblica con la selva di antenne, di vele e di bandiere. Dall’acqua gorgogliante del bacino emergono oggi i colossi lucenti della nostra Marina, le cui sagome si stagliano nel cielo, mentre i cannoni fitti puntano a beragli invisibili nello spazio, ma nel fervore della voluta rievocazione ci sembra di veder qui uscire dalle ombre dei secoli, le otto figure gigantesche le quali, all’invito prendono posto su quest sommergibili già pronti a fendere come lame taglienti il seno del mare.” The sermon was reproduced in full in the Gazzetta 20 Jun. 1938 “Spettacolo di potenza marinara in Bacino di San Marco".
of the Slavs [dei Schiavoni] leads into this riva of Empire [dell'Impero]. The destination of these new vessels to the new submarines of the Italian Navy, labeled with eminent names in the history of the Venetian Republic, is therefore not without intentional significance.¹⁶⁷

Even in the rituals that explicitly commemorated the Battle of the Piave, rather than those re-evoking contemporary military glories and ideals, the particular importance of the battle to the city of Venice was often repeated. Though the main theatre of the battle was located in the province of Treviso, fighting also took place in the north of the Venetian lagoon, where the Piave flows into the Adriatic sea. The belief – not without foundation – that the Piave victory saved Venice from imminent Austrian invasion was insistently courted by the Gazzetta and the Gazzettino. The Gazzetta, for example, reminded its readers that the anniversary celebrations constituted a "ritual of devoted admiration, fervid homage and undying gratitude towards those who gave their precious contribution of sacrifice, courage and blood for the Piave victory and at the same time for the saviour of the city of St Mark."¹⁶⁸ Venice’s particular debt to the soldiers and sailors who fought the Battle of the Piave was recorded again in the Naval minister, De Bono’s address to the King, which recalled the “superb” fighting prowess of the Reggimento Marina during the battle and Venice’s subsequent desire to express its gratitude to the regiment by renaming it in honour of its patron saint, San Marco, “thereby consecrating her sentiment of love and recognition towards the heroes who protected her immortal beauty with their blood.”¹⁶⁹

As with the festa delle Marie and the Giornata della Madre e del Fanciullo, the organisers of the Piave anniversary celebrations sought not only to appropriate Venetian luoghi comuni to lend credence to the festival but also made recourse to the rituals, liturgy and personnel of the Catholic Church. The religious form and content of the celebrations was extremely strong; the hierarchy of Venetian Catholicism participated fully in the commemorative rituals, exemplified by the ceremonial blessing of the crown of laurel leaves in honour of the Caduti nel Mare and, above all, in the ritual blessing of the flags designated for the latest additions to the Navy’s arsenal by the Venetian patriarch, Cardinal Piazza. Religious liturgy was used repeatedly in the

¹⁶⁷ "Bene i nuovi vessilli si affiancano pure al gonfalone di San Marco, il quale sventola e freme a lato del tricolore, quasi per insegnare alle generazioni che avanzano i fasti di una potenza marina, che sembra non aver avuto altro destino che di preparare e di aprire le vie alla maggiore grandezza dell’Italia imperiale. È per questo che a Venezia, la riva degli Schiavoni sbocca in questa riva dell’Impero. Non quindi priva di significato intenzionale è la destinazione di quest nuovi vessilli ai nuovi sommergibili della Marina italiana, contrassegnati da nomi eminenti nella storia della Repubblica Veneta." Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ "Rito di ammirazione devota, di fervido omaggio e di gratitudine imperitura verso coloro che hanno dato il loro prezioso contributo di sacrificio, di ardimento e di sangue per la vittoria del Piave e insieme per la salvezza della città di San Marco." Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ “Consacrando così il suo sentimento d’amore e di riconoscenza verso gli eroi, che ne hanno protetto, col loro sangue, la bellezza immortale.” Gazzetta 19 Jun. 1938 “Alla presenza augusta del Re Vittoriosa Venezia esalta la gloria degli Eroi del mare e rievoca i fasti della Marina".
newspapers’ representations of the anniversary celebrations; the Piave, scene of the battle, was nominated the “sacred river” both by Podestà Alverà in his manifesto and in the newspaper accounts of the festivities.\textsuperscript{170} The flag-blessing ceremony as a ritual of baptism (another ‘rite of aggregation’) was reinforced by the presence of the madrine; eight ladies whose role was to play ‘godmother’ to the submarines and torpedo boat.\textsuperscript{171} The eight madrine came from the highest echelons of the Venetian elite including members of old patrician families such as the Countesses Costanza Mocenigo Faà di Bruno, Marisa Marcello del Mayno, and Carola Nani (who acted as godmothers to the submarines bearing their own family names) as well as the new fascist elite, represented by Ada Catalano, the wife of the Venetian Prefect.\textsuperscript{172} Performing civic duties resonant of those carried out by their noble ancestors, the participation of these “most elect Venetian ladies” in the twentieth anniversary celebrations attests to the enduring presence of paternalistic networks within Venetian society.\textsuperscript{173}

Whilst the organisers of the anniversary celebrations appropriated religious symbols and rites to lend legitimacy to their ceremony, the Venetian religious authorities, in turn, embraced the secular language of nationalism with their participation in the festivities. The sermon made by the patriarch as he blessed the submarine flags intertwined religion, militarism and nationalism, with references both to the past military glories of the Venetian republic and to the contemporary greatness and potentiality of fascist Italy. From the outset, the patriarch emphasised the marriage and common aims of the triumvirate of church, monarchy and the fascist regime, which he saw symbolised in the colours of the Italian tricolour. Unsurprisingly, he gave a little extra weight to the spiritual over the secular;

And so the flag of Italy, in a superb synthesis of its constituent elements: the Christian tradition of the House of Savoy and the imperial power restored with the fasci of Rome, represents complete national unity, an inseparable unity which is not merely civil and political but is also, above all, spiritual and religious; unity germinated from blood and Victory, reconsecrated with the Conciliation, admirably tested at the time of the conquest of the

\textsuperscript{170} “Fiume sacro.” See, for example, the Gazzetta 18 Jun.1938 “Venezia acclamerà oggi il Re Imperatore”.
\textsuperscript{171} The Gazzettino edition on Monday 20 June told how, after the flags had been blessed by the Patriarch, the madrine kissed their flag before presenting it, in its decorative coffer, to their ship’s commander. Il Gazzettino 20 Jun. 1938 “Cento imbarcazioni accompagnano le bandiere da Ca’ Littorio ai Giardini”.
\textsuperscript{172} Maria Damerini knew five of them personally. Damerini M \textit{Gli ultimi anni del Leone} p. 241. The madrine were: Contessa Ada Catalano Capiabili to the Marcantonio Bragadin; Sig.ina Giulia Vallotto to the Pier Fortunato Calvi; Sig.ina Gina Salza Bosco to the Enrico Dandolo; Contessa Marisa Marcello del Mayno to the Lorenzo Marcello; Contessa Costanza Mocenigo Faà di Bruno to the Lazzer Mocenigo; Contessa Carola Nani Mocenigo to the Giacomo Nani; Contessa Clotilde Etti di Rodeano to the Sebastiano Veniero; and Contessa Nella Farinati degi Uberti to the torpedo boat, Tolosetto Farinati. Gazzetta 19 Jun. 1938 “L’attesa per il rito odierno”.
\textsuperscript{173} “Dame più elette di Venezia.” The godmothers were thus dubbed by the Patriarch in his sermon address. Reported in the Gazzetta 20 Jun. 1938 “Spettacolo di potenza marinara in Bacino di San Marco”.

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Empire. As long as this unity remains intact and efficient – and it undoubtedly will for centuries – the blessing of God will lie upon our magnificent flag.\textsuperscript{174}

Time and again, the cardinal explicitly linked the past, present and future glory of Italy and nationalist with religious sentiment. In highlighting Venice’s own past as a vast marine and imperial power the cardinal implied that fascist Italy represented the natural inheritor of the Serenissima empire; it was he who spelled out the relevance of the new submarines’ names to the listening crowds, using his sermon to recount the heroic and patriotic deeds of each of the men whose names were now bestowed upon the warships. His reference to St Mark and his symbol – surely the archetypal lieu de mémoire of the Venetian republic – is particularly revealing for its weaving of nationalist and militarist sentiment and menacing tone:

In the liturgical blessing of these vessels I have recalled the name and invoked the protection of our St Mark. In Venice no other saint has equal claim to our piety and trust. His venerated glorious remains lie under the highest dome of his golden Basilica; meanwhile from on high his spirit watches over the fortunes of Italy as he watched over and protected the fate of the Republic. Now the Evangelist’s book is always open on the page that reveals to the world the message of peace: “Pax tibi, Marce”. But to guard this book and defend this peace God assigned an invincible lion: the Lion of St Mark. Let no-one disturb him, lest his legs become vices of steel and his roar, the sound of cannon fire.

Majesty, our prayer is this: that the Book of the Evangelist must never close from the page announcing peace, that the Lion of St Mark may long remain crouched and mute holding up the prophetic book; but always with ear cocked and eye unflagingly open and fixed in the distance, scrutinizing the mirror and abysses of the seas of the Fatherland.\textsuperscript{175}

As ever, the newspaper accounts of the twentieth anniversary celebrations of the Battle of the Piave suggested that the event proved extremely popular with the Venetian population. Both papers referred insistently to the presence of “an enthusiastic crowd, full of pride,” their “warm demonstration of devoted affection” and seemingly interchangeable shouts of “Long live the...

\textsuperscript{174} "Così la bandiera d'Italia, nella sintesi suberba degli elementi costitutivi: la cristiana tradizione sabauda e la potenza imperiale risorta coi fasci di Roma, rappresenta l'unità nazionale piena e inscindibile unità non soltanto civile e politica, ma anche e soprattutto spirituale e religiosa; unità germinata dal sangue e dalla Vittoria, riconsacrata dalla Conciliazione, mirabilmente collaudata nei giorni della conquista dell'Impero. Finché permanga intatta ed efficiente questa unità – e sarà certamente per i secoli – la benedizione di Dio riposerà sulla nostra magnifica bandiera." Gazzetta 20 Jun. 1938 “Spettacolo di potenza marinara in Bacino di San Marco”.

\textsuperscript{175} "Nella benedizione liturgica di queste vescelli ho ricordato il nome e invocato la protezione del nostro San Marco. Nessun altro santo a Venezia ha pari diritto alla nostra pietà e fiducia. Le sue spoglie giancano venerale e glorioso sotto la cupola più alta della sua Basilica d'oro; mentre suo spirito veglia dall’alto sulle fortune d’Italia come vegliò e protesse le sorti della Repubblica. Or il libro dell’Evangelista è sempre aperto alla pagina che rivela al mondo il messaggio di pace: "Pax tibi, Marce". Ma a guardia di questo libro e a tutela di questa pace Dio pose un leone invincibile: il Leone di San Marco. Nessuno lo molesti, perché le sue zampe non diventino morse di accaio, e il suo ruggito voce di cannone. Maestà, la nostra preghiera è questa: che il Libro dell’Evangelista non debba mai richiudersi della pagina che annuncia la pace, che il Leone di San Marco possa restare a lungo accosciato e muto a reggere il Libro fatidico; ma con l'orecchio sempre teso e con l'occhio instancabilmente aperto e fisso a scrutare in lontananza lo specchio e gli abissi dei mari della Patria.” Gazzetta 20 Jun. 1938 “Spettacolo di potenza marinara in Bacino di San Marco".
Emperor King”, “Long live the House of Savoy”, “Long live Italy” and “Long live the Empire.” Of course, the King, navy and the Great War, the ostensible focus of the festivities, were all symbols, which though by no means entirely divorced from fascism, retained some degree of autonomy from fascist ideals and aims and could potentially maintain an independent ‘hold’ on the collective imagination. In this sense, their involvement perhaps allowed some to express their patriotism without overt recourse to fascism. It is difficult, therefore, to distinguish how far the population’s enthusiastic response to the anniversary celebrations encompassed the ‘fascistised’ elements of the celebrations – the emphasis on fascist militarism, nationalism, sacrifice and duty – and how far these independent luoghi acted as rival or as complementary sources of legitimacy to the regime. Maria Damerini, that inveterate member of the Venetian social elite, described the atmosphere and emotion of witnessing the event in her memoirs; she recalled the “clouds of smoke pouring from the cannons’ mouths which immediately dissolved into the sky creating, or perhaps this was already there given the time and season, a light haze, which aided the landscape of festive excitement, wrapping it in the magical atmosphere that Venice throws around itself like a veil at times of summer delight.” Though a confirmed supporter of fascism, her recollection of the festivities interpreted the popularity of the festival among Venetians as being found not so much in the notions of contemporary nationalism or sacrifice that the fascist authorities were so keen to promote, but rather in the combined luoghi comuni of the Great War and Venice’s eternal and special relationship with the sea:

The crowd’s shouts of applause underlined every act of that ceremony which, being maritime, had lured a great many people, on the anniversary of a victory which Venice had felt almost in her very waters.

To conclude, this study of the manifestations and representations of ‘popular’ celebrations and festivals in 1930s Venice – particularly the festa delle Marie, Christmas and the twentieth anniversary celebrations of the Battle of the Piave – reveals the Venetian fascist authorities’ efforts to appropriate the lieux de mémoire of the Serenissima republic and the Catholic church,

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176 “Una folia entusiasta e piena di fierezza [...] calorosa manifestazione di affetto devoto [...] Viva il Re Imperatore [...] Viva casa Savoia [...] Viva l’Italia [...] Viva l’Impero.” Ibid.
177 “Fumate spante dalle bocche dei cannoni si dissolvevano subito nell’azzurro creando, o forse c’era già per l’ora e per la stagione, una lieve foschia, utile al paesaggio di esaltata festa, avvolgendo dell’atmosfera magica che Venezia si butta attorno come un velo nelle ore di gioia estiva.” Damerini M Gli ultimi anni del Leone p. 241.
with the intention of disseminating fascist ideals into the daily lives of ‘ordinary’ Venetians. Historic myths, customs, figures and physical spaces of Venice, in conjunction with many symbols and rituals of the Catholic church, were harnessed as mediatory mental tools in the fascist regime’s quest to create new fascist men and women. The *luoghi comuni* of a republic and empire, which in many ways had set itself apart from the rest of the peninsula, became tools in the construction of a national identity. Whilst debate in elite circles revolved around prescriptions for the city’s future – as a centre for international tourism (or reduction to the status of a cultural theme-park, depending on one’s point of view) or as an industrial, modern port and commercial centre – the city’s past was reinvented and redeployed, in part to fill the seasonal calendar of social events for well-to-do Venetians and international-set visitors to the city and in part to act as fascism’s *città-vetrina*, presenting the international face of Mussolinian Italy. But the fascist recourse to the ‘traditions’ and ‘memory’ of the Serenissma was also – and this is particularly the case in the predominantly non-season festivities that formed the focus of this chapter – guided by the desire to reach the Venetian *popolani* and persuade them of the correctness of the fascist project. The *festa delle Marie* – reinstated as the Venetian festival of marriage – and the redesignation of Christmas Eve as the ‘Day of the Mother and Child’ were seen as vehicles for the regime’s policies of social assistance and the demographic campaign, including its racist element; the concept of the need defend the purity of the Italian race. Both the commemorative celebrations for the twentieth anniversary of the Battle of the Piave and the *festa delle Marie* called upon Venetian men and women to fulfil, in their distinct ways, their sacrificial duty for the *patria*. Past Venetian heroes – whether the heroic rescuers of the kidnapped Venetian brides celebrated in the *festa delle Marie* or the gallant military commanders like Marcantonio Bragadin, who, more often than not, sacrificed their lives in the service of the Serenissima exalted in the Piave anniversary commemorations – were held up in contrast to Venice’s age-old ‘others’ – Turks and Slavs.

In (re)inventing these Venetian festivities, then, the fascist authorities made recourse to those ‘traditions’ whose meanings they felt would be understood by the population – but this is not to say that the Venetian people always ‘understood’ the messages transmitted through the fascistised festivals in ways that had been intended. Indeed, this chapter has sought to highlight the reciprocity and ambiguity of the relationships between ritual organisers, participants and spectators and between intention and reception. The reconfiguring of the *festa delle Marie* and the *Giornata della Madre e del Fanciullo* and the ritual baptism of naval ships with the names of Venetian heroes as part of the Piave anniversary celebrations did provide the
regime with the opportunity to link the ‘memory’ of the Venetian republic and Christian values of
the family, procreation within marriage and patriotic duty with fascist ideas about demography,
race and self-sacrifice. But the fact that the regime had to employ rituals and lieux de mémoire
that belonged to alternative – at times supportive but at times rival – sources of authority left it
unable to control how their message would be received by the population. Whilst this study
does not wish to suggest that fascist messages were invariably distorted by contact with local
and religious symbolic and ritual forms, the short duration of the festa della Marie, the primacy
accorded to economic and familial concerns over ideological conviction in birthing strategies
and the failure of the fascist demographic campaign in Venice, as throughout Italy, as well as
the pre-eminence accorded within Venetians’ mentalités to the lieux de mémoire of the city’s
peculiar attachment to the sea over any sense of affiliation with fascism in Maria Damerini’s
experience of the Piave anniversary rites, all point to the pluralistic and ambiguous nature of
their reception. Ultimately, the mental tools of the Serenissima Republic, a thousand years in
the making, remained elusive to would-be fascist infiltration, at least in the memories of ordinary
Venetians.
Chapter 4

“Fare di ogni famiglia italiana un fortizilio”: The League of Nations’ economic sanctions and everyday life in Venice

Venice during the Fascist ventennio was a city and province in profound economic transformation. Following a trend initiated in the first decade of the century, the economic development of the region in the 1920s centred principally around the industrial base constituted by the Venetian islands and immediately adjacent areas of terraferma, with transport, engineering, food, clothing and – given the need to rebuild the city following the material damage caused by wartime aerial bombardments – construction industries providing the chief sources of employment for the local workforce. By the close of the 1920s, however, the traditional industries of the Venetian centro storico had begun to decline: the naval construction and repair sector centred around the once unrivalled Arsenale and smaller neighbouring cantieri was severely hit by the post-war restructuring of the maritime industry; repair works in the city decreased by 80% between 1922 and 1925 causing the city’s naval workshops to shed 20% of their employees between 1923 and 1929. The artisan industries of the Venetian islands producing glass, lace, silk and clothing suffered from the closure of their traditional American and British markets as a result of the revaluation of the Lira to ‘quota novanta’ in 1927 and, above all, the impact of the Depression; the lace-making sector, which in

1 Mussolini made a speech from the central balcony of Palazzo Venezia on 7 May 1935, in front of “over 100,000 women” in which he thanked Italian women and told them that the Italian victory in the Ethiopian war was, in part, thanks also to the “delicate and decisive task” entrusted to the women of Italy; that of turning every Italian family into "a fortress of resistance to the sanctions". Mussolini B, (Susmel E & D eds.) Opera Omnia vol. 27 Florence, La Fenice, 1959, p. 266.
2 The 1911 census reveals that 1,317 out of 2,835 firms registered in the province of Venice were based in the centro storico, employing around 60% of the active population. By 1927, the census results for the comune of Venice (which from 1926 included not only the islands of Venice, the Lido and the Giudecca, but also the islands of Pellestrina, Murano and Burano, as well as Mestre, Favaro, Chirignano, Zelarino and Malcontenta on the mainland) highlights the intensification of this relationship between the regional and provincial capital and its hinterland: Over half of industrial firms in the province lay within the comune of Venice, employing over 72% of the population (4,411 industrial firms with a total of 39,180 employees). A marked increase was also registered in the number of large-scale firms in Venice; in 1911 39 of the 49 firms in the province employing over 100 people were to be found in the Venetian centro storico; by 1927 in the Venetian comune there were 80 such firms. See Fontana GL “L’economia” pp.1857-1860. Information on the enlargement of the Venice comune can be found in Reberschak M “L’economia” p. 262.
3 Fontana GL “L’economia” p. 1463.
4 From 21 December 1927 the value of the lire against the sterling was fixed at a rate of 92.47.
1924 had employed around 2,000 Venetians, mainly female home-workers, paid by the piece, in 1933 numbered just 300. Similarly, the number of Venetian glass blowers dropped between 1924 and 1934 from over 6,000 to 1,600. Even the largest firms on the island felt the effects of economic decline; the Mulino Stucky, which dominated the sky-line at one end of the Giudecca—employer to 1,109 Venetians in 1927—along with fellow major employers, the Cotonificio Veneziano and Junghans matchmakers saw their activity contract by 40% within the space of a decade.5

Conversely, this same period from the late 1920s to mid 1930s coincided with the rapid growth of a massive, innovative industrial development of national importance at Porto Marghera. The dramatic development of vast chemical, metallurgical and heavy industrial plants on the mainland facing out towards the islands of Venice and the lagoon, under the direction of Count Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata6 (begun at the close of the Great War but given its most decisive thrust, according to Maurizio Reberschak, by the adoption of autarchic principles and a war economy in 19357) failed, however, to provide an outlet for the increasing numbers of Venetians no longer able to find work in the traditional maritime and artisan industries of the laguna in the early 1930s. Aside from a minority of specialist workers from the centro storico of the regional capital, the vast majority of people employed in Porto Marghera were ‘contadini-operai’; peasant men (and women) who hailed from the surrounding provincial countryside mainly around Dolo and Mirano and who often commuted between the metallurgical factories and chemical plants and the fields, remaining closely tied to the land.8

As a consequence of the decline in the centro storico’s traditional industries and failure of Porto Marghera industrialists to recruit workers from the islands of Venice, unemployment in the city rose sharply; in just three years the number of Venetians out of work increased from 4,575 in 1928 to 13,172 in 1931.9 This upturn in unemployment and decline of ‘industrial Venice’ was accompanied by what has been termed a “forced exodus” of the Venetian ceti popolari from the

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5 Fontana GL “L’economia” pp 1463-4.
6 For a discussion of the career of Giuseppe Volpi, see p. 32 of the introduction to this thesis.
7 Reberschak M “L’economia” p. 260.
8 See Fontana GL “L’economia” p 1464 and Reberschak M “L’economia” p.262. Reberschak suggested that the reason that most of the work-force in Porto Marghera was recruited from the provincial countryside, rather than from the pool of unemployed naval, industrial and artisan workers of the Venetian centro storico, was not so much the result of a tradition of isolazionismo or hatred towards the terraferma on the part of the lagunari, as it was the product of precise industrial strategies which preferred a peasant workforce because of their perceived greater physical strength, ‘costanza in lavoro’ and sense of discipline.
9 Fontana GL “L’economia” p. 1463.
overcrowded and unsanitary housing of the centro storico; although some settled only as far away as the newly-constructed ‘città-giardini’ on Sant’Elena and the Lido, many others transferred to, thereby augmenting, the urban sprawl of Mestre on the mainland. In this way, with the Venetian ceti popolari and the industrial cantieri in which many of them had worked driven to the peripheries of Cannaregio, Castello, the Lido and Mestre, central Venice, radiating out from Piazza San Marco and the Grand Canal, was free to focus upon its role as a city dedicated to culture and tourism. This, then, was the economic backdrop of Venice, against which the League of Nations’ economic sanctions were introduced in November 1935.

The Italian imperialist project put into practice with the invasion of Abyssinia – present day Ethiopia – in October 1935 was justified by Mussolini, at least in part, in economic terms. Alongside the expressed desire for Italy’s return to its rightful place as a colonial power and the perceived impact this would have in terms of national prestige, identity and the creation of new fascist men and women, Mussolini made repeated references in his speeches and writings of the mid 1930s to the relationship between colonial and economic expansion; the oft-vaunted idea that new colonies would bring economic riches to the ‘mother country’ by providing abundant raw materials and an easy market for manufactured goods. Well before Mussolini’s announcement in March 1936 officially adopting a policy of state intervention in the economy in order to exploit national resources in readiness for war and, indeed, before the invasion of Abyssinia in October 1935, the Fascist government had introduced protectionist economic

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10 The population of Mestre increased from 36,256 in 1921 to 53,936 in 1931, rising further to 65,961 in 1936. Reberschak argued that the dramatic population increase in Mestre resulted from this ‘forced exodus’ from Venice rather than from the migration of Porto Marghera workers from the provincial hinterland. The planning of garden-city style residential areas on Sant’Elena and the Lido dated back to 1911, but were constructed on a large-scale from 1924. From 1933, the Venetian podestà, in an attempt to provide housing for an increasing number of migrants to the area around Mestre, unveiled plans to create the euphemistically titled “villaggio rurale” Ca’ Emiliano in Marghera. Described by Reberschak as “huts” [capanne] rather than adequate housing, Ca’ Emiliano began to be populated by ‘exiled’ working-class Venetians from 1935, and was swiftly joined by Ca’ Sabbioni and Ca’ Brentelle. By 1939 the three ‘rural villages’ housed 1,663 people. Reberschak M “L’economia” p. 265.

11 For a discussion of the debates surrounding the city’s orientation towards culture and/or industry see pp. 41-3 of the introduction to this thesis.

12 In a speech made to the Assemblea Nazionale dei Corporazioni on 23 March 1936, Mussolini declared: “Political autonomy, in other words, the possibility of an independent foreign policy cannot be conceived of without a corresponding capacity for economic autonomy. This is the lesson that not one of us will forget! Those who think that, once the siege is over, we will return to the situation as it was on 17 November are fooling themselves. [...] Italy can and must reach the maximum level of economic autonomy for times of peace and above all for times of war.” (“L’autonomia politica, cioè la possibilità di una politica estera indipendente, non si può più concepire senza una correlativa capacità di autonomia economica. Ecco la lezione che nessuno di noi dimenticherà! Coloro i quali pensano che finito l’assedio si ritornerà alla situazione del 17 novembre si ingannano. [...] L’Italia può e deve raggiungere il massimo livello di autonomia economica, per il tempo di pace e soprattutto per il tempo di guerra. Tutta l’economia italiana deve essere orientata verso questa suprema necessità: da essa dipende l’avvenire del popolo italiano”) Il Piano Regolatore della nuova economia italiana in Mussolini B, (Susmel E & D eds.) Opera Omnia vol. 27 pp. 241-8.
policies, motivated perhaps as much by expediency as by design, in response to the global Depression that followed the Wall Street crash of 1929. From 1934 Mussolini dramatically increased military spending and, with his Minister of Finance (from January 1935), Count Paolo de Thaon Revel, increasingly steered the Italian economy towards autarchy and economic nationalism. Multilateral trade and payments agreements and most-favoured nation treaties were abandoned and strict quotas on imported goods were introduced.

It was within this context of a conscious shift towards autarchy that economic sanctions against Italy were announced by the League of Nations on 9 October 1935 as punishment for Italy's unprovoked invasion of Abyssinia, a fellow member-state. The sanctions, which took effect from 18 November, forbade member states from exporting, re-exporting or carrying arms and other war materials to Italy; from giving credit to the Italian government, businesses and individuals; importing any Italian goods; and from exporting a range of goods and materials to Italy, with the notable exceptions of steel, coal and petrol.

It is widely accepted that the League of Nations sanctions against Italy failed. Certainly, they were not effective in curbing Italian belligerence; the war in Ethiopia continued unabated despite the sanctions, Italian victory being declared on 5 May 1936 after just eight months of fighting. The sanctions had a relatively modest effect on the national economy; Italy exported 36% less goods and materials abroad and imported just 20% less during the eight months of the sanctions in comparison with the same period of the previous year. In Venice, in economic terms at least, the sanctions appear to have had little impact. The city's port industry experienced a sustained period of growth from 1933, reaching a total of 1,676,000 tonnes of goods loaded and unloaded on the Venetian docks in 1936. Although the application of quotas on the import and export of cotton, phosphates and other materials did register a discernible

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15 For a discussion of the range of materials included in the economic sanctions and the implications of these in terms of the failure of the sanctions, see Federico G "Le sanzioni" in de Grazia V & Luzzatto S eds. Dizionario del fascismo vol 2 Turin, Einaudi, 2003, pp. 590-2 and Ristuccia C A "The 1935 sanctions against Italy: would coal and oil have made a difference?" in European Review of Economic History 2000, vol. 4.1, pp. 85-110.
16 Philip Morgan, for example, described the economic impact of the sanctions as "minimal" and "ephemeral". Morgan P Italian Fascism p. 143. Furthermore, Giovanni Federico asserted that following the League of Nations' incapacity to prevent the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the failure of the sanctions against Italy was seen as heralding further proof of the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations, and therefore could be credited as having helped nudge Mussolini towards rapprochement with Hitler, culminating in the Pact of Steel in May 1939. Federico G "Le sanzioni" in Dizionario del Fascismo vol 2. pp. 590-2.
reduction in demand for imported versions of these materials in the Venetian port, the transportation of other goods, for which Italy was heavily reliant on foreign imports, such as coal, was "resolved" by the simple switching of supplier from Britain to Germany.\(^{18}\)

The historiography surrounding the 1935-6 economic sanctions has tended to polarise around two principal debates. In the first place, debate has focused on the efficacy of the sanctions in both economic and diplomatic terms and, consequently, on the impact of the perceived failure of the sanctions both on the credibility of the League of Nations and on the relationship between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.\(^{19}\) Other historians – here we come to the second strand of historiographical debate related to the sanctions and the one which interests us most in this study – have tended to emphasise the importance of the sanctions in terms of their propaganda value to the fascist regime. With this interpretation, put forward by social and cultural historians such as Victoria De Grazia, Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi and Marla Stone, the real significance of the League of Nations' sanctions is seen to lie not in their economic impact, but in their political worth. De Grazia, in her examination of *How Fascism Ruled Women,\(^{20}\) argued that the 1935-6 sanctions fortuitously provided the fascist regime the opportunity to mobilise Italian families, and particularly women, to the fascist cause, reinforcing the extent of the regime's intrusion into the so-called private sphere of individuals' lives. By enlisting Italian households in drives to collect scrap metal and donate their gold jewellery and medals to the war effort and by encouraging Italian women to fulfil their patriotic duty by feeding and clothing their families with only 'national products', the regime sought to forge a bond between household and regime, family and fascism.\(^{21}\) In her work on fascist aesthetics, Falasca-Zamponi\(^{22}\) illustrated the way in which the fascist regime took advantage of the

\(^{18}\) Fontana G L "L'economia" p. 1472-3.

\(^{19}\) Historians disagree about the causes of the failure of the sanctions in economic terms. Shepherd B Clough, for example, in the 1960s argued that the sanctions caused grave concern among economic policy makers and business leaders. Short of foreign credits and reliant on imports for much of its raw materials including coal, iron, petrol, cotton, wood pulp, quinine, and rubber, Clough maintained that the sanctions "would have brought Italy to its knees" had they been more rigorously and universally applied in the long term. More recently, however, economic historians such as Cristiano Andrea Ristuccia have questioned this interpretation, arguing that the modest effect of the sanctions should be attributed not only to the non-uniform manner in which League of Nations member states applied the measures, but also, and more significantly, to the limited range of products and materials placed under embargo. In this interpretation, the omission of steel, coal and petrol from the list of banned materials, was crucial. This led Ristuccia to engage in an exercise of counterfactual history when he recently asked whether the extension of the sanctions to coal and oil "would [...] have made a difference". Clough S B *The Economic History of Modern Italy*, particularly pp. 254-5; Ristuccia C A "The 1935 sanctions against Italy: would coal and oil have made a difference?" in *European Review of Economic History* 2000 4(1) pp. 85-110 and *The Italian Economy under Fascism 1934-43*, PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 1999.


\(^{21}\) Ibid. p. 78

\(^{22}\) Falasca-Zamponi S *Fascist Spectacle*, particularly chapter 5.
Ethiopian war and especially the wider European reaction to Italy’s invasion of a League of Nations member state, in order to create a ‘liturgy of virtue’ of notable propaganda value. In some of his most dramatic speeches, Mussolini repeatedly told Italians that they were victims of grave injustice and hypocrisy on the part of the great powers. In the regime’s rhetoric, fascist Italy, home to a virtuous “people of poets, artists, heroes, saints, sailors, transmigrants,” was cast as the saintly suffering victim, juxtaposed against the villainy of Britain and France.  

Marla Stone, meanwhile, in her 1998 work on art and culture under fascism, examined the 1938 national Autarchy Exhibition, opened on the occasion of the second anniversary of the sanctions’ introduction. She demonstrated how the fascist regime used the sanctions to convince the Italian population of Italy’s readiness and ability to wage war. For Stone, the Autarchy Exhibition, along with its three sister exhibitions staged at the Circus Maximus in Rome in the second half of the 1930s to record the social, economic and political concerns of the regime, marked a departure in the fascist organisation of culture away from eclectic modernism towards a much more severe imperialist, militaristic and increasingly racist aesthetic, often articulated through a classical style, which was designed to overwhelm and subordinate the individual to the regime, rather than generate active, voluntaristic participation in the fascist project.

Whether explicitly or implicitly, De Grazia, Falasca-Zamponi and Stone agreed not only that the sanctions constituted a valuable propaganda tool, but also that the fascist regime did succeed in making effective use of the sanctions in order to harness Italians to the national imperialist cause, create fascist identity and build consensus. De Grazia, for example, maintained that the events and drives staged to ‘resist’ the sanctions – during this period the country was constantly described in newspapers, radio broadcasts and by politicians, as being in a state of siege – helped enlist women into fascist organisations and pointed out that, whilst the authorities had been promoting autarchy and economic frugality for a number of years, it was only with the advent of the sanctions and subsequent appeal to economic patriotism that bourgeois Italian ladies were persuaded to dim the lights in their houses, monitor servants’

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23 From a speech made by Mussolini on 2 October 1935, reproduced in Scritti e discorsi vol IX and quoted in Falasca-Zamponi S Fascist Spectacle p. 172.
24 Stone MS The Patron State. Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy, especially chapter 7.
25 The autarchy exhibition was the fourth and final exhibition in a series of exhibitions staged by the regime at the Circus Maximus in Rome. The three preceding exhibitions in the series focussed on: the colonie estive and fascist policies of child assistance; the dopolavoro organisation; and on national textiles. Ibid. p. 226.
26 De Grazia states that during the twelve months of 1936, ½ million women enrolled in fascist institutions including almost 250,000 massaie rurali. De Grazia V How fascism ruled women p. 78.
spending and drink Italian, rather than English, brands of tea. All concurred that by organising symbolic as well as more practical forms of resistance to the sanctions, including the decreeing that every Italian household should fly the tricolour on the day the sanctions came into effect and the *Giornata della fede* when Italian women were called upon to follow the lead of Queen Elena and donate their wedding rings to the war effort, the regime succeeded in making effective use of the sanctions in order to promote policies of autarchy and economic nationalism, already underway by this time, and to harness Italians to the national imperialist cause, create fascist identity and build consensus. Indeed, the regime's apparent success in 'milking' the "sense of outrage" at the introduction of sanctions and translating this into sentiments of "reactive nationalism" and "xenophobia", has led some to declare that "the Ethiopian war marked the high point of support and consent for the Fascist regime."28

This chapter examines the way in which the fascist authorities used the imposition of the League of Nations' sanctions to promote the ideologies of nationalism and autarchy and to generate consent for the regime and explores the effect of the anti-sanctions resistance measures on Venetians' daily lives, focussing particularly on the effect on food consumption, clothes and fashions as well as transportation (as the gondola became the 'new' mode of transport of choice). It is the principal contention of this study that the reactions of Venetians – from party officials to local businessmen and ordinary consumers – to fascist propaganda concerning anti-sanctions ‘resistance’ was characterised above all by confusion and by a multiplicity of personal choices, spanning a range of possible responses from unequivocal support through passive acceptance or indifference to outright rejection or subversion of the sanctions resistance measures. Such choices and responses can be seen as akin to those opportunistic ‘tactics’ identified by Michel de Certeau, which allow consumer-producers to ‘make do’, to appropriate, to accept or to subvert cultural products in the construction of their individual ‘trajectories’.29

Certainly the political mileage sought, and to an extent gained, from the sanctions by the fascist authorities outweighed their actual economic impact by far. Following the announcement of the punitive measures in October, the Venetian newspapers and journals began espousing a raft of measures that citizens should undertake in order to “resist” the economic “siege”. For example,

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27 De Grazia V *How fascism ruled women* p. 78.
28 Morgan P *Italian Fascism* p. 143.
29 For Michel de Certeau’s concept of ‘tactics’ and the way in which they relate to the present study see pp. 20-1 and footnote 50 in the introduction to this thesis.
the Venetian journal, *Le Tre Venezie*, published an article in its November 1935 edition entitled “18 NOVEMBER 1935: a date of ignominy for the world of Geneva, 18 NOVEMBER 1935: a date of glory for Fascist Italy” alongside a set of instructions: citizens were advised not to consume foreign products of any kind; to severely limit their use of imported primary materials, particularly petrol; to make every possible effort to substitute national products for foreign-made ones; and finally, to “boycott with religious fervor every practice which renders us reliant on foreign aid: we must also read in Italian, speak in Italian, always and in every instance make use of the honest mentality and clear good sense which are among the fundamental qualities of the Italian people.”

The sanctions decreed by the League of Nations came into effect on 18 November 1935. To mark the occasion the Fascist *Gran Consiglio* instructed town councils to erect stones in remembrance of the onset of the siege whilst the *Foglio d'ordine* called for every home to be bedecked with the Italian tricolour as a symbol of resistance. The Venetian newspapers took this call to heart, as, at least so the press asserted, did the local population. The day after the commencement of the sanctions, the *Gazzetta* announced with pride that “the city until evening was literally covered by tricolours” in protest at the “sanctionist offensive” with flags flying from public buildings including St Mark’s basilica and the clock tower – providing a powerful visual equation of the sanctions, fascism and Venice – as well as “from all the houses, even the houses of the poor who, when they could not display the woollen or cotton flag contented themselves by improvising their flags with three pieces of paper glued together.” Shopkeepers reportedly displayed photographs of the king and the *Duce* alongside flags in their windows, whilst hundreds of students demonstrated, first in Piazza San Marco where they sang patriotic and fascist hymns, then in procession to *Ca’ Littorio*, the PNF headquarters in Venice, where they deposited flowers at the sanctuary of the fallen. In several Venetian schools, “the first day of resistance was [...] a day of wise and effective propaganda:” lessons were interrupted as the deliberations and motions voted by the *Gran Consiglio* were read aloud.

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30 “18 NOVEMBRE 1935: una data di ignominia per il mondo ginevino 18 NOVEMBRE 1935: una data di gloria per l’Italia fascista Bisogna: [...] boicottare con fervore religioso ogni consuetudine che ci renda bisognosi di ricorrere all’estero: bisogna anche leggere in italiano, parlare in italiano, servirsi sempre e in ogni caso della onesta mentalità e del chiaro buon senso che sono tra le qualità fondamentali del popolo italiano.” *Le Tre Venezie* Nov. 1935 p. 543-4

31 The Fascist party’s ‘sheet of orders’.

32 See Falasca-Zamponi *Fascist Spectacle* p. 173.

33 “La città è stata fino a sera letteralmente coperta da tricolori [...] di tutte le case anche di quelle della povera gente che quando non potè esporre il drappo di lana o di cotone si accontentò di improvvisare la sua bandiera con tre pezzi di carta incollata.” *Gazzetta* 19 Nov. 1935 “La prima giornata della rivolta all’assedio”.

34 Ibid.
followed, at the “Manzoni” primary school, by the recital of the *Balilla* oath “pronounced in unison by a thousand little chests full of fascist faith and enthusiasm.” Whether such resolute demonstrations of symbolic opposition represented the reality of the immediate response of Venetians to the sanctions or rather an idealised version concocted or exaggerated by the local press, the potential worth of such images of unified, patriotic resistance would not go unnoticed.

The propaganda value of the sanctions was quickly and publicly acknowledged. Already in October 1935 *il Ventuno*, the journal of the Venetian GUF, recognised that the application of punitive sanctions by the League of Nations could in fact be used to help consolidate the fascist project:

> If there were a means that could have definitively cemented the revolution, what’s more, the need for a revolutionary climate to abolish that residual dualism between Nation and State, between Italy and Fascism which still exists in some corners of our society, nothing could have been better than this regime of sanctions which Europe has voted to our material disadvantage and our exclusive spiritual advantage.

But how successful was the regime – through the advice / propaganda published in newspapers and the mass mobilisation of Italians into city, town and village squares on the day the sanctions commenced or for the *Giornata della fede* on 18 December 1935 – in manipulating the sanctions to persuade ordinary Italians of the virtue of the fascist project, to penetrate further into the private spheres of ordinary Italians’ lives and to build consent for the regime?

Although the fascist authorities sought to engage entire Italian households in the *lotta alle sanzioni*, the group most significantly affected and mobilised into the front-line of resistance against the sanctions were Venetian women. As the principal controllers of family consumption, women were to be re-imagined, not as frivolous, wasteful shoppers, but as consumer-combatants. Victoria De Grazia, in her study of the relationship between women and fascism

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35 “II primo giorno della resistenza è stato […] giorno di saggia ed efficacia propaganda [including, at the Manzoni school, the recital of the Balilla oath] che viene pronunciato all'unisono da mille piccoli petti pieni di entusiasmo e di fede fascista.” Gazzetta 19 Nov. 1935 “Le sanzioni e le scuole”.


37 See Belinda Davis’ chapter, “Food scarcity and the Empowerment of the Female Consumer in World War I Berlin” in de Grazia V with Furlough E eds. *The Sex of Things. Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1996, pp.287-310. In this chapter Davis demonstrated the way in which the ‘home-front’ experience of Berliners during World War One transformed the imagined construct of
in Italy, argued that the organisation of women as the mainstay of resistance to the sanctions and, in particular, the Giornata della fede (the Venetian event is dealt with subsequently in this chapter) when women were encouraged to pledge their wedding rings, family jewellery and mementoes, including their fallen husbands' and sons' war medals to the national imperialist cause, marked a new level of union between Italian women and the fascist state. Certainly, Italian women were placed at the very centre of the fascist programme of resistance to the sanctions; to illustrate this, when the League of Nations finally lifted the sanctions in July 1936, Mussolini made an "eulogy to the women of Italy," lauding them for having made "every Italian family a fortress of resistance."  

In Venice, as in the rest of Italy, even before the sanctions came into effect the women of the Fascio femminile set up a committee to co-ordinate resistance activities, comprising the Fascio's leader, Contessa Vendramina Brandolin Marcello, and representatives of the Italian Red Cross and the Association of Mothers and Widows of Fallen Soldiers. Sub-committees were also created to organise resistance in each sestiere of the city, each headed by "the district leader and the mother or wife of a fallen soldier". The stated aim of the resistance committees was to carry out "a vast and effective propaganda campaign in every little centre of civil and provincial life, to induce the application of [resistance] measures, [...] to devise new means of resistance and victory, [and] co-ordinate the anti-sanctionist activity of Venice so as to

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38 De Grazia V How fascism ruled women p. 78. It should be noted, however, that in other work De Grazia has demonstrated the limits of fascist propaganda in relation to the sanctions and Ethiopian war. In her chapter, "Nationalising Women. The Competition between Fascist and Commercial Cultural Models in Mussolini's Italy" in de Grazia V with Furlough E eds. The Sex of Things, pp. 337-358, De Grazia highlighted not only the tensions within fascist consumption policy between auto-consumption and the growth of a mass consumer market but also the cultural constraints – particularly 'bourgeois' norms and Catholicism – on policy formation and reception.  


40 Contessa Vendramina Brandolin Marcello, descendant of one of the most illustrious patrician families in Venice, was appointed as fiduciaria provinciale of the Venetian Fascio Femminile following the death of her predecessor, Maria Pezze Pascolato in February 1933.  

41 "La Fiduciaria rionale e la madre o la moglie di un Caduto." An integral part in this female propaganda campaign was to be played by the Visitatrici fasciste, described as "the true army of the Party's mission" ("Il vero esercito della missione del Partito"). The visitatrici, whose tasks combined propaganda and inspection, were in fact members of the Italian Red Cross, who reportedly "have accepted enthusiastically their new mission" ("hanno entusiasticamente accettata la loro nuova missione"). Gazzetta 17 Nov. 35 "La resistenza contro l'offensiva sanzionistica".  

42 Ibid. The allotment of the leadership of these committees to women by virtue of the death in war of their husband or son provides a further example of the special status reserved both for the 'fallen' and mothers/wives of the 'fallen' in the gendered Fascist social hierarchy.
mutually integrate and increase its efficiency." The intended focus of the women's attention was also made explicit; their propagandistic efforts should be undertaken in the first place within their own family household, but then directed outwards towards "the working classes: simple and sincere classes that often only await the word that dissipates ignorance". Belying this though was the acknowledgement that particular efforts would need to be directed more towards the habits and lifestyle of the Venetian middle and elite classes than towards those of the *popolani* of Castello and Cannaregio. From the start, resistance to the sanctions was not to be limited to the economic sphere; here was an opportunity to eradicate those 'foreign' habits, customs, even words supposedly beloved of the bourgeoisie. The sanctions resistance, it seemed, would necessarily both make recourse to and serve to reinforce the Italian 'character'.

In the city particular persuasive efforts will be displayed to induce every woman to abandon non-national products: we will ensure that within the family foreign languages are not spoken out of snobbery, we'll ban certain exotic newspapers, we'll ensure that at 5pm the excellent *The Ati*, of our own production, is served, and if there remains at home a stock of Russian or English tea we'll use it for our own consumption but not offer it to friends gathered for conversation.

Also from the start, the resistance instructions were marked by uncertainty, exception and caveat. Foreign tea must be banished from the tea service when in company, but apparently could still quite acceptably be consumed within the privacy of the family.

Countless aspects of the imagined bourgeois lifestyle came under the gaze of those organising the 'resistance' to the "economic siege"; the Venetian press reserved particular venom for the supposedly unpatriotic practices of the bourgeoisie and indeed the advice/instruction related to resisting the sanctions was directed at this group perhaps more than any other. For example, the *Gazzetta* criticised, with a severe and disparaging tone, the tendency, "on the part of the bourgeois *nouveau riche*" to take on 'aristocratic' airs by hiring foreign governesses to take charge of the education of their children:

Then, around the little Italian who becomes marvellously bastardised, the cot, the lunch table, the high-chair, the toy (oh, especially the toy) they spoke of foreign production, they

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43 "Una vasta ed efficace opera di propaganda in ogni più piccolo centro della vita cittadina e provinciale, di persuadere all’applicazione dei provvedimenti già emanati per la più pronta efficacia della campagna, escogitare nuovi mezzi di resistenza e di vittoria, coordinare le attività antisanzioniste del capoluogo così da integrare scambievolemente e da potenziarne l'efficenza." *Gazzetta* 17 Nov. 1935 “La resistenza contro l'offensiva sanzionistica”.

44 "Le classi operaie e lavoratrici: classi schiette e sincere che attendono a volte solo la parola che disipi l'ignoranza." Ibid.

45 "In città verrà particolarmente esplicata opera di persuasione perché ogni donna abbandoni i prodotti non nazionali: si farà che nelle famiglie non si parlino per snobismo lingue straniere, mettiamo al bando certi giornali esotici, facciamo che alle 5 si serva l'eccellente The Ati di nostra produzione e s'è in caso ancora qualche scorta di te russo od inglese adoperiamolo per nostro uso ma non offriamolo agli amici raccolti per la conversazione." Ibid.
proclaimed the ideal, finally achieved, of creating around him an environment which has absolutely nothing of the Italian.

Let’s not even speak of when il or la baby grows up and can choose their own wardrobe, games and reading material. They will not have read I Promessi Sposi but will know perfectly which is the latest book in French, English, Polish, German and so on, to create a sensation in the literary world.46

The tirade against apparently unpatriotic, pro-sanctionist ‘bourgeois’ practices extended to the Italian language and, in particular, the selection of forenames. The paper railed against the “deplorable” fashion of bestowing “foreign names” on Italian children; “gloomy” names which, it considered, “could equally be given to a child or a pet dog.”47 Instead, it issued a plea for forenames that reflected the patriotism and glory of the fascist epoch:

Does your family not have a good Italian name which simultaneously recalls an ancestor and an Italian glory? […] Are we perhaps lacking in glorious traditions to offer today’s parents good glorious names of saints, warriors, heroes, scientists, poets, of loved and valorous women?

Names form part of the personality. If, even from the name our nationality is abjured, what will happen later, in the midst of ferocious invasion attempts by foreign nations? And if, despite the name, we seek to raise young boys and girls as Italians, how unpleasant an incongruence is a foreign name? […]

Enough of exotic names: let’s give children who are born in this renewed atmosphere of Italianità a name which re-evokes one of our glories, a bella figura which stands out in the world today, tomorrow, always.48

Even the language of the postal system was not overlooked by those organising resistance to the sanctions. In an article entitled ‘Punto’ ovvero ‘alt’ mai ‘stop’, the Gazzetta referred to a “happy innovation” that had arisen in the transmission of telegrams in response to the sanctions. State bodies, private firms and individuals had begun to substitute the universal, but

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46 . “da parte della borghesia arrichita […] Poì, intorno al piccolo italiano che va imbastardendosi meraviglosamente, il lettino, la tavola da pranzo, la seggiolina, il giocattolo (oh soprattutto il giocattolo), parlavano di produzione estera, proclamavano l’ideale, finalmente raggiunto, di creargli intorno un ambiente che d’italiano non avesse nulla, proprio nulla. Non parliamo poi di quando il baby o la baby diventano grandi e possono scegliere il loro vestiario, i loro giochi, le loro letture. Non avranno letto “I Promessi Sposi” ma sanno benissimo qual è l’ultimo libro francese, inglese, russo, polacco, tedesco e via dicendo, che fa chiasso nel mondo letterario. Gazzetta 21 Nov. 1935 “L’implacabile resistenza alle sanzioni”.

47 “Nomi stranieri [che] si possono mettere ugualmente alla bimba o alla cagnolina di casa.” Ibid.

48 “Non avete nella vostra famiglia qualche bel nome italico che ricordi al tempo stesso un antenato e una gloria italiana? […] Mancano forse tra noi tradizioni gloriose per offrire ai genitori di oggi bei nomi gloriosi di santi, di guerrieri, di eroi, di scienziati, di poeti: di donne amate e di donne valorose?

Il nome fa parte della personalità. Se fin dal nome si abbia alla nostra nazionalità, che cosa avverà più tardi, in mezzo a così feroci atti di invadenza delle nazioni estere? E se, nonostante il nome, cercheremo che il ragazzo o la fanciulla crescano italiani, quale antipatico controsense il nome straniero? […]

Basta coi nomi esotici: diamo ai bimbi che nascono in questa rinnovata atmosfera di italianità un nome che rievochi una gloria nostra, una bella figura che si imponga al mondo oggi, domani, sempre.” Ibid.
English, term ‘stop’ in the wording of telegrams with either ‘punto’ or ‘alt’; the Post Office was reported to prefer ‘alt’ – made up of just three letters – though declared itself neutral and willing to transmit “the text and words which citizens present at post office counters.” The Gazzetta, of course, made no such claim to neutrality.

Between alt and punto the latter is perhaps preferable as a most Italian term; alt, a military term and now italianised through use, derives from the German halt.

Stop, in any case, will disappear from Italians’ vocabulary and nobody will feel regret. Also because there is no need to use it, given that we can easily and optimally substitute it.49

Perhaps the greatest efforts of the Venetian anti-sanction committees were directed into the production of a resistance handbook for women, the Decalogo delle Donne Italiane. Pocket-size vademecum with prefaces by Contessa Brandolin Marcello and Mussolini, were to be distributed throughout the city and province, listing the ‘10 commandments’ of resistance that it was the duty of “every Italian woman from the most humble housewife to the richest lady” to follow in order to “reach those goals which history has indicated and the genius of the Duce reveals to us, to ensure for our children a secure and tranquil future and for the fatherland the road to Empire.”50 The commandments reminded Venetian women of their duty to limit their family’s consumption, mixing patriotic exhortations to purchase only national products with practical advice, for example, to eliminate meat from the family menu on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, to seek low-cost but highly nutritious foods, to plant vegetable seeds in any available piece of land and to save light, gas and electricity.51 Besides these, the Decalogo

49 “Quel testo e quelle parole che i cittadini presentano agli sportelli [...] Tra alt e punto è forse preferibile quest’ultimo, vocabolo italianissimo; alt, termine militare e ormai italianizzato dall’uso, deriva dal tedesco halt.

Lo stop, communque, sparrà dal vocabolario degli italiani e nessuno proverà rimpianto. Anche perché non c’è nessuna necessità di adoperarlo, visto che possiamo facilmente e ottimamente sostituirlo.” Gazzetta 18 Nov. 1935

50 “Ogni donna italiana dalla più umile massaia alla più ricca signora deve sentire alta la conscienza del proprio dovere ed assumere un suo posto di responsabilità e di azione [...] per raggiungere quelle mete che la storia ha segnato e che il genio del Duce ci additta, per assicurare ai nostri figli un sicuro e tranquillo avvenire, alla Patria le vie dell’impero.” Preface by Contessa Marcello to the Decalogo delle Donne Italiane. Reproduced in the Gazzetta 17 Nov. 1935. Unfortunately, no reference to the Decalogo has been found other than that in the Gazzetta, so it is impossible to determine how many and how widespread the bookletlets were actually distributed. Certainly, it was the intention of the Venetian Fascio Femminile to publish the Decalogo “in migliai di esemplari” for distribution throughout the city and province.

51 These instructions were made in Commandments 1-4 and 7:
1) Eliminare dei pasti la carne il martedì e il mercoledì e non fare provvista nei giorni precedenti.
2) Non comprare che prodotti italiani, sia negli alimenti quanto nei generi di abbigliamento, arredamento, ecc. rifiutando sempre quanto viene dall’estero.
3) Cercare di fare la massima economia in tutto: luce, gas, riscaldamento, alimenti, oggetti di lusso specialmente, eliminando i ‘capricci’ e questo è rivolto in particolare alle classi più abbienti perché è specialmente chi ha molto denaro che può fare maggior economia!
4) Scegliere gli alimenti che con la minima spesa rappresentino il più alto valore nutritivo, ed anche qui bando ai capricci. […]
also sought to regulate female behaviour and lifestyle, implying that only by behaving as ideal fascist women, would they be carrying out their patriotic duty. The fifth commandment instructed women to eliminate “useless pastimes [and] frivolous entertainments” from their lives and to instead spend their time ensuring the smooth running of their households. At least an hour of each day, as commandment six decreed, should be employed in making baby outfits “for children whose fathers are far away” and “body belts, woollen socks and scarves, balaclavas etc. [...] for our soldiers in East Africa.” Interestingly, the Decalogo also considered it a woman’s duty to keep up to date with current events, although this was inevitably circumscribed. Whilst women should have an understanding of politics and current affairs, this knowledge was to be employed within the confines of their role in the family household:

8) Read newspapers and keep up-to-date with the situation. Don’t say, like the stupid little women of the past: I’m a woman and therefore newspapers don’t interest me. Today, an Italian woman must have her own personality, must be the central point to whom, in each and every occasion, her family resorts: every Italian woman must be the dispensary of tenderness and courage, of strength, of enthusiasm and of faith: faith in God, in the Duce and in herself.

Although part of an initiative which in so many ways assigned a very public role to women, the final two commandments, which stressed women’s role within fascism as the educators, wives and mothers of present and future fascists and soldiers, confirmed this relegation to the private – albeit fascistised – sphere:

9) Mothers, raise your children as the Duce desires. In your houses there should be a portrait of our Duce. Talk to your children of him. In this way, your children, tomorrow’s soldiers, will learn to love him as he loves them.

10) Mothers, wives, sisters, fiancées of Italy. Be strong, be good, be always smiling because the courage and faith of our soldiers depends on you, therefore in part, the greatness of Italy depends on you.

7) PER CHI HA TERRENO OD ANCHE UN MINUSCULO GIARDINO: Seminate – quando sarà tempo – carote, patate, fagioli, pomodori; costituitevi un piccolo pollaio così da utilizzare anche i minimi avanzi da cucina ed avere uova fresca per la vostra famiglia. Se il vostro terreno lo permette, tenete un paio di caprette. Avrete il miglior latte, superiore a quello di mucca, per i vostri piccini e per i bambini meno fortunati dei vostri vicini.

Gazzetta 17 Nov. 35.


53 Commandment 6: Dedicare almeno un’ora al giorno alla confezione di indumenti per chi ha meno di noi e per i nostri soldati nell’Africa Orientale. Specifico: corredini per neonati e bambini, per tutti i bambini che hanno i papà lontani. Per i nostri soldati: pancere, calze e sciarpe di lana, passamontagna ecc. Ibid.

54 Commandment 8: Leggete i giornali e tenetevi al corrente della situazione. Non dite come le stupide donnine di una volta: Io sono una donna e perciò non mi interesso dei giornali. Oggi, una donna italiana deve avere la sua personalità, deve essere il centro attorno al quale, in ogni e qualsiasi occasione, ricorre la propria famiglia: ogni donna italiana deve essere la dispensatrice di tenerezza e di coraggio, di forza, di entusiasmo e di fede: fede in Dio, nel Duce e in sé stessi. Ibid.

55 Commandments 9 & 10:
With the Decalogo then, the fascist authorities used the pretext of anti-sanctions resistance not simply to provide advice and instruction relating to household parsimony but also to articulate and remind Venetian women of how their own behaviour and lifestyle should be conducted.

A second high-point of the attempts to mobilise women in the anti-sanctions campaign was provided on 18 December 1935, which in Venice as throughout the Italian peninsula was decreed a national holiday and renamed the Giornata della fede. In Venice, the day took on a festive aspect with tricolours flying from the basilica, from public and private buildings, even, it was noted, "from the windows of the poorest case del popolo". The ring-offering ceremonies were scheduled to take place in the open, outside Ca' Littorio and the various party headquarters in each sestiere, in front of plaques dedicated to "the Fallen in war or for the Revolutionary Cause." Although lashing winter rain and wind thwarted these plans and caused the ceremonies to be transferred inside, the remembrance plaques nevertheless remained a focal point of the day's ritual.

The marble plaques, sacred to the re-evocation of names so dear to all Italians were in fact decorated with flags and with flowers and all day long had a guard of honour of Giovani Fascisti and Balilla moschettieri.

The Gazzetta's report of the day's events in Venice emphasised the symbolic importance of the material decoration of the spaces where the ring-offering ceremonies were held.

As the possibility of celebrating the ritual in the open air became increasingly unlikely, each Sestiere Fascist group dedicated itself to embellishing its headquarters one way or another to ensure that the material, spiritual and symbolic value of the offering be expressed and exalted also in external form before the crowd of donors. Consequently, portraits of the King and the Duce everywhere dominated the collection centres among sprigs of date palms and draped flags, everywhere the tricolour was married to the Lictor's symbols, all the more so around the tables on which war helmets waited to welcome the offering.


10) Madri, mogli, sorelle, fidanzate d'Italia. Siate forti, siate buone, siate sempre sorridenti poiche il coraggio e la fede dei nostri soldati dipende da voi, quindi in parte, la grandezza dell'Italia dipende da voi. Gazzetta 17 Nov. 35.

56 "Unanime di fervida passione il popolo veneziano ha compiuto il sacro rito dell'offerta della fede alla patria" Gazzetta 19 Dec. 1935. N.B. The meaning of "case del popolo" carries some ambiguity as, although it refers to municipally built houses for poorer citizens, it is also used to refer to the local Communist party headquarters.

57 "Caduti in guerra o per la Causa della Rivoluzione [...] I marmi sacri alla rievocazione dei nomi tanto cari a tutti gli italiani vennero infatti ornati con bandiere, e con fiori, ed ebbero per tutto il giorno la guardia d'onore di Giovani fascisti e di balilla moschettieri" Ibid.

58 "Venuta meno la possibilità di celebrare il rito all'aperto, ogni Gruppo Fascista di Sestiere si è prodigato per abbellire la propria sede in un modo o nell'altro per far si che il valore materiale, spirituale e simbolico dell'offerta fosse espresso ed esaltato anche in forme esteriori davanti alla folla degli offerenti. Doveunque pertanti i ritriti del Re e del Duce dominavano il centro di raccolta tra i ciaffi dei palmizi e il drappeggio delle bandiere, doveunque il tricolore si spossava al simbolo del Littorio tanto attorno alle tavole sulle quali gli elmetti da guerra aspettavano da
Thus the material culture of the ceremonies united national symbols – the tricolour and portrait of the king – with the fascist – the Fascist Lictor and portrait of Mussolini – the religious – the palm branches – and the military – the upturned helmets into which women placed their wedding rings. Such symbols served to remind women of the multiple significance of a ceremony which, if only symbolically, wed them to the fascist state.

The principal ceremony in Venice was held at Ca’ Littorio, the fascist party headquarters in the historic Palazzo Michiel delle Colonne on the Grand Canal, which had been inaugurated just a few months previously. Here the Fascio femminile leaders and female members of the Venetian elite carried out the ritual to offer their wedding rings to the patria, followed by a “multitude” of ‘ordinary’ women. Venetian men offered their war medals. In keeping with the centrality accorded to death – in particular dead soldiers and the combined exaltation of self-sacrifice and the glory of violent death, preferably in war – within Mussolinian ideology, the ceremony began with a homage at the sacraio dei caduti which remained a focal point of the day’s rituals. The Gazzetta reported that “the majority of donors went to pay homage to the memory of the Fallen for the Revolution, before or after making their offering for the new fortunes of fascist Italy”. The “sacred rite” was strictly segregated according to gender: the women’s ceremony, to donate wedding rings and other gold jewellery was held in one room of Ca’ Littorio in the presence of Contessa Brandolin Marcello, whilst the men’s ceremony, to collect war medals and other distinctions was held in a separate room and presided over by General Macaluso. Thus, each sex offered to the patria those symbols emblematic of the principal role accorded to them by the regime; women, the rings which marked them as wives and mothers, men, the military decorations that defined them as soldiers and patriots. As each woman offered her wedding ring to the fascist cause, usually by placing it in the upturned helmet of a fallen soldier – once again reinforcing the value of death in war – she was presented with a replacement steel ring, a reminder of her sacrifice and bond.

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accegliere l’offerta” Gazzetta 19 Dec. 1935 “Unanime di fervida passione il popolo veneziano ha compiuto il sacro rito dell’offerta della “fede” alla patria”.

59 It was announced in February 1935 that the new PNF headquarters in Venice would be housed in Palazzo Michiel Delle Colonne. For a discussion of the significance and symbolism of the Venetian Fascist party headquarters, see Fincardi M “Gli ‘anni ruggenti’ dell’antico leone” pp. 445-474.

60 “La maggior parte degli offerenti si recò a rendere omaggio alla memoria dei Caduti per la Rivoluzione, prima di compiere o dopo aver compiuto l’offerta per le nuove fortune dell’Italia fascita” Gazzetta 19 Dec. 1935 “Unanime di fervida passione il popolo veneziano ha compiuto il sacro rito dell’offerta della “fede” alla patria”.
The smaller ceremonies, held in each sestiere of the city, followed a similar line in upholding of the fascist hierarchy relating to gender and death. The rituals took place in the local party headquarters, each decorated with flags, lictors and flanks of Giovani Fascisti, Avanguardisti and Balilla. In the sestieri of Cannaregio and Santa Croce, the rings were received by the mother and the widow of a fallen soldier. On the Lido, however, the ceremony was not carried out, as elsewhere, within a predominantly secular space, but instead took place "with religious fervour" in the crypt of the Tempio Votivo, the recent burial place of Cardinal La Fontaine, "a site which, due to its mysticism, seemed the most appropriate for the event".

It would appear that Venetian women participated in the Giornata della fede ceremonies in considerable numbers. By the end of the day, 24,173 wedding rings had been collected (in a city with a total population of approximately 170,000) and it was reported that stocks of replacement steel rings at Ca' Littorio were running low within just two hours. The Gazzetta reported "very long queues of citizens in the campi and calli" and emphasised the diversity of the "varied and magnificent crowd in which the full and conscious consent of all Venice was conveyed: a crowd of old and young, eminent personalities and humble workers of brain and brawn, elegant ladies and working women of modest means". The paper recounted a number of what it called, "moving episodes of pure patriotism"; stories of women who had donated their dead sons' war medals or their Monte di Pietà savings books to the fascist cause. It also reproduced, in their own words, several women's motivations for giving up items of such sentimental value. The women interviewed for the article invariably (and, of course, inevitably) expressed the view that the donation of their wedding rings constituted their way of contributing to the war effort and thereby fulfilling their patriotic duty. For example, one "vecchietta", Elisa Gatto, told the Gazzetta reporter in thick Venetian dialect, "It's now sixty years that I have this...

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61 Gazzetta 19 Dec. 1935 "Unanime di fervida passione il popolo veneziano ha compiuto il sacro rito dell'offerta della "fede" alla patria".
62 "Con religioso fervore [...] luogo che per il suo misticismo parve il più adatto alla manifestazione." Ibid. Cardinal La Fontaine was the Patriarch of Venice until his death in July 1935. Having taken up the post of Patriarch of Venice in June 1915 just one month after Italy's entry to the Great War, La Fontaine was universally lauded as a "true front-line soldier" because of his refusal to leave Venice, not even during the fierce aerial bombardments of the city; his death, funeral and burial place were conferred with a blend of fascist, military an religious symbolism by the local Fascist authorities. For more on the death, funeral and burial site of Cardinal La Fontaine, see chapter 5.
63 Reported in Gazzetta 19 Dec. 1935 "Unanime di fervida passione il popolo veneziano ha compiuto il sacro rito dell'offerta della "fede" alla patria". Furthermore, the donation of gold was not limited solely to the Giornata della fede; virtually every day from 24 November, the Cronaca della città pages of the Gazzetta included lists of Venetian citizens who had donated their valuables to the patria.
64 "Lunghissime code di cittadini nei campi e nelle calli [...] di folla varia e magnifica nella quale era espresso il consenso pieno e consapevole di tutta Venezia: folla di vecchi e di ragazzi, di personalità eminenti e di umili lavoratori del cervello e del braccio, di signore eleganti e da modestissime donne del popolo" Ibid.

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on my finger, I haven't got anything but this and if I did have something else I'd give that too", whilst a lady further down the queue declared;

The youngsters are ready to give their blood and their lives. I haven't got anything but this [ring] and I'm giving this because I can't give more. Because the Fatherland wouldn't know what to do with my blood and my meagre life. If not I too would be ready to go to Abyssinia.65

It is to be expected, of course, that the Gazzetta would report only those interviews and anecdotes that reinforced their representation of the Giornata della fede as a triumphant display of Venetians' devotion to fascism and their fatherland. However, evidence suggests that not all women fully entered into the spirit of the sacrificial ritual. In her memoir, Vana Arnold recounted how both her mother and aunt, though they felt compelled to donate their rings to the war effort, were so reluctant to part with their wedding bands that they bought two new rings to give up to the fascist cause, rather than sacrifice their own treasured rings.66 In some cases, therefore, pressure from one's peers was perhaps as, if not more, influential than fervid enthusiasm for the fascist imperialist project in persuading some women to part with their wedding rings. By purchasing two emotionally valueless rings to offer to the patria, Vana Arnould's mother and aunt employed a 'tactic' which allowed them to defy the regime's propaganda and pressure from their peers whilst maintaining the appearance of compliance.

It has been suggested that episodes such as the Giornata della fede and female mobilisation into the anti-sanctions resistance in general, actually served to confuse women's understanding of their role within the fascist state. Victoria De Grazia has argued that by encouraging women to symbolically offer themselves as brides to the state, women were cast into confusion as to where their primary loyalties should lie; with their families, or with the Duce, the nation and fascism.67 On the one hand, women were told to remain in their traditional household domain and that their primary role as fascists was to procreate, nurture and educate generations of future soldiers, whilst on the other, fascist welfare and economic policies, given the inexorable shift during the 1930s towards consumerism and the mass mobilisation of women with the sanctions, relied heavily upon women being active in the public sphere, whether performing

65 “Commoventi episodi di puro patriottismo”; “Xe 60 anni che lo go in deo, ne go che questa e se gavesse qualcosa altra dario anche quello”; “La gioventu xe pronta a dar el so sangue e la so vita. Mi no go che questa e dago questo perche no posso dar de piu. Perche del me sangue e de la me vita granca la Patria no saveria cossa farghne. Se no saria pronta per andar anca mi in Abissinia.” Gazzetta 19 Dec. 1935 “Unanime di fervida passione il popolo veneziano ha compiuto il sacro rito dell'offerta della "fede" alla patria”.
66 ADN MP/And Arnould V "Me g'ha contà la nonna" p. 223.
charitable duties or as controllers of consumption. \(^{68}\) Although it would be imprudent to overstate the extent of women's 'confusion' as to with whom their principal loyalty should lie, the onset of the economic sanctions in November 1935 and subsequent drafting of women into the vanguard of anti-sanctions resistance (albeit largely within the confines of the household) do point to the apparent contradictions in fascist policies towards women during the ventennio.

Family dynamics in Venice were disrupted not only by the enlisting of women in the *lotta alle sanzioni* but also of Venetian children. It has already been noted that 18 November, the day the League of Nations' sanctions came into force, was marked in Venetian schools with ceremonies involving the singing of fascist hymns and the recital of the deliberations of the *Gran Consiglio* and *Balilla* oath of allegiance as well as with student manifestations in Piazza San Marco. The mobilisation of children at the onset of the sanctions was repeated when they came to an end. On 8 May 1936, three days after the national *adunata* celebrating victory in the Ethiopian war and the declaration of the Italian empire, Venetian middle school students staged a "spontaneous" demonstration to celebrate the victory; having asked their teachers to be excused from lessons, over 1,000 children processed with flags and placards, singing patriotic hymns, first to Piazza San Marco, proceeding on to the church of Santo Stefano to pay homage to fallen fascists and then, finally, to the Austrian Consulate in Venice, in recognition of the anti-sanctionist "friendly nation". \(^{69}\)

During the eight months of the sanctions, the fascist authorities in Venice sought to co-opt children into the imperialist project, particularly by involving them in the collection of metal and bellicose materials. The Venice-based children's comic, the *Gazzettino dei Ragazzi*, wasted little time in encouraging its young readers to resist the sanctions. The first reference to the sanctions came in the issue published on 24 November 1935, in an article entitled *Resisteremo ad ogni costo*. Alongside a cartoon drawing of a young boy shouting defiantly at two shifty-looking men in suits next to an anonymous Venetian canal, the article's author, Ada Adamo Bazzani, exhorted Venetian youngsters to remember and repeat "the heroic motto of our

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\(^{68}\) See De Grazia V *How fascism ruled women* pp. 78-9.

\(^{69}\) "Nazione amica" *Gazzettino* 9 May 1936. It is interesting to note that the Venetian press and, it would seem, school children wished to publicly recognise Austria as a "friendly nation" just two years after Italian troops were sent to the Brenner Pass in an escalation of tensions between the two states, which threatened to result in a military confrontation. It is perhaps even more surprising that Austria should be viewed as a 'friend' given the history of Austrian domination of Venice from 1814 until Venice became part of the unified Italian nation in 1866. Indeed, concurrent with this exaltation of Italo-Austrian amicability was the equation of the resistance to the League of Nations sanctions with the 1848 Venetian uprising and subsequent siege, led by Daniele Manin against Austria.
fathers" from the 1848-9 siege of Venice; the second Venetian Republic's futile but “heroic” resistance to besiegement by the Austrians (by no means a “friendly nation” then) under the leadership of Daniele Manin. In particular the author related an episode which reportedly occurred on 2 April 1849, after twelve months of siege, when Manin called upon the crowd in Piazza San Marco to decide whether or not to continue resistance. The reply came: “Resistance at any cost.” Thus the author drew a parallel between the Venetian resistance to the 1848 siege and the contemporary need to resist the “economic siege” eighty-six years later and reserved Venetian children a particular role in this resistance. She instructed them to take care of their possessions, to renounce “spontaneously” sweets, amusements and toys, and to support “with courage and philosophy” unpleasant food, patched-up socks, a torn overcoat or a poorly-heated house. Only by following the example of the “unconditional, infinite love of the Fatherland” of their heroic forefathers could Venetian children fulfil their “duty as Italians, at the present difficult hour.” Two issues later, another sanctions-themed story appeared in the Gazzettino dei Ragazzi in which the young protagonist, Roberto, learned “what are these monstrous sanctions” and how he could play his part in the resistance. Not content simply with eating all his bread and being obedient, the story concluded with Roberto cutting off his “beautiful golden curls” to offer to the patria.

On a more practical level, the Gazzettino dei Ragazzi encouraged young Venetians to play an active role in collecting scrap metal, paper, wood and other materials for the war effort. The issue of 8 December 1935 devoted an entire page to photographs of “kids who have donated iron to the Patria” [figure 1] and such pages soon became a regular feature. Indeed, on 15 December, the front page of the comic [figure 2] showed two young Venetian boys, dressed in the uniform of the Piccoli Italiani, clutching sacks of donated silver and gold with the tag line

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71 “Il motto eroico dei nostri padri: [...] resisteremo ad ogni costo” Gazzettino dei ragazzi 24 Nov. 1935 “Resisteremo ad ogni costo” p. 4.
72 “Incondizionato, infinito amore di Patria [...] dovere d’italiani, nella difficile ora presente” Ibid.
73 “Che cosa sono queste mostruose sanzioni [...]bei riccioli d’oro” Gazzettino dei ragazzi 8 Dec. 1935 “Roberto e le sanzioni” p. 9.
Figure 1: Il Gazzettino dei Ragazzi 8 December 1935 p. 4.
Figure 2: Il Gazzettino dei Ragazzi 15 December 1935 p. 1
The *piccoli italiani* are proud to be able to offer to the Fatherland their most dear possessions: here are two proud Venetian representatives of the phalanx of little donors with their offerings of gold and silver, brought to Ca' Littorio.75

Even the comic's pages of cartoons were imbued with anti-sanctionist messages. In the 19 November 1935 edition, regular characters, Pik and Puk, were depicted tormenting Sir John Kat "the rich Englishman with big teeth always flying in the wind" [figure 3]. The cartoon ended with the patriotic duo telling the Englishman: "go back to your village, you great miser!"76 The anti-sanctionist cartoons became increasingly severe in tone. *Distrattoni e l'inglese* [figure 5] showed an Italian boy, intently completely a crossword, stepping on the toe of an Englishman – identifiable from his stereotyped peak cap, pipe and plus fours as well as his mutterings of pro-sanctionist sentiments in bad Italian. Delighted with himself for having injured the Englishman, Distrattoni told him, "This way, my good man, at least I've paid you back for the sanctions!"77 It is worthy of note that the cartoon immediately below *Distrattoni e l'inglese*, featuring *Barbanera e l'americano*, did not negatively stereotype the American character, not, after all, the citizen of a sanctionist state. On the contrary, in this tale it was the Italian *Barbanera* who was portrayed as lazy, aggressive and foolish. The American, meanwhile was caricatured as a rich and smartly dressed, if eccentric, benefactor.78

Perhaps the most significant anti-sanctionist cartoon in the *Gazzettino dei Ragazzi* was that featuring the perennial favourite, *Topolino*.79 The cartoon in the 26 April 1936 edition [figure 6] recounted the story of *Topolino e il medico sanzionista*. As usual, Topolino's wife had called in a doctor to cure her ailing husband, this time depicted with some of the crude racial characteristics often used to denote 'Jewishness' in this period.80 Unusually, though, this time

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75 "I piccoli italiani sono orgogliosi di poter offrire alla Patria tutto quello che posseggono di più caro: ecco due fieri rappresentanti veneziani della falange dei piccoli donatori con le loro offerte d'oro e d'argento, portate a Ca' Littorio." *Gazzettino dei ragazzi* 15 Dec. 1935.

76 "Il ricco inglese dai gran denti sempre al vento [...] torna al tuo paesello, avarone!" *Gazzettino dei ragazzi* 19 Nov. 1935 "Pik e Puk" p. 6.


78 *Gazzettino dei ragazzi* 8 Mar. 1936 "Barbanero e l'americano" p. 8. It was perhaps with cartoons such as this in mind that the Ministry of Popular Culture passed a decree in 1938 regulating the content of children's comics, stating, in particular, that characters in the comics should exalt "Italian heroism" and should be divested of their current criminal, paradoxical, dark and morally equivocal elements. *Gazzetta di Venezia* 13 Nov. 1938.

79 Topolino is often cited as a favourite character in the Premio da Ponte essays considering "Il giornalino che leggo più volentieri", discussed in chapter 2.

Sir John Kat, con gran dolore, pensa a Pronto: «Voglio che tu faccia un materasso», dice. Sir John Kat pensa alla pasticceria e per dirmi se non è stato, ma ognuno ha gran fretta di tornare.

Figure 3: Il Gazzettino dei Ragazzi 19 November 1935

Figure 4: Il Gazzettino dei Ragazzi 12 June 1936
Figure 5: Il Gazzetino dei Ragazzi 8 March 1936
Figure 6: Il Gazzettino dei Ragazzi 26 April 1936
it was not Topolino, but his children who resolved to rid themselves of the doctor. Knowing that “my father is too Italian to be treated by a sanctionist”, Topetto and his brother decided to “send him straight back to his village” by painting and attaching a large sign reading, “Down with the sanctions! Long live Italy,” to the house then proceeding to chase the “ugly sanctionist” down the street with sweeping brushes. Topolino is shown heartily congratulating his sons for their anti-sanctionist actions. The cartoon, therefore, served as an exemplar to the young Venetian readers of the Gazzettino dei Ragazzi, encouraging them to play their part in the resistance.

The onset of the economic sanctions, then, was used by the fascist authorities as a way of mobilising Italians – particularly women and children – into the fascist imperialist project. In this way, the sanctions provided the regime with a motive and potential means of further infiltrating the so-called private sphere of Italian society. But how far did the sanctions actually affect Venetians’ day-to-day lives? Certainly the regime, the press and businesses all sought to turn the sanctions to their advantage, in order to prescribe and regulate individuals’ everyday lives; what they ate and drank, what they wore, how they spent their free time, how they moved about the city and so on. The remainder of this chapter will be spent examining this aspect of the effect of the sanctions in Venice and will ask how far Venetians took on board and assimilated the fascist prescriptions relating to the sanctions.

Both the regime and Italian firms seized upon the opportunity afforded by the sanctions to influence citizens’ consumption patterns. The Decalogo had urged local women not only to restrict their family’s consumption of various types of food, particularly meat, but also to be patriotic in their consumption, by purchasing only nationally produced goods. The Venetian newspapers and journals took up this campaign of patriotic autarchy with great gusto, calling upon Venetians to consume only Italian products from Sicilian oranges and lemons to locally processed tea and cheeses. Seemingly no product would be left un-nationalised. The Gazzettino, for example, informed its readers with great delight that Vidal, “the old Venetian soap works which is always in the vanguard of every modernising initiative” had “already brilliantly resolved the serious soap problem”. The ‘soap problem’ had been overcome by the complete elimination of palm oil “from English dominions”, traditionally employed in the

81 “Mio padre è troppo italiano per farsi curare da un sanzionista [...] rimandarlo dritto al suo paesello [...] Abbasso i sanzionisti! W l’Italia [...] brutto sanzionista.” Gazzettino dei ragazzi 26 Apr. 1936 “Topolino e il medico sanzionista” p. 6
manufacture of Vidal soap, and its substitution with Italian laurel and olive oil, "resulting in a soap which couples the indisputable merit of its superior quality with the sweet scent of the laurels of the beautiful Lake [Garda]." The new laurel-olive soap, the paper crowed, "can well call itself 100% Italian."82

The *Gazzettino Illustrato*, the local weekly illustrated journal, featured a series of double-page spreads in December 1935 encouraging Venetians to eat national, if not local, produce [figs. 7 & 8]. Under headlines including: "The struggle against the sanctions: ‘Let’s eat more fish!’; "The best products of allotments and gardens are from Italian soil" and "Game, poultry, eggs, milk and cheese substitute beef to the great advantage of our health", the articles featured photographs of hearty Venetian *popolani* mending fishing nets, unloading and selling their produce at the Rialto, or patronising local retailers.83 The images were intended to remind Venetians of the quality and abundance of local foods as well as their historic significance: fish from the *laguna*, fruit, vegetables, cheeses and game from *terraferma*; all products identified as part of Venice’s “*cucina della memoria*”.84

Such visual propaganda was reinforced in numerous articles published in the *Gazzettino Illustrato* and the *Gazzetta*, particularly in the first months of the sanctions. At times this campaign for patriotic consumption was articulated in racial terms. An article purportedly offering “the Doctor’s advice” advanced a thesis of nutrition based on race. Having praised the natural medicinal qualities of local fruit and vegetables, the article went on:

Another interesting thing to know is that seasonal fruit is more relevant and therefore more appropriate to the population of the country that produces it, rather than to other races. We, Mediterraneans, therefore can draw sufficient nourishment from the simple winter fruits of our countries, such as chestnuts, citrus fruits, apples, pears, fresh and dried figs, olives, oil and various vegetables; whilst the northern populations of carrion-eaters and five meals per

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82 "La vecchia saponeria veneziana che è sempre all’avanguardia di ogni moderna iniziativa [...ha] già brillantemente risolto il grave problema dei saponi [...] risultandone un sapone che al pregi indiscusso della qualità superiore, accoppia il soave profumo del laureti del bel lago italiano [...che] ben può chiamarsi italiano al 100 per 100." *Gazzettino* 14 Dec. 1935 “Saponi e sanzioni”.
84 For a discussion of the “*cucina della memoria*” of Venice and the Veneto, see Plebani T *Sapori del Veneto: Note per una storia sociale dell’alimentazione*, Rome, Edizioni De Luca, 1995.
Figure 7: Il Gazzettino Illustrato 1 December 1935
LA LOTTACONTROLESANZIONI:
I MIGLIOIRIPRODOTTIDI ORTI E GIARDINI
SONODI TERRA ITALIANA

Figure 8: Il Gazzettino Illustrato 15 December 1935
The sanctions, the article asserted as it ended on a triumphant note, furnished the opportunity to follow a diet more suited to the Italian ‘race’:

With the sanctions it will follow that all this splendid stuff, fruit, vegetables, herbage, oils and wines will remain on our markets. Unused? Ah! No, we’ll eat it all with great pleasure and fully conscious that, produced by our land blessed by God, it will be perfectly capable of nourishing us even without recourse to the bloody carrion which must no longer pass the border.86

The sanctions collided with the Venetian cucina della memoria on the occasion of the traditional festa della Salute, celebrated in the city each year on 21 November.87 The annual festival remembered Venice’s deliverance from plague in 1630 and centred around a procession – once led by the Doge, now, in its reinvented form, by the podestà and Patriarch – from San Marco to the church of Santa Maria della Salute, crossing a temporary bridge especially constructed from gondolas over the Grand Canal. As with almost all Venetian festivals, the festa della Salute was associated with a traditional dish; in this case castradina, a kind of boar sausage, which was sent over to Venice each year from Dalmatia, once part of the Serenissima Republic and still the focus of Italian irredentism in the 1930s. The festa della Salute of 1935, however, went ahead without its traditional dish. With the sanctions in force for just two days, the Gazzetta reported defiantly that “Venetian gourmands will have to make a small sacrifice of gluttony” this year and forgo the castradina.88

85 “Un’altra cosa interessante a sapersi e che il frutto di stagione è più aderente e quindi più confacente e utile alla popolazione del paese che lo produce, piuttosto che alle altre razze. Noi mediterranei perciò possiamo trarre una alimentazione sufficiente dai semplici frutti invernali dei nostri paesi quali le castagne, gli agrumi, le mele, le pere, i fichi freschi e secchi, le olive, le erbe, le varie verdure, mentre male si accomoderebbero ad una simile dieta i popoli nordici dai cinque pasti e dai molti carni.” II Gazzettino il 24 Dec. 1935 “Il consiglio del medico: Frutta e verdure notranze.”

86 “Con le sanzioni avverà che tutta questa splendida roba, frutta, verdura, erbaggi, oli, vini, resterà sui nostri mercati. Inutilizzati? Ah! no, ce la mangeremo tutta con gusto grandissimo e con la piena coscienza che essa, prodotto della nostra terra benedetta da Dio, sarà perfettamente capace di nutrirci anche senza ricorrere ai sanguinosi carni che non devono più passare la frontiera.” Ibid.

87 The rituals of the festa della Salute centred upon the church of Santa Maria della Salute, a baroque votive temple constructed to give thanks to the Virgin Mary for Venice’s deliverance from plague in 1630. Along with the festa del Redentore, celebrated in the third week of July and which also originated as a votive festival of thanksgiving, this time after the intercession of the Redeemer to deliver Venice from the outbreak of plague in 1575-6, the festa della Salute is one of the most important festivals in the Venetian calendar. Marco Fincardi, in his discussion of “i fasti della tradizione” describes the castradina, as the traditional food eaten on the festa della Salute as “un tratto essenziale dell’identità locale, per i ceti abbienti che possono permettersene l’acquisto, o per i lavoratori che un tempo la mangiavano all’osteria.” He suggested that whilst the absence of traditional Dalmatian castradina as a result of the economic sanctions at the 1935 celebration of the festa della Salute was given a great deal of coverage by the Venetian press, the absence of foodstuff habitually eaten on a more daily basis, such as baccala would have been more keenly felt by the population of Venice. Fincardi M “i fasti della ‘tradizione’” p. 1494.

88 “I buongustai veneziani dovranno fare un piccolo sacrificio di gola.” Gazzetta 20 Nov. 1935 “La “Salute” senza castradina.”
missing from Venetian dinner tables and restaurants not because its importing was forbidden by the sanctions nor because the money needed to purchase the meat was not available, but rather because "Venetian shopkeepers in retaliation against the sanctions, this year have sent back all the produce to Yugoslavia." To reinforce the sense of worthiness in abstaining from the festa’s traditional dish, the Gazzetta noted that 1935 was not the first year that castradina had been missing from the festive menu:

The absence from Venetian cuisine on this day of the noted and popular dish, the memory of which goes back to the Middle Ages, has occurred only in 1849 during the siege of Venice and successively for five years from the onset of the European war until its peaceful conclusion.90

Once again, the current “economic siege” was equated with the events of 1848-9 and the straightened circumstances of the Great War, when Venice found itself virtually on the front line.

It was not only the fascist authorities – primarily through the local press – that sought to use the sanctions to influence citizens’ consumption; Venetian businesses also sought to cash in on the patriotic appeal of the sanctions to persuade consumers to buy their products. The back page of the Gazzetta newspaper of 17 November 1935, an edition which included pages of editorial on the sanctions under the headlines, “The resistance against the sanctionist offensive – How Venetian Fascist women are participating in the struggle against the sanctions – The organisational developments in the city and province – Feverous initiatives in every sector”, was devoted entirely to advertisements of Venetian firms under the banner: “Buy Italian products”.91

Perhaps the most prolific use of the sanctions to advertise products was realised by Vittorio Polacco, proprietor of a men’s outfitters in Piazza San Marco. On 2 December 1935, and on several subsequent occasions, Signor Polacco placed a large advertisement on the Cronaca della Città page of the Gazzetta which read:

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89 "I negoziani veneziani per rappresaglia contro le sanzioni, hanno quest’anno respinto alla Jugoslavia [...] tutta la merce." Gazzetta 20 Nov. 1935 “La “Salute” senza castradina”.
90 “L’assenza in tal giorno della cucina veneziana della notissima e popolare vivanda, della quale si hanno memorie fin dal Medio Evo, si è avuta soltanto nel 1849 durante l’epoca dell’assedio di Venezia e successivamente per cinque anni dall’apertura della guerra europea fino alla conclusione della pace.” Ibid.
91 "La resistenza contro l’offensiva sanzionistica – Come le Donne fasciste veneziane partecipano alla lotta contro le sanzioni – Gli sviluppi dell’organizzazione in città e provincia – Fervore di iniziative in ogni settore [...] Aquistate prodotti italiani” Gazzetta 17 Nov. 1935.
COMMUNICATION
In my shop, goods of foreign production are not and have never been sold, and if our "dear friends"... have ignobly applied sanctions against us we must all demonstrate that... we couldn't give a damn.

Therefore, no price increases; on the contrary in my shop from today 10% discount will be given on the prices indicated on all items.

Vittorio Polacco
Re della Cravatta
Piazza S Marco 145 (near Bar Americano)

N.B. – Discount will not be given to citizens of “Sanctionist” nations.92

How shrewd a business plan was Vittorio Polacco’s plan to offer customers a discount of 10% in defiance of the sanctions is not clear. What can be said with certainty is that Signor Polacco, whether through political conviction or keen business sense, identified the sanctions as a key factor in determining Venetians’ patterns of consumption.

The 1935-6 sanctions were by no means the only time that Italian firms used the fascist imperialist project to appeal to consumers’ patriotism. Already in 1934, adverts for bananas from the Italian colony of Somalia appeared in the Gazzettino Illustrato [figs. 9 & 10]. One depicted a smiling Somali man holding a giant bunch of bananas, next to the legend, “the colonies’ offering to the Motherland”,93 whilst another, showing a smiling Italian mother and child, told consumers:

Italian Somalia, thanks to the provisions of the Fascist Government and the tenacious labour of the Italian colonisers, produces bananas, excellent in terms of taste and aroma, of large dimensions and easily conserved, whose sale has been extended throughout Italy at prices that are constant and accessible to all. Eating Somali banana, Italians help the production of their colonies.94

92 “COMUNICATO
Nel mio negozio non si è mai venduto né si vende merce di produzione straniera, e se i nostri "cari amici"... vilmente ci hanno applicato le sanzioni noi tutti dobbiamo dimostrare che ...ce ne freghiamo.
Quindi niente aumento di prezzi; anzi nel mio negozio da oggi si accorda lo sconto del 10% sui prezzi segnati su tutti gli articoli.
Vittorio Polacco
Re della Cravatta
Piazza S Marco 145 (vicino Bar Americano)
94 “La Somalia italiana, grazie alle provvidenze del Governo Fascista e al lavoro tenace dei colonizzatori italiani, produce banane, ottime come gusto e aroma, di grandi dimensioni e di facile conservazione, la cui vendita è stata estesa a tutta l'Italia a prezzi costanti e accessibili a tutti. Mangiando banane Somal, gli italiani aiutono la produzione delle loro Colonie.” Gazzettino Illustrato 6 May 1934.
Similarly, in 1937, a series of advertisements for the Venetian concession of the Soc. An. Frutta Esotiche were published in the journal, *Le Tre Venezie*. The advertising copy extolled the nutritious qualities of bananas, asserting that the current era, "which requires the prompt implementation of thought and energy," should be the "age of the banana."95

Whilst the period of enforcement of the League of Nations sanctions from November 1935 until July 1936 was by no means the only occasion that Italians were urged to eat patriotically, the sanctions represented a highpoint of the promotion by the Fascist authorities and local businesses of economic autarchy and nationalist/imperialist models of consumption among the Venetian population.96 This is not to say, of course, that the anti-sanctions resistance was entirely effective as a propaganda tool. How far did this propaganda succeed in infiltrating the consumption habits of ordinary Venetians? It is the contention of this study that, far from

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96 Carol Helstosky has recently traced the evolution of fascist food policy, or ‘alimentary sovereignty’; she demonstrates how, from the mid 1920s and the ‘battle for grain’, the regime began to reverse post-war trends towards greater diversity in food consumption, instead calling upon Italians to eat with restraint only domestically produced goods to show their political and patriotic allegiance. The Ethiopian war and subsequent sanctions served to accelerate and intensify this political trajectory. Helstosky C F “Fascist food politics: Mussolini’s policy of alimentary sovereignty” in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* vol. 9.1, 2004, pp. 1-26.
mobilising Venetians into an organised resistance, let alone generating consent for the Fascist regime, the responses of Venetians to the attempts to regulate their consumption were characterised above all by contradiction and confusion.

It is telling that the majority of Venetians' diaries and memoirs from the 1930s held at the Archivio Diaristico Nazionale make reference to the League of Nations' sanctions, reflecting the place occupied by the “economic siege” as a luogo comune in the collective memory of fascism. The nature of Venetians' experiences and memories of the sanctions, however, was by no means uniform. Maria Damerini, the high-society wife of the editor of the Gazzetta newspaper, made repeated reference to the sanctions in her memoirs. Though not a card-carrying member of the party, Maria and her husband Gino remained very sympathetic to the fascist project, which Gino relentlessly promoted in the pages of the Gazzetta, and counted Giuseppe Volpi and other members of the Venetian fascist elite among their circle of friends. Of the onset of the sanctions, she recollected:

The sanctions, threatened, suspended and finally decided, arrived on 18 of November, exactly with the first frosts, perhaps, in the intention of those who decided them, in order that the winter season appear more inclement. They ceased not even nine months later. First and only application of the severity of the League of Nations.

Writing over fifty years after the event, Damerini mused on the ultimate beneficiary of the sanctions and how far the fascist regime was able to gain from its self-portrayal as the victim of injustice at the hands of the Great Powers. On reflection, Damerini concluded that the sanctions did not ultimately serve the fascist cause. However, she made clear that at the time, she, like many others, believed that the regime would actually benefit from the sanctions as they united Italians against a common enemy and she embraced anti-sanctions resistance, or at least her own interpretation of resistance:

To what and whom did they serve? At the time it seemed that they would benefit a closer union of Italians between themselves; instead I believe that in the long term others profited from them. Not immediately, but a little later, they served to catalyse the malcontent of those who, temporarily it seemed, though it was feared not, saw their foreign trade diminish.

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97 Four of the six memoirs held in the Archivio Diaristico Nazionale in Pieve Santo Stefano (AR) make reference to the League of Nations' sanctions. These are: MP/And Arnould V Me g'ha contà la nonna; Dogà A Dai racconti della nonna; MP/02 Baldo A G Ricordi di guerra di un diciasettenne 1940-45 (now published with the same title at Caselle Sommacampagna by Cierre Edizioni, 2004); MP/86 De Cilia R, (Armani B ed.) Mi chiamo Rosa De Cilia 'ai suoi comandi'.


99 A che e a chi servirono? Allora parve che fossero proficue all'unione più stretta degli italiani tra loro; invece io credo che a lunga scadenza ne approfittassero gli altri. Non nell'immediato, ma un po' più tardi, servirono a
Other memoirs, however, articulate a very different attitude; one of personal disdain for the government's policies which led to the pronouncement of the sanctions. In such accounts, the sanctions, far from rallying Italians to the national-fascist imperialist cause, in some cases exacerbated the distance between individual and regime. Rosa de Cilia, at the opposite end of the spectrum to Maria Damerini in terms of socio-economic status and political affiliation, wrote of her disapproval of the Ethiopian campaign, a sentiment she felt was given legitimacy by the League of Nations' decision to place sanctions on Italy.100 Again writing fifty years after the events she describes, De Cilia recorded her dismay and feeling of isolation in the face of ostensible popular support for fascist imperialist policies:

Ah yes because they wanted to conquer East Africa to free the slaves in chains and turn Italy into an empire.... In other words more war and more death! [...]

By now with this fascism there was no peace and everyone had to stay hush-hush, even those who had realised that – the war for East Africa won, which turned our King into an Emperor – we were going against the tide because a good fifty-two nations, gathered together – punished us decreeing sanctions against us ... and that meant "get by on what you produce yourselves". But the Duce had taught everyone this lovely reply: "I couldn't give a damn" and all the fascists who believed in – were convinced by – him said this and so Mussolini continued to promise heaven and earth and nobody doubted his words because .... you have to understand that when he gave his speeches batting his eyes and all jaunty, hands by his sides, he possessed a force which magnetised people.

Just imagine that once he asked all those who'd gone to sing his praises at Palazzo Venezia in Rome:- Comrades... Butter or Cannons? Do you know what they replied? Cannons!!!!!!! Ah yes, that’s just how they replied and I heard it with my own ears on the radio, of the "Voice of the Leader" brand, which we’d just bought in installments.

Even in the streets and piazzas of all Italy, those who’d gone to listen to his speech had cried: cannons!!!!!

Damn, but I was the only one who instead cried: butterrrrr! And a good thing that nobody heard me – for the grace of God – otherwise for this word, at the least, they would have sent me al confM

101 Eh si perche volevano conquistare l'Africa Orientale per liberare gli schiavi in catene e far diventare l'Italia un impero.... Insomma ancora guerra ed ancora morti! [...]
Venetians’ reactions to the sanctions, then, were inevitably complex and varied, ranging from the acceptance and indeed embracing of resistance measures to (clandestine) support for the decision of the League of Nations’ policy.

The impact of the sanctions on the Venetian daily diet exemplifies the sense of ambiguity and uncertainty engendered by the resistance propaganda. Of course, although certain dishes, particularly those associated with Venetian festivals such as castradina or the fried fish in saor (sweet and sour) eaten on the festa del Redentore in July, crossed socio-economic divides, the daily diet of Venetians varied enormously according to socio-economic status. Whilst the Venetian social elites regularly dined at the fashionable hotel restaurants on the Lido and along the Grand Canal, the staple diet of the popolani centred around fish, polenta, rice and vegetables. Eating habits at both extremes of the social spectrum, however, were influenced by the 1935-6 economic sanctions. At one end of the scale, Maria Damerini described the way in which the eating habits of at least some of the Venetian elites were altered by the sanctions:

To deprecate the sanctions, Anna and Francesco Malipiero came to lunch one day more often than the usual once per week.

The Damerinis’ and Malipieros’ tactic of dining together more frequently as a demonstration of malevolence towards the sanctions highlights the ambiguity of which actions could be considered to constitute anti-sanctions resistance; holding more luncheon parties, rather than less, surely contravened the exhortations of the Decalogo to maximize economy in all areas of the household and to eliminate bourgeois pastimes, entertainments and habits. That these couples chose to express their solidarity with the anti-sanctions resistance precisely by

contro corrente perchè ben cinquantadue nazioni, riunite fra di loro – ci castigarono decretando contro di noi le sanzioni ... e questo voleva dire “arrangiatevi da soli con quello che producete”. Ma il Duce aveva insegnato a tutti questa bella risposta: “Me ne frego” e tutti i fascisti che credevano in lui – convinti – la dicevano e così Mussolini continuava a promettere mari e monti e nessuno dubitava sulle sue parole perché.... si capisce che quando faceva i suoi discorsi tirando gli occhi e tutto pimpante con le mani sui fianchi, aveva in sé una forza che magnetizzava la gente.

Figuratevi che una volta ha domandato, a tutti quelli che erano andati ad osannarlo in Piazza Venezia a Roma:- Camerati... burro o cannoni? Sapete che cosa hanno risposto? – Cannoni!!!!!!!!! Eh sì, hanno risposto proprio così e l’ho sentito io con le mie orecchie per la radio, che avevano appena comprato a rate che era di marca “La voce del padrone”.

Anche per le strade e per le piazze di tutta Italia, quelli che erano andati ad ascoltare il suo discorso, avevano gridato: cannoni!!!!!!!!!

Ostrega, ma che fossi stata solo io che invece ho gridato: burrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr! E meno male che nessuno mi ha sentito – per grazia del Signore – altrimenti per questa parola, come minimo, mi avrebbero mandato al confino! Eh purtroppo una volta era così! Rosa De Cilia (Armani B ed.) Mi chiamo Rosa De Cilia ‘ai suoi comandi’. ADN MP/86 pp. 55-6.

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engaging in those practices that were forbidden or at least frowned upon underscores the level of confusion and range of highly personalised, often contradictory interpretations of resistance reached by individual Venetians.

Eating in company once more often per week in order to “spite the sanctions” was not an option for those Venetians who found themselves at the opposite end of the socio-economic ladder to the Damerinis. Antonio Baldo, a teenager at the time of the sanctions, came from a working class family in Marghera. In his memoir, he recounted his daily diet from the ‘time of the sanctions’:

I think it might be interesting to know the culinary ‘Menù’ of that time, in consideration of the limited economic possibilities and the state of autarchy imposed on the country by the fascist government for the war conducted in Ethiopia. [...] In 1936-7, at the family meal table was prepared:

In the morning barley coffee boiled Turkish-style in a pan with bread. Not always was there milk.

Lunch varied from beans with pasta, rice and peas, rice and potatoes, pastasciutta. We children were also given half a slice of bread with jam, or, alternatively, mortadella, the cheapest of the sausages. Same in the evening.

Sundays were distinguished by soup made with beef broth. Only on feast days did we eat with less limitation, for that reason we awaited such occasions anxiously.

Behind the house, beyond the workshop, my mother had fenced off a small patch of land creating a little menagerie (you could in those days) in which she kept hens and ducks. Making the most of these birds, she and the family could use eggs, chicken and duck meat. Steak: never set eyes on it!

For some Venetians the sanctions seem to have had little impact on their eating habits. The Gazzetta repeatedly reproached its readers and complained about non-compliance with the fascist directives related to the sanctions on the part of both Venetian shopkeepers and consumers. On 21 November 1935, the paper expressed its concern about the number of

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104 Baldo’s father had transferred his family to Marghera, where he found work as a night security guard in one of the industrial plants.

Venetian housewives whom it believed were not respecting the limits on consumption dictated by the authorities and asked readers to denounce any episodes of disobedience to the anti-sanctions measures:

A malevolent spirit has whispered in our ear that not every housewife passed by the fishmongers, nor did every housewife take herself off to the Rialto to procure a main course of cheese or vegetables. Is it possible that some families yesterday too [a Tuesday] ate beefsteak or a veal chop placed in an icehouse the night before; perhaps in that of an obliging butcher?106

Over the following days the paper continued to report evidence of shopkeepers' having infringed the anti-sanctions directives placed on them by the Commissario Intersindacale either by selling forbidden produce like meat or selling goods at higher prices. Amadeo Corso, Giovanni Folin and Scarpa Sante, to cite just three examples, were all punished by the Prefect for having violated anti-sanction diktats; Corso and Folin were ordered to close their grocery shops in Dorsoduro for one day for having sold eggs at a higher price than the decreed L.1.20 per pair, whilst Sante paid the same penalty for having sold radicchio trevigiano at L.1.50 on his Rialto stall, marked up excessively from its wholesale price of L.0.80. Other shopkeepers were even ordered to shut up shop for five days for having excessively marked up the price of goods.107

As the weeks progressed, initial hiccups and non-compliance with the anti-sanctions resistance measures set out by the fascist authorities mushroomed into real confusion as to what types of behaviour actually constituted resistance to the sanctions. At times, even the Venetian Fascist authorities were not sure as to how resistance ought to be carried out. On 21 January 1936 the federal secretary of the Venetian Fascio, Michele Pascolato, wrote to Giovanni Marinelli, administrative secretary of the PNF, revealing his confusion as to how to interpret anti-sanctions resistance directives: Pascolato had been solicited by a Parisian bookstore, the Maison du Livre Francais, to compel a Venetian bookshop, Libreria Tarantola, to pay a sum owing to the French firm for goods supplied. The Venetian bookshop, however, had had other plans. Pascolato wrote:

106 "Qualche maligno ci ha sussurrato presso l'orecchio che non tutte le massaie sono passate per la pescheria, né tutte si sono recate a Rialto per procacciarsi il piatto forte a base di formaggio e di verdura. È possibile che in qualche famiglia si sia mangiata anche ieri la bistecca di manzo o la costata di vitello poste in ghiacciaia la sera precedente; magari in quella di un macellaio compiacente?" Gazzetta 20 Nov. 1935 "Il metodico sviluppo della lotta contro le sanzioni".

107 Gazzetta 21 Nov. 1935 p. 4.
The Tarantola firm has deposited the sum into my hands, asking me to employ it, rather than as payment to a firm from a sanctionist country, towards purposes of assistance and resistance to the sanctions.\textsuperscript{108}

Having no idea as to how to proceed, Pascolato turned to Marinelli for instruction; from Marinelli’s reply it appears that, in this instance, the Venetian firm had acted somewhat overzealously in its interpretation of resistance:

Given that the transmission of money abroad is regulated by the Undersecretary for Exchange and Currency, I must point out that the Federation cannot keep the sum deposited with it by the Tarantola company.\textsuperscript{109}

The leaders of the Venetian Fascio were also perplexed as to how to conduct their own resistance to the sanctions and on occasion, as with the case of the excessively ardent Venetian bookstore, resorted to seeking clarification from the national party headquarters. In particular, questions arose over the proscribed obligation of Party branches to deal solely with ‘national’ firms for the provision of goods and services. For example, having requested proof from the Compagnia Multiplicatori “D.Gestetner” in Milan that the materials used in the duplicating machine recently purchased from the firm by the Venetian GUF were ‘made in Italy’, and having received no reply, Pascolato once again sought clarification from Marinelli as to the steps he now ought to take.\textsuperscript{110} In his reply, Marinelli, lightly reprimanding in tone, felt compelled to remind Pascolato of the party’s responsibility not merely to source materials nationally, but indeed to conduct business exclusively with Italian firms:

With reference to your n. 3087 of the 13 of this month regarding the provision of materials for the duplicator in the possession of [the Venetian] GUF, I must inform you that it is the sacrosanct duty of the Party not to buy from foreign firms, even if the Italian goods cost more.

I therefore request that you cancel without delay the order sent to Gestetner and purchase what is required from an Italian firm.

I await your assurances.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{108} “La Ditta Tarantola ha depositato a mie mani la somma, domandandomi di impiegarla, anziché come pagamento ad una ditta di paese sanzionista, per scopi di assistenza e di resistenza [sic] alle sanzioni.” Letter from Michele Pascolato to Giovanni Marinelli 21 Jan. 1936. ACS PNF DG Servizi vari Serie 1, b. 1187 9.89.12.

\textsuperscript{109} “Given that the transmission of money abroad is regulated by the Undersecretary for Exchange and Currency, I must point out that the Federation cannot keep the sum deposited to it by the Tarantola company.” Letter from Giovanni Marinelli to Michele Pascolato 30 Jan 1936. ACS PNF DG Servizi vari Serie 1, b. 1187 9.89.12.

\textsuperscript{110} Letter from Michele Pascolato to Giovanni Marinelli 13 Nov 1935. ACS PNF DG Servizi vari Serie 1 b. 1187 9.89.12.

\textsuperscript{111} Con riferimento alla sua N.3087 del 13 corrente in ordine alla fornitura di materiale per il duplicatore in possesso di codesto GUF, debbio farle presente che il Partito ha il sacrosanto dovere di non comperare da Ditte straniere, anche se la merce italiana costa di più.

Pregola pertanto disdirre senz’altro l’ordinazione passata alla Gestetner ed acquistare quanto occorre da Ditta italiana.
The confusion of the Venetian Fascio filtered through to the city’s population as they received contradictory messages from the authorities. In particular, a backlash arose, articulated in the Venetian press, against so-called pseudo-sanctionism; those who used the pretext of resisting the sanctions to justify excessive parsimony and lack of spending. The pseudo-sanctionists were accused of failing to support and actually damaging Italian business through their inadequate expenditure and, consequently, of not fulfilling their duty as patriots or fascists: whilst it was considered desirable that the nation should strive towards self-sufficiency, individuals, it now seemed, should be anything but.112

By mid-December, the Gazzetta realised that it had perhaps been too hasty in the advice it had given readers on resistance to the sanctions. Instead of continuing to publish articles inspired by early fascist measures like the Decalogo delle Donne Italiane, urging Venetians towards autarchic practices including the cultivation of any spare pocket of land (in short supply in Venice) for vegetables and animal-rearing, the paper now railed against those who "have confused the duty of every Italian to control against imported goods with miserliness, reducing their spending without need, fleeing public spaces, evading the obligations of their rank, deserting shops and thereby injuring our very own commerce, industry, labour and artisan sector; whilst instead what was needed was to give these the strength to become established, with tangible demonstrations of solidarity."113 Instead of retreating from the marketplace into auto-consumption, the revised course of action Venetians were now advised to take was to maintain, even increase, their spending and consumption, but only of ‘national products’:

To resume the rhythm of our life without worry, indeed to spur on our life, helping it with diverse demonstrations in all fields of spirit and labour, this is the real task of each and every one of us. And to unmask that false Franciscan-ism which is concerned only not to put hand to purse... out of patriotic duty.114

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112 See Gazzetta 14 Dec. 1935 “Per la nostra vita indipendente dalle sanzioni”.
113 “Hanno confuso il dovere di controllo di ogni italiano contro le merci di importazione con la taccagneria, riducendo senza bisogno le proprie spese, fuggendo i luoghi pubblici, sottraendosi agli obblighi del proprio grado, disertando i negozi, e colpendo così il commercio, le industrie, il lavoro e l’artigianato prettamente nostri; mentre bisognava invece dare ad essi forza per affermarsi, con dimostrazioni tangibili di solidarietà.” Gazzetta 14 Dec. 1935 “Per la nostra vita indipendente dalle sanzioni”.
114 “Riprendere il ritmo della nostra vita senza importare, spornare, anzi, la vita nostra, aiutandola con manifestazioni varie in tutti i campi dello spirito e del lavoro, ecco il vero compito di ognuno e di tutti. E smascherare quel falso franciscanismo che si preoccupa soltanto di non metter mano alla borsa... per dovere patriottico.” Gazzetta 14 Dec. 1935 “Per la nostra vita indipendente dalle sanzioni”.
The debate about pseudo-sanctionism and the correct way to resist the "economic siege" was particularly fierce with relation to clothing and fashion, once again placing Venetian women in the frontline of resistance to the sanctions. Of course, the League of Nations' sanctions by no means marked the beginnings of the fascist regime's interest in female clothing, nor indeed did it signal the first attempts to 'nationalise' the world of fashion. From the turn of the century, women's magazines such as *La Donna* and *Margherita* had promoted the national character of Italian fashion, highlighting the unsuitability of "the cosmopolitan figure proclaimed by Paris, which often renders the Italian woman a doll" or of English styles which "dehydrate and make her ridiculous".\(^{115}\) The impact of the Depression, following the 1929 Wall Street Crash, prompted general fashion trends to reject the *maschietta* style of the *anni ruggenti* - much abhorred by Catholic and fascist commentators - in favour of more nostalgic, modest and voluminous designs. Though fascism had for some time promoted its own ideal models of beauty - the "authentic woman" in contrast to the independent, thin, masculine, anti-maternal and foreign-influenced "crisis woman" - the regime took up the cause of promoting suitably 'patriotic' fashion in a concerted, organized manner in the early 1930s.\(^{116}\) In 1932 the regime instituted a regulatory body to govern and "restore life and strength " to the Italian clothing industry, the *Ente autonomo per la mostra permanente della moda*.\(^{117}\) By the time of the introduction of the sanctions - which undoubtedly accelerated its mission - the *Ente* could count upon the efforts of approximately 1,500 Italian (aristocratic) women,\(^ {118}\) organized in sixty

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116 For example, in 1931, the head of the Ufficio Stampa, Gaetano Polvereili, ordered newspapers to eliminate from their pages female images considered too slim or masculine and representative of a sterile female type. De Giorgio M *Moda* p. 141-2. In addition, women's magazines, following the example set by Lidel in 1932, championed the cause of the 'anti-slimming' campaign. Gnoli S *La donna, l'eleganza, il fascismo* pp. 44-7.

117 "Ridare vita e forza." Approved with the *Legge* n.1618 published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* on 26 December 1932. In 1935 the *Ente* became known more simply as the *Ente Nazionale della Moda*, following the *Decreto-Legge* n.2084 of 31 October 1935, which also increased the scope of the *Ente* from the "progressive affirmation of Italian fashion" ("progressiva affermazione della moda italiana") to include "the strengthening and increasing of the fashion and clothing industries and related businesses both in Italy and abroad" ("il potenziamento e l'incremento, sia in Italia che all'estero, delle industrie delle attività di moda e dell'abbigliamento o ad esse collegate"). See Gnoli S *La donna, l'eleganza, il fascismo* p. 68.

118 De Giorgio M *Moda* p. 141. De Giorgio pointed out that these aristocratic women were those who, until recently, would be most likely to have worn the very 'exotic' fashions now prohibited. In addition, she indicated that she has no proof of the zealousness displayed by these women in dressing in 'national rayon' or *orbace* (Sardinian woollen cloth) in accordance with the "nuova mentalità femminile". Indeed, Victoria De Grazi has demonstrated that, although the mid-1930s, coinciding with the experience of the sanctions and the Ethiopian war, marked a new phase in the regime's attempts to regulate female fashions, particularly with the introduction of uniforms - blue gabardine dresses with white piqué blouses designed by the ultra-modish Fontana sisters - for the Fascist *Visitatrici* such directives were by no means universally heeded. Starace, for example, voiced his frustration at the reluctance of Fascist women to don uniforms made of the rough *orbace* used for male uniforms. De Grazi V *"Nationalising Women. The Competition between Fascist and Commercial Cultural Models in Mussolini's Italy"* in eds. De Grazi V with Furlough E *The Sex of Things*, pp. 351-4.
committees, to promote its Directory of Italian Tailors and marca di garanzia; a triangular golden ticket which certified individual items of clothing considered worthy for their "rigorously autarchic" materials and "authentically national" form.\textsuperscript{119}

Although the promotion of national fashion in Italy was well underway by the mid 1930s, the Ente's efforts were not always met with universal enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{120} In Venice – a meeting place for the Hollywoodian and European international-set and the location of the international Biennale art exhibition and film festival – patriotic fashion faced a perhaps greater degree of competition from rival cultural trendsetters, often from abroad. The memoirs of Maria Damerini, for example, which discussed at length the changing trends and styles of Venetian high-society fashions, evoke a picture, at least in the first half of the 1930s, of a fashion scene which drew its inspiration from Paris and, particularly, from Vogue magazine.\textsuperscript{121}

The anomalous direction of Venetian fashions perhaps helps explain the contradiction and confusion in the Venetian press' prescriptions on female clothing habits in the light of the sanctions. Every Monday the Gazzetta included a section dedicated to "Elegance, advice and female readers letters". With the on-set of the economic sanctions, this section digressed from its usual discussion of the latest cuts, colours and fabrics and instead began to urge its female readers to be parsimonious, to make and repair clothes at home and, if and when they had no alternative, to buy only clothes 'made in Italy'. The edition published on 2 December rejoiced in the disappearance of foreign furs, hats and perfume and their replacement in shop-windows by goods whose Italian provenance was clearly displayed.\textsuperscript{122} But resistance through fashion ought

\textsuperscript{119} "Rigorosamente autarchica […] autenticamente nazionale." The firms listed in the directory of Italian tailors were obliged to produce at least 25% of their goods certified by the marca di garanzia. Failure to reach this target could be punished by fines of between L. 500-2,000. Gnoli S. La donna, l'eleganza, il fascismo pp. 30-1.

\textsuperscript{120} Gnoli does point, however, the limits of the Ente Nazionale della Moda's reach. The Ente was accused of impracticality in carrying out its directives, whilst Ester Lombardo, a fervent supporter of the regime and editor of Vita Femminile, deplored the devaluation of the marca di garanzia, which she felt was awarded to too many – or to be precise too many 'insignificant' – clothing manufacturers: "Accanto al vestito e al cappello della grande casa troviamo marchiato il cappellino da magazzino e il vestituccio da dozzina di casa a serie, così che la signora in nome di italianità può essere vestita presapoco a somiglianza della propria cuoca. Sacrificio che non bisogna chiedere ad una signora." Lombardo E "Il primo esperimento di moda italiana" in Vita Femminile, Apr. 1936 p. 9, cited in Gnoli S. La donna, l'eleganza, il fascismo p. 93. Furthermore, whilst the judging of clothes put forward for the marca di garanzia was carried out principally through the use of photographs, the Italian fashion houses, unlike the French, were not accustomed to photographing their creations, leaving the Italian women's magazines with a significant shortage of images of national fashions with which to regale their readership. Gnoli S La donna, l'eleganza, il fascismo p. 94-5.

\textsuperscript{121} Damerini M Gli ultimi anni del leone p. 82.

\textsuperscript{122} "Una manifestazione plebiscitaria per il prodotto nazionale, [un'] opportuna rettifica dei gusti e delle abitudini della clientela femminile." Gazzetta 2 Dec. 1935 "Eleganze, Consigli e Posta delle Lettrine: Parliamo alle donne".

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to go further, according to the Gazzetta, "beyond the appearance of shop-windows, it must reverberate deep in the souls and convictions" of Venetian women. The paper insisted:

It's essential to be self-sufficient, above all it's essential that our own production is known and appreciated in the correct way.\textsuperscript{123}

The "italianisation" of fashion, the Gazzetta asserted, was imperative for two reasons: firstly, because "precisely the current difficult emergencies will give the maximum thrust towards rendering such an important branch of female industry independent from abroad"; and secondly, it provided a means of consolidating the fascist project. Fashion, it seemed, was also a question of race:

What we don't have, we'll find a way of replacing. But, besides primary materials, we possess, and this counts more than anything else, the good taste innate to our race, the ingenuity of our designers, our tailors, and our shoemakers. We'll make our own! We have the strength and pride, made more alive because expressed by an entire people, solidly united in the fascist discipline, in which the shared aspirations of producers, distributors and consumers are combined.\textsuperscript{124}

Such unity of purpose, however, had disappeared from the pages of the Gazzetta just three weeks later when the author of the fashion section addressed her readers with a new apologetic and embarrassed tone. Having been accused of defeatism by "leading industrialists" for directing Venetian women towards prudence and frugality in their dress, her instructions for resisting the sanctions were now completely reversed.

Fashion is and must remain rich, and all these makeshift measures can only be modest solutions to small individual problems, and if we want an Italian fashion to be born and to flourish, let's remember that the cradle of this newborn which all Italian women are ready to love and to welcome with joy, must be a precious cradle and not a humble nest of wood and scanty rags. [...] 

Instead of economy it would be better to speak of common sense, measure, taking care not to push women too far down the road towards the most austere renunciations which as an immediate consequence could bring significant damage to numerous categories of industrialists and workers who are, and can become even more so in the future, a living force of the Nation. [...] 

\textsuperscript{123} "Oltre l'esteriorità delle vetrine, deve ripercuotersi in profondità negli animi e nelle convinzioni [...]Occorre bastare a noi stessi, occorre soprattutto che sia conosciuta ed apprezzata al giusto modo la nostra produzione." Ibid. 

\textsuperscript{124} "Proprio le attuali dure contingenze sapranno dare la massima spinta a rendere indipendente dall'estero quella importantissima bran chià dell'industria femminile [...] Per quello che non abbiamo, troveremo il mezzo di sostituirlo. Ma, oltre le materie prime, noi possediamo, e ciò conta più di tutto, il buon gusto innato nella razza, l'ingegno dei nostri creatori, dei nostri sarti, dei nostri calzolai. Faremo da noi! Ne abbiamo la forza e l'orgoglio, tanto più vivo l'altro in quanto espressi da tutto un popolo, saldamente unito nella disciplina fascista, nel quale sono fuse le aspirazioni concordi dei produttori, dei distributori e dei consumatori." Ibid.
Doors open and hearts open to this Italian fashion which before being able to give us what we want, has yet need of our faith and, let's be honest, also our money.\(^\text{125}\)

It is difficult to imagine that Venetian *popolane*, in the throes of the decline of the *centro storico*’s traditional industries, would have been able to heed the call to increase consumption of nationally produced clothing. In terms of the clothing habits of wealthier Venetians, on the other hand, evidence suggests that the exhortations of the anti-sanctions resistance did indeed enjoy some impact. Maria Damerini chartered the effect of the sanctions on fashion within her elite social circle. Though she made no mention of the *marca di garanzia*, Damerini suggested that high-society women were indeed persuaded to follow the advice to swap foreign labels for Italian designers:

Some people at home, however, benefited from the sanctions: among the industries, that which profited most was clothing. Italian fashion, which had already taken its first steps, suddenly matured, asserted itself, was liked. First Florence and immediately afterwards Milan and Rome made a name for themselves. Other Italian cities, especially in the north, followed hot on their heels. The names of Ferragamo, Biky, Palmer, Caraceni replaced with decisive aplomb Hermes, Poiret, Chanel, Patou, Balenciaga. The Italian woman initiated new sporting, directive, responsible activities with Italian fashion.\(^\text{126}\)

But not only did Damerini suggest that the sanctions prompted the Venetian elite to shift their allegiance to Italian fashion designers, she claimed that they also dictated a new style of clothing, one that was decidedly more simple and practical than before. As she put it:

\(^{125}\) La moda è e deve rimanere ricchezza, e tutti I ripieghi non possono essere che modeste soluzioni di piccoli problemi individuali, e se vogliamo che nasca e fiorisca una moda italiana, ricordiamoci che la culla di questa neonata che tutte le donne italiane sono pronte ad amare e ad accogliere con gioia, deve essere una culla preziosa e non un modesto nido di legno e di poveri cenci. [\ldots]
Quindi più che di economia sarà opportuno parlare di buon senso, di misura, guardandosi bene dallo spingere troppo le donne sulla via delle più austere rinuncia che possono portare come conseguenza immediata, un danno importantissimo a numerose categorie di industriali e di lavoratori che sono e possono diventare ancora di più in seguito, una forza viva della Nazione. [\ldots]
Porte aperte e cuori aperti a questa moda italiana che prima di poterci dare quello che aspettiamo, ha pur bisogno che noi le doniamo fede e si, bisogna pur dirlo, anche denaro!" *Gazzetta* 23 Dec. 1935 “Eleganze, Consigli, Posta delle Lettrici”.

\(^{126}\) "Qualcuno se ne giovò tuttavia, anche in casa nostra, delle Sanzioni: tra le industrie ne profittò maggiormente quella dell'abbigliamento. La moda italiana che aveva mosso di già i primi passi, maturò di colpo, si affermò, piazzette. Firenze per prima e subito dopo Milano e Roma s'imposero. Seguirono a ruota le altre città italiane specie dell'Italia del nord. I nomi di Ferragamo, Biky, Palmer, Caraceni sostituirono con decisa padronanza Hermes, Poiret, Chanel, Patou, Balenciaga. La donna italiana s'avviò con moda italiana alle nuove attività sportive, direttive, responsabili." Damerini M *Gli ultimi anni del leone* p. 186. This example perhaps represents an instance of inaccuracy in Maria Damerini’s memory; although Salvatore Ferragamo, Marta Palmer and Domenico Caraceni had established collections by 1935, the first Biki clothing collection, designed by Elvira Leonardi, appeared in 1936 and the label only really took off from 1937. Admittedly, the label had designed collections of ladies’ underwear since 1934. See Gnoli S *La donna, l'eleganza, il fascino* pp. 57 & 110.
What Coco Chanel did for Paris, the Sanctions did for Italy. *L'overdress* came to be considered an enormous sin of taste, purchasing abroad came to be considered an enormous sin against the economy.¹²⁷

Indeed Damerini recalled how not only the sanctions, but also other aspects of the fascist imperialist project dictated women's fashions: "The war in Africa brought greater liberty in the summer, the war in Spain, straight afterwards, brought us the elegance of the bolero."¹²⁸

The fascist authorities, under the pretext of the economic sanctions, not only sought to dictate what kinds of foods ordinary Venetian consumers should eat, or which products they ought to buy. Fusing *venezianità* with the fascist project, the local press began a campaign to promote a return to that most Venetian of modes of transport; the gondola. The very geophysical nature of the city meant that the declared need to save petrol as a result of the sanctions caused particular concern for the passage of people and goods around the city.¹²⁹ Inflated petrol prices rendered the cost of using *motoscafi*, already high, prohibitive for much of the population. In addition, within the first days of the sanctions coming into effect, the *Azienda Comunale* introduced a vastly reduced timetable of its waterbus lines, causing great inconvenience to ordinary Venetians, particularly those living in peripheral but increasingly-populated parts of Venice – the extremities of Sant'Elena, Cannaregio and the Lido – where the population relied heavily on the *vaporetti* to ferry them to and from work.¹³⁰ The solution to this problem seemed obvious to the Venetian press; all that was required was the reinvention of the city's most famous tradition. With great satisfaction at its own common sense, the *Gazzetta* observed:

With regards to the city of Venice and urban communications there, there's a very simple and agreeable means of saving petrol: a return to the gondola. [...] Here, therefore, the gondola returns to the front line of civil life as the most useful and economic means of transporting

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¹²⁸ "La guerra d'Africa portò nell'estate una libertà più decisa, la guerra di Spagna, subito dopo, portò da noi la grazia del bolero." Ibid. The experience of participation in the Spanish Civil War did not just affect the direction of Italian fashions; Sheila Fitzpatrick, in her fascinating work on everyday life in the Stalinist Soviet Union, noted Aleksei Adzhubei, the editor of *Izvestiia*'s recollection of how in 1937, "Spanish caps – blue with red edging on the visor – came into fashion, and also big berets, which we tilted at a rakish angle." Fitzpatrick S *Everyday Stalinism* p. 69.

¹²⁹ Petrol was not included in the list of import materials prohibited by the sanctions; nevertheless, the *Gazzetta* commented on 20 November 1935 on the "elevated price of petrol" ("prezzo elevato della benzina"). Six days later, however, the need to save petrol was ascribed not to its prohibitive cost, but to two motives: "first of all because it comes from abroad and secondly because it is greatly employed in wartime, particularly in the case of a colonial war" ("prima di tutto perché ci viene dall'estero, in secondo luogo perché è di larghissimo impiego bellico specie quando si tratti di una guerra coloniale"). *Gazzetta* 20 Nov. 1935 "Il compito della gondola" & 26 Nov. 1935 "La gondola e le sanzioni. Un esempio significativo".

¹³⁰ *Gazzetta* 20 Nov. 1935 "Il compito della gondola".
people. And here a good opportunity is presented to the gondola and gondolier to
demonstrate with facts the practicality and convenience of their service.\textsuperscript{131}

The paper noted that the Gondoliers’ association had already resolved to offer public
institutions, private firms and individuals the hire of a gondola and gondolier for an
indeterminate length of time, “at particularly advantageous terms”.\textsuperscript{132} For the Gazzetta,
however, this did not go far enough. Given the current “exceptional period of national and
Venetian life”, the paper argued that gondolas ought to be made available “at particularly
advantageous terms”, to the entire population of the city, and furthermore called for all gondolas
to be kitted out – “as long ago” – with the felze, the covered wooden cabin designed to protect
passengers from the inclement winter weather.\textsuperscript{133} The Gazzetta’s plea for the “return to the
gondola” then, was articulated in essentially practical terms: increased use of the gondola
would reconcile the need to provide transportation around the city’s waterways with the
obligation to curb petrol consumption. However, its campaign, whilst recognising the need to
provide the Venetian masses with an alternative to the public vaporetto service, was directed
principally at the city’s elites, “who currently avail themselves of motorboats even to travel very
brief distances”.\textsuperscript{134} Once again, it was the wealthy Venetian middle-class and patrician elites
who found themselves the principal targets of the anti-sanctions resistance. To this end, on 26
November the Gazzetta reported the commendable example set by the Prefect, Benigni, who,
in order to travel (the brief distance) from the Prefecture to Ca’ Foscari University for a degree
presentation ceremony, “made use of a gondola with two oars, furnished with the traditional
“felze” and has decided to definitively adopt the old means of transport at least for journeys
within the city”.\textsuperscript{135}

The journal, Le Tre Venezie, on the other hand, took a far less practical tone and made its
appeal for the return of the gondola in the service of the regime in romantic, almost spiritual
terms. For Guido Marta, author of the article lauding the “symbol of the Ducal City” in the
November 1935 issue of the journal, the restoration of the “old Venetian boat” to spite the

\textsuperscript{131} “Per quanto riguarda poi la città di Venezia e le sue comunicazioni urbane, c’è un mezzo semplicissimo e
simpatcissimo di risparmiare la benzina: ritornare alla gondola. [...] Eccoci adunque che la gondola torna nel primo
piano della vita cittadina come il piu utile ed il piu economico mezzo di trasporto delle persone. Ed ecco che alla
gondola e al gondoliere si presenta una bella occasione di addimostare coi fatti la praticita e la convenienza del
loro servizio.” Gazzetta 24 Nov. 1935 “Risparmiare la benzina” and 20 Nov. 1935 “Il compito della gondola.”

\textsuperscript{132} “A condizioni particolarmente vantaggiose.” Gazzetta 20 Nov. 35 “Il compito della gondola.”

\textsuperscript{133} “Eccezionale periodo della vita nazionale e veneziana.” Ibid.

\textsuperscript{134} “Che ora si valgono del motoscafo anche per percorrere brevissime distanze.” Ibid.

\textsuperscript{135} “S’è valso della gondola a due remi munita del “felze” tradizionale ed ha deciso di adottare definitivamente il
vecchio mezzo di trasporto almeno per i percorsi in città.” Gazzetta 20 Nov. 1935 “Il compito della gondola.”
"iniquitous sanctions [...] has undoubtedly a significance full of nobility, poetry and - let's say it - melancholy." Revealing his animatistic conception of the gondola, Marta lamented the relegation of the "old deposed dame [...] in out of the way shipyards to convalesce from some inveterate illness or to wallow in the sun, tied to mooring-poles". His pleasure at witnessing the "revenge" of the gondola over the "shiny roaring motorboats, which - in recent times - in all directions plough through the tranquil waters of the Grand Canal, as if they owned it," was presented not only as the triumph of tradition over modernity but also as a victory for the fascist project:

With pleasure we re-entrust ourselves to her as if between the consoling arms of an old friend, who without rancour will forget certain desertions and will renew for us the illusion of a return to the past.

And it's also for this reason that it is necessary, now more than ever, that every manifestation of the Fascist Regime aspire to the most sincere and home-grown traditions, to contribute in every way to the re-flowering of this ancient means of transport and sport, re-establishing - aside from practical consideration - its just aesthetic and spiritual value.

This view of the gondola and the traditions and mythical image of Venice that it represents, stands as the polar opposite to the description of gondolas proffered by the leader of the futurist movement, Marinetti, as "rocking chairs for cretins" in his 1910 Manifesto, in which he called for the death of "the old Venice of foreigners, market of fake antiquaries, calamity of snobbery and universal imbecility, sagging bed of caravans of lovers, gem-encrusted hip bath of cosmopolitan courtesans, utmost cesspit of traditionalism," and, in its place, "the birth of an industrial and military Venice able to dominate the Adriatic sea, the great Italian lake."

How far this call for the return to everyday use of the gondola as Venetians' principal mode of transport was heeded is difficult to judge. Certainly, none of the memoirs of Venetian popolani mention the employment of gondolas to move around the city during the period of the sanctions.

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137 "Con piacere ci raffidiamo a lei come tra le braccia consolatrici di una vecchia amica, che senza rancore saprà dimenticare certi abbandoni e rinnovare per noi l'illusione che il passato ritorni. Ed è anche per questo ch'è necessario, oggi più che mai, che alla tradizione più scietta e più nostra s'ispira ogni manifestazione del Regime Fascista, contribuire in tutti i modi al rifiorire di questo antico mezzo di trasporto e di dipinto, rimettendolo - a parte ogni considerazione pratica - nel suo giusto valore estetico e spirituale." Ibid.

138 "Poltrone a dondolo per cretini [...] l'antica Venezia dei forestieri, mercato di antiquari falsificatori, calamità dello snobismo e dell'imbécilità universali, letto sfondato da carovane di amanti, semicupio ingemmato per cortigiane cosmolitichi, cloaca massima del passatismo [...] la nascita di una Venezia industriale e militare che possa dominare il mare Adriatico, gran lago italiano." From Marinetti F T (ed De Masia L) *Teoria e invenzione futurista* Milano 1983 p33-4
(or at any other time). However, a double page article published in a March 1936 issue of the Gazzettino Illustrato intimated that the appeal to use gondolas was enjoying notable success [figs. 10 & 11]. The article asserted that, since the introduction of the sanctions, the waters of the Grand Canal had fallen silent because of the near disappearance of motoscafi. Meanwhile, it continued, the gondola was experiencing a renaissance as “the authorities and private individuals, for ease of transport, have taken up its use once more, sending their shiny motorboats into the shipyards where they rest.”\textsuperscript{139} No longer “a thing of the past”, a decadent ornament “distinctly detached from present-day life”; indeed, the number of gondolas in the city’s fleet had risen:

Now, however, [the gondola] has shown itself to be even more useful than before, leading to an increase in the ‘fleet’ possessed by the city, which is formed of approximately fifty gondolas.\textsuperscript{140}

Perhaps the Venetian (fascist) political and business elite were persuaded to demonstrate their patriotism by swapping motoscafo for gondola, if only for the short journeys around the channels of the centro storico: given the exorbitant cost of riding a gondola, then as now, it seems less likely that the Gazzetta’s campaign to promote the availability of gondolas at an “advantageous” price for “anybody whatsoever” enjoyed an equal degree of success.

To conclude, although the economic consequences of the sanctions were perhaps slight, their value to the regime in terms of propaganda was considerable. Through the organisation of common forms and rituals of resistance such as those advocated in the Venetian Fascio femminile’s Decalogo delle Donne Italiane, the Giornata della fede and drives to save and collect scrap paper, wood and metal, the fascist authorities attempted to mobilise Venetians, particularly women as envisaged consumers and children, not only into the vanguard of resistance to the sanctions but also in active support of the Italian imperialist project. Here, women were marshalled not as ahistorical repositories of national virtue and continuity, but as

\textsuperscript{139} “Autorità e privati per comodità di trasporto ne hanno ripreso l’uso inviando nei cantieri i lucidi motoscafi che ne stanno così in riposo.” Il Gazzettino Illustrato 29/03/36 “La gondola ... non consuma benzina”

\textsuperscript{140} “Una cosa passata [...] nettamente staccato dalla vita dei nostri giorni [...]”Ora invece [la gondola] si è dimostrata anche più utile di prima determinando un aumento nella “flotta” posseduta dalla città e che è formato all’incirca da cinquanta gondole.” Ibid
LA GONDOLA...

Mentre la gondola, grazie a vari dei diversi
mecanismi dell'antico condotto, permette la circolazione
alla corrente del fiume, venendo in contatto con
i potenziali blocchi che possono ostacolare la navigazione:
con una rigorosa tecnica, l'operatore guida la veletta
con movimenti delicati e precisi, evitando di interferire
con le barriere naturali che possono impediare la navigazione.

Figure 10: Il Gazzettino Illustrato 29 March 1936
Sotto il capo d'asse, ultimato da un certo momento, si vede un cartello con una scritta: "NON CONSUMA BENZINA"

Figure 11: *Il Gazzettino Illustrato* 29 March 1936
agents in the historical transformation from nation to empire.\footnote{In this sense, the sanctions represented one element of the fascist imperialist project in which women were envisaged outside of the static and essentially passive role which Patrizia Palumbo's recent study of children's colonial literature at the time of the Ethiopian war has shown was usually assigned to them. See Palumbo P “Orphans for the Empire” pp. 225-251.} The sanctions were seized as a means of creating fascist men and women; anti-sanctions propaganda tended to direct their attention to the consumptive habits and practices of the Venetian ‘bourgeoisie’ and patrician classes, more likely to consume ‘foreign’ products or to have assimilated fashionable ‘foreign’ habits in their lifestyles, now deemed anti-fascist. In this way, the sanctions provided an opportunity to advance the autarchic and anti-bourgeois ideals of the fascist ‘revolution’.\footnote{Indeed, the fact that many of the autarchic directives put into place as part of the raft of measures to resist the sanctions remained in place even after the sanctions had been lifted, lends credence to the idea that the sanctions provided the fascist regime with the opportunity to increase and accelerate a policy of autarchy which already enjoyed ideological currency among the fascist hierarchy. See Morgan P Italian Fascism pp. 166-7.}

Ultimately, however, the impact of the anti-sanctions measures was circumscribed by the often confusing and contradictory messages emitted. Certainly, the anti-sanctions directives imposed by the regime did seek to penetrate many aspects everyday life in Venice; patterns of consumption – what people ate, how they dressed, how they travelled – domestic habits and even language. And some Venetians, particularly those from the middle and upper classes at whom so much of the anti-sanction resistance was directed, did modify their daily habits and lifestyles in accordance with the fascist directives and propaganda, whether in terms of eating ‘national products’, wearing fashions created by Italian, rather than Parisian, designers or swapping their \textit{motoscafo} for the symbolically Venetian gondola.

Crucially, though, the sanctions cannot be seen to have gifted Mussolini’s regime an unequivocally successful means of gathering support for its ‘revolution’. Much of the resistance directives and advice was ambiguous and equivocal, allowing space for individuals to interpret, appropriate and disrespect the measures in multiple ways: the confusion surrounding actions that could be read either as acts of sanctions resistance or psuedo-sanctionism in the sphere of ladies’ fashion is a case in point. This ambiguity in the modes of behaviour judged to constitute ‘resistance’ to the sanctions allowed individuals to construct trajectories of behaviour which, even under the auspices of resistance, often deviated from official anti-sanctions rhetoric. In this way, Maria Damerini and friends could rejoice in their belief that, by holding dinner parties more frequently, they were doing their bit to resist the sanctions. For Venetian \textit{popolani} including shopkeepers and manual workers for whom the question of mere economic survival...
was so pressing, support for the anti-sanction resistance measures, though forthcoming in terms of principally symbolic acts of resistance as articulated in the *Giornata della fede*, was more circumspect with regard to measures that would entail or exacerbate material hardship and was at times subject to ‘tactics’ which resisted resistance, such as Vana Arnould’s mother and aunt’s decision to donate emotionally worthless ‘fake’ wedding rings to the *patria*. Other resistance measures, such as the vetoing of meat consumption on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, were largely academic to a sector of society which, in the words of Antonio Baldo, never set eyes on a piece of steak.

The picture that emerges, then, of the impact of the sanctions on everyday life in Venice, is far from the De Felicean image of the population to a man rallying in unequivocal support not merely for the Ethiopian war and resistance to the sanctions, but also to the fascist imperialist project in general: on the contrary, the reaction of Venetians to the economic sanctions meted out by the League of Nations and to the anti-sanctions ‘resistance’ promoted by the fascist authorities defies neat categorisation, revealing instead a multiplicity of personal choices and responses, a space where Venetian consumer-producers could accept, reinterpret, appropriate, and at times disrespect and subvert the resistance measures in multiple, complex ways.
Chapter 5

Death in Venice: The fascistisation of funerals and the rituals of death

On Friday 3 June 1936, in the Gazzetta di Venezia, one of Venice’s two daily newspapers, the following notice, printed in large, bold letters, appeared, announcing the death of a Venetian man killed during the fascist campaign in Ethiopia. It read:

On the 11 May, in sight of the Robi torrent near Makfud, wounded to the chest, heroically fell,

EUGENIO MANETTI
Captain of the Savoy division
Volunteer in the Alpine division in the Great War – Silver medal – Squadrista of the first hour
Volunteer in East Africa

His wife, daughter, mother and all his relatives announce the supreme sacrifice of their beloved for the adored fatherland.

The obsequies will be celebrated on 10 June at 10.30am in the church of San Maurizio in Venice.
VENICE, 3 June 1936 – XIV

A report of the announced funeral appeared in the paper on 11 June. Captain Manetti’s funeral was attended by eminent representatives of fascist, military and war veterans’ organisations, as well as an “emotional crowd”. Inside the church, the funeral bier was covered by the Italian tricolour, on which a helmet had been laid. The coffin was surrounded by a ring of wax candles and, beyond these, by two lines of representatives of local fascist groups and youth organisations, each carrying their banners and pennants. Members of the 71st infantry division and of various Great War veterans’ organisations made up the honorary escort.

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1 Il giorno 11 maggio, al guardo del torrente Robi presso Makfud, colpito al petto è caduto da eroe
EUGENIO MANETTI
Capitano della divisione sabauda
Volontario degli Alpini nella grande guerra – medaglia d’argento – Squadrista della prima ora
Volontario in A. O.
La moglie Maria Radaelli con la figlia Margherita, la madre Gisella Asti ved. Manetti, ed i congiunti tutti, danno l’annuncio del supremo sacrificio del loro Caro alla Patria adorato.
Le esequie saranno celebrate il giorno 10 Giugno alle ore 10.30 nella Chiesa di San Maurizio in Venezia.
VENEZIA, 3 Giugno 1936 – XIV. Gazzetta 3 Jun. 36.

2 Gazzetta 11 Jun. 1936 “Le esequie del cap. Eugenio Manetti”.
3 Gazzetta 11 Jun. 1936 “Le esequie del cap. Eugenio Manetti”.

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After the Catholic requiem mass, read by the local parish priest, came the fascist ritual: the *appello fascista* or fascist roll call. The vice-secretary of the Venetian *fascio*, Dott. Giunio Favini, called out the name "of the departed comrade, in whose name the crowd responded: Present!" Captain Manetti’s body was then carried to the waiting funeral gondola and rowed out to the cemetery island of San Michele for burial. The ritual surrounding Captain Manetti’s death was completed with a further notice placed jointly in the *Gazzetta* by his wife and mother to thank the Fascist Party, the Armed Forces and other organisations that had participated in the funeral of their husband and son.

Six years earlier, in May 1930, the Venetian *fascio* had lamented the ‘fall’ of another of its company, the ardent young blackshirt, Militia *Capo Squadra*, Gesù Codré. The death of Codré was brought to the attention of Mussolini by his mother, who requested that the *Duce* make provision that "a plaque be placed on the tomb of her son, recording his faith and enthusiasm for the Fascist cause nurtured until his final moments, not having the means to provide directly for this herself." The Fascist party resolved to meet Codré’s mother’s request, moved by the blend of maternal grief and fascist sentiment articulated in her letter:

Excellency,

Allow me your benign patience to read these miserable lines.

I am a mother grieving for the loss of her only son, 25 year old Codré Gesù, *squadrista purissimo* from the very first moment of the fascist movement and the first to gather members to the advantage of the fascio of Udine, in Friuli. […]

He died of an infection in just a few days. Before dying he said, as he always he used to say, that he would have liked to have a glorious death, worthy of his fascist faith.

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4 Ibid.
5 The *ringraziamento* notice appeared in the *Gazzetta* on 11 Jun. 1936.
6 "Sulla tomba del figliuolo sia apposta una lapide che ne ricordi la fede e gli entusiasmi nutriti fino all’ultima ora per la Causa Fascista, non avendo essa i mezzi per provvedervi direttamente." Letter from Giovanni Marinelli (Administrative Secretary of the PNF) to Giorgio Suppiej (Federal secretary of the Venetian Fascio) 20 May 1930. ACS PNF DG Servizi vari, Serie 1, b. 1183, corrispondenza.
Now he lies in the cemetery in Mestre where he gave service as a squadrista of the MVSN with no sign to remember him to friends, relatives and comrades.

To you, Excellency, who were to him a most precious father, I address [...] warm and tearful prayers that he might have a plaque, as he wished before dying [writer's underline] which pronounces his ideal and reminds the people who approach his tomb that there beneath lies One of the fascist revolution.

I will never be able to satisfy him because I've a husband out of work for over a year [...] True misery, Excellency, is in those people who hide it beneath dignity.

Do not refuse me this charity, Excellency, and He above will protect you with your noble family from all misfortunes.

Pardon my daring to perform a votive offering, Excellency, sure of your immense goodness of heart towards your most pure sons.

Eternally obliged,

Rina Codrè, Calle Zen 1264, Venice, 3 May 1930, Year VIII7

Between them, the passing of Captain Manetti and Capo Squadra Codrè or rather the representations of their passing could be said to epitomise the 'ideal fascist death' both in terms of the manner of their deaths and the nature of the rituals to commemorate them. Manetti's death serves to highlight the convergence of fascist and militaristic understandings of death: a 'good death' in fascist terms articulated the seeming paradox of the vitality of death and embraced the notion of the purifying and regenerative effects of the sacrifice of blood; ideals

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7 "Eccellenza,
Permettetemi la Vostra benigna pazienza per leggere queste misere righe.
Sono una mamma addolorata per la perdita dell'unico suo figlio di 25 anni Codrè Gesù, squadrista purissimo del primissimo momento del movimento fascista e il primo a raccogliere le adesioni per favore il fascio di Udine del Friuli. [...] Mi e morto in pochi giorni per infezione e prima di morire e sempre diceva che avrebbe voluto fare una morte gloriosa degna della sua fede fascista.
Ora soave nel cimiterio di Mestre dove prestava servizio come squadrista della MVSN senza mai segno che lo ricordi agli amici, parenti e camerati.
Rivolgo a Voi Eccellenza che per lui eravate padre preziosissimo... preghiera calda e lagrimante affinché possa avere una lapide come desiderava prima di morire che dica il suo ideale e che ricordi alla gente che si avvicinano alla sua tomba che la sotto soave Uno della rivoluzione fascista.
Io non potro mai accontentarlo perché da oltre un anno ho il marito disoccupato [...] La miseria vera Eccellenza sta in quelle persone che sotto la dignità la nascondono.
Non mi riscusate questa carità Eccellenza e Lui sul cielo vi proteggerà con la vostra nobile famiglia da tutte le disgrazie.
Perdonatemi l'ardire compiere un voto Eccellenza sicura sulla vostra immensa bontà di cuore verso i vostri purissimi figli,
Eternamente obbligata,
Rina Codrè, Calle Zen 1264 Venezia 3 maggio 1930, anno VIII." Letter from Rina Codrè to Benito Mussolini, 3 May 1930 ACS PNF DG Servizi vari, Serie 1, b. 1183, corrispondenza.
borrowed both from the Christian tradition and from the nineteenth-century Italian nationalist unification movement. The language of the Captain's death notice adopts these concepts of duty, self-sacrifice and the glory of dying for one's country. To this end, his family used the death notice as an opportunity to assert their pride at Manetti's "supreme sacrifice", choosing to stress the violent manner of his death in dramatic fashion; "struck in the chest" on the banks of the "Robi torrent" and emphasising the fascist credentials of the deceased — as a squadrista and 'fascist of the first hour', as a decorated veteran of the Great War and as a volunteer for the war in Ethiopia. The presence at the funeral of uniformed fascists with their flags and pennants served to reinforce the bond between fascism and the ideal of heroic self-sacrifice for the sake of the fatherland. Perhaps above all, the inclusion of what Emilio Gentile considered "the supreme rite of Fascism," the final fascist roll call, reminded the participants — through its assertion of the continued presence of the deceased in them — of the exemplary nature of Manetti's death. The representation of the death of Gesú Codré, though it did not take place on the field of battle, picked up on the theme of the regenerative value of youthful sacrifice. Though denied his expressed desire to die "a glorious death worthy of his fascist faith", carried off instead by a more prosaic infection, Codré's mother nevertheless represented her son's death in keeping with the tradition of the sacrifice of youth, now transferred from the military context of death in battle and applied to civilian death. For example, Signora Codré twice emphasised the purity of youth; she described her son as a "squadrista purissima", like Manetti, 'of the first hour', and again as a representative of his generation — the "most pure sons" of the Duce. Cloaked in religious language evoking "prayer" and "votive offering" to "Him above", Codré's mother asserted her, and her son's wish for him to be remembered, not for his piety, nor for any other particularly Christian characteristic, but for his faithful adherence to fascist ideals, as "One of the fascist revolution". Though he died neither violently nor particularly gloriously, Codré's death was articulated as a sacrifice to fascism. As a mother who had sacrificed her son to the fascist cause — and had thereby fulfilled her ultimate duty as a fascist woman — it would have been difficult for the Venetian fascio to refuse her request; on the contrary, Rina Codré was lauded by the Administrative Secretary of the PNF as the embodiment of not only "maternal pride but also of exemplary fascist pride".  

8 Gentile E The Sacralisation of Politics in Fascist Italy p. 27.  
9 "Orgoglio materno ma anche di esemplare orgoglio fascista". Letter from Giovanni Marinelli to Giorgio Suppiej, 20 May 1930. ACS PNF DG Servizi vari, Serie 1, b. 1183, corrispondenza.
This chapter examines the ways in which and the extent to which fascism pervaded the experience of death in Venice. The very ‘fascist’ deaths of Captain Manetti and Gesù Codré have already been outlined, but how representative are these cases? How far was fascism able to permeate Venetians’ experiences and understanding of death? In reality, the fascist conception of death was neither articulated nor appropriated uniformly and important distinctions in Venetians’ experiences of death must be drawn. Drawing mainly upon representations of funerals reported in Venetian newspapers and journals, this chapter will seek to demonstrate that whilst a considerable degree of success in equating fascist ideals with the notion of death can be discerned for ‘military’ deaths (albeit using a discourse which, as we shall see, stretches back through the ideals of the Risorgimento and traditional Christian narratives), the authorities had much less success in permeating attitudes towards death and funeral rituals among the wider ‘civilian’ population. It will suggest that both the success (in terms of military death) and failure (in terms of civilian death) of fascist ideas in infiltrating perceptions of death can best be attributed to the continuity of long-standing and widely held attitudes and rituals of death rooted in the Italian Risorgimento tradition, the experience of the Great War and modem methods of warfare, as well as in Roman Catholic narratives of death and sacrifice.

Without doubt, the fascist regime in Italy attached a great deal of significance to the notion of death and, in particular, the exaltation of youthful self-sacrifice and bloodshed, of glorious, violent death, preferably in war or armed combat. The local fascist authorities in Venice followed this line; the newly acquired (in 1935) Venetian fascist party headquarters at Ca’ Littorio, on the Grand Canal included the requisite Sacrario dei caduti, which provided a focal point for fascist ritual and celebrations. Even before the move to Ca’ Littorio, the seat of the Venetian fascio was decorated with seven framed photographs of Caduti Fascisti and two of the “Cattelan funerals”, alongside the ubiquitous portraits of Mussolini and Victor Emmanuel II.

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10 Mabel Berezin, for example, in Making the Fascist Self. The Political Culture of Interwar Italy, pointed to the centrality of death and particularly dead soldiers to fascist ideology. She argued that the body of the dead soldier was employed by fascism as the principal icon transmitting the value of war to Italian society; in turn, she asserted that Italian popular culture idealised the dead soldier and his sacrifice. She very successfully used the obituaries, funeral cards and accounts of death scenes accumulated by local fascist party leaders in preparation for the planned repeat (for 1942) of the Mostra della Rivoluzione, in order to access both public and private notions of fascist self. Berezin M Making the Fascist Self. The Political Culture of Interwar Italy, chapter 6.

11 For example, the Venetian Giornata della Fede, a ceremony held on 18 December 1935 in which women gave up their wedding rings to aid the fascist imperialist campaign in Ethiopia (discussed in chapter 4) centred around the sacramento dei caduti.
In 1933 podestà Alverà, in acquiescence to a request from the Venetian *fascio*, awarded “the free use, in perpetuity” of a 225m sq. area of the cemetery island of San Michele to the *Fascio* “in order to build a monumental tomb there in which to collect the remains of the Glorious Fallen of Venetian Fascism [... to] honour the memory of those who sacrificed their own lives for their faith in the highest of human idealism,” currently dispersed in graves throughout the cemetery. The symbolic value of young dead soldiers or ‘martyrs’ was appropriated in order to give new force to the (nationalist, futurist and fascist) concept of regeneration through bloodshed to ensure the eternal youth of the fatherland. However, this did not necessarily herald a marked break with the past. Indeed Italian fascism’s preoccupation with death must be located within the context of the continuation of an Italian tradition stretching back to the *Risorgimento* and even further; the work of Italian historians such as Alberto Banti and Bruno Tobia has illustrated this continuity. Fascism’s exaltation of the value of the sacrifice of young men in war as a purifying and regenerating agent for the nation and insistence upon a cult of commemorating these secular martyrs as exemplars in order to reinforce nationalist sentiment and infuse Italians with the new fascist identity, must, then, be understood in terms of the continuity of Italian religious and risorgimentalist traditions. But the Italian fascist concept of glorious death must also be located as one manifestation of a transnational trend resulting from the experience of the First World War.

12 Inventory of furniture, machinery etc bought for the headquarters of the Venetian *Fascio* in year VIII. ACS PNF DG Servizi vari, Serie 1, b. 1183, 9.89.6. Giovanni Cattelan, a Venetian *squadrista* who transferred allegiance from communism to fascism, was killed at the age of 19 by Venetian communists as punishment for his defection. In retaliation for Cattelan’s death, a group of Venetian *squadristi* attacked the Castello branch of the communist party, destroying the headquarters, ‘punishing’ the thirty communists they found there, two of whom were taken off to the local *fascio* for further interrogation. The leader of the Venetian *fascio* ordered shops and public services to shut and tricolours to be displayed in every home on the occasion of the “grandiose funerary ceremonies” for the newly martyrised Cattelan. Franzinelli M *Squadristi: Protagonisti e tecniche della violenza fascista 1919-1922* Milan, Mondadori, 2003, p. 55. See also Vicentini R *Il movimento fascista* pp. 260-261 and Albanese G *Alle origini del fascismo* p. 237.

13 “L’uso perpetuo gratuito [...] per erigrervi una tomba monumentale in cui raccogliere le spoglie dei Gloriosi Caduti del Fascismo Veneziano [...] per onorare la memoria di chi fece olocausto della propria vita per la fede nelle più alta delle umane idealità.” AMV DP Trim. III n. 30613.

14 Bruno Tobia, in his work on late nineteenth-century public commemorative forms and rituals, particularly those surrounding the deaths and tombs of the Italian monarchy, argued that following unification special efforts were directed into producing new celebrative and commemorative ‘traditions’ in order to both create and feed the national founding myth of the Risorgimento. He related this preoccupation, for example, with the organisation of national pilgrimages to the burial sites of Risorgimento heroes such as Mazzini, Cavour, and Garibaldi as well as Victor Emmanuel II, particularly in Umbertan Italy, to the Italian state’s ‘crisis of legitimacy’ in the period – the apparent gap between ‘legal Italy’ and ‘real Italy’ and the problematic of making the move from the heroic age of Risorgimento to a more “tranquil” period of state-formation and consolidation. Tobia B *Una patria per gli italiani: spazi, itinerari, monumenti nell’Italia unita (1870-1900)* Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1991, passim. For a discussion of Alberto Banti’s work on the construction of national identity in post-unification Italy (*La nazione del risorgimento*) see pp. 50-1 of the introduction to this thesis.
The experience of the Great War and the unprecedented scale of bloodshed which it wrought, contributed to the development of a national secular religion by providing a new font of myths, symbols, feast days and heroes to worship. Furthermore, the immense loss of life made necessary by modern methods of warfare had to be justified to the populations of nation-states: emphasising the heroism and regenerative effect of death in war was one way to achieve this. George Mosse, in his 1990 work, *Fallen Soldiers. Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, has demonstrated how the reality of soldiers’ daily encounters with death and dead bodies in the trenches, which evoked a complex mix of elements of mourning, pride and camaraderie, was mythologised after the war. Cults of commemoration swept Europe and the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, complete with martyrs, holy days and places of worship – veterans' organisations, war memorials, tombs dedicated to the unknown soldier, battlefield pilgrimages and tourism, to name but a few aspects of this cult – arose within all the societies that had participated in the war. In Italy, this cult of commemoration provided part of the foundations for the already-underway development of a kind of nationalist 'civil religion' whilst the nascent fascist movement tapped into and, to an extent, founded itself upon the memory of the war and the experience of fight, struggle and bloodshed. Commemorative events saturated the fascist calendar and helped disseminate the fascist message from Rome to the provinces. The dead soldiers / martyrs became collective symbols – for there is little room for individual suffering and death in the monuments dedicated to the 'unknown soldier' and the undiscriminating cult of the fallen. Because the dead soldiers tended, on the whole, to be young, the notion of 'fallen youth' fed into the national-fascist ideal of the eternal youth of the patria. Along with the belief that the sacrifice of young blood had somehow purifying characteristics came an emphasis on the sanctity of the places where these young soldiers had fallen and were buried. Mosse argued that similarities can be drawn between the cults of commemoration and the significance placed on the purifying, martyr-like qualities of death in battle in Britain, France, Germany and

15 Approximately 13,000,000 people were killed in the First World War; 1,000,000, for example, in the inconclusive Battle of the Somme alone. Figures from Mosse G *Fallen Soldiers. Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* New York, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 4.
16 Ibid.
17 The scale of death and suffering of the Great War led historian David Cannadine to remark that "inter-war Britain was probably more obsessed with death than any other period in modern history". Cannadine D *War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain* in Whaley J ed. *Mirrors of Mortality* London, Europa, 1981, p189. See also Mosse G *Fallen Soldier*, passim.
18 Gentile E *The sacralisation of politics in Fascist Italy*, passim.
19 Berezin asserted that commemorative events "worked themselves into the fabric of a small social milieu and brought the fascist mission closer to the capillary cities of Italy." Berezin M *Making the Fascist Self*, p. 206.
Italy, following the Great War. Therefore, the importance placed on death by the Italian fascist regime must in part be located within the wider context of the nature of total warfare, in which the inevitable sacrifice of enormous numbers of soldiers as cannon, or rather machine-gun, fodder had to be justified and of the cults of commemoration sweeping the continent in response to the thirteen million dead of the Great War.

This chapter also draws upon the historiography of death which has tended, in the main, to focus on the medieval and early modern periods of European history and on the notion of a very slow yet perceptible change in people's attitudes towards death over time. In his perhaps flawed but highly influential work, *Western Attitudes towards Death*, Philippe Ariès drew on Huizinga's notion of a Middle Ages obsessed by death and the macabre to suggest that a tangible shift occurred in attitudes towards death over the course of the eighteenth century. For Ariès, the medieval era was one in which ordinary people were more familiar and comfortable with the idea of death, due to the public nature of the death-bed scene and the physical proximity of the living to the buried. From the eighteenth century, however, Ariès identified a new preoccupation and meaning attached to death which stressed the dramatisation of bereavement and mourning of the death of others, linked to the so-called 'rise of individualism'. This increase in importance attached to bereavement and the loss of others gave rise to the 'cult of tombs'; the attaching of significance to knowing exactly where a person is buried and visiting that spot. The romantic nineteenth-century unwillingness to accept the death of others then gave way to modernity's absolute intolerance and rejection of death. Though many of the rituals surrounding death remained from earlier periods – such as the importance placed on the dying person's last words – the experience of death was displaced (from homes to hospitals) and privatised. So it was that, by the twentieth century, according to Ariès, building on the theory of the "pornography of death" articulated by Geoffrey Gorer.

21 Mosse G *Fallen Soldiers*, passim.
23 Ariès argued that the medieval familiarity with death stemmed in part from the way in which the living lived among the dead; he pointed to the medieval practice of burying bodies both inside churches and in churchyards, a departure from early Christian practices, and also highlighted the common practice of cemeteries being used as places where people met, danced and conducted business etc. However, by the late seventeenth century this practice became increasingly frowned upon. Ariès charted the rise in the second half of the eighteenth century, as part of 'Enlightened' concerns about public health, of public cemeteries, often situated on the outskirts of towns, which helped erode this familiarity with death. Ariès P *Western Attitudes towards Death*, passim.
death shifted from being familiar and accepted to being seen as irrational, shameful, rupture and taboo. In the words of Ernest Becker, in modern industrialised society, death is ‘denied’.25

A number of the suggestions Ariès makes in *Western Attitudes towards Death* are somewhat questionable.26 However, there is much in this provocative work that proves relevant to the study of death rituals and funeral practices in Fascist Venice. Ariès’ concepts of the significance of the death scene, of the dichotomies of familiarity / intolerance of death and of the public / private nature of death and the ceremonial surrounding death, as well as Becker’s theory of modernity’s ‘denial of death’, can all be related to aspects of mortality and funereal ritual in 1930s Venice.

**Negotiating death in Venice**

This study argues that the fascist authorities in Venice ‘borrowed’ extensively in their construction of ‘fascist’ ideals and rituals of death. The (mis)appropriation of ‘traditional’ symbols of death, whether borrowed from the religious or military spheres, to some extent renders these symbols both ambiguous and subject to change in terms of the meaning they conveyed. Reinhart Koselleck, in his study of the visual symbolism of death in the caricatures of Daumier, sketched over the revolutionary years of the nineteenth century, has highlighted the flexible, shifting meanings of the “Western symbolic language” relating to death.27 Whilst Daumier plundered the “world of signs” – the cross, the Grim Reaper, the skeleton, martyrs, resurrection, apocalypse, memorial inscriptions and so on – in his pictorial representations of death, such symbols, though deeply-rooted in classical, pagan and Christian discourses, are nevertheless constantly subject to evolution and change in meaning, both in terms of intention

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26 The medievalist, David D’Avray, described the concept of the rise of individualism as “something of a liability in the historiography of death”. In relation to the connection made between the development of the belief in purgatory and the rise in individualism made not only by Ariès but also by other notable historians including Vovelle and Le Goff, D’Avray argued that the assertion that people did not fear condemnation and judgement, as individuals, at the moment of death until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is misguided; for him “the idea of an individual judgement at the point of death was well established in and before the eighth century.” D’Avray D *Death and the Prince*. pp. 177-182. What’s more, Ariès’ assertion that the ideas of failed promise or unfulfilled potential were concepts alien to members of traditional medieval societies and his paradoxical argument that the “existential pessimism” and conversely the “love of life which we today can scarcely understand” of these societies derived from the omnipresence of death in the Middle Ages seem improbable and, like his notion that parental love did not develop until the eighteenth century, have been partly discredited. See Ariès P *Western Attitudes towards Death* p. 44-45.

and reception. In seeking to interpret the fascist appropriation of conventionally Christian or militaristic notions, symbols and rituals of death, and the apparently relatively successful equation of fascist ideals and military/violent death in Venice, it is not possible to infer that the overtly or partly Christian, military or indeed 'fascist' meanings of such symbols and rituals was either intended or received clearly. On the contrary, their ambiguity and flexibility must be emphasised. David Kertzer, in his anthropological study of Ritual, Politics, and Power, has suggested that it is precisely the multivocality – the plurality of meanings attached to a ritual, both in terms of the way they are represented and understood – and the ambiguity – the lack of a single, eternal and precise meaning of a given ritual – of symbols and rites that gives ritual the power to engender consensus. For Kertzer, the fact that the same ritual may be understood in multiple, diverse ways by individual participants and observers is not problematic and indeed strengthens ritual’s ability to foster a sense of shared experience and encourage cohesion; what is important in maintaining group cohesion is not ‘cultural consensus’ – i.e. agreement as to the meaning behind a particular ritual – but rather ‘social consensus’ – the simple agreement to come together and (re-)enact a given rite. If this were entirely true, the need to investigate and reconstruct the multiple layers of meaning and understanding relating to the rituals of death in 1930s Venice would become redundant. However, whilst I believe Kertzer’s understanding of the “virtues of ambiguity” to be useful insofar as it reminds us of the forceful impact of participation and observation in ritual action, regardless of the ‘meaning(s)’ attached to the rite, I nevertheless would argue that the multiplicity of possible understandings of the message of rituals does indeed impress upon the way and extent to which participation in ritual is able to foster consensus.

If the rituals and representations of death, then, are subject to ambiguity and multiplicity in both intention and reception our task is to seek to understand how, and in light of what kinds of influences, Venetians ‘received’ the fascistised concept of death conveyed to them, or rather, as David D’Avray, quoting Theodore Fontane’s novel, Vor dem Sturm, put it, how people practiced “the fine art of filling in the blanks”. To the fascist ‘messages’ expressed to them through death rituals, individual Venetians added images, ideas and beliefs with which they were already familiar in a process of negotiation and appropriation which would allow them to

29 Kertzer DI Ritual, Politics, and Power p. 11.
30 Kertzer borrows the distinction between social and cultural consensus from the work of James Fernandez. See ibid, chapter 4, “The virtues of ambiguity”.

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place and make sense of fascist ideals within their own world-view. Thus, a more organic account of Venetians' understanding of death in the 1930s, which takes this shifting gap between intention and reception into account, must also explore the luoghi comuni and mental tools of Venetian collective memory, which may have helped shape ordinary citizens' understanding of death.

The most obvious point of reference for Venetians seeking to place fascist concepts of death into the context of their own experience and memory is surely the experience of the First World War. Though, of course, individual experiences of the war varied enormously, certain commonly-understood concepts, 'memories' and language entered the national discourse; the dichotomy between interventionism and defeatism, the symbolism of Monte Grappa or Caporetto and key dates like 24 May or 8 November formed part of a collective vocabulary repeatedly evoked and recorded by Italians of all ages from veterans' organisations to school children in the names of streets and squares and in the war memorials, monuments, military cemeteries and parks of remembrance built throughout the country. One individual perhaps more than any other was considered to embody the 'heroic' memory of the Great War, as the epitome of courage, duty, ardour and self-sacrifice; the warrior-poet Gabriele D'Annunzio. The connection between D'Annunzio and Venice, particularly in relation to the war, is inseparable; having spent much time in the company of the city’s patrician elites and set two of his most famous works, Il Fuoco (1900) and La Nave (1908), in the space and history of the capital of the Serenissima Republic, D'Annunzio spent his war flying daring air missions and taking part in naval incursions using Venice as his base, whilst in 1919 the city provided the launch-pad for the irredentist cause led by the soldier-poet known as the Fiume adventure. The "voluntary Venetian's" dedication to Venice – that's to say Venice as a dynamic, modern city rather than

31 D D'Avray Death and the Prince. pp.189-90. For a discussion of the methodology of 'filling in the blanks', see pp. 24-8 of the introduction.
32 Other luoghi comuni that may have influenced individuals' understanding of the fascist ideas on death include the 'African dream' and search for Italy's "place in the sun". Certainly, the centrality in Italian collective memory of the 1896 defeat at Adowa helps account for attitudes towards death in the Ethiopian War of 1935-6, and towards that war in general.
33 See Mario Isnenghi's contribution, "La Grande Guerra" in the collection of Italian lieux de mémoire edited by him; i luoghi della Memoria, vol. 3 pp. 275-309.
35 This is Mario Isnenghi's description of D'Annunzio, found in his contribution, "Venezia e l'ideologia della venezianità", to the collection of conference papers published as, Mariano E ed. D'Annunzio e Venezia: atti del convegno, Venezia 28-30 ottobre 1988 Rome, Lucarini, 1991 p. 231. Isnenghi also wrote about D'Annunzio's Notturno as the work of literature which brought the idea of heroic death in combat to the forefront of national memory in the early 1920s in the chapter entitled "Il dovere nazionale" in L'Italia del Fascio pp. 86-94.
as a backward-looking cultural theme-park – was reciprocated by the city: D'Annunzio was fêted by early-twentieth century Venetian elite circles centred first around Piero Foscari and later Giuseppe Volpi and Vittorio Cini; the Fiume adventure "electrified" the city; the Venetian *fascio*, the second in Italy to spring up in 1919, adhered, at least initially, to a more spiritual, irredentist, Adriatic-focussed and D'Annunzian – rather than Mussolinian – brand of national-fascism;\(^{36}\) whilst to mark the death of the dashing *alleato-rivale* of fascism, in September 1938 the city authorities staged a grand open-air production of *La Nave* at Sant'Elena.\(^{37}\)

The bond between Venice, D'Annunzio and the memory of the Great War which he both articulated and stoked, can perhaps be most readily found in *Notturno*, the stream-of-consciousness piece of prose written in 1916, during his turbulent period of convalescence from a war-injury which left him blinded in one eye, spent at the *Casetta Rossa* on the Grand Canal.\(^{38}\) A piece of writing which offers a greatly nuanced and complex elaboration of the ideal of heroic death, comradeship and sacrifice, *Notturno* perhaps allows us access to the kinds of memories and mental tools through which the articulation of the fascist concept of death had to be filtered. The themes of mourning, loss and heroic sacrifice are intrinsically interlaced in the pages of *Notturno*, perhaps most eloquently in the passages in which D'Annunzio described the death of his fellow pilot and friend, Giovanni Miraglia.\(^{39}\) D'Annunzio's response to Miraglia's death is far more multifarious than the more crude, conventional exaltation of violent death in the line of duty usually expounded by fascism; his deep sense of sorrow and bereavement is palpable, whilst the notion of brotherly sacrifice and comradeship is expressed almost spiritually. Whilst upholding the fascist ideals of bravery and courage, and lauding the purity of death in war, D'Annunzio is far from unequivocal in his celebration of death; on the contrary, his personal brush with death evoked horror.

My knees shake. My tongue is mired. I leave Renata at Campo San Maurizio. I continue down Via Ventidue Marzo. I pass Miraglia's house, at the entrance to Corte Michiel. People stare at me. I am unable to master my horrible fear. We run into a sailor who is walking quickly. Genua stops him. I cannot hear what he says to him, I come closer. The sailor was on his way to my house. I learn that the body has been taken to St. Anna's Hospital. The body! He is dead.

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\(^{37}\) The 1938 staging of *La Nave* was headline news in the Venetian press and is discussed in detail in Paolo Puppa "La Nave", in Mariano E ed. *D'Annunzio e Venezia*, pp. 253-270.


\(^{39}\) Miraglia was killed along with his mechanic, Giorgio Fracassini, at the end of a test flight, just off San Nicolò on the Lido in 1916.
Genua steadies me.
I begin to run. [...]
The sky everywhere.
Bewilderment, despair.
The immobile veil of tears.
Silence.
The throb of the engine.
The Giardini.
We turn into the canal.
On the right, the bank with its naked trees; it looks funereal and remote. [...]
The corpse lies on a trundle bed.
The look of an Indian prince wearing a white turban.
Hands yellowish, crossed over his chest. Both feet swathed in white gauze bandages.
The right foot is broken. The thumb of one hand is broken. One leg broken. Several ribs broken.
He wears a blue jacket with gold buttons. The jacket he had on yesterday. They try to drag me away. I refuse. I remain on my knees. Beg them to leave me here alone.
When I am alone, I bend over the dead man, call him several times. My tears rain down on his face. He does not answer, does not move. 40

Genua mi sorrege.
Mi metto a correre [...] Il cielo da per tutto.
Stupore, disperazione.
Il velo immobile delle lacrime.
Silenzio.
Il battito del motore.
Ecco i Giardini.
Si volta nel canale.
A destra la ripa con gli alberi nudi, qualcosa di funebre e di remoto. [...] Sopra un letuccio a ruote è disteso il cadavere.
La testa fasciata.
La bocca serrata.
L’occhio destro offeso, livido.
La mascella destra spezzata: comincia il gonfiore.
Il viso olivastro: una serenità insolita nell’espressione.
Il labbro superiore un poco sporgente, un po’ gonfio.
Batuffoli di cotone nelle narici.
L’aspetto di un principe indiano col turbante bianco.
Le mani conserte sul petto, giallastre.
I due piedi fasciati di garza bianca.
Ha la giacca azzurra col bottoni d’oro, quella di ieri.
Though he asserted that Miraglia looked princely and peaceful in death, in keeping with conventionally Christian language, this stands somewhat at odds with D'Annunzio's vivid description of his friend's broken, lifeless corpse. The violence traced physically on Miraglia's body also contrasts with the description of the mechanic's appearance in death, which heavily echoes Christian narratives of death.

He looks like a monk to whom the crossing has brought beatitude. His manly face, almost always shiny and dripping sweat, with its pale, daring eyes, its broad open forehead, its hooked nose, has become peaceful, ennobled. He is truly at rest.41

Echoes of this rather problematic duality in the representation of death between vivid, dramatic depictions of the violence of death, manifested on the body of the deceased on the one hand, and the desire, located within a religious tradition, to assert the peacefulness of death on the other can be found in the Venetian encounters with death examined in this chapter.

D'Annunzio's literary depiction of the 'funerary' rituals of modern death offer a point of comparison with those practiced by Venetians. The ritual action surrounding the death and the dead body of Giovanni Miraglia take place within an entirely secular and highly militarised context. Flames flickered around the corpse, laid out for the wake in a bare mortuary chamber – as opposed to a church or the family home – as the deceased's military colleagues entered to pay their respects. D'Annunzio brought a traditional offering of flowers to place by the deceased, though this ritual is accorded a nationalist twist; "I put the white jonquils on the red and green of the flag".42 Miraglia's body is flanked by a guard of honour; two sailors, armed with bayonets stand to attention. D'Annunzio's description of the ritual action in the mortuary chamber, his rage and emotional devastation at the loss of his friend reinforces the sense of death's futility and of the spiritual, fraternal bond between comrades – *la coppia virile*.43 Such militarised funereal ritual, surely a relatively common aspect of life during the war, may go some way to accounting for how relatively easily fascistised, militaresque rituals – flags, flanks of

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42 "Pongo le giunchiglie bianche sul rosso e sul verde della bandiera." D'Annunzio G *Notturno* p. 29; English translation: D'Annunzio G (Rosenthal R trans.) *Nocturne and five tales of love and death* p. 227.

43 At times this depiction of the fraternal bond broken by Miraglia's death takes on an almost erotic quality – in D'Annunzio's description, for example, of "the two stock-still sailors; the stiff gleam of the naked bayonets" standing to attention at Miraglia's body in the mortuary chamber. D'Annunzio G (Rosenthal R trans.) *Nocturne and five tales of love and death* p. 227. ("I due marinai immobili; il luccichio rigido delle baionette nude" D'Annunzio G *Notturno* p.29.)
guards of honour, the roll call – inserted themselves into the experience of violent death in Venice in the 1930s. At the same time, however, the fact that such secularised death rituals ‘existed’ as an alternative to the more traditional Christian forms of funerary ceremonial and rites, serves to emphasise the tenacity of the latter because it implies that the persistence of religious death rituals in Venetian funerals in the 1930s resulted, at least in part, from choice.

The rituals of death

Perhaps the most significant and visible way in which the fascist authorities sought to infiltrate and ‘fascistise’ the rituals of death was through the augmentation of the *appello fascista*, also referred to as the *rito fascista*, to the existing religious funeral ceremony. The *appello fascista* took place at the end of the traditional Catholic requiem mass and the absolution, usually after the coffin had been carried out of the church, just before it was placed on the funeral boat to be rowed out to the cemetery on San Michele or to be buried on *terraferma*. Depending upon the importance of the deceased in terms of their standing within the community or the fascist party structure, the *appello* would be made by the local PNF secretary or by the head of the fascist group in the *sestiere* in which the deceased lived. For example, the funeral of the *camicia nera* and "valorous decorated war veteran", Giovanni Farfusola, who worked as a watchman for the *Uffici sanitari* on the island of Poveglia, was held in Malamocco on the Lido and reported in the *Gazzetta* on 16 February 1937.4

Given the deceased’s adherence to fascism, it is hardly surprising that his funeral was attended by numerous representatives of the Lido and Malamocco *Fasci* or that Farfusola’s fascist uniform and military decorations were laid on his coffin next to the wreath of flowers placed there by his wife. The account of Farfusola’s funeral is more useful to us for its description of the *appello fascista*:

After the religious ceremony the body was carried on the shoulders of the comrades of the deceased, who was particularly known for his sporting activity carried out at the *Fascio* of Malamocco. At the end of the ceremony, before the earth enclosed his tear-covered remains, the representative of the *Fascio* of Malamocco ordered the fascist roll call, to which all the bystanders replied with emotion: *Presente!* 45

44 "Valoroso decorato di Guerra." Farfusola’s funeral was recounted in the *Gazzetta* 16 Feb. 1937 *Cronache funebre*.  
45 "Dopo la cerimonia religiosa la salma è stata trasportata a spalle dei camerati dello scomparso, il quale era conosciuto particolarmente per la sua attività sportiva prestata al Fascio di Malamocco. Al termine della cerimonia, prima che la terra ricoprisse le lagrimate spoglie, il rappresentante del Fascio di Malamocco ha ordinato l’appello fascista, al quale tutti gli astanti hanno risposto commossi: *Presente!*" Ibid.
The final fascist roll call was bestowed upon those Italians who had contributed significantly either to the Fascist revolution or to the nation; it became such common practice that it earned itself a citation in the 1940 Dictionary of Politics, a work which sought to provide a summary of fascist doctrine. The dictionary entry articulated the intended function of the roll call:

This rite symbolically expresses the spiritual continuity, beyond their own lifetimes, of those whose activity contributed to the reconstruction of Italian life promoted by Fascism. The dead are not absent; they live on in the record of their highest achievements. The reply 'Present!' shouted as one by their comrades expresses not just recognition for their lasting contribution to the historical reality of the nation but the way in which there endures, in every soul, the high ideals that moved the departed comrade to his act of sacrifice.

The spiritual, mystical ritual, therefore, was intended to fulfil multiple roles; in the first place, to recognise the deceased’s contribution to fascism or the nation, secondly, to uphold the deceased’s life or death as an exemplar, and finally, it provided a means of binding together the living with the dead, the past that they represented and with contemporary fascist ideals, through the unisonality of the cry of ‘Present!’: Claudio Fogu, in his examination of the commemorative events to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Giuseppe Garibaldi’s death in 1932, which included the exhumation in Genoa and monumental reburial in Rome of the remains of Anita Garibaldi, drew a distinction between the commemorative ritual of “calling to attention” (Attenti!) and its “purely fascist alternative”, the roll call. Whilst the Attenti!, through its use of silence, served to emphasise the distance between past and present, the appello, on the other hand, connected ‘martyr’, participants and onlookers in a “mystical communion”. To this end, Fogu contrasted the use of the Attenti! in the Genoese exhumation ceremony as part of a series of rituals designed to recall nineteenth-century styles of mourning, and thereby accentuate the gap between past and present, with the very dramatic recourse to the appello at the moment of Anita Garibaldi’s reburial underneath the memorial dedicated to her on the

46 Dizionario della politica vol. 1 pp.146-7. It should be noted that this ritual was not confined to Italian Fascism; Paul Connerton in his work, How societies remember, described the commemorative rites recalling the Munich putsch in Nazi Germany, celebrated each 9 November. The 1935 celebration, he asserted, was particularly grand as it included the exhumation and reburial of the corpses of the sixteen “blood witnesses” in the newly constructed Ehrentempel. As part of the reburial ritual, the names of the sixteen were called out in succession; after each name was called, the gathered members of the Hitler Youth cried back ‘here’ as three shots were fired into the air following the recital of each name. This National Socialist paractice, in all likelihood, aped the pre-existing Italian rite. See Paul Connerton How societies remember Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 42-3. It was also not a ritual confined to the extreme right; the funeral of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, held in the tense days following the September 1973 coup against the Allende government, featured a more spontaneous roll call ritual: “When we managed to get the coffin out, a considerable group of workers and students had gathered outside in the street and I heard the first shouts: ‘Comrade Pablo Neruda!’ someone screamed and all the others answered: ‘Present!’” Loyola H Ser y morir en Pablo Neruda Bordeaux, Actas del Quinto Congreso, AIH, 1974, cited in Feinstein A Pablo Neruda London, Bloomsbury, 2004 p. 419.

47 See Fogu C Fascism and Historic Representation, pp. 331-5.
Gianicolo hill in Rome, which sought to reinforce the link between the gathered masses and fascism as a dynamic movement, between the historical and the contemporary. Fogu argued that, in replying to Ezio Garibaldi’s shout of his grandfather’s first wife’s name, the crowd, or “fascist mass subject”, not only obliterated the residual distance between itself and the past it revived, but highlighted its own presence as a maker of history.”

Fogu also drew attention to a distinction between his understanding of the appello and that put forward by Emilio Gentile. Whilst Gentile viewed the appello purely as an emblem or reflection of the nature of fascism as a political religion, Fogu asserted the agency of the rite as a rhetorical device which impacted, and did not merely reflect, upon the participants in the rituals during which it was used. This study would also identify the appello as a ritual which, at least in its intent, sought to effect rather than simply reflect; this, of course, by no means implies that the appello would have invariably influenced participants and observers of the ritual in the way in which it was intended, at all times and to all people.

However, by no means all funerals held in Venice during the 1930s included this fascist addition. A survey of a cross-section of funerals held in Venice during the 1930s reveals that under half incorporated the appello fascista into their funereal rites [table 1].

Table. 1 Incidence of the appello fascista in a cross-section of Venetian funerals, February 1930-9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funeral category</th>
<th>Appello fascista</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No appello fascista</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-military</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total no. of funerals</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The incidence of funerals including the appello fascista divided along lines of gender and membership of ‘military’ organisations. Men’s funerals were much more likely to include the appello fascista than women’s: 48% of male funerals between 1930 and 1939 included the ritual in comparison to just 20% of female funerals. Similarly, belonging to a military

48 Fogu C “Fascism and Historic Representation”, p. 335.
49 Ibid. pp. 331-5.
organisation (a category understood as ranging from the military personnel of the army or navy, to membership of veterans’ organisations such as the Nastro Azzurro and also including those Venetians who died during the Fascist campaigns in Ethiopia or Spain and were brought back to the city for burial) seems to have been a determining factor in terms of the appello fascista. Seven of eight (87.5%) funerals of those included in the ‘military’ category incorporated the rito fascista into the ceremony, compared with just 25% of ‘civilian’ funerals. In total the majority of funerals – 57% - did not incorporate this fascist ritual in their ceremonies.51

A further indication of the extent of fascism’s penetration into the rituality of death in 1930s Venice is provided from the survey of a cross-section of the death notices published in the Venetian newspapers.52 On most days, the entire right-hand column of the cronaca pages of the Gazzetta and the Gazzettino would be devoted to notices announcing deaths, anniversaries of deaths or thanking those who had participated in a funeral. Because these death notices were placed by the families or organisations connected to the deceased, an examination of the language used in these announcements might help to map Venetians’ responses to the attempts to ‘fascistise’ the experience of death.

Death notices tended to employ ritualistic or formulaic language in announcing the death of a loved one. Whether expressing their bereavement in religious or secular terms, certain stock phrases frequently recurred. For example, the notices often referred to death as a release from suffering; there was a continual recurrence of terms such as “after a long illness” or “after long suffering” which may have been “borne with Christian resignation” or simply “with serene resignation” depending on the religiosity of the deceased and their family.53 Death notices placed not by families but by organisations, including fascist institutions, tended not to deviate from the ritualistic language. An announcement placed by the Confederazione Fascista degli

50 This survey of a cross-section comprised the examination of all accounts of funerals held in Venice, reported in the Gazzetta newspaper during the month of February from 1930-1940.
51 These statistics, however, should come with a proviso: the data used in the survey is slightly problematic in the sense that it inevitably relies on only those funerals which went reported in the newspapers, which as one might expect tended to be those of people who represented the professional and/or aristocratic elite of Venetian society. Those non-establishment funerals that are described in the papers tend to be out of the ordinary, reported because the deceased was perhaps a war veteran, or killed in Ethiopia or Spain or in untimely or unusual circumstances. Hence, these reflections on the use of the appello fascista – and on funeral practices in general - should be viewed as comments upon the funerary practices and understanding of death, not of Venetian society as a monolithic whole, but rather of a more restricted group.
52 The survey of death notices comprised the examination of all the death notices reported in the Gazzetta newspaper during the month of February 1930-40.
53 “Dopo lunga malattia”; “dopo lunghe sofferenze”; “soportate con cristiana rassegnazione”; “con serena rassegnazione” Gazzetta 2 Sept. 30 & 3 Sept. 30.
*Industriali* on the occasion of the death of Prof. Gr. Uff. Giovanni Dettori, declared simply that the confederation “shares with most vigorous and deep sorrow in [Dettori’s] death which took place today”. Similarly, in the case of the death of war veteran Angelo Dal Tedesco: “The Venetian section of the Nastro Azzurro Institute has the sorrow of sharing in the death of the Azzurro Dal Tedesco Angelo, decorated for military valour.” Information about the deceased person in the notices was usually restricted to their name and age, although sometimes the profession or other details about the life of the deceased would also be included. The death notice for Giovanni Zenoni is typical in this regard:

**Giovanni Zenoni**
Retired teacher at R. Liceo Foscarini
Venice, 13 February 1931

Details such as the profession or organisations to which the deceased belonged, which departed from the conventional formula – hour and date of death, mode of dying (i.e. “serenely” etc.) and list of relatives left bereaved – are significant because they provide information that those placing the notice felt was important enough to include. On occasion the death notices would go further to contain additional information and detail the deceased’s affiliation to fascist organisations or their war record. For example:

The wife and [other relatives] announce with immense torment the premature passing of their most adored

**Lieutenant Colonel**

Marino Arnoldo Ottolenghi
**Disabled ex-serviceman, decorated for valour**

Occurred yesterday morning with the Comforts of Religion, after a life nobly and saintly lived for his Fatherland and for his family […]

Venezia, 8 February 1934 XII

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54 “Partecipa con più vivo e profondo dolore la morte oggi avvenuta…” Gazzetta 13 Sept. 36.
55 “La Sezione Veneziana dell’Istituto del Nastro Azzurro ha il dolore di partecipare la morte dell’Azzurro Dal Tedesco Angelo, decorato al valore militare…” Ibid.
56 “Nelle prime ore del 12 febbraio coi conforti della Fede e colla particolare bendizione del Santo Padre e di S. E. il cardinale patriarca, spirava santamente

**Giovanni Zenoni**
Già professore del R. Liceo Foscarini
57 “La moglie e [other family members] annunciano con immenso strazio l’immatura dipartita del loro adoratissimo

**Tenete colonello**

Marino Arnoldo Ottolenghi
Invalido di Guerra e decorato al valore

Avvenuta ieri mattina con i Conforti della Religione, dopo una vita nobilmente e santamente vissuta per la Patria e per la famiglia […]

Venezia 8 Febbraio 1934 XII” Gazzetta 8 Feb.1934.
This was also the case with the perhaps most striking example of the permeation of fascist ideals into death notices; the announcement of the death of the Venetian blackshirt, Eugenio Manetti, highlighted at the beginning of this chapter. It must be stressed, however, that such notices were very much the exception to the rule – just two of the 117 death notices examined made reference to the ideal of heroic patriotic death and only one of these linked this explicitly with adherence to fascism. In these two cases, one of the men who died was a war veteran, the other an active combatant. It seems that, when we look at the announcements of the deaths of ‘civilian’ Venetians, the infiltration of fascist notions of death is much less evident.

One area where Venetians were more likely to make reference to fascism in relation to death was in the *ringraziamento* notices placed by families to thank those who had attended the funeral of their loved one. Of thirty *ringraziamento* notices surveyed, nine gave thanks to the fascist authorities; the podestà, the party or the MVSN, for example.58 The *ringraziamento* notice for Maria Vitale Dorigo, placed in the *Gazzetta* by her family on 20 February 1931 is a case in point:

> In particular [the Vitale and Dorigo families] thank His Excellency the Prefect, the Illustrious Gentlemen the Podestà of Venice, the Provincial President, the Federal Secretary; the Hon. Senator and Deputies, His Excellency the President of the Court and all the Authorities, Bodies, Representatives etc. who have, most amiably, taken part in their great sorrow.59

One should, though, be cautious about drawing too much significance from the inclusion of fascist institutions in the *ringraziamento* notices. These announcements tended to be placed upon the deaths of individuals who, if they were not ‘public’ figures were, for the most part, well-established in the political, social and/or cultural circles of the city. The dominance, by the 1930s, of institutions in these spheres belonging to or closely allied with fascism means that it would perhaps have been difficult for the *ringraziamento* notices of these Venetians to have avoided reference to fascist organisations.60

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58 As with the death notices, this survey of a cross section of *ringraziamento* notices examined all those notices placed in the month of February 1930-40 in the *Gazzetta* newspaper.


60 It should be remembered that only those Venetians able to afford to pay to place the *ringraziamento* notices would do so; thus these notices reflect the practices of more elite sectors of Venetian society, who might be expected to have more links with the ‘authorities’ – whether religious, civil or fascist – than Venetians from more popular sectors of society.
One curious development which might indicate the infiltration of ‘fascism’ into the experience of death in Venice is the increasing inclusion of the fascist year in death notices. Table 2 demonstrates the growth of use of the fascist date: at the beginning of the decade not a single death notice included the fascist roman numerals indicating the number of years since 1922 (the ‘March on Rome’ being designated ‘Year 0’) after the conventional date and its use until 1933 remained somewhat erratic. From 1933, however, the inclusion of the fascist date in death notices increased dramatically; 95% of notices in 1933 included the fascist year whilst at the end of the decade every single notice contained the epitaph ‘XVII’. Over the course of the decade an average of 69% of death notices included the fascist date. There are just a couple of anomalous ‘blips’ in the statistics; in 1936 only 50% and in 1940 60% of notices included the fascist year. This increase in the use of the fascist year at the end of death notices is significant in so far as the inclusion of the roman numerals would appear to result from the decision to do so by those who placed the notices. It seems that the families and organisations

Table 2: Survey of cross-section of death notices, February 1930-4061

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total no. of death notices</th>
<th>Religious (%)</th>
<th>Fascist date (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 (100)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5 (33)</td>
<td>8 (53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5 (46)</td>
<td>3 (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12 (63)</td>
<td>18 (95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6 (60)</td>
<td>8 (80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3 (33)</td>
<td>7 (78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2 (14)</td>
<td>7 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5 (33)</td>
<td>14 (93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3 (75)</td>
<td>3 (75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2 (29)</td>
<td>7 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1 (10)</td>
<td>6 (60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>44 (38)</td>
<td>81 (69)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

61 This survey of a cross section of death notices includes all such notices published in the Gazzetta newspaper in Venice in the month of February during the years 1930-40.
formulating the wording of the notices were not obliged to use the fascist date; if this were the case, then surely every notice, without exception, would have done so. However, the dramatic rise and near 100% inclusion of the fascist year in the announcements towards the end of the 1930s suggests that, by then, the use of the fascist year had perhaps become less the result of a conscious choice and more a conventional part of the formulaic language of death notices.

Military death

As has been noted, the incidence of the fascist roll call in Venetian funerals indicates that fascist ideals most successfully permeated the experience of death in the military spheres; those who died in battle and the deaths of veterans of the First World War. The Venetian newspapers recounted a number of gruesome descriptions of soldiers’ death, particularly during the Ethiopian and Spanish campaigns. In their representations of death scenes the identification of fascist with militaristic understandings of death is striking, particularly in contrast to descriptions of civilian death, which were usually represented as “peaceful” and “a release” from suffering. Death in battle, on the contrary, was exalted for the ‘glory’ of its violence and bloodiness. For example, in February 1938, a Venetian priest, serving as part of the Italian fascist intervention in the Spanish Civil War, died in military service. Padre Teodoro Bortolon, a Franciscan monk on the cemetery island of San Michele, had already served during the Ethiopian campaign and joined the Blackshirts in Spain in order to be “among the front rows of nationals and to wear the uniform of the legionnaire-crusader, to push himself forward to where the danger was most grave and the threat most immediate, in the struggle of Christian and Latin civilisation against the foolish Bolshevick barbarism.” As an MVSN chaplain attached to the III gruppo Camicie Nere, he had arrived in Spain on 27 January 1938. After just three days in action near Guadalajara Padre Bortolon was killed; the commander of his detachment wrote to Padre Brunetta, Bortolon’s fellow Franciscan monk-turned-military chaplain, describing the scene of Bortolon’s death:

During the battles in Brihuega he behaved as a priest and as a soldier and for this reason I have put him forward for a reward for valour with the following motivation: “Priest, soldier of high patriotic and fascist sentiment, during three days of battle, he did all he could on the battlefield to recover the wounded, to gather the fallen.” Hit by enemy aerial machine-gun

62 “Tra i primi nelle file dei nazionali e indossare la divisa del legionario crociato, per spingersi innanzi dove più grave era il pericolo e più immediata la minaccia, nella lotta della civiltà cristiana e latina contro la stolta barbarie bolscevica.” Reported in the Gazzetta 6 Feb. 1938 “L’eroica morte in Spagna d’un Padre Francescano di S. Michele”.

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volleys, he fell gloriously, invoking from God the benediction for his brothers fighting for the great and just cause.63

What is important in the Militia commander’s account of Padre Bortolon’s death is not just the combination of priestly, soldierly and fascist-patriotic duties that he achieved in the three days of his participation in the Fascist campaign in Spain, but also the manner of his death. Padre Bortolon died “gloriously” because he died violently, calling for victory for his country and for fascism.

Two years earlier, the Gazzetta printed a letter written by a Venetian combatant, Lorenzo Leonardi, serving in Ethiopia with the 49th Legione San Marco, to his sister and ‘godmother’ to the 4th Legion, Countess Giulia Leonardi. The letter reported the heroism and “splendid” behaviour of her ‘god-legion’ at Passodi Uacieu. Leonardi then went on to tell his sister of the heavy losses his battalion had sustained in battle: in particular, he complained of the Ethiopians ‘barbaric’ way of killing:

I won’t tell you the barbarities that those rogues commit. This should be enough for you. Captain Dal Fiume had fallen wounded. The stretcher-carriers had placed him on a stretcher in order to transport him: they were killed by sabre blows. After this the Abyssinians, after having surrounded the poor captain, did all things imaginable to him and then they slaughtered him with scimitar blows. Here we are furious at this barbarism and I assure you that we have sworn to avenge those poor devils and we will avenge them.64

It was not so much the death of Captain Dal Fiume that angered Leonardi. Earlier in the letter he had informed his sister quite matter-of-factly, “on our side we have had several dead and injured but compared to the Abyssinian losses these are trivial matters [...] There have been two officers wounded and the odd one dead, but as ever the Abyssinians had the worst of it.”65

What seems to have particularly outraged Leonardi in the case of the death of Captain Dal Fiume was the dishonourable way in which he was killed. Leonardi’s letter articulated the belief

63 Durante i combattimenti di Brihuega si è comportato da sacerdote e da soldato e per questo l’ho proposto per una ricompensa al valore con la seguente motivazione: “Sacerdote, soldato di alti sentimenti patriotici e fascisti, durante tre giorni di combattimento, si prodigava sul campo di battaglia a ricoverare i feriti, a racogliere i caduti.” Colpito da raffiche di mitragliatrici aeree nemiche cadeva gloriosamente, invocando da Dio la benedizione sui fratelli combattenti per la grande e giusta causa.” Gazzetta 6 Feb. 1938 “L’eroica morte in Spagna d’un Padre Francescano di S. Michele”.


65 “Da parte nostra abbiamo avuti parecchi morti e feriti ma in confronto alle perdite abissine sono cosa irrisoria. [...] Vi sono stati due ufficiali feriti e qualche morto, ma come sempre gli abissini hanno avuto il peggio.” Ibid.
that death in battle should be glorious; when death occurred in an 'inglorious' manner, it had to be avenged.

In March 1936 a ceremony was held on the magnificent staircase of the Palazzo Ducale, emblem of the Venetian Republic, to remember the "heroic sacrifice" of Padre Reginaldo Giuliani, a veteran of the First World War and the Fiume 'adventure', killed whilst serving in the Ethiopian campaign. During the commemorative ceremony, attended by the prefect, podestà and the patriarch as well as representatives of fascist and veterans organisations, Giuliani's fellow Dominican and "valorous ardito and Fiume legionnaire", Padre Acerbi, made a speech which included a reconstruction of the scene of Padre Giuliani's death. The military chaplain was hit by a bullet as he comforted a soldier wounded on the battlefield and was killed later that night, "by [the] scimitar blows" of enemy troops:

And he died on the road, at the side of the wounded man he was assisting and comforting. [...] Seniore Valcarenghi: He spoke to you of Christ and you had peace. He spoke to you of the Fatherland and you smiled. But you also saw him grow pale, struck on the hip by a bullet: and fall backwards.

To him nobody spoke of God because he desired that every remaining Blackshirt save himself so that the Fatherland would know how heroes defend themselves.

Then came the night. And, with the hyenas, the enemy closed in. What did he say to the lunatics who finished off the wounded with scimitar blows in order to rob them? Perhaps in an extreme effort, he ran to meet them in order to save others who they were attacking with sabres; perhaps, as on the Tonale, he took the Cross in his hands to implore them to respect the dying for the love of God crucified; but to quieten him they finished him off too.

He was found by Blackshirts with his forehead smashed and ribcage exposed. He was serene. He was the Apostle who had reached his divine purpose. The Italian who perpetuated the history of his race. The soldier who immolated himself for His Fatherland.

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66 "Valoroso ardito di guerra e legionario fiumano"; "a colpi di scimitarra"; The ceremony was reported in the Gazzetta 30 Mar. 1936 "L'eroico sacrificio di padre Reginaldo Giuliani/Rievocato dal Domenicano Acerbi in Palazzo Ducale."


A lui nessuno parlò di Dio perché volle che l'ultima Camicia Nera rimasta si salvasse affinchè la Patria sapesse come gli eroi si difendono. Poi giunse la notte. E con le iene calarono i nemici. Cosa dissero ai forsentati che finivano i feriti a colpi di scimitarra per derubarli? Forse in uno sforzo estremo, corse loro incontro per salvare altri che stavano sciabolando; forse, come sul Tonale, prese le mani la Croce perché rispettassero i moribondi per amore del figliuolo e di Dio crocefisso: ma lo finirono anche lui perché tacesse.

Lo trovarono le Camicie Nere con la fronte spaccata e col costato aperto. Era sereno. Era l'Apostolo che aveva raggiunta la meta divina. L'Italiano che perpetuava la storia della sua razza. Il Soldato che s'era immolato per la Sua Patria." Ibid.
Thus Padre Acerbi speculated about the heroics of the moment of the chaplain’s death and in the final paragraph describing Padre Giuliani’s death drew together the triple themes of patriotism, military values and religion which defined the fascist understanding of death. As befitting a eulogy to the death of an ardent fascist, the gruesome details of the bloody nature of the chaplain’s death were not hidden, indeed they were exalted. It is interesting to note, however, that the grisly image of Padre Giuliani “with his forehead smashed and ribcage exposed” is juxtaposed against the improbable assertion that he looked “serene” in death. The notion of serenity in death surely belongs to the Christian tradition; it is reminiscent also of D’Annunzio’s paradoxical representation of the peaceful aspect of his dead friend, Miraglia, coupled with his brutal description of the physical vestiges of violence visible on his dead body.

The ambiguous mixture of military and religious symbolism in the representation of Padre Giuliani’s death was continued in a fresco depicting the moment of the chaplain’s death, painted by Armando Baldinelli for the 1938 Venice Biennale [see figure 1). That Baldinelli’s representation of Giuliani’s death won the Biennale’s fresco competition that year and was subsequently purchased by Mussolini himself suggests its harmonious identification with prevailing currents of fascist ideology on death. Not only did Baldinelli adhere to racial stereotypes in his depiction of the dark, chaotic and ‘primitive’ Ethiopians encircling the calm, white-clad priest, but he also employed many of the techniques and iconography traditionally found in religious art to denote martyrdom; the veiled rider as a portent of his martyrdom and the empty space above the priest’s head implying his direct ascent to heaven. However, in the fresco as in the priest’s and press’ representations of Giuliani’s death, the cause for which Padre Giuliani immolated himself is perhaps more ambiguous; fascism or Christianity, patria or faith? As Reinhart Koselleck has reminded us, the meanings of signs and symbols relating to death, whether pooled from classical or Catholic iconography do not remain static; on the contrary, the messages transmitted and received by these symbols are both in constant evolution and have multiple layers.

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68 For a discussion of Baldinelli’s fresco of the death of Padre Giuliani see Marla Susan Stone The Patron State, pp. 213-14.
69 Stone M The patron state p. 213.
70 Reinhart Koselleck The Practice of Conceptual History p. 268.
The far greater incidence of the use of the *appello fascista* in the funeral rituals of ‘military’ deaths (87.5%) compared with ‘civilian’ deaths (25%) has already been identified.\(^7\) Even if the *appello fascista* was not always incorporated, the funerals and remembrance ceremonies of ‘military’ personnel – those who died in action in the Ethiopian and Spanish campaigns or simply war veterans of the First World War, the Fiume ‘adventure’ or earlier fascist campaigns – invariably included the ‘official’ participation of fascist groups.\(^7\) For example, the *esequie in suffragio* for Captain Eugenio Manetti, whose death notice was reproduced at the beginning of the chapter, was attended by both military and fascist representatives.\(^7\) Of the eight funereal or commemorative ceremonies held in honour of military deaths examined in this study, only one did not include the *appello fascista* – that of Padre Giuliani, the nevertheless ardently fascist military chaplain whose gruesome death scene has just been described. The service to commemorate Padre Giuliani, however, did include a high degree of involvement of fascist and

\(^{71}\) Reproduced in Stone M *The patron state* p. 214.

\(^{72}\) See Table 1 on p. 248.

\(^{73}\) In this context ‘official’ participation refers to the presence of Fascist groups in uniform, with or without flags, banners etc, who play some kind of active role in the funerary rituals or the inclusion of fascist elements, such as the Fascist anthem, *Giovinezza*, in the rituals.

\(^{74}\) *Gazzetta* 11 Jun. 1936.
military organisations – categories that were grouped together, interchangeably, in the newspaper reports. For example, the ceremony was attended by, amongst others, “centurions of Mutilati, Nastro Azzurro, the Association of Infantrymen, Bersaglieri, Cavalrymen, Grenadiers, Volunteers, Arditi with Lieutenant Fraschetti and Captain Bucca, carabinieri, the Noncommissioned officers’ association, customs officers, Alpini, Artillerymen, [...] sailors on leave and Fasci Giovani and Azzurri di Dalmazia”. Fascist rituals were woven into the service. The ceremony began with the arrival of Padre Acerbi, accompanied by a group of Arditi and volunteers, into the courtyard of the Doge’s Palace where they were “greeted by prolonged applause and the sound of la Giovinezza from the music section of the Fasci Giovani.” Following this grand entrance;

The orator ascends the scala dei Giganti [the ceremonial staircase of the Doge’s Palace] at the summit of which he delays to salute the various authorities who are presented to him and thereafter he appears at the balustrade of the balcony where the pennants of the Venetian Fascio and the Association of families of the Fallen for the fascist cause already hang.

Padre Acerbi then made his eulogy to the dead Dominican military chaplain, making repeated reference both to Giuliani’s adherence to fascism and to his bravery during the campaigns of the Great War and Fiume adventure. After the conclusion of his speech, the fascist rituals continued:

The crowd lingers in the courtyard because it wishes once again to applaud the orator, who in the meantime has withdrawn, and when he reappears at the balcony, urged by a number of his fellow comrades-in-arms, a new, unstoppable ovation greets him, which reaches its diapason when the Dominican friar is approached and embraced by his old mother. The profoundly moved crowd can no longer contain itself and in chorus sings the opening lines of war songs, echoed by the guest of honour himself, to shouts of: Viva l’Italia.

The music resumes its rhythm: “Faccetta nera” is sung by thousands of people, who then line up into columns and set off, with banners in the lead, towards Piazza San Marco. Father Acerbi is in the midst of the Blackshirts and Volunteers and with them he goes to the Arditi’s Refuge at the Palazzo delle Prigioni where the group breaks up.

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Gazzetta 30 Mar. 1936 “L’eroico sacrificio di padre Reginaldo Giuliani/Rievocato dal Domenicano Acerbi in Palazzo Ducale”.

76 “Accolto da prolungati applausi e dal suono della Giovinezza da parte della musica Federale dei Fasci Giovani”;

“l’oratore sale la scala dei Giganti sulla cui sommità si indugia a salutare le diverse autorità che gli vengono presentate e poscia si affaccia alla balaustra del terrazzino dove sono già il galiardetto del Fascio veneziano e quello dell’Associazione familieg dei Caduti per la causa fascista.” Ibid.

77 La folla si attarda nel cortile perché vuole ancora una volta applaudire l’oratore che nel frattempo si è ritirato, e quando egli si riaffaccia al terrazzino sospinto da alcuni commilitoni, lo saluta una nuova irrefrenabile ovazione la quale tocca il suo diapason quando al frate domenicano si avvicina la sua vecchia mamma che lo abbraccia. La folla vivamente commossa non può più contenersi e in coro intonna le canzoni di guerra imitato dallo stesso festeggiato, al grido: Viva l’Italia.
Thus, it is possible to discern a strong identification with fascist notions of the regenerative nature and glory of death and self-sacrifice for one’s fatherland in the majority of military funerals and commemorative ceremonies held in Venice during the 1930s. There are a number of explanations for this: obviously, as men who voluntarily participated in the Fascist wars in Ethiopia and Spain or as war veterans, the people being commemorated were more likely to be ardent fascists or belonged to a section of society more likely to share fascist ideology. In addition, though, an important aspect of this high level of identification between fascist and military death rituals must be attributed to the extent to which fascist notions of death borrowed from pre-existing military and risorgimentalist ideas about the glory and nobility of death in battle.

The ceremonial surrounding Venetian funerals and commemorative rituals was also juxtaposed against ‘other’ funerary practices – those of the enemy in Ethiopia – and thereby used as a way of asserting and justifying the Italian invasion and colonisation of the country. In January 1936, as Italian troops continued their advance into Ethiopia, the Gazzetta published an article detailing certain “Abyssinian customs”. Neglecting to mention the presence of Christianity – and Christian ritual – in Ethiopia, the article was disparaging in tone in its discussion of Ethiopian funeral practices which were presented as reflecting “all the characteristics of a barbarous and primitive people,” a population whom, it followed, could not but benefit from the ‘civilising’ influence of Italian rule. In particular, the article was especially indignant about the “primitive” burial practices it identified in Ethiopia, where, it asserted, cemeteries or places dedicated exclusively to the burial of the society’s dead were unknown. The overtly racist juxtaposition of ‘civilised’ versus ‘primitive’ society displayed in the discussion of Ethiopian funeral practices was presented as evidence of the necessity of the Italian colonial mission there. The author of the article found extremely distasteful the practice of leaving the relatives of the deceased to dig the burial tomb and the fact that the lack of concentrated burial grounds meant that within a generation or two burial sites often became overgrown and forgotten. However, the author reserved particular venom for what they disparagingly termed “making a

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78 Gazzetta 22 Jan. 1936 “Usanze abissine”.

79 “Tutte le caratteristiche di un popolo barbaro e primitivo.” Ibid.
scene before the dead”, whereby the family of the deceased’s public display of grief and unwillingness to be parted from their loved one’s body “ends up becoming comic and ridiculous”:

The arrival of those responsible for carrying out the transportation of the corpse signals the highpoint of the sensational scene: the women feign a real battle with them, squabbling with and manhandling them to prevent the departure of the body, and finally, after a long conflict sustained by some with emotion and by others as a simple parade, nonchalantly and naturally, everyone ends in resignation and surrender.  

Religion, militarism, fascism: the death of Cardinal La Fontaine

The complex interchange between religion, militarism and fascism through the regime’s appropriation of long-standing nationalist, militarist and religious symbols is revealed in the death of the Venetian patriarch; a man termed a ‘holy warrior’ for his soldierly and patriotic conduct during the First World War. By early July 1935, it had become clear that the Venetian patriarch, Cardinal Pietro La Fontaine, was seriously ill. Because of his poor state of health, the cardinal had left the city for the presumed healthier climate and tranquillity of the seminary at Villa Fietta, in the foothills of Monte Grappa, a potent symbol of Italian suffering, heroism and ‘mutilated victory’ in the First World War. The cardinal eventually died at 10 o’clock on 9 July: the Venetian daily papers, the Gazzetta and the Gazzettino and the religious weekly, the Settimana Religiosa, all represented the moment of the cardinal’s death as a relatively public affair, somewhat akin to Ariès’ description of the death scenes of the Middle Ages. The last hours of the cardinal’s life were spent with the recital of several masses and a constant coming and going of friends and colleagues to take their leave at the cardinal’s bedside:

The chamber now gathers together, anguished and drawn close around the Eminentissimo, all the relatives and those present at Villa Fietta. At the sides of the bed are the brother of His Eminence, dott. Pio and the Monsignor Auxiliary Bishop, in tears, whilst Mons. Camozzo supports the head of the dying man. All around, kneeling, are, Mons. Ravetta, Mons. Piva,

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81 “Finisce per diventare comica e ridicola”; “L’arrivo degli incaricati ad eseguire il trasporto del cadavere segna il colmo della scena clamorosa: le donne fango con essi un vero combattimento accappigliandosi e malmenandosi per impedire la uscita della salma, e finalmente, dopo un lungo contrasto sostenuto da alcuni con sentimento e da altri per semplice parata, ma con disinvoltura e naturalezza, tutti finiscono per rassegnarsi e per cedere.” Ibid.
82 The significance of Monte Grappa as an Italian luogo comune or lieu de mémoire is discussed in the chapter dedicated to Monte Grappa, written by Mario Isnenghi in Isnenghi M ed. I luoghi della memoria vol. 1.
83 Certainly the description of the Cardinal’s death-scene (see footnote 81) is more reminiscent of the public and familiar medieval deathbed scenes which Ariès describes, than of the private and intimate setting which supposedly characterises the ‘modern’ experience of death. See Ariès’ chapter, “Tamed death” in Western Attitudes towards Death.
Don. Olivotti, Don. Marchetto, the most faithful servant Oreste Primavera, Don Galuppo and a group of his beloved seminarists from the Patriarchal Seminary. Also present are the Archpriest of Paderno, the parish priest of Fietta and the Vicar of Cavaso, the Mother Superior of the Istituto di Maria Bambina di Crespano, with Mother Donata, of the Seminary and others still.84

All the papers, including the Settimana Religiosa, chose to link the precise moment of the cardinal’s passing with the symbolism of its geographic location – Monte Grappa, a luogo comune of the First World War. The Gazzetta and the Settimana Religiosa (which came out four days later) used identical language in their narratives of the moment of Cardinal La Fontaine’s death. The Gazzetta stated; “It is precisely 10 o’clock, when, in the silence that had arisen in the vast room, whose windows open before Monte Grappa, the altar on which the sons of the fatherland immolated themselves, the Patriarch of the war renders up his beautiful soul to God”.85 The Settimana Religiosa copied the Gazzetta’s account virtually word for word:

It is precisely 10 o’clock, when, in the silence that had arisen in the vast room, whose windows open before Monte Grappa, the altar on which the sons of the fatherland immolated themselves, the Patriarch of the war consummates his own sacrifice. The sacrifice of a life spent in the heroic fulfilment of his duty as Priest and Bishop, in the generous dedication of all of his being to the good of his Venetians, in inexhaustible charity towards physical and moral suffering.86

Although this suggests that the Settimana Religiosa used the Gazzetta article published on 10 July as source material for its own, it is significant that both of these newspapers, particularly the Catholic newspaper of the Venetian diocese, should choose to correlate the patriarch’s death with a mountain which doubles as a symbolic reference point for the Italian war-time experience.87


85 “Sono le 10 precise, quando nel silenzio che si è fatto nell’ampia stanza, che apre il suo finestrino al Monte Grappa, l’altare sul quale si sono immolati i figli della Patria, il Patriarca della Guerra rende la bella anima a Dio.” Ibid.

86 “Sono le 10 precise, quando nel silenzio che si è fatto nell’ampia stanza, che apre il suo finestrino al Monte Grappa, all’altare del quale si sono immolati i figli della Patria, il Patriarca della Guerra consuma il suo sacrificio. Sacrificio di una vita nell’eroico adempimento del suo dovere di Sacerdote e Vescovo, nella generosa dedizione di tutto sè stesso al bene dei suoi Veneziani, nell’in esaureibile carità per tutte le sofferenze fisiche e morali.” Settimana Religiosa 14 Jul. 1935.

87 For a discussion of the relationship between the Settimana Religiosa and the Venetian fascist authorities and ideology, see the recent article by Vian G “La stampa cattolica e il fascismo a Venezia negli anni del consenso”, pp. 85-115.
Unsurprisingly, in their obituaries of Cardinal La Fontaine, the papers remembered the patriarch in predominantly religious terms. He was commemorated as a moral and spiritual shepherd for the people of Venice and as a humble person who shunned elaborate pomp and ceremony, except those proscribed by scripture, and rejected any form of luxury and comfort in his own lifestyle, including any heating of the patriarchal palace during the cold winter months. Indeed, shortly before his death, he had renounced “even his gondola, to benefit the poor.” Besides these character traits, which might be considered traditionally Christian, the obituaries eulogised other aspects of his character, linked more explicitly with fascism. In the first place, the patriarch’s conduct during the First World War was particularly lauded. Cardinal La Fontaine took up the post of patriarch of Venice in June 1915 just one month after Italy’s entry to the hostilities. The cardinal was universally extolled as having been a “true front line soldier” because of his refusal to leave Venice, not even during the aerial bombardment of the city. All the obituaries reported the events of the notte di otto ore in November 1917, subsequently remembered as the fiercest night of Austrian bombing of the city, when the cardinal reputedly spent the night praying to the Virgin Mary and pledged to build a votive temple in her honour if she delivered Venice safely from the bombing. The obituaries pointed to the patriarch’s ‘baptism of fire’, as it were, arriving in Venice in the difficult and dangerous days of the war, as having forged an irrevocable bond between the patriarch and the city. All emphasised the venezianità of Cardinal La Fontaine, despite the fact that he was born and lived much of his working life outside the city; the Gazzetta maintained that precisely because the cardinal arrived in Venice “in a particularly dramatic moment of the history of the city [he] was able to intimately assimilate not only the external and formal aspects of its life and customs, but also its deepest and fundamental spirit.” For this reason, it continued, “he was a truly Venetian Patriarch, who felt Venice’s high historic and spiritual mission, in which the Catholic faith is inextricably linked to the most pure and vigorous national feeling.” Hence, in this instance, the patriarch’s loyalty to Venice became, by extension, a demonstration of his loyalty to his country. The paper further asserted the extent of the patriarch’s identification with Venice by reference

89 “Vero soldato al fronte” Gazzettino 10 Jul. 1935.
90 This temple was subsequently built on the Lido. The significance of the temple is discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.
91 “In un momento particolarmente drammatico della storia della città, [ha] saputo assimilarne intimamente non soltanto gli aspetti esterni e formal de della sua vita e dei suoi costumi, ma anche lo spirito più profondo e riposto.” Gazzetta 10 Jul. 1935.
92 “Egli è stato un Patriarca veramente veneziano, che di Venezia sentiva l’alta missione storica e spirituale, nella quale la fede cattolica è indissolubilmente legato al più puro e gialliardo sentimento nazionale.” Gazzetta 10 Jul. 1935.
to his donation of the croce di Guerra with which he was presented in recognition of his war conduct to the Nicopeja Virgin, whose icon hangs at the altar dedicated to her in St Mark's basilica; “a gesture in which the memories and sentiments of the ancient rulers of the Serenissima live on.”

The cardinal's special relationship with Venice, generated through the common experience of war, was then used as explanation for his supposed subsequent affiliation with fascism. Again, the Gazzetta asserted:

Cardinal La Fontaine was able to perform his mission in the city in arms during the Great War with the highest prestige; for this reason He knew to restore a profoundly moral content to the title which, by traditional right belonged to the patriarch of the Serenissima, that of Primate of Dalmatia; for this reason He, among the first pastors of the Catholic church in Italy, understood the fascist revolution, and within the limits of possibility allowed by his most high yet most delicate dignity, favoured it with the full sincerity of his heart.

The transportation of Cardinal La Fontaine's body from Villa Fietta to Venice took place with great solemnity on 11 July 1935. The patriarch's coffin arrived at Piazzale Roma, having been escorted there by a fleet of cars containing local fascist and municipal leaders, including Count...
Volpi in his role as *Primo Procuratore di San Marco*, where it was met by an "impressive show of people"; the prefect, the local fascist party secretary, the local MVSN legion commander, a long file of *centurie marinari, Balilla, Avanguardisti, Giovane and Piccole Italiane* as well as religious authorities.96 Waiting to transport the coffin to St Mark's basilica was a "large funeral boat adorned with black drapes and with lions and symbols of immortality carved in the wood and gilded", with an escort of ceremonial gondolas belonging to the Venetian rowing societies and the Fascist *dopolavoro* organisation, a familiar sight at Venetian festivals.97 The *Settimana Religiosa* described the procession route lined with people crowding every *riva*, bridge and outlet along the *canal grande*, waxed lyrical about the "characteristic homage of the gondoliers" whose boats, fifty of them left empty as a mark of respect, surrounded the coffin, and recounted how, as the funerereal gondola passed, the crowds 'saluted' it reverently and threw flowers from windows and bridges onto the coffin; a "so characteristically Venetian triumph".98 Meanwhile, in Piazza San Marco cordons of troops held back the crowd along the *portici* of the old Procurators' offices that line the square.99 The funeral procession arrived at the *piazzetta* to be greeted by representatives of the ancient confraternities dating back to the days of the Serenissima Republic, the patriarch's coffin was solemnly carried on the shoulders of eight priests into the church as "people in the crowd kneel[ed] reverently, raised their arm in the roman salute, murmur[ed] prayers, most made the sign of the cross."100 Thus, religious rites and Venetian symbols mingled with the fascist.

The following day the funeral took place. Draped Italian tricolours flew "from every public and private building" whilst the city's shops, their shutters down, displayed notices explaining their closure due to "civic mourning" and the orchestras of the grand cafés of the *piazza* remained silent.101 By 10am crowds of "faithful" filled the square.102 Inside the church, the pews teemed

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96 "Manifestazione imponente di popolo." *Gazzetta* 12 Jul. 1935 "Il commosso omaggio dei veneziani".
100 "La folla si inginocchia reverente, leva il braccio nel saluto romano, bisbiglia orazioni, i più si fanno il segno della Croce." Reported in *ibid.*
101 "Da tutti gli edifici pubblici e privati"; "lutto cittadino". Description of funeral from report in *Gazzetta* 13 Jul. 1935 "L'ultimo commosso saluto di Venezia al suo venerato Patriarca".
with representatives of the religious and municipal authorities and the nave was lined with a double file of military representatives. On the side closest to the altar of the Nicopeja Virgin were ranged the Catholic associations and the family of the deceased, whilst on the other could be seen the flags and banners of the “patriotic and combatants’ associations”\(^{103}\) and various charitable organisations. Neither the church nor the Catholic requiem mass was immune from ‘fascist’ penetration. Just before the start of the mass, a “moment of profound emotion” took place: all the artillery soldiers and sailors in the church stood to attention as the Royal Navy band played the *Canzone del Piave* at the exact moment that the host was raised by the officiating priest.\(^{104}\) The *Gazzetta* understood the significance of this simultaneous ritual as the equation of Jesus’ sacrifice and death for the sake of mankind with the act of self-sacrifice committed by Italian soldiers for their nation.

This tribute of our combatant Army well befits the memory of the great Deceased who loved our soldiers with a paternal affection and who remembered them not only in life, but also in death, sending them a special benediction in his spiritual testament.\(^{105}\)

\(^{103}\) “Associazioni patriottiche e combattantistiche”; organisations such as the *Nastro Azzurro*, *Vedove e Madri dei Caduti*, *Arditi* etc. *Gazzetta* 13 Jul. 1935.

\(^{104}\) “Un momento di profonda commozione.” *Gazzetta* 13 Jul. 35; *Gazzettino* 13 Jul. 35; *Settimana Religiosa* 14 Jul. 35. The *Canzone del Piave* was, in the 1930s, a very popular war hymn. The hymn remembers the decisive Italian victory against the Austrians during WWI fought on and along River Piave near Venice and in the Venetian laguna itself, a battle often portrayed as one that was fought to ‘save’ Venice. The twentieth anniversary celebrations of the battle of the Piave, held in Venice in June 1938, feature in chapter 3 of this thesis.

\(^{105}\) “Questa rievocazione del nostro Esercito combattente ben si adde alla memoria del grande Defunto che amò i nostri soldati con amore paterno e che di essi si ricordò non solo in vita, ma anche in morte mandando ad essi nel suo testamento spirituale una speciale benedizione.” *Gazzetta* 13 Jul. 1935 “L’ultimo commosso saluto di Venezia al suo venerato Patriarca”.

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Figure 2: *Gazzettino Illustrato* 21 Jul. 1935 p. 3
Following the funeral ceremony, the patriarch's coffin was carried back towards the funereal boat, moored at the Molo in preparation to carry the patriarch over to the Lido where he would be buried. Before loading the coffin onto the boat, it was placed on the ground whilst the Venetian podestà, Mario Alverà, made his speech. In his "last salute" to Cardinal La Fontaine, the podestà emphasised the cardinal's loyalty both to Venice and to his country.\textsuperscript{106} Once again it was the common experience of war that was represented as having forged the bond between the cardinal and both his adopted city and his country; Alverà lauded the "beloved Bishop, who for twenty years, incessantly lavished His intelligence, His goodness, His fervour, His very example, to the City which perhaps he loved the most because he became more intimately acquainted with it in the torment of war, endured with Christian resolve and a magnificent love for his country." \textsuperscript{107}

Before his death, Cardinal La Fontaine had voiced his desire to be buried in the Tempio Votivo on the Lido; the temple, still under construction, that he had offered to the Virgin Mary in return for Venice's safe deliverance from Austrian air-raids during the First World War. The cardinal's wishes were fulfilled: after the podestà's speech in front of the Palazzo Ducale, the brothers of the Misericordia confraternity, helped by four representatives from the carabinieri, pompieri and vigili urbani placed the patriarch's coffin back on to the funereal gondola which then made its way over to the Lido. Once arrived on the Lido, the coffin was solemnly processed the short distance to the temple, as a uniformed division of blackshirts and children from the Lido branches of the Balilla, Avanguardisti, Piccole and Giovane Italiane watched on. As the coffin passed by, religious and fascist rites once again mingled, interchangeable but gendered, as "women kneel [and] the men make the Roman salute".\textsuperscript{108} In what was the most private element of the funerary ritual, the patriarch was buried in a ceremony attended only by the deceased's family and very few high-ranking representatives of the local religious and civil authorities in the crypt of the semi-built temple, alongside "3,000 fallen heroes" – the already interred bodies of soldiers who died in the First World War.\textsuperscript{109} The local newspapers, including the Settimana Religiosa, all placed great emphasis on the symbolic significance of Cardinal La Fontaine's burial place, as did participants in the ritual. Podestà Alverà, in his speech, articulated the idea

\textsuperscript{106} "Estremo saluto." The podestà's speech is reproduced in Gazzetta 13 Jul. 1935 "L'ultimo commosso saluto di Venezia al suo venerato Patriarca".

\textsuperscript{107} "Amato Presule che per vent'anni, incessatamente, profuse la Sua intelligenza, la Sua bontà, il Suo fervore, il Suo stesso esempio, alla Città che forse ha maggiormente amata perché conobbe più intimamente nello strazio della guerra, sopportato con cristiana fermezza e con magnifico amor di patria." Ibid.

\textsuperscript{108} "Donne s'inginocchiano [e] gli uomini salutano romanamente." Gazzettino 13 Jul. 1935.

\textsuperscript{109} "Tremila eroi caduti." Ibid.
that the patriarch would now watch over the souls of the fallen soldiers amongst whom he was buried:

He goes away towards that votive temple which he promised on the terrible night during which it seemed the enemy ire would shake and devastate the city, but in our hearts we feel that, even in eternal rest, in the long silence of the crypt, He will once again and forever comfort the immortal spirits of the Heroes, and Venice, which could not garner his last breath, will safeguard his venerated remains as an honour befitting her loyalty and affection.110

The Gazzettino took this idea further, suggesting that not only would the cardinal watch over the fallen soldiers interred alongside him, but that his spirit, together with those of the “fallen for Venice”;111 would now watch over both the city and the nation:

The mortal remains of the unforgettable Bishop will thus rest, in humility, with those of the heroic sons who defended Venice and the fatherland and for whom He – for which he was justly decorated with the croce di Guerra – dreamt and wished for the austere and beautiful Votive Temple; his most high spirit will merge with that of the heroes in order to beseech the Virgin Mary to protect the fatherland and Venice, which he loved as his own true city.112

In these assertions religious concepts interlaced with more secular, fascist notions. In effect the soldiers were beatified by the podestà and the newspapers; they are represented as martyrs, who have shed their blood, not for Christianity, but for the nation; a sacrifice which rendered them the new ‘guardian angels’ of modern Venice and Italy.

Indeed the mixing of religious concepts of sacrifice and worship with fascist nationalism and venezianità in the Tempio Votivo on the Lido is striking. The Venetian newspapers all used the occasion of the cardinal’s death and his choice of burial place to represent the history of the temple as being firmly located in the three traditions of Venice, the church and fascism. In terms of its venezianità, the patriarch’s votive prayer to the Virgin Mary during the ferocious bombing of Venice on the ‘night of eight hours’ was cast as the continuation of the Serenissima Republic’s tradition of constructing temples to give thanks for the city’s salvation from the plague; the church of the Redentore on the Giudecca, built following the plague of 1575-6, and

110 “Se ne va verso quel Tempio Votivo da Lui promesso nella notte terribile in cui l’ira nemica pareva dovesse sconvolgere e devastare la Città, ma nel nostro cuore sentiamo che anche nell’eterno riposo, nei lunghi silenzi della cripta, Egli conforterà ancora e sempre gli spiriti immortali degli Eroi, e Venezia che non potè raccogliere l’ultimo respiro ne custodirà come un onore che appartiene alla sua fedeltà e al suo affetto la spoglia venerata.” Reproduced in Gazzetta 13 Jul. 1935.
112 “La spoglia mortale dell’indimenticabile Presule riposerà così, in umiltà, presso quelle degli eroici figli che Venezia e la Patria difesero e per le quali Egli – a giusto merito decorato dalla croce di Guerra – sognò e volle, austero e bello, il Tempio Votivo; il Suo Altissimo Spirito con quello degli Eroi si confonderà nell’impetrare da Maria protezione sulla Patria e su Venezia che amava come sua vera città.” Gazzettino 11 Jul. 1935 “Plebiscito di dolore attorno alla salma del Patriarca Card. La Fontaine”. 
the baroque church dedicated to *Santa Maria della Salute*, constructed after an outbreak of the plague in 1630. To this end, the *Gazzetta* declared, "the Votive Temple on the Lido, desired by Pietro La Fontaine in order to give thanks to the Virgin for having saved the city from destruction at the hands of the enemy, and for have accorded the victory to our arms, perpetuates the august traditions of the Venetian Senate." To reinforce this sense of continuity with the history of the *Serenissima* republic, the *Settimana Religiosa*, in an article to commemorate the evolution of the project to build the votive temple, reproduced Cardinal La Fontaine's sermon made during the Christmas Day mass in St Mark's in 1916, in which he himself described the temple as the self-conscious continuation of Venetian tradition:

I realise, my children, that the force of my affection has opened the way for me to talk to you of the vow, which I intend to make, to obtain from God, in the midst of danger, the safe deliverance of Venice and her dear inhabitants. And what will this vow be? In 1630, when a fierce plague came to desolate beautiful Venice, the governors of the Republic thought to obtain the patronage of the Virgin Mother for the liberation of the city, offering her a Votive Temple, that is the beautiful church of the *Salute*.

Oh, could we not do likewise? On the Lido, the population having grown considerably, a temple is needed: but it must be a temple that is worthy of the traditions of Venice. The governors of public matters have already turned their considerate attention to the problem and made a number of decisions on this subject. This new temple could be our votive temple. I would like it dedicated to the Most Excellent God in honour of the Immaculate Virgin [...] In it should rise a chapel named after the cherished saint of miracles and of providence: St Anthony of Padua; and another chapel should be built in the temple, a prized expiatory chapel of intercession for the souls of our dear soldiers, killed fighting for the Fatherland.

Thus the temple, from the ceremonial blessing of its foundations and burial of "the first fallen soldier" in 1925, loomed large on the Venetian horizon, both physically and figuratively, as a powerful *luogo comune* whose meaning blended the Venetian tradition and Catholic concept of

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114 "Mi accorgo, figliuoli miei, che l'impeto dell'affetto mi ha aperto la via a parlarvi di quel voto, che io intenderei fare per ottenere da Dio in mezzo al pericolo l'incolumità di Venezia e dei suoi cari abitatori. E quale sarà questo voto? Nel 1630, quando una fiera pestilentia venne a desolare Venezia bella, i reggitori della Repubblica pensarono di ottenere il Patroncino della Vergine madre per la liberazione della Città, offrendole un Tempio Votivo, cioè la bella Chiesa della Salute.


115 "Il primo caduto." Ibid.
devotion and thanks-giving with more secular notions of nationalism, duty and sacrifice. Whilst in the first instance the understandings of sacrifice and duty as embodied in the temple were not necessarily fascist in nature – after all the conception of the temple preceded that of fascism – by the time of the cardinal’s death in 1935, the temple had, at least in part, been ‘fascistised’, helped in no small measure by the personal support given by Mussolini to the project.116

Civilian death

The funerals of civilian Venetians were less likely to include fascist rituals than their ‘military’ counterparts. Just a quarter of funerals and commemorative ceremonies remembering Venetian civilians included the fascist roll call, although just over half - 55% - did feature some form of fascist participation in the ceremony. This was the case, for example, with the funeral of Professor Pietro Pauletti, an art historian, held at the church of S. Angelo Raffaele in February 1936. Whilst the funeral ceremony of Professor Pauletti did not conclude with the rito fascista, the procession which followed his coffin to the church was made up not only of representatives of the major cultural institutions of Venice, such as the Accademia and the Fondazione Querini Stampalia, but also of “a division of uniformed fascists from the Dorsoduro group with banner”.117 Similarly, the account of the funeral of Maria Lucatello, published in the Gazzetta on 16 February 1934, mentioned the presence of both the male and female divisions of the Circolo fascista of Dorsoduro complete with flags at the ceremony, whilst the ringraziamento notice placed by her family expressed particular thanks to the “political authorities [and] the Command of the MVSN legion”.118 Even without the appello fascista, the very presence of uniformed fascists and balilla, particularly the presence of their flags and banners inside the church, often flanking the coffin, must have impacted significantly on funeral aesthetics.

It could be argued that, because the funerals described in the Venetian newspapers tended to be those of the professional and aristocratic elite, one might expect to find an even higher

116 It should be made clear that the temple was ‘fascistised’ in terms of the Venetian authorities’ and the Venetian newspapers’ understanding of it. This does not necessarily mean that ‘ordinary’ Venetians conceived of the temple in this ‘fascistised’ way.
incidence of fascist participation in these funerals than in those of the civilian population as a whole, and that this participation was perhaps more due to convention and a consequence of the deceased’s relatively high ranking in Venetian society, rather than the revelation of a deeply-held affiliation and identification with fascist ideals on the part of the deceased and his or her family. There is no doubt some degree of truth in this; however, given the lack of source material depicting the funerals of Venetian popolani, this is very difficult to ascertain. This survey has found just one article describing the funeral of a Venetian popolano who was neither a war veteran nor killed in either the Ethiopian or Spanish wars. The funeral of this popolano, from the fishing and lace-making island of Burano, did incorporate fascist rituals, including the appello fascista, although, again, this is perhaps as much the result of the age of the deceased and the unusual manner of his death as it is an indication of his or his family’s identification with fascism. Fifteen-year-old Giuseppe Tagliapietra was among twenty-three victims of a violent storm which battered the Venetian lagoon on 10 February 1936. His body was found some days after the storm along with that of his “companion in misadventure”, the “ex-combatant” Attilio Molin, and both were solemnly transported from Venice to Burano for the funeral ceremony on 17 February. 119 Perhaps because of relatively atypical and tragic circumstances of Tagliapietra and Molin’s deaths, or perhaps because of the nature of Burano’s small island community, the joint funeral was a very public ceremony. The shopkeepers of Burano closed down their shutters as an “enormous crowd” gathered to greet the arrival of the two coffins from Venice. 120 Alongside the crowd awaiting the funereal boats were “the Royal Carabinieri Marshall, sig. Palmieri, the Municipal Police Chief, sig. Tubello, representatives of the 49th and 16th Coastguards, numerous ex-combatants led by sig. Vio Angelo [as well as] uniformed Avanguardisti [and] Balilla.” 121 When the funereal boats arrived, the coffins of Tagliapietra and Molin were processed to the church; Molin carried by “national militiamen and ex-combatants”, Tagliapietra “carried on the shoulders of uniformed Avanguardisti, [with] the pennant of the Avanguardisti centurion, a squad of Balilla [and] Municipal Police in dress uniform”. 122 After the religious ceremony came the appello fascista. In addition, an ex-combatant accorded Molin “the salute of his fellow comrades-in-arms on land, sea and air, who were his companions in

119 “Compagno di sventura”; “ex- combattente”. The death and funeral of Tagliapietra and Molin were reported in the Gazzetta 18 Feb. 1936.
120 “Enorme folla.” Ibid.
the Great War".123 "Young" Giuseppe Tagliapietra was also saluted by the veteran, as the "future hope of the Fatherland and soldier of an idea".124 Thus, both deaths were represented as patriotic sacrifice – Molin’s the result of his status as a war veteran, Tagliapietra by virtue of his tender age and unfulfilled potential. These particular obsequies do seem to suggest that the funerals of the popular classes in Venice during the 1930s were permeated, to some extent by fascist rituals; however, given the young age and somewhat unusual circumstances of this popolano’s death, it would perhaps be imprudent to draw too wide a conclusion from this individual case.

An important indication that the osmosis of fascist ideas about death into the lived experience of ordinary Venetians was not entirely successful is provided in an article written for Ventuno, the journal of the Venetian GUF.125 Despite representing the official mouthpiece of student fascism in Venice, an article written by Massimo Puccini for the June 1938 edition articulating the author’s attitude towards death and dead bodies deviated somewhat from the ‘orthodox’ fascist concept of death. The article concurred, however, in many ways with the more complex, intricate understanding of death and loss articulated by Gabriele D’Annunzio. In the article, entitled “Un giorno alla Città Universitaria”, Puccini described how he and a group of friends, all students at Ca’ Foscari university, one day decided to attend a lecture at the Istituto di Medicina Legale purely because “we’d been told that at a certain point the professor would push a button, and: tac, cadavers would come out.”126 He recounted how he and his friends entered the lecture theatre “triumphant and light-hearted”.127 At first, the lecture proceeded without incident; towards the end of the hour, however, came the moment Puccini and his friends had been waiting for – a cadaver was brought into the theatre, ready for dissection. The arrival of the dead body was presented in the article as “an intruder” which interrupted the normal flow of the lecture.128 As the professor pushed the button which prompted the dissection table to emerge from below the lecture theatre, Puccini described the extreme nervousness he and his friends felt, in comparison to the apparent calm of the medical students. Puccini expressed surprise, even distaste, at the medical students’ and the professor’s familiarity with death;

123 “Il saluto dei commilitoni della terra, del mare e dell’aria, che gli furono compagni nella grande Guerra.” Gazzetta 18 Feb. 1936.
124 “Futura speranza della Patria e milite di un’idea.” Ibid.
125 For an account of the development of Il Ventuno see chapter 2, p. 68-9 & footnote 21.
But here is a kind of large plate, with the cadaver covered and wrapped in a sheet. And now, who will lift the sheet, who will have the courage? Instead, professor and assistant remove it, indifferent, the moment it is within their reach. The medical students do not recoil as we do and do not utter a swear word or two, but they lean forward so as to have a better view. We, on the contrary, pull back, look each other in the face, talk. Who can he be, how could he have died, and why? This is what interests us. And then, the professor explains to us: a young lad who fell off the roof of a cinema. Now it's the others who talk, and they annoy us: but are they men, do they have any sensitivity, do they have any nerves? Here's one, for example, who, called upon by the professor, touches and analyses the young boy. Fracture here, injury there. As if he were a sack. Or, better still, as if he were a cadaver made of terracotta.129

This distaste and nervousness in the face of death and abhorrence of what is seen as the medics' disinterest in the life of the young boy lying on the anatomy table is some way from the conventional fascist ideal of the glory of violent death and youthful sacrifice. It chimes more, perhaps, with D'Annunzio's understanding of personal tragedy and individual loss, articulated in Nottuno. The Ventuno article continued with the author fantasising about the young boy's life, the choices he might have made and the circumstances that might have led to his death. The lecture then broke for an interval, after which Puccini was presented with a sight of death which he found even more horrendous;

Now the second, more frightening, inhuman tragedy appears: two old people, man and woman, death by asphyxiation. Whilst all the others are unmoved, whilst everything remains stable and normal, I suffer: and I move, I turn away. My eyes feel like they cannot absorb that image.130

The vision of these dead bodies sparked not simply physical revulsion but also a series of philosophical musings in Puccini; in the end he concluded that it was the very reality of death that was “unbearable” to his “too pure and innocent eyes”.131 His relief on leaving the dead bodies in the lecture theatre was palpable:

Outside, in the open air, once again into normal life, we start joking again, someone even laughs coarsely. And yet within us something remains in our memory, an almost indelible shadow: we have passed a terrible hour, perhaps the first of our lives.


130 "Appare adesso la seconda più spaventosa, inumana tragedia: due vecchi, uomo e donna, morti per asfissia. Mentre tutti gli altri non si commuovono, mentre tutto rimane stabile e normale, io soffro: e mi muovo, mi rigiro. Gli occhi sento che non reggono quell’immagine." Ibid.

131 "Insopportabile", "occhi troppo puri ed innocenti". Ibid.
We head off towards the arts faculty: there’s an Italian literature class. Of course, the desire to exalt the value of life does not necessarily preclude or run counter to the prizing of heroic death; our reading of D’Annunzio’s intricate understanding of death and loss exemplified this. Nevertheless, it is striking that ‘fascism’ is wholly absent from Puccini’s account, published in the official organ of the Venetian student fascist organisation, which depicted death as alien to the everyday life of young Venetians, at least within his social circle, and railed against the futility of death and those who seemingly do not appreciate the loss that death represents. The encounter of this young man with death was “terrible”.

**Maria Pezzè Pascolato: questions of gender in the death of a fascist civilian**

Perhaps the most striking illustration of a civilian funeral incorporating fascist ritual is the case of the death of Maria Pezzè Pascolato, an eminent member of Venetian high society and leader of the Venetian Fascio femminile, the fascist women’s organisation. However, even in this example of the funeral of a “fascist of the first hour”, the limits of the regime’s ability to successfully permeate and appropriate the rituals of death are apparent. Ultimately, what is striking about Pascolato’s funeral is its ‘ordinariness’. On Monday 27 February 1933, a large death notice appeared in the *Gazzetta*, to announce “on 26 February 1933, year XI, at 10pm” the death of Maria Pezzè Pascolato, “after having dedicated all her strength to a life of abnegation and labour.” Having helped her close acquaintance, Elisa Majer Rizzioli, the founder of the women’s fasci, to establish the Venetian Fascio femminile, Maria Pezzè Pascolato remained provincial leader of the group from its inception until her death; from a well-connected family (her father was a “patriot”, a lawyer and served as a parliamentary deputy and minister), she was also an established member of the Venetian social and cultural elite, whose working life was divided between teaching Italian literature and charitable works. Combining her status as a fascist ‘of the first hour’ with the philanthropic initiatives typical of Italian upper-

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132 “Usciti, all’aria aperta, di nuovo nella vita comune, si riprende a scherzare, qualcuno ride anche sguaiatamente. Eppure in noi rimarrà qualcosa nella memoria, un’ombra quasi incancellabile: abbiamo passato un’ora terribile, la prima forse della nostra vita. Ci dirigeremo verso la facoltà di lettere: vi è una lezione di letteratura italiana.” Puccini M “Un giorno alla Città Universitaria” p. 46.

133 “Il giorno 26 febbraio 1933 A. XI alle ore 22 [...] dopo aver dedicato tutte le sue forze ad una vita di abnegazione e di lavoro.” Gazzetta 27 Feb. 1933.

134 Further information about the life of Maria Pezzè Pascolato can be found in Nadia Maria Filippini’s article “Storia delle donne: culture, mestieri, profili” in Isnenghi M & Woolf S eds. *Storia di Venezia* vol.2 pp. 1623-1662. For the establishment of the Fasci femminili see De Grazia V *How fascism ruled women. Italy 1922-1945* pp. 30-35.
middle and aristocratic women, previously carried out under the auspices of the church, she
founded several institutions which blended charitable and fascist ideals including the biblioteca
dei ragazzi in 1926, a Colonia estiva on terraferma as well as the Casa del ragazzo at Sant'
Elena, "which takes in boys or young men in order to give them substantial board and a healthy
fascist education."\textsuperscript{135}

The obituary of the Fascio femminile leader was the headline news on the Gazzetta’s cronaca
della città page two days after her death. Unsurprisingly, the obituary placed great emphasis
on the ‘fascist virtues’ of the deceased; it stressed her model patriotic and bellicose conduct
during the First World War and the biennio rosso and promoted her as a “wonderful example for
Venetians”:

In those uncertain and dark years, during which it seemed that Victory, snatched at the cost
of so much blood, and the very existence of social and national order would be shipwrecked—
and they would have been shipwrecked without the intervention of Mussolini—Maria Pezze
Pascolato fought, stage by stage, the national and fascist battle.\textsuperscript{136}

On closer examination, however, it seems that the character traits highlighted even in the
obituary of this “Fascista della vigilia” have more in common with traditional Christian narratives
than peculiarly fascist ones. She was described as, “a creature sent by Providence to the earth
to alleviate the suffering of her kind, to correct the destinies of so many wretched people and
lead them back into society from the obscure meanders of perdition.”\textsuperscript{137} The article further
asserted that it was Signora Pascolato’s pious nature, charitable works, intelligence, modesty
and “evangelical humility” which “made the chosen Woman the radiating centre of every
beneficent fascist activity”. Thus, the writer of the obituary employed traditional Christian terms
to recall the fundamental qualities and to construct the memory of Maria Pezze Pascolato as
“the Italian woman, the fascist woman, in the highest and most exact ideal meaning of these

\textsuperscript{135} “…che raccoglie ragazzi o giovanotti per dar loro un vitto sostanzioso ed una sana educazione fascista.”
Gazzetta 28 Feb. 1933.
\textsuperscript{136} “Un esempio mirabile ai veneziani”; “In quegli anni incerti e foschi, nei quali pareva dovessero naufragare la
Vittoria, strappata a prezzo di tanto sangue, e l’esistenza stessa dell’ordinamento sociale e nazionale – e sarebbe
naufragati, senza l’intervento di Mussolini – Maria Pezze Pascolato combatté, tappa per tappa, la battaglia
nazionale e fascista.” Gazzetta 28 Feb. 1933 “Il cordoglio per la morte di Maria Pezze Pascolato”. During the First
World War Maria Pascolato led the Comitato di Resistenza Civile and organised a Laboratorio Femminile to give
assistance to women and children. During the general strikes of the 1919-20 biennio rosso, she organised groups
of strike-breakers and carried out the duties of striking Venetian workers, for example, delivering telegrams in the
place of striking postal workers and taking over the duties of striking nurses in local hospitals.
\textsuperscript{137} “Una creatura inviata dalla Provvidenza in terra per lenire il dolore dei suoi simili, per spargere ovunque e
sempre il grande lievito del bene, per correggere il destino di tanti intelci, e ricondurli nella vita sociale dagli oscuri
meandri della perdizione.” Gazzetta 28 Feb. 1933 “Il cordoglio per la morte di Maria Pezze Pascolato”. 
words."\(^{138}\) Equally, the death notice placed by her fellow trustees in the Fascio femminile adopted conventional religious language, lamenting the passing of a "noble example of every excellent virtue, no longer of this world."\(^{139}\)

The funeral of Maria Pezze Pascolato combined public and private ritual and traditional Catholic ceremonial with fascist participation and rites. On 28 February the Gazzetta conveyed lengthy instructions to the various fascist organisations that were summoned to participate in the ritual; the Fascist party secretary, Giorgio Suppiej, urged representatives of fascist groups of each sestiere, of the Fasci giovanili, Avanguardisti, Balilla, Giovani and Piccole Italiane, as well as an armed escort of the Federazione veneziana dei fasci di Combattimento to attend the ceremony, bringing with them their flags and banners. In addition, every member of the Fascio femminile and Giovane Fasciste in Venice was ordered to report to the Fascio femminile headquarters in order to "go united" to the nearby church of San Stefano.\(^{140}\)

The following day's reports of the funeral described the ceremony as an "impressive display of homage" involving "the spontaneous participation of the people; their suffering clear, emotion evident in every face."\(^{141}\) The ceremony began at 7.30am with the transportation of Signora Pascolato's body, "preceded by the clergy and escorted by armed detachments [and] followed by relatives in mourning and some of the most intimate friends of the deceased" – a procession which therefore brought together the religious, the fascist and the private – from her home to the church of San Stefano.\(^{142}\) Inside the church, the bier was circled by the flags and pennants of the sestiere fascist groups, the ONB and local schools and orphanages, and by wreaths sent by the Federazione dei fasci di Combattimento, the Ufficiali and Camicie Nere of the 49th Legione S. Marco and the Regio Istituto Superiore Ca' Foscari. Shortly before the beginning of the Roman Catholic funerary rites, two Blackshirts solemnly placed "a large fascio littorio of violets tied with tricolour ribbons" on the coffin on behalf of Achille Starace and "all the

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\(^{138}\) "...facevano dell'eletta Donna il centro irradiatore di ogni benefica attivita fascista [...] a Donna italiana, la Donna fascista, nel piu alto e piu esatto valore ideale di queste parole." Gazzetta 28 Feb. 1933 "Il cordoglio per la morte di Maria Pezzè Pascolato".

\(^{139}\) "Un nobile esempio di ogni preclara virtu non piu di questa terra." Ibid.

\(^{140}\) "Recarsi unite". Gazzetta 28 Feb. 1933 "Dispensioni del Segretario federale e del Fascio Femminile."

\(^{141}\) "L'imponente manifestazione di omaggio [...] la spontanea partecipazione del popolo; il suo dolore palese, la commozione evidente in ogni viso." Gazzetta 1 Mar. 1933 "L'imponente manifestazione di omaggio alla salma di Maria Pezzè Pascolato".

\(^{142}\) Preceduta dal clero e scortata dai reparti armati [e] seguita dai congiunti in gramaglie e alcuni tra i piu intimi amici dell'Estinta." Ibid.
Blackshirts of Italy."143 After the traditional funeral mass and assoluzione della salma, a procession made up of "the Marinaretti della Scilla, the institutes, Balilla, the primary schools, the nurseries, the Giovani Fascisti, the various associations [and] the banner of the Federation with honorary escort" followed by "the relatives, the authorities and an enormous crowd of representatives and people" to escort the coffin, which was carried by six Giovani Fascisti, snaked its way towards the bank of the Grand Canal next to the Accademia bridge.144 Once arrived at the water's edge, the procession halted and the appello fascista was made:

Close by the slope of the old iron bridge, the body is placed on the ground and the Federal Secretary, avv. Comm. Giorgio Suppiej, according to the fascist rite, called out loud the name of Maria Pezzè Pascolato, to which the crowd replied: "Present!"145

Following this, the coffin was loaded into the funerary gondola and accompanied by gondolas and motorboats to the cemetery island of San Michele, where Maria Pezzè Pascolato was buried in her family tomb.

A year later, a number of ceremonies were held to record the first anniversary of Maria Pascolato's death. Again, these rituals grafted fascist elements onto more traditional religious rituals. Two of the ceremonies were essentially religious in nature: one, a mass held in the church of Santo Stefano attended by Piccole Italiane, representatives of the fascist organisations and the podestà; the other, a mass held at the cemetery church of San Michele, "a solemn religious function", organised by the Fascio femminile and the Federazione Provinciale Maternità ed Infanzia.146 Finally, one entirely secular ceremony took place at Ca' Foscari university, where Pascolato had taught literature, attended by the great and the good of Venetian fascism, including Count Volpi, Giorgio Suppiej, and the Prefect. At the ceremony, prof. Arturo Pompeati gave a speech recalling the highlights of Maria Pezzè Pascolato's life, singling out for particular praise her conduct during the war and the successive biennio rosso and her adherence to fascism from its inception.147 In 1935, to mark the two-year anniversary of her death, a religious service of remembrance was held in the church of San Zaccheria as well as a ceremony to unveil a plaque dedicated to Maria Pascolato in the Biblioteca dei

143 "Un grande fascio littorio di violette stretto da nastri tricolori [...] tutte le Camicie Nere d'Italia." Gazzetta 1 Mar. 1933 "L'imponente manifestazione di omaggio alla salma di Maria Pezzè Pascolato".
144 "I Marinaretti della Scilla, gli istituti, i Balilla, le scuole elementari, gli asili, i giovani fascisti, le associazioni varie, il gagliardetto della Federazione con la scorta d'onore [...] i congiunti, le autorità e l'enorme folla di rappresentanze e di popolo." Ibid.
145 "Presso la rampata del vecchio ponte di ferro, la salma venne deposta a terra e il Segretario Federale avv. Comm. Giorgio Suppiej, secondo il rito fascista chiamò ad alta voce il nome di Maria Pezzè Pascolato, al quale la folla rispose: "Presente!" Ibid.
146 "Una solenne funzione religiosa." Gazzetta 27 Feb. 1934.
ragazzi, one of the charitable enterprises she had initiated in the city. The plaque, which articulated the fascist idealisation of youth, read:

Maria Pezze Pascolato – The great friend of youngsters – In 1926 founded this library – Here returns her vigilant spirit – Among the new youth of Italy – Year XIII F[ascist] E[ra].

The unveiling ceremony was described as having a “simple solemnity”. Maria Pascolato’s successor as fiduciarina of the Fascio femminile, Contessa Vendramina Brandolin Marcello, ordered the unveiling of the plaque and carried out the appello fascista followed by a minute’s silence and an eulogy to the deceased. Significantly, the Gazzetta justified the ceremonial form chosen as having “the value of a religious ritual.” Once again, the remembrance ceremonies for Maria Pezze Pascolato reveal fascism’s repeated recourse to pre-existing, Catholic forms of ritual. Indeed, what seems striking about the rituals held to mark the death of Maria Pascolato, from the notices published in the Gazzetta announcing her death to the remembrance services recalling the first and second anniversaries of her passing, is that they were not more ‘fascistised’. Despite the relatively high but unsurprising level of fascist participation and the roll-call, Maria Pascolato’s life (as recounted in her obituary), death and funeral were all articulated and mediated through religious discourses – unlike D’Annunzio’s account of the secular rituals of Miraglia’s death. Could this be because, as a civilian and, what’s more, a women, it was much harder for Pascolato to have an ‘ideal fascist death’? After all, as Mabel Berezin has shown, in contrast to their male counterparts the death rituals of fascist women, though they may have included ‘fascist’ elements such as the roman salute or the presence and participation of party officials in the funeral ceremony, above all tended to commemorate the deceased woman as a “fascist nun” – silent and disembodied.

To conclude, this chapter has sought to present the ways in which fascist rituals and understandings of death attempted to infiltrate the experience of death in Venice during the 1930s. Located within both the international context of the cult of commemoration which transfixed much of Europe and the United States following the unprecedented bloodshed of

\[147\] Pompeati’s speech was reproduced in the Gazzetta 27 Feb. 34.


\[149\] “Il valore di un rito religioso.” Ibid.

\[150\] Berezin analysed the case of the death of Letizia M., who was killed by a communist bomb in Fiume in 1942. As was the case with Maria Pezze Pascolato, Berezin noted how the obituaries of Letizia M. emphasised her Christian rather than fascist qualities and characteristics – her piety and virginity – and accorded no space to the reproduction of Letizia’s own ideas and writings, as was usual with dead male fascists. In addition, though she was killed violently, in an explosion, only one brief mention was made to her “ripped flesh”; in the main, then,
the First World War and within the national and Catholic tradition of exalting heroic sacrifice, the fascist glorification of violent death for the sake of the patria sought to permeate the pre-existing culture of death, through the introduction of rituals like the appello fascista and the highly visible participation of fascist groups with their uniforms, flags and songs into funerary and commemorative ceremonies. By celebrating, rather than ignoring, disguising or negating death, particularly death in battle, the Italian fascist concept of death can be seen as an attempt to make the experience of mortality a familiar and public encounter; this is certainly a far cry from Gorer, Ariès and Beker’s assertion of modernity’s intolerance and denial of death and bears testament, at least in part, to the seismic impact of the scale of collective death and loss which pervaded post-1918 European society.

The fascist authorities in Venice enjoyed a varying but ultimately limited degree of success in terms of appropriating popular understandings of death. The equation of fascist ideology with the experience of military death – the death of war veterans or combatants in battle – was relatively successful. The majority of funerals held in Venice during the 1930s for war veterans and soldiers killed in the Ethiopian and Spanish campaigns embraced fascist participation and rituals within their ceremonies. In their accounts of deaths in battle, the Venetian newspapers articulated the notion of the glory of bloodshed and self-sacrifice, which characterised the fascist concept of death. However, given that the fascist understanding of death in many ways borrowed from pre-existing national and military concepts of death, duty and sacrifice, this was surely to be expected. And yet, on the deaths of such ardent fascists as Captain Manetti and Gesù Codré, those representing their deaths still made recourse to religious ritual and language.

Fascist permeation of the experience of death was certainly less successful when it came to the deaths of the ‘ordinary’ civilian population in Venice. Although just under half of the civilian funerals in Venice included the appello fascista in their rituals and many more included some level of participation by fascist organisations, this can at least in part be attributed to the fact that most of the funerals surveyed were those of members of the Venetian political, aristocratic, professional or cultural establishment, who would perhaps be more likely to have links with the ‘authorities’.

Letizia M. was rendered voice-less and body-less in death, in great contrast to the representations of fallen fascist men. Berezin M Making the Fascist Self pp. 236-242.
When fascist rituals or concepts of death were employed in Venetian funerals — military and civilian — they were mediated through the long-standing, pervasive and traditional Venetian, national and, especially, Roman Catholic discourses of death. D'Annunzio's nuanced secular and highly militarised narrative, which simultaneously exalted heroic death and, in its appreciation of the loss which death represents, valued life, was one such 'mental tool' through which Venetians could negotiate their lived experience of funereal ritual and understandings of death. These mediatory narratives had the potential both to help and to hinder the intended transmission of fascist ideals relating to death: even on the occasion of the death of the leader of the Venetian Fascio femminile, a 'fascist of the first hour', the obituaries, funeral and commemorative ceremonies dedicated to the deceased were all articulated through traditional religious forms. A 'good fascist death', then, was never just that — it entailed the interweaving of long-standing local, national, militaristic and religious narrative and ritual forms — ultimately weakening fascism's ability to successfully pervade the experience of death in Venice.
Epilogue and conclusion

The arrival of war in Europe in September 1939 – and to fascist Italy in June 1940 – touched Venetians in manifold ways, changing both nothing and everything. On the one hand, unlike during the first global conflict of the century, Venice found itself relatively removed from frontline fighting and an unspoken agreement between the allies that Venice should be considered città-franca ensured that the city's artistic and architectural patrimony – and also, therefore, its inhabitants – would not this time be threatened by aerial bombardment. As such, the city became a leave-time destination of choice for Axis soldiers and, after September 1943, home to numerous ministries, semi-state bodies and diplomatic missions of the Repubblica Sociale Italiana; the presence of civil servants, soldiers on leave, Cinecittà actors transferred from Rome to the safety of the Biennale pavilions at the Giardini, mockingly renamed Cinevillaggio, and not a few obstinate holiday-makers, all looking for the worldly entertainments for which Venice and the Lido were so renowned, conferred upon the war-time city the "aura of Casablanca." Their presence ensured that much of the Venetian tourist calendar of spectacles, exhibitions and amusements continued unabated – to the point that the Gazzettino was prompted to repeat the invocations of the Serenissima Republic's sagacious rulers against

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1 Italy's entry to the Second World War more generally is credited with prompting disenchantment with the regime among the Italian population; this is often held in marked contrast to the responses of the population of National Socialist Germany on the outbreak of war. See De Felice Mussolini l'alleato 1940-1945 Turin, Einaudi, 1997; Colarizi S L'opinione degli italiani; Knox M Common destiny: Dictatorship, Foreign Policy and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000; Bessel R ed. Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: comparisons and contrasts Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.
2 Biancamaria Mazzoleni, aged 12 on the outbreak of war, reflected in her memoir on the comparative tranquility of war-time Venice: "The alarm sounds, but in Venice people are almost untroubled. Who would dare to throw bombs on this marvel of a city? The atmosphere, however, is one of concealed disquiet. There are shelters and one goes there as a precaution, with a few things in a bag, in any old bundle." ("L'allarme suona, ma a venezia si sta quasi tranquilli. Chi potrà avere il coraggio di gettare bombe su questa meraviglia di città? L'atmosfera è, comunque, di velata inquietudine, i rifugi ci sono e ci si va per prudenza, con poche cose in una borsa, in qualsiasi fagotto.") Mazzoleni B Il tempo delle Margherite ADN MP/99 p. 11. If the islands of Venice remained an "oasis of peace", mainland Venice was not so fortunate; the chemical and petroleum works at Marghera made the area around Mestre a prime target for allied bombs. On two notable exceptions the centro storico also found itself the target of aerial attacks; on 14 August 1944 a German hospital ship moored off the Punto della Dogana at the entrance to the Grand Canal was hit, along with two vaparetti which happened to be alongside, killing over thirty people whilst on 13 October 1944 a commuter ferry-boat was sunk off the coast of Pellestrina at a cost of over 100 lives. See Liucci R "Il '43 – '45" in Isenenghi M & Woolf S eds. Storia di Venezia L'Ottocento e il novecento vol. 3 Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Treccani, 2002 pp. 1741-1766.
3 For example, the Ministry of Public Works, part of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Istituto LUCE all made their home in Venice between September 1943 and April 1945. Liucci R "Il '43 – '45" p. 1746.
4 Ibid. p. 1750.
waste, luxury and "pomp". On the other hand, however, the fact that the usual blend of high-
society aristocrats, moneyed bourgeoisie and treni-popolari daytrippers had to a large degree
been replaced by Italian and German soldiers on leave and workers in the ministries and
associated bodies of Salò was inescapable. Neither did Venetians' day-to-day lives remain
immune from the tumultuous social, psychological and economic upheavals brought by full
mobilisation and militarisation, conscription, rationing and shortages. Rosa De Cilia's family
took to finding food on the black market, sometimes travelling to the rural mainland to 'acquire'
products found only scarcely or not at all in the centro storico's shops, the young Biancambaria
Mazzoleni secretly devoured the sugar lumps her grandmother kept hidden, but not well
enough, in a drawer, whilst Vana Amould's mother made the most of the new 'war food' or
"scoazze" [Venetian dialect for 'rubbish'] as she called it:

She used to make these grey coloured potato gnocchi – such was the shade of flour in those
days – that looked frightful but, given our hunger, came to be considered a delicacy besides
the soups made with pea-pods or diced cabbage stalks which never used to be cooked.
Everything was good to fill the stomach, but it was difficult to find even chestnut or American
potato flour without a card, in other words, without being asked for ration stamps.

Even the eating habits and social life of the wealthier Venetian elites were altered by the
coming of war; recalling the last meal she had attended at the home of friends, 'Casa Galli',
where the menu was inspired by "the great French cuisine or let's say the cuisine that, at that
time, had never been polluted by American approximation to taste", Maria Damerini remarked:

It was not the first dinner that was hosted in that house of friends, but it was the last. The
global conflict was around the corner and France would be among the first to be implicated.
Blanche [Galli] was French and she soon found herself deserted. I continued to see her,
preserving a liking for her which it seemed to me was more useful than ever, given her
loneliness.

5 Articles appeared in the Gazzettino alluding to the contemporary relevance of "Sprechi d'altri tempi. La
Magistratura contro il lusso nell'antica Venezia" and "La lotta contro il lusso e gli sprechi. Sponsali e conviti nella
legislazione veneta" Gazzettino 23 Jan. 1941 & 25 Aug. 1941. See RJB Bosworth "Venice between Fascism and
international tourism, 1911-45" pp. 13-17 for a discussion of the impact of the Second World War on the Venetian
tourist industry and, for a more comprehensive treatment of the Venetian experience of war; Franzina E "Il "fronte
1685-1739.
6 De Cilia R, (Armani B ed.) Mi chiamo Rosa De Cilia 'ai suoi comandi' ADH MP/86.
7 Mazzoleni B Il tempo delle Margherite ADN MP/99 p. 11.
8 "Faceva certi gnocchi di patate color grigio – tale era la tonalità della farina in quei tempi – che a vederli facevano
orrore, ma, data la fame, venivano considerati una squisitezza, come d'altronde le minestre con le buccio di piselli
o i torsoli di cavolo a dadini che non si cucinavano mai. Tutto era buono per riempire lo stomaco, ma era difficile
trovare fuori tessera, cioè senza che venissero richiesti i bollini annomeri, anche la farina di castagne o le patate
americane." Arnould V Me g'ha contà a la nonna ADN MP/And p. 229.
9 "La grande cucina francese o, diciamo di quella cucina che allora non era mai stata inquinata dal press'a poco di
gusto americano. [...] Non era la prima cena che fosse offerta nella casa amica, ma fu l'ultima. Il conflitto mondiale
era alle porte e la Francia tra i primi ne sarebbe stata coinvolta. Blanche [Galli] era francese e presto si trovò il
vuoto intorno. Io continuai a vederla, serbandomi la simpatia che mi pareva, più di sempre, utile alla sua
solitudine." Damerini M Gli ultimi anni del Leone, p. 266.
For the Damerinis, the nation's entry into the Second World War coincided with personal
disappointment; one which would lead to their increasing disappearance from the central circles
of political and social life in a city which itself would cease to be the magnet of mondanità it had
been during the first half of the century. At the end of 1940 Gino Damerini was removed from
the editorship of the Gazzetta, as the paper was subsumed by its rival Gazzetino, at the
instigation of his ‘friend’ Giuseppe Volpi, who by now owned both titles. From her memoir,
however, the greatest impact of the coming of war on Maria Damerini appears to have
centered on the psychological, almost spiritual, continuities which the conflict offered.

That morning, however, it was gaiety all round and if talk was of war it was for the moment
about probable war elsewhere. One talked without great fear of our possible entry to that
conflict, which seemed improbable to the females present and imminent instead to the men,
as it was.

Those present would accept it and fight.

Later, having left the young ones in the beach hut, I headed to the hotel to wait there for
the coach that serviced the route between the Excelsior and the golf club. It stopped close to
the entrance.

On the first few steps of that pretentious flight of steps which, between two crouching
sphinxes, leads from the beach to the hotel rooms, I met Ninetto Bonmartini.

"Don't look at me with that shocked air, you ought to know by now that I always do the
opposite of what everybody else does. I'm going for a dip in the sea."

"Why at this hour?"

"Because at this hour there's nobody around."

"You'll catch sunstroke."

"Is that a wish?" he asked, mockingly. But then he stopped and, looking at the soot-
coloured sea, still as a steel plate: "He is my friend," he concluded and addressed to the
translucent mirror the word that sounded as both recognition and salute; "I'Amarissimo", he
said.

That word made real a presence, which seemed to me had been his wish. In fact it was:
"I miss him," he murmured. "It's a year since he went. Not that I could get very close to him
by then, but I used to write to him some times and he always replied to me. Sometimes he
sought me out." He turned and stood next to me and immediately the Fiume adventure
flourished on his lips.

"Those who weren't there can never know what it meant. For me it meant a break."

He looked at me, seeking assurance that I understood him. He remained silent for a while
and then concluded: "Try to understand, in short, try to understand; I could forget the names
of my father and mother; of my own name, in the end, in order to go back to being a soldier."

"A soldier of fortune?" I asked.

"Call me what you will. There they called me a legionary. And don't ever think ill of
adventure."

We discussed a little what adventure means and how every conquest is always an
adventure. In fact, I would have agreed if it had not been for his insistence on polemics at all
times.

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10 Maria Damerini's account of the end of the Gazzetta is described in her memoir. See Mario Isnenghi's preface
to Damerini M Gli ultimi anni del Leone pp. 13-17 and also i cento anni del "Gazzettino": 1887-1987. Turin,
We entered the vast hall, completely empty at that time of day. We sat down and once again it was clear to me how he needed to talk without impediments or constrictions as if he were alone. In silence I listened to him talk the way he used to like to talk of Fiume and of how his desire to participate in the Fiume adventure was born and how he was welcomed, as all were welcomed, with warm gratitude. In the half shadows, an odorous breath of saltiness filtered through the large screening door-curtains cleansing the frequent bitterness of his words. “Fiume, Fiume, Fiume…” and d’Annunzio ever present.11

In Maria Damerini’s recollection, mundane continuities – breakfast at the beach hut followed by a round of golf – mingled with the persistent presence of D’Annunzio and of Fiume in the collective memories of the Venetian fascists who had adhered the soldier-poet’s spiritual and irredentist brand of ‘Adriatic fascism’. Total war offered the chance to recapture and continue the spirit of “conquest” and “adventure” which they perceived in the fascist movement and

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11 “Quel mattino peraltro era per tutti gaio e se si parlava di guerra era per il momento di probabile guerra altrui. Si parlava senza gran tema di una nostra possibile parte a quel conflitto che alla presenza femminile pareva improbabile e agli uomini invece imminente, quale era.

I presenti l’avrebbero accettato e combattuto.

Più tardi, lasciata in capanna la gioventù, mi avvii all’albergo per aspettarvi il pullman che faceva servizio tra l’Excelsior e il golf. Si fermava innanzi all’ingresso.

Sui primi gradini di quella scalinata pretenziosa che tra le due sfingi accosciate porta dalla spiaggia alle sale dell’albergo, incontrai Ninetto Bonmartini.

“Non mi guardi con quell’aria esterefatta, dovrebbe pur saperlo, io faccio sempre il contrario di quel che fanno gli altri. Vado a buttarmi a mare”.

“Perché a quest’ora?”

“Perché a quest’ora non c’è nessuno in giro”.

“Si pigliarà un colpo di sole”.

“È un augurio?”, chiese con scherno. Ma poi s’arrestò e guardando il mare caliginoso immobile come una lastra d’acciaio: “Lui è mio amico”, concluse e disse rivolto allo specchio traslucido la parola che suonava un riconoscimento e un saluto: “Amareissimo”, disse.

Per quella parola si realizzò una presenza che mi parve fosse nel suo desiderio. Infatti: “Mi manca”, mormorò. “Da un anno se ne è andato. Non che lo potessi ormai avvicinare molto, ma qualche volta gli scrivevo e mi rispondeva sempre. Qualche volta mi cercava lui”. Si volse e si affiancò a me e subito la festa fiumana gli fiorì sulle labbra.

“Chi non c’era non può sapere quello che ha significato. Per me ha significato una pausa”. Mi guardava cercando di rendersi sicuro che lo comprendessi. Rimase in silenzio un poco e concluse: “Cerchi di capire, insomma, cerchi di capire; potrei dimenticarmi dei nomi di mio padre e di mia madre; del mio nome infine, per tornare ad essere un soldato”.

“Un soldato di ventura?”, chiesi.

“Mi chiamò come vuole. Là mi chiamarono legionario. E non pensi mai male dell’avventura”. Discutemmo un poco su quel che l’avventura significhi e come ogni conquista sia sempre un’avventura. In fondo sarei stata d’accordo, se non fosse stato per l’insistere suo, sempre polemico.

understood also as an integral part of the luogo comune of Venice's special relationship with the sea.

It did not need the war, however, for fascist narratives of redemptive war, duty and sacrifice to meet, mingle and clash with alternative discourses and sources of memory and authority, such as the Serenissima Republic. Since the 'March on Rome' and Mussolini's accession to and increasing dominance of power, the fascist leadership had sought to transmit its ideals to every citizen and to permeate even the seemingly most 'private' aspects of their daily lives, in order to remould Italians into new model fascist men and women, deserving of and requiring a reinvigorated imperial Italy. During the 1930s, with the 'totalitarian' apparatus of the regime at its most complete – though still far from perfected – the fascist authorities sought to put their gendered and generational stamp of duty to the Duce and to the patria onto the daily experiences and life-courses of Venetian men, women and children, from birth strategies and baptisms, through marriage, to funeral practices and the rituals of death.

In promoting their 'civil religion', the fascist hierarchy borrowed heavily from the liturgy and rites of the Catholic church and from historical repositories of symbols, myths and lieux de mémoire including those of classical Rome, the Risorgimento and the Great War. The 'memory' of the Roman republic and empire, the struggle for national unification and the vittoria mutilata – or at least those memories and 'traditions' best placed to serve contemporary ends – were reinterpreted and 'reinvented' in order to site the fascist project within a complex and dynamic interplay of past, present and future; fascism was presented as the natural heir of Rome, as the completer of the unfinished project of national unification and as having been forged in the camaraderie and sacrifically-regenerative climate of the trenches, but it was also, or so it claimed, an entirely new, modern and forward-looking force which, not content with simply 'reclaiming' appropriate elements of the past, abandoned conventional notions of historical time in favour of showing fascism to be the dramatic fusing of past, present and future – an ever-dynamic and incomparable historical moment and agent.12

12 In his study of the fascist 'historic imaginary', Claudio Fogu accomplishedly demonstrated fascism's self-perception as a historical agent, in other words, as possessing the properties of agency and 'maker of history' more usually associated with those events that popular culture defines as 'epoch-making'. In its many representations and recreations of 'historic spectacles', the fascist regime sought not just to gain legitimacy by linking itself to suitably glorious moments of Italy's past, but to demonstrate that, in fascism, the past was present, and therefore that the conventional Enlightened notion of historical time had been superseded. Fogu C The Historic Imaginary. Politics of History in Fascist Italy, passim.
This study has highlighted in particular three narratives or themes whose both historical specifics and supposedly atemporal (but not immovable) values were mined by the fascist authorities in Venice as mediators through which to convey fascist ideals and policies to the lagoon’s inhabitants. These mediating narratives were repeatedly employed in fascistised cultural products; in the stories, cartoons and puzzles of children’s comic books, in the old Venetian festivals and ‘new’ commemorative events staged by the regime in the città-palcoscenico, in the literature advocating resistance and patriotic consumption in response to the League of Nations’ sanctions, and in the symbols and rituals surrounding the experience of death in Venice.

The first of these mediating narratives was that of the ‘nation’, which bound together notions of palingeneticism and the exaltation of patriotic duty and war as a formative test of both individual and nation with the idea of historical legitimacy, conferred on fascism through the national line that was traced through time – eliminating time – from imperial to risorgimentalist to Mussolinian Rome. Belligerent and imperialist nationalist ideals pervaded the cultural products of fascism; comic books like the Gazzettino dei Ragazzi, the Corriere dei Piccoli and the official title of the regime, Il Balilla, urged young girls to sew national flags, become ‘madrine’ to colonial combatants and prepare themselves to fulfil their patriotic duty of bearing sons who would ultimately fight – and potentially sacrifice themselves – for the patria. Young boys, fed countless dashing tales of national risorgimentalist and Great War heroes who gladly embraced pain, sacrifice and death for their country’s glory, were called upon to behave as little soldiers with the courage, discipline and readiness, once their time would come, to die for their country and fascism – for the two were presented as inextricably bound. The imperialist-racist justifications which informed Mussolini’s demographic campaign – the increase in births (of Italian stock [stirpe]) would both necessitate and be necessitated by colonial expansion – underpinned the resurrected festa delle Marie and the re-baptising of Christmas Eve as the ‘Day of the Mother and Child’. The 1938 twentieth anniversary celebrations of the Battle of the Piave mustered all the pomp of the nation’s military, royal and fascist hierarchy for a series of elaborate rituals which commemorated what was perhaps fascism’s most useful luogo comune in terms of imagining a national community; the Great War. The anti-sanctions resistance espoused by the Venetian fascist authorities, albeit at times contradictory in terms of practicalities, was unerring in its recourse to patriotic tropes – not least the call to Italian women to offer their wedding rings to the patria – in its exhortations towards ‘national consumption’. Perhaps more than any other cultural experience examined in this study, though, the
experience and rituals of death offered the regime’s best opportunity to equate nation with fascism; risorgimentalist and religious ideals of the ultimate self-sacrifice were appropriated in order to present the fascist ‘revolution’ as the expression of the regenerative bloodshed of the nation’s youth. To this end, for example, the insertion of the fascist roll call into the funereal rites of those who had contributed to the glory of the nation or fascism was intended as “both pledge and annunciation” to remind participants of the continual bond between the nation’s living and its dead.13

Of all its mediating ‘messages’, the one that carried most currency with Venetians, at least for the frequency with which it was invoked, was surely this ideal of the nation. The essays written by Venetian school children as part of the 1935 Premio da Ponte competition often expressed their preference for the patriotic content of their favourite comic books – the pagine degli Eroi and “patriotic facts” which, in extremis, prompted little Maria de Spirit to feel “the enthusiasm and readiness to offer my own blood for the Fatherland too”.14 However, given the, at times complementary but at times rival, alternative sources of authority on which it drew – the Risorgimento, the monarchy, the multiple experiences of the ‘generation of 1914’ – the exaltation of the nation and particularly of the nation at war was not always translated unequivocally to the Venetian population. Patriotism and the nation were not necessarily always equated with the fascist project; to return to the example of the Premio da Ponte essays once more, 31% of the readers of the Corriere dei Piccoli who wrote positively of the ideal of the nation and associated concepts of war and militarism did so with no reference to Mussolini or the organs of fascism, reflecting instead on a nation imagined in terms of the Great War or through the figure of the King.15 Furthermore, young fascists like Franco Pasinetti, contributor to the magazine of the Venetian GUF, il Ventuno, felt that they had to negotiate their place within the regime and nation “having been unable to participate in the War and in the Revolution”16 whilst, at the other end of the life-course, Peppino Ranieri railed against what he perceived as the abandonment of those “who still carry the signs of such sacrifices for the greatness of Italy and of Fascism imprinted indelibly on their own flesh” in favour of Giovani

13 Speech made by the Venetian podestà, Mario Alvera, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Battle of the Piave, reported in the Gazzetta 18 Jun.1938 “Venezia acclamerà oggi il Re Imperatore.” See chapter 3, p. 169.
15 This compares with 46% of Corriere readers who made no mention of fascism whatsoever and 12% who explicitly wrote of fascism in their essays. See chapter 2 p. 109.
Italiani whose love for the nation – and for fascism – had not yet passed the ultimate test of war.17

Whilst nationalist narratives were invoked by the regime in its quest to remake Italians into fascists, the more geographically restricted but no less potent ‘memory’ of the Venetian Serenissima republic was harnessed as a legitimiser of the fascist project. The myths, symbols and physical spaces of the Serenissima, already imbued with meaning (or contested meanings), were mobilised by the leaders of the Venetian Fascio, by the city’s religious leadership and by a local press inspired by the vision of a modern and dynamic ‘Venezia risorta’ fed by the writings of D’Annunzio and the commercial wranglings of Volpi and Cini’s ‘Venetian group’, in order to present fascism and its pretensions to imperial greatness and (re)domination of the Mediterranean or Mare Nostrum, as the natural heir of the vast and enduring Venetian empire. In this way a city-republic and empire which for much of its existence had directed its focus towards the ‘East’ and been renowned for its political and social ‘insularity’ in relation to the rest of the peninsula, was redefined (in intention) as “the greatest and purest heir to Rome”18 and, therefore, a useful link in the chain which the regime wished to extend from Caesar to Mussolini.

Although the ‘myth’ of Venice as a great maritime power and seat of wise and stable government found itself instrumentalised in articles exalting Italy’s irredentist claims in the eastern Adriatic in children’s comics and in the exhortations to Venetians to follow the heroic example set by Daniele Manin and the 1848 revolutionaries in their resistance to the “economic siege” laid by the League of Nations, the most evident ‘use’ of the history and memory of the Serenissima by the regime came in the mid-1930s staging of popular festivals and commemorative events which drew upon and reinvented ‘ancient’ Venetian ‘traditions’ to persuade the lagunari of the correctness of the fascist project. Thus, the festa delle Marie was revived, or rather reinterpreted, from its medieval Marian origins into the fascist festival of marriage; though it seemingly deviated from the ‘original’ rites and practices of the medieval festival, the organisers and supporters in the press of the reinstated fascist festa delle Marie, which exalted marriage and fecundity as well as victory over ‘Slavic’ pirates, insisted on presenting the festa as evidence of the seamless continuity between the “wisdom of the ancient

17 Letter from Ranieri to Starace 11 Oct. 1932. ACS PNF Serie I, b. 1184
Venetians [and] the clear vision [of] Benito Mussolini, *Duce* of the new Italy*. Once again revealing itself to be as concerned with the past as it was with the future, the regime’s staging of the 1938 Piave celebrations plundered the *Serenissima’s* repository of heroic martial figures from the blind old Doge of the fourth crusade, Enrico Dandolo to Giacomo Nani, the last *Provveditore al Mare* of the Venetian republic as well as its most symbolic *luoghi* – in terms of expressing the empire’s political, military and mercantile might – St Mark’s bay and the *Arsenale* as historic fonts of legitimacy in the ceremonial baptism of the latest additions to the Italian navy, which under fascism would give rise to future national glory.

As with the narratives of the nation, the symbols, rituals, semiophores and *lieux de mémoire* of the *Serenissima* appropriated by the regime, proved by no means unceasingly supportive of its ends. The nuanced myths and anti-myths of Venice, a thousand years in the making, had long been subject to reinterpretation and redeployment to myriad ends. Particularly tricky to negotiate – and therefore largely ignored by the regime – was the anti-myth which recalled the city’s apparent spiral towards extinction amid the frivolous and corrupt decadence of its inhabitants during the eighteenth century. The ‘inglorious’ end of the Republic, surrendered with little protest to Napoleonic troops on 12 May 1797 was only partially atoned by the 1848 uprising against Austrian rule. Thus in the fascist version, the end of the Republic was spun as the beginning of Venetian victimhood – at French and then Austrian hands – and quickly glossed over; the résumé of Venetian history in the municipally produced city-guide, *Venezia*, after pages of detailed accounts of Venice’s ascent as a great power dealt with the fall of the Republic in just a couple of lines and ended the city’s history with the 1866 accession to the new Italian nation.

The enormous riches accumulated allowed [Venice], however, to live for another century with the semblance of magnificence and splendour until, in 1797, Venice ceded to the armies of Napoleon. Austrian dominion replaced French occupation. [...] In 1848 the Venetians with Daniele Manin at their head recovered their ancient spirit, drove off their oppressors and for over a year resisted the memorable siege. It was a page of glory which redeemed the sorrow of ‘97. In 1866 Venice was finally joined to Italy.

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20 “Le ingenti richezze accumulate le concessero tuttavia di vivere ancora un secolo sotto apparenza di fasto e di splendore finché nel 1797 Venezia cedeva agli eserciti di Napoleone. All’occupazione francese subentrò il dominio austriaco. [...] Nel 1848 i Veneziani con a capo Daniele Manin, ritrovato l’antico spirito, caciavano l’oppressore e resistevano per più di un anno al memorabile assedio. Fu una pagina di gloria che riscattò la tristezza del 97. Nel 1866 Venezia era finalmente congiunta all’Italia.” *Venezia*. Venice, Comune di Venezia, Ufficio per il turismo, 1938.
The final mediating narrative highlighted by this study was that provided by the Catholic church which, even after the 1929 Conciliation between church and state, brokered partially thanks to the efforts of the Venetian patriarch, Cardinal La Fontaine, oscillated between fervent and more qualified support for fascist policies and ideals. Without doubt, the Catholic church and fascist state found common cause in reaching into the homes and daily lives of Italian citizens in order to promote their shared conservative values: marriage and fecundity within marriage, abstention, duty, self-denial and sacrifice; remembrance of the dead; and “educating [...] children in the love of God, the love of the family and the love of the Fatherland, which we desire great and glorious”. To this end, the fascist regime borrowed heavily from the liturgy, rites, myths and language of sacrifice and martyrdom of the church in order to create a national secular and political religion; in Venice, this was manifested, for example, in the appropriation of the story of Christmas, the feast day of the purification of the Virgin, the rituals of baptism and marriage and the principal religious luoghi of the city – the basilica of San Marco, the patriarchal palace and the cathedral of San Pietro di Castello – to promote the demographic campaign and the work of ONMI. Nationalist sentiment and the cult of the dead were woven with religious-esque rites and language by the Venetian fascist authorities; to Podesta Alvera the Piave became the “sacred river”, the Giornata della Fede wedding-ring donation ceremony, the Gazzetta declared a “sacred rite”. To a considerable extent, the regime’s mobilisation of religious values and forms was met with the approval of the Venetian religious leaders. Cardinal La Fontaine, for example, blessed the twelve couples married as part of the festa della Marie before sending them off to pray before the altar of the Nicopeja Virgin, whilst his successor, Cardinal Piazza, who offered the most vociferous approval of the new Fascist Italy in the speech he gave during the Piave celebrations invoking the “blessing of God [...] upon our magnificent flag” whose elements unite “the Christian tradition of the House of Savoy and the imperial power restored with the fasci of Rome”.

21 Gazzetta 4 Feb. 1934
22 From Mario Alvera’s speech reported in the Gazzetta 18 Jun. 1938 “Venezia acclimerà oggi il Re Imperatore. L’ardente vigilia del rito guerriero in onore degli Eroi del Mare”. See chapter 3 p. 169.
officiating priest raised the host – as did his place of burial, alongside the remains of 3,000 fallen Venetian soldiers in the Tempio Votivo on the Lido which La Fontaine himself had pledged to the Virgin Mary during the bombardments of the Great War, and from where, it was declared, his spirit and those of the ‘heroes’ would intercede with the Virgin Mary on behalf of Venice and the fatherland.\textsuperscript{25}

The relationship between the fascist and Catholic leadership was not always, however, one of such close identification; whilst the collaboration between the fascist and religious authorities in Venice exemplified in the festa delle Marie or the Giornata della Madre e del Fanciullo can be read as the result of the shared aims and values of church and state, it must in part also be understood in terms of the contesting of roles and jostling for jurisdiction over aspects of social life traditionally mediated and governed by the church and now challenged for by the regime. Those areas of society traditionally dominated by religious institutions – morality, education, charitable institutions, welfare and social assistance provision amongst others – would not be relinquished to the fascist authorities without, sometimes quite literally, a fight.\textsuperscript{26} Thus, whilst giving its broad endorsement to the parachuting in of the ‘Day of the Mother and Child’ onto the eve of the most important date in the religious calendar, the Settimana Religiosa advocated an acknowledgement of the ‘separate spheres’ of the secular and the sacred and, above all, the remembrance of “the religious precepts which constitute the most robust and fertile bond of the family”.\textsuperscript{27} Such points of conflict and contested space between church and state ensured that, as one of the principal mediatory narratives, the institutions and, especially, the appropriated discourses, myths and rites of the church played an ambiguous and pluralistic – at times supportive but at times contradictory – role as they negotiated between regime and population.

The picture that emerges of everyday life in Venice and the creative relationship of ‘ordinary’ Venetians with the ‘fascistised’ cultural products that they encountered during the 1930s is one that cannot be reduced to a Defelician or Colarizian portrait of a totalitarian regime (in both intent and effect) successfully eliciting the consent of the population, reaching its peak in 1935-6 with the war in Ethiopia and subsequently rapidly descending to its lowest trough with the introduction of the racial laws in 1938, from which it would never recover its previous level of popular support. This study has argued that, given the presence of a brutal dictatorship which

\textsuperscript{25} See chapter 5 pp. 266-269.

\textsuperscript{26} Such as the violent scuffles that broke out between members of the Venetian branches of the GUF and FUCI during the ‘crisis’ of 1931; see chapter 2 pp. 71-3.

\textsuperscript{27} Settimana Religiosa 24 Dec. 1933 “Il Fanciullo e la Madre”. See chapter 3 p. 155.
certainly sought to pervade every aspect of its citizens' lives and the parallel absence of the
means and institutions for expressing contentment, disapproval, consent and dissent – political
parties, trade unions, a free press, freedom of expression and so on – usually found in
democratic systems, the consent/dissent dichotomy must be rejected and replaced with more
nuanced categories of 'accommodation' and 'mediation' between regime and citizens which are
better placed to address the "ambiguities" and "ambivalences" of daily life under dictatorship.28

The inquiry into the way in which the fascist authorities used the imposition of the League of
Nations' sanctions to promote the ideologies of nationalism and autarchy and to generate
consent for the regime and into the impact of anti-sanctions resistance on Venetians' daily lives
would question the positing of the Ethiopian war as the climax of fascist consensus; certainly
many Venetians rallied to the regime's calls for resistance and modified their day-to-day habits
and consumptive practices, however, the ambiguity, created at least in part by the fascist
authorities themselves, as to what forms of behaviour could be considered acts of resistance
allowed individuals to make choices and behave in myriad ways, even under the pretence of
resistance, which often strayed considerably from official anti-sanctions directives. As such, the
Ethiopian War appears less as a high-point of support for fascism and more as a high-point in
the regime's intense efforts to intrude and impact upon daily life, through propaganda which
manipulated the imposition of sanctions to promote fascist ideals of autarchy, national
consumption and imperialism, but which nevertheless still afforded individual Venetians an
array of personal choices and responses to the entrance of the regime into their everyday lives.

Treading a line which seeks to heed Mossean exhortations to examine fascism from the inside
as well as out- and to take seriously fascism's own understanding of itself, whilst rejecting the
reduction of the fascist project to nothing more than spectacle and discourse, this study has
sought to reveal the intricacies, complexities and potential creativity of life under Mussolini's
dictatorship. Of paramount importance has been the distinction between intention and
reception; whilst the regime bombarded the men, women and children of Venice with the
cultural products of their civil religion this does not mean that the liturgy and rites of fascism
were faithfully repeated throughout the lagoon. Following the approaches of Richard Hoggart
and, in particular, Michel de Certeau, the Venetians of the 1930s have been revealed as
'consumer-producers' who used the fascist cultural products they encountered creatively,

28 Ben Ghiat R 'Review of La Rovere L Storia dei GUF. Organizzazione, politica e miti della gioventù universitaria
absorbing, accepting, modifying or rejecting the fascist messages – mediated as they were through narratives with the potential to both strengthen and weaken their intended meaning – as these mingled and clashed with pre-existing and enduring mentalités.

The testing of the methodological tools of de Certeau, Hoggart, Jauss, Chartier and Hobsbawm among others, through the empirical research carried out for this thesis makes a persuasive case for their wider application. I am convinced that in any study which seeks to engage with questions of cultural production and the reception of cultural products, it is essential to recognise the relationship between intention and reception as one of reciprocity and mutual impact. From this understanding of the inter-connectedness of cultural production and reception it follows that we must seek to understand the attitudes, memories, symbols and beliefs which could be corralled as mediators between producer and consumer and back again in order, as D'Avray suggested, to ‘fill in the blanks’ between the objectives of the cultural producer, the image or product itself and the recipient. One way in which we can fill in the ‘blanks’, as it were, is to reconstruct the “mental tools” and shifting “horizons of expectations” of contemporary groups, to borrow Febvre’s and Koselleck’s terms. This need to understand the parameters of what was possible to think or do in contemporary society is surely key to reading both the absences and what is present in the source material relating to cultural production and the aesthetics of reception whether in 1930s Venice or any other society.

In intention, then, the fascist authorities in Venice, as elsewhere in Italy, aimed to forge the population into the uomo and donna fascista and bind them to an imagined community of a fascist nation. Young Italians – many of whom, growing up in the 1930s, had known only fascist governance – continually heard themselves feted as the vanguard and ‘milite dell’idea’ of the fascist ‘revolution’ (despite the fact that the elite fascist debates exalted ‘youth’ as a spirit or attitude, when these debates trickled into local and popular discussions, the ‘youth’ in question was more readily understood as an age-bound stage in the life-course). After-school and holiday activities organised under the auspices of the party and Balilla organisations and comic books injected with stories, games and puzzles lauding fascist ideals, sought to extend the regime’s reach beyond that already achieved with the ‘fascistisation’ of the school system into children’s private leisure time and to “rescu[e] little ones […] from the inauspicious influence of the street and the tedium of segregation within the family.”

course, other aspects of 'private' life were considered public matters of state concern: marriage and procreation were championed through reinvented and novel festivals as central tenets of fascist 'duty'; the regime intervened in family Christmas celebrations to insist that Italians decorate their homes with nationally-sound cribs rather than "Nordic" trees and purge their Christmas dinners of 'foreign' elements – the English mustard, Russian caviar and French wines which hailed from 'enemy' nations; the anti-sanctions resistance in 1935-6 took the opportunity of the "economic siege" to induce Venetians to alter their habits of consumption in terms of food, fashion and even transport, reinventing the gondola as the ideal form of patriotic locomotion. As Venetians reached the end of their own life-course or experienced the passing of others, the regime sought to permeate the pre-existing culture of death, with its ritual par excellence, the appello fascista, as well as the presence of fascist uniforms, flags and songs in religious funeral rites and in its exaltation of the redemptive and regenerative glory of violent death.

If it was the regime’s intention to reach into the homes and private lives of its citizens, the better to mould them into ideal fascists, then this study of the reception of fascistised cultural products reveals their project to have enjoyed only partial success. Despite the concerted efforts of the Venetian fascist authorities, aided by the support of the local press and, in the main, of the city’s religious leadership, to infiltrate and promote their brand of nationalist-imperialist, jingoistic and anti-bourgeois ideology through a series of cultural experiences encountered by Venetians in their daily lives and over the life-course, the inevitable creativity of Venetians’ reception of these cultural products left the regime unable to control how their message would be received by the population. Thus, even in a city "where everybody, then, knew one another [and] every even private happening, once outside the four walls of the home, became a public event",30 which was governed by a coercive and repressive dictatorship, some degree of autonomy and of choice in belief and behaviour was possible, whether pro- or anti-fascist or politically ambivalent. To this end, many of fascism’s cultural products were greeted with enthusiasm by some lagunari; the striking acceptance of the equation of the military and the fascist cultures of death in the funerals of Great War veterans like Giovanni Farfusola and Attilio Molin is a case in point, as is the switching to the haute couture – or rather alta moda – ‘made in Italy’ by Maria Damerini and friends following the imposition of sanctions. At the same time, however, alternative and more equivocal – with regard to the regime – forms of behaviour were

30 Damerini M Gli ultimi anni del Leone. p. 52. See chapter 1 p. 39.
chosen by Venetians, in part as the result of the often ambiguous and even contradictory messages diffused and in part due to the fact that the regime had to employ rituals and lieux de mémoire that belonged to other – at times supportive but at times rival – sources of authority. The conspicuous absence of any mention of fascism, of the Duce, or even of the Balilla organisations to which many of them surely belonged in the forty-seven essays written by Venetian school children at the supposed peak of fascist consensus; the return of the short-lived festa delle Marie to the ‘history books’ after just two years and the continued primacy of economic and familial considerations in Venetians’ decisions about procreation; the unorthodox and contradictory acts of ‘resistance’ of the Damerinis and Arnoulds and the circumspect responses of many Venetian shopkeepers to anti-sanctions directives; and the articulation of the obituaries, funeral and commemorative ceremonies through ‘traditional’ religious narratives that accompanied the funeral of even a ‘fascist of the first hour’ as was Maria Pezzè Pascolato, testify to the limitations and superficiality of the regime’s ability to penetrate the private spheres of Venetian society. Circumscribed by the unique make-up of their city and the coercive apparatus of the regime, the lived experience of fascism in Venice nevertheless interlaced a multiplicity of personal choices and responses, and represented a space where Venetian consumer-producers could choose to accept, assimilate, reinterpret or at times disrespect and even subvert ‘fascistised’ cultural products in multiple, complex ways.
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