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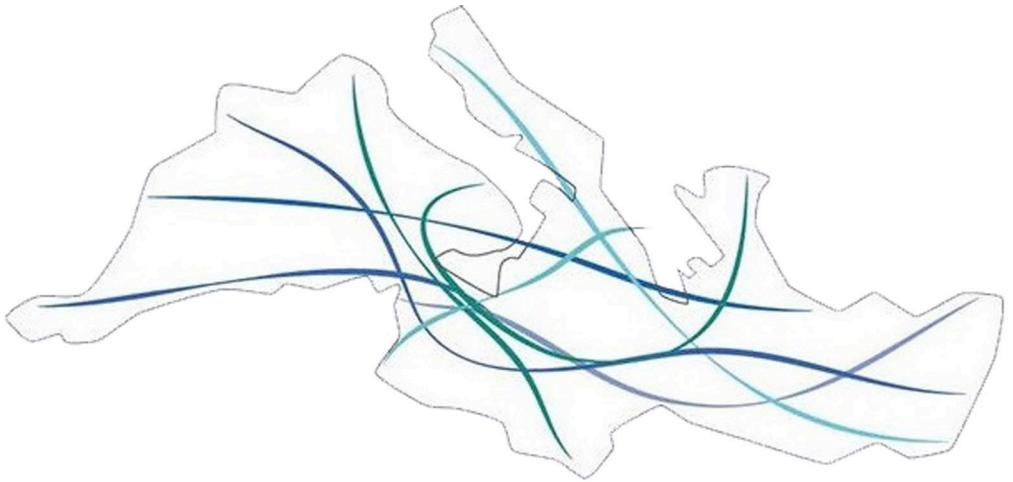
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THEMES AND PERSPECTIVES



*Interactions and Exchanges between
the Mediterranean and the Atlantic*

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"The ocean is bridged". The Italian Great War in the diary of Gino C. Speranza (1915-1919)

Abstract

During the Great War, Gino Speranza (1872-1927), a lawyer and journalist, second generation Italian American, left New York for Italy with his wife, Florence, as a correspondent for the newspapers "New York Evening Post" and "The Outlook". Along with the work as a journalist, he soon started to collaborate with the American Embassy in Rome. When the United States joined the war, he volunteered to work in the office of the Military Attaché at the Embassy, becoming later, on a proposal by Ambassador Thomas Nelson Page, an Attaché on Political Intelligence. The diary he left us (published posthumously by his wife), still largely ignored by the historiography, represents an important source not only as an account of the life of the country during the First World War, for the accurate description of the morale of soldiers and civilians at the home front, for the description of cities of art, but also and above all for the study of diplomacy and relations between Italy and the United States.

Keywords: First World War, Transnational Studies, Italian Americans, Migration History, Italian American Relationships

"The ocean is bridged". La gran guerra italiana en los diarios de Gino Speranza (1915-1919)

Resumen

Durante la Gran Guerra, Gino Speranza (1872-1927), abogado, periodista e italoamericano de segunda generación, salió de Nueva York junto a su pareja Florence como corresponsal de los periódicos "New York Evening Post" y "The Outlook". Además de desempeñarse como periodista, Speranza empezó pronto una

colaboración con la Embajada de Estados Unidos en Roma. Cuando EE.UU. entraron en la guerra, trabajó como voluntario en la oficina del Agregado militar de la Embajada y más tarde el embajador Thomas Nelson Page propuso que fuera nombrado Agregado de servicios secretos. El diario que nos deja, y que su esposa publicó póstumamente, ha sido casi totalmente ignorado por la historiografía, pero representa una fuente importante no solo sobre la vida italiana en los años de la Gran Guerra por las descripciones exactas de la condición del moral de los soldados y de los civiles en el frente interno y por la de las ciudades de arte, sino también y sobre todo por los estudios de la diplomacia y de las relaciones entre Italia y Estados Unidos.

Palabras clave: Primera guerra mundial, Estudios transnacionales, Italoamericanos, Historia de las migraciones, Relaciones entre Italia y EE.UU.

“The ocean is bridged”. La Grande guerra italiana attraverso il diario di Gino Speranza (1915-1919)

Sinossi

Durante la Grande guerra, Gino Speranza (1872-1927), avvocato e giornalista, nonché italo-americano di seconda generazione, partì da New York insieme alla moglie Florence in qualità di corrispondente dei giornali “New York Evening Post” e “The Outlook”. Oltre a svolgere il lavoro di giornalista, Speranza iniziò presto a collaborare con l’ambasciata americana a Roma. Quando gli Stati Uniti entrarono in guerra, lavorò come volontario nell’ufficio dell’Attaché militare dell’Ambasciata e in seguito, su proposta dell’ambasciatore Thomas Nelson Page, divenne addetto ai servizi segreti. Il diario che ci ha lasciato (pubblicato postumo dalla moglie), ancora largamente ignorato dalla storiografia, rappresenta una fonte importante non solo sulla vita del Paese durante la Prima guerra mondiale – grazie all’accurata descrizione del morale dei soldati e dei civili nel fronte interno e per la descrizione delle città d’arte – ma anche e soprattutto per lo studio della diplomazia e delle relazioni tra Italia e Stati Uniti.

Parole chiave: Prima guerra mondiale; Studi transnazionali; Italo-americani; Storia delle migrazioni; Relazioni tra Italia e Stati Uniti.

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“The ocean is bridged”. The Italian Great War in the diary of Gino C. Speranza (1915-1919)

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*Nationalism, after all, is a form of extreme individualism,
and individualism is deeply rooted in the Italian character.*
(Gino C. Speranza)

Introduction

Gino Charles Speranza, “perhaps the most prominent Italian-American public intellectual of the early twentieth century” (Guglielmo, 1999, 169), represents “the dilemma of the second-generation American reformer in 1920s” (Salerno, 1996, 143). An influential representative of the Progressive Era, during his career as a lawyer, in the years before the outbreak of the First World War, Speranza had always tried to reach a mutual understanding between native and immigrant. Before departing from New York to Europe in 1915, he had been “one of the city’s most articulate lobbyists for immigration reform and one of America’s earliest proponents of cultural pluralism” (Pozzetta, 1983, 48).

Speranza was born in 1872 in Bridgeport, Connecticut; his father was a specialist on Dante who had come from Verona to teach at Yale University and then at Columbia University. As a young man, he spent 9 years in Verona where he received part of his early education. Speranza then graduated in 1892 at the City College of New York and obtained a Law degree two years later at New York University. He soon specialized in International Law, pleading the case of hundreds of immigrants. He was particularly interested in investigating their working conditions (his most celebrated case

concerned the mobbed Italian miners in the West Virginia coal regions in 1906). From 1901, he served as secretary for the Society for the Protection of Italian Immigrants whose “great success rested upon the willingness of American reformers, Italo-American progressives, the Italian government, and Italian citizens to cooperate in a concerted drive to uplift the Italian urban poor in America” (Iorizzo and Mondello, 1971, 100-101). In 1912, Speranza gave up his successful law practice to concentrate fully on his writing career for a “systematic interpretation of Italy to America and of America to Italy” (Livingston, 1941, XIII) and to provide additional time to volunteering, becoming involved in the *Scuola d’Industrie Italiane*. In these years, in a series of articles, he investigated many different aspects of the Italian immigration experience, explaining the nature of immigrant institutions such as the mutual-aid societies, Italian language newspapers, immigrants’ banks and religious festivals, but also dealing with crime, the Black Hand and Mafia (Pozzetta, 1983, 61).

When the Great War broke out, Speranza began to write freelance on Italy-related issues and when the Italian Kingdom joined the Allies he journeyed to the peninsula as a correspondent for the *New York Evening Post* and *The Outlook*. Alongside the work as journalist, very soon he collaborated with the American Embassy in Rome. From April 1917, when United States joined the war, he volunteered to work in the office of the Military Attaché at the Embassy, becoming later, on a proposal by Ambassador Thomas Nelson Page, an Attaché on Political Intelligence with the specific task “of keeping the American Embassy and the State Department informed as to Italian events and policies, and especially as to currents in Italian opinion” (Livingston, 1941, XV).

However, Speranza’s cultural pluralism was transformed during the war. Speranza personally experienced the parable of President Wilson in Italy: at the beginning, Speranza had enjoyed “immense popularity”, then the friendliness “came to an abrupt halt in March 1919 when tensions over President Wilson’s stand against Italian claims to Fiume and other territories boiled to a fever pitch” (Pozzetta, 1983, 62). Speranza was attacked in the Italian press that accused him of being “a paid agent of Jugo-Slav imperialism” and a Americanizer of Italians in New York. At the same time, his

opinion was no longer considered credible by the American government, so much so that one of his report on the Italian situation was accompanied by a note that called him an "Italian nationalist propagandist" (Rossini, 2000, 189) and Speranza ended up considering himself "persona non grata" (Peragallo, 1949, 204). Despite the enthusiasm permeating the conclusion of his diary, the differences between Italians and Americans now appeared to Speranza less easily reconcilable. The outbreak of post-war nationalism in Italy and elsewhere that threatened the Wilsonian world order disillusioned Speranza who became convinced that essential differences existed between America and Italy and, therefore, the rest of the world. Returned home, in the early 1920s Speranza wrote a series of controversial articles for the *World's Work* and other anti-immigrant magazines, which were compiled in the book *Race or Nation. A Conflict of Divided Loyalties*, published just a year prior the 1924 "Immigration Act" that would have introduced quotas for specific countries based on 2% of the U.S. population from that country as recorded in 1890. Speranza unpredictably became a militant supporter of Americanization (defending the Anglo-Saxon and Protestant stock) and a more restrictive legislation on citizenship: "long study, observation and thought" (Speranza, 1923, 31) had wholly changed his views. Speranza, who throughout his life had suffered from illnesses, died in 1927 for a pleurisy at 55. As Pozzetta argues, "the intellectual odyssey followed by Speranza was, in many ways, a reflection in microcosm of what was then transforming the American society" (Pozzetta, 1983, 63). But even though he "rejected his Italian ancestry to become an American ethnic chauvinist" (Salerno, 1996, 144), his assimilationist position should not obscure the work he had accomplished on behalf of Italian immigrants.

During his stay in Italy, from August 1915 to April 1919, he wrote over sixty articles which then he gathered together with notes and travel photos in a volume never published entitled "Avanti Savoia" and preserved among the Gino Speranza Papers at the New York Public Library. His personal diary, instead, was collected and edited by his wife, Florence Colgate, in 1941. The diary is an accurate and emotionally dense description of the spirit and feeling of life in Italy during the war, a diplomatic account of the activities of the Embassy

and an external look over the Italian political figures made by an observer who owns the tools to decode it. That is why it is worth, especially today, as part of a reborn multilateral approach in Mediterranean-Atlantic relations, to consider it as a valuable source for those who want to approach the study of Italian Great War and diplomatic relations between Italy and the United States during those years. This essay will try to offer some thematic routes to better understand the structure and purpose of this two volumes diary.

In the opinion of Arthur Livingston who wrote the biographical introduction on its author, the diary, unlike the articles written by Speranza, where “the political writer, working on the Allied side of the battle lines, had to pretend that all was sweet and idyllic in the relations between Italy and her three great Allies”, reflected fewer limitations and was more spontaneous and true and could also count on a ton of information since that, unlike the Second World War in whose progress the book came out, “a vast area of free observation and of free opinion still was left” (Livingston, 1941, XIV). Among the reviewers, Bernadotte E. Schmitt, Modern European History professor at Chicago University, argued that “no more penetrating record of any belligerent country during the war of 1914 has, in fact, been published. He saw and wrote always as an American and never allowed his genuine sympathy for Italy to overcome his desire for truth.” (Schmitt, 1941, 559). Constantine Panunzio, writer, and Sociology professor at University of California, claimed instead that “the momentous events of the first World War are described with detachment and remoteness, serenity and calm” but the author “does not describe events he himself has participated in or observed directly; he gives reports of reports, most of the action is that of others”:

A feeling persists that Mr. Speranza sees without having seen the events or felt the pulse of the people’s lives. Also, one wonders whether perchance the loving hand of the editor has not robbed these pages of some of the forcefulness which characterizes Mr. Speranza’s other writings. Undoubtedly the reticence, dignity, and good taste of these pages will delight some readers, but most Americans who will read these volumes will probably consider them somewhat distant abstract, cold, and having an aura of labored nicety (Panunzio, 1941, 224-225).

Speranza's diary, "interesting both for the richness of the political-diplomatic news on the war period, and as a singular example of 'travel in Italy', along non-traditional itineraries" (Durante, 2005, 50), can be easily juxtaposed to Salvatore Cotillo's memoir (Cotillo, 1921), and to the pages that Fiorello La Guardia and the already mentioned Costantine Panunzio dedicated to the war in their biographies (Panunzio, 1921; La Guardia, 1948), with the difference that Speranza was not sent along Italy as a "speaker" by the Wilsonian Committee on Public Information, as Cotillo, La Guardia and Panunzio did, but remained quite detached from the propaganda work pursued by Wilson and to which he looked with some detachment never joining that "great machine of journalists and professors" come "to advertise the United States in general, and Wilson in particular as a figure of Holiness and Righteousness" (Speranza, 1941, II, 153).

1. Italian Americans and their "dual allegiance"

Gino Speranza and his wife leave from New York on August 12, 1915, embarking on the steamer *SS. Taormina* together with about nine hundred people, mostly Italian reservists who come from every part of the United States. From the outset, the sentiment that Speranza resents towards his country, which has decided to remain neutral, emerges: on board there is also the Third Secretary of the American Embassy in Rome and Speranza ironically argues that "if we are torpedoed, to concentrate our efforts while drowning on keeping his head under water. We want to make a clear case for Mr. Wilson" (Ibid., I, 3). Further on, he wonders if "while others are fighting for principles as necessary and sacred to us as to them, will our country, our great country, look on and deal no brave, stout blow?" (Ibid., I, 9).

The enthusiasm of the Italian American passengers (even the most Americanized) going to Italy to respond to the "sacred duty" emerges explicitly in Speranza's pages. "Yesterday, - Speranza asserts - these young men were solving the problems of industrial America; today they are going to fight the battle of freedom in Europe; tomorrow, perhaps, they will police the peace of the world"

(Ibid., I, 3). The journalist tells, for instance, about two boys: on one hand, a young from Connecticut, who naively believes that “all the men there are like sons of Victor Emmanuel”; on the other, a guy from Minnesota, a “lost soul”, darker in his predictions:

I don't know why I am going to Italy [...] for I don't know Italy and do not speak its language, and my parents and friends are in America, where I have an excellent position. My mother used to tell me, when I was a little boy, of her father and uncle who were placed against a wall and shot down mercilessly because they refused to fight against Garibaldi. (Ibid., I, 5)

After their arrival in Italy, at the end of August, the Speranzas move to Florence, which will remain the main seat of their Italian stay, in particular residing in a house immersed in the countryside of Fiesole, “a little valley of sweet delight” (Ibid., I, 153), at least until the spring of 1917, when Speranza will be officially appointed Secretary of the Military Attaché of the Embassy in Rome. To be noted in these days are the visits to some hospitals, such as the American Hospital for Italian soldiers in Villa Modigliani (Speranza himself will be included in the General Board as a member). Among the patients he meets two *Americani*, as he calls the Italians of America:

One of them returned from Pittsburgh some years ago to join his wife and children in Southern Italy. “Had I known that all this was coming, I would have stayed in America”, he said quite positively. The other, a bright boy of native intelligence from Avellino, a laborer for eight years on the railroads in “Boston, Mass.” is suffering from a wound in his arm but is not at all dismayed by the prospect of returning to the front. (Ibid., I, 19)

With some of these, Speranza will come into contact during his years in Italy, both in person and by post. His personal method of identifying an *Americano* is both physical (by the “gold fillings in their teeth”!) and psychological (he has “more go than the stay-at-home Italians and the impress of a wider horizon, more confidence in himself as the captain, or should I say the corporal, of his soul”, Ibid., II, 47). The main theme of Speranza's reflection on Italian Americans – which also appears in some of his articles (Speranza, 1916, 1917) –, the “dual allegiance” for their mother-country and for the United States, derives from his direct experience. In one case, one of these

boys, though arrived in America as a child, he had not asked for naturalization:

You don't think of taking out papers when you grow up with other boys, work in the same shop, belong to the same union, go to the same church, and do the same things. [...] I was only eleven when my brother sent for me to come out to him. He was a foreman in the shops, and everybody knew him; so the boys took me right in. [...] It is a kind of confused in my mind. A couple of years before the war the nearest Italian Consul sent me a notice to report at the Consulate and be examined for service as a soldier. It's the law over here, you see, and everybody fit has to serve. I didn't pay any attention to it, for I thought of myself as an American. But when the war broke out, things looked different to me. Even the boys thought I was doing right when I told the boss I was going over to the fight. (Speranza, 1941, II, 48-49)

Even though the distinction between Italian and American citizenship to most of the returned emigrants to whom Speranza speaks seems "vague and unreal" (Ibid., II, 165), the issue was serious and a diplomatic one. On September 22, 1915, Speranza writes that the government of the United States was "anxious to bring about a citizenship convention with Italy that will regulate the military and civil status of naturalized Italo-American citizens, but the Italian Foreign Office wants to know what the *quid pro quo* will be, and there appears to be no *quid*" (Ibid., I, 30-31). And on February 18, 1916 he asserts:

A new and serious question has arisen between Italy and America, the refusal of Italian authorities to allow the wives of some native Italians to join their husbands in America, because these men, who are naturalized citizens of the United States, have not answered Italy's call to arms. The holding of innocent hostages seems to me so mediaeval a weapon that I cannot believe Italy will use it. (Ibid., I, 180)

When he is appointed assistant at the Embassy, one of his first suggestions given to Ambassador Page is about the urgency to press the Italian Government to solve the issue of citizenship, a theme that Speranza had already placed in some of his writings and that he would continue to consider fundamental even later and that perhaps was the basis of his subsequent changed approach to the problem of aliens in the United States:

Approximately one million naturalized citizens of Italian origin in North and South America, who have not responded to the Italian call to arms, are going to become

criminals unless their status is regulated by a change in the *lex sanguinis*. Classed as technical deserters, they will become detached from Italy – indeed they are selling their holdings here – and an element in reducing Italian exchange abroad after the war will be lost. (Ibid., II, 26)

2. *The War in Wounded Soldiers' Words*

Speranza's diary contains a series of valuable and thought-provoking first-hand descriptions of the war life in the trenches, collected from the hands-free voice of the protagonists. The first impression that Speranza records on the war is provided by a wounded man he meets on the train from Venice to Florence.

The Italians are good fighters, but *chiassosi* to a degree. The very moment when they ought to be hiding themselves from the enemy, they stand still and shout "Savoia!" like madmen. On a charge, however, they are irresistible and generally sweep everything before them. [...] On the other hand, there are men in whose eyes you see the fear of death as clearly as you see the rigidity and whiteness of their faces, and, yet, they do not run away. Those who fail at the front, not through fear, but from sheer inability to stand the noise and excitement, often become insane (Ibid, I, 103).

The meeting on the train of some soldiers will be a constant in his diary, a sort of *topos*. He is impressed by the sight, on one hand, of the trains that go to the North "bursting with joyous songs and battle hymns", and on the other, of "long trains, impressive and ominously still, slip silently southward, bearing the freight most precious of all to the nation – the wounded of soldiers of Italy" (Ibid., I, 104). In one of his casual meetings, Speranza talks to an "emaciated *sottotenente*" wounded on Mt. San Michele by a missile which grazed and opened his stomach and that despite this now could not wait to return to fight. A character possessed by bellicosity, "his eyes shone and sparkled as if with fever", that describes Italian soldiers in the most animal-like way:

Feed them, give them plenty of tobacco, a little wine, and they keep perfectly fit. Courage isn't necessary. They acquire it in action. There is no denying that everyone feels afraid before a charge, but the most cowardly man jumps out of the trench like a new being at the battle cry "Savoia!" [...]. If the Teutons win, we shall become slaves. We mustn't forget that. (Ibid., I, 364)

Another description of the trench is that made by a soldier in convalescence whose feet had been partially frozen by icy water. According to him, in the first lines of the trenches

the soldiers stay for a period of five days, living as best they can, sometimes in fifty centimetres of water, which has been known to wash away the soles of their shoes. Food is irregular; sleep is almost impossible; and the vermin are maddening. After a turn in the trenches, they are allowed a rest in the *trincerone*, back of the lines, where they enjoy the certainty of meals and the comfort of being dry, for, at the worst, only a few drops of rain trickle through. (Ibid., I, 133)

The report of the moments preceding an attack on the front is striking and so is the candid admission that if the attack fails, there is nothing left but to run back or seek shelter.

The planes go out to reconnoitre, the artillery sweeps the trenches of the enemy for several hours to clear away obstacles, and then the Genio goes forward to cut wires and place bombs and nitro-glycerine tubes. As soon as all is in readiness, the officers shout "Avanti Savoia," and the men spring out of the trenches and make a dash for enemy. "A man gets terribly frightened and goes ahead only because the officers lead - otherwise he couldn't. The noise, the explosions, the cries of the wounded for their mothers are so terrible that it seems as if one were to lose his mind, and by the time the Austrian trenches are reached, everybody is ready to spike the first man he encounters". If the soldiers succeed in reaching the points where the entanglement of wire has been cut, the charge is generally successful. If it is a failure, "Si salvi chi può" becomes the order of the day, and everyone rolls, runs, or creeps back to the Italian lines as expeditiously as possible, or drops into some hiding place while the artillery belches forth a curtain of fire to cover the retreat and stave off a counterattack. (Ibid., I, 134)

The effects of the war on the combatants and the shock caused by the fighting appear during a visit to an hospital where, during the Christmas holidays, "a bell summoned the soldiers to wind up the festivities with marsala and *brioche*" and "one robust-looking Tuscan peasant" suddenly resents the ringing of the bell.

It made him nervous, he said. This little incident reveals the state of "shock" often lurking behind the normal appearance of these men. "We must keep merry," said this man. "We must not think of battles. Those who do, go mad. For weeks after I left the front, I dreamed about it. I do still." (Ibid., I, 140)

During the war, Speranza visits several other *Ospedali di Riserva*, for example on January 18, 1916 he tells of a soldier met at Villa Biondi, also in Tuscany,

a Reggio-Calabrian, tall and dark, a former railroad employee, was practicing walking on his artificial leg and rejoicing in the promise of a suitable position, which will enable him, with the help of his pension, to support himself and his parents, both of whom are over eighty years of age. (Ibid., I, 156-157)

While in another hospital he meets “a Sardinian, a fine-looking young man, minus a leg” who is hungering for home and has told his family that he is only suffering from vertigo.

A sweet-looking boy, with one leg gone, said smilingly, “A leg is less than a life. I think I shall be able to do light country work; so I can’t complain.” A Sicilian, sitting up in a bed, avidly eating a hearty meal fed him by a nurse, was the perfect embodiment of Sicilian *fierezza*. The stumps of his arms, for he had lost both hands, stood out strong in immaculate dressings; his chest and head were bandaged and one eye was lacking, but the other shone out of his scarred face, bright, steady, firm and undaunted. [...] Never have I seen such life and strength as I saw in the one eye of that shocked face and in that broken frame. (Ibid., I, 401).

3. *At the front*

In April 1916, Speranza obtains his first permission from the Supreme Command to travel as a journalist to the front. He is not alone, with him there are also other correspondents including Ambrosini of *La Stampa*, Cantalupo of the *Catholic Trust*, Baskerville of the *New York’s World* and Lapido of Montevideo’s *La Tribuna*. Before arriving in the war zone, he is at Udine, the city seat of the Supreme Command that he describes with these words:

The town is very busy, as busy as if it were in midst of a *fiesta* and soldiers are everywhere, spending their little all on this trinket. All the articles on sale bear testimony to the fact that men can be soldiers and children at the same time. There is everything to fit out a man for war and everything to please the child in him: views, postcards, souvenirs, jewelry, jokes, and candies. (Ibid., I, 217)

During his trip to the front, Speranza passes through Aquileia from whose bell tower he enjoys a dramatic panoramic view: to the east and south Monfalcone, Trieste, Miramare, Belvedere, and Grado,

to the northeast Doberdò and Sels, Monte Sei Busi, San Michele, Podgora and the "beautiful heights adjacent to Gorizia which have cost Italy blood and given her new glory; and in the background, the red Carso, redder ever under the light of the setting sun, upon which Italians endurance has written a record of imperishable names and heroic deeds" (Ibid., I, 226). In the small town of Gradisca, walking around, he does not see "nothing of human life except the shell of its social expression: roses blooming on shattered walls, white-flowered chestnuts towering majestically over roofless houses [...] churches with great doors nailed fast, public buildings, schools, and orphan asylums, with awnings in shreds, doors ajar, and shutterless windows staring at the sky. [...]". But even in the midst of desolation and ruin, Speranza catches a glimpse of "Italian geniality" in a "young soldier who is carrying a flask of ruby-red wine in one hand and a bright rose in the other. Gradisca may be buried alive, but the kindly care of the Italian soldiers will keep its heart beating until it is restored to the sun and joy of life" (Ibid., I, 232-234).

At San Giorgio di Nogaro, Speranza visits the *Università Castrense*, established by Giuseppe Tusini, professor of clinical surgery at Modena, for the purpose of allowing medical students called to arms to complete their course of studies.

On the lower floors of a school building, converted into a field hospital, are housed the insane and cases of "mental confusion" resulting from the shock of war. In its small wards nine hundred men have been comfortably cared for and treated during the past four months. The two main forms of derangement are the melancholy and the psychomotive or extension of battle excitement. As an example of the latter Professor Tusini cited a sergeant who cannot banish from his eyes the picture of the head of his commanding officer being shot off. The cure consists in rest and the use of some opium. (Ibid., I, 241)

In the tiny village of Saletto, under Austrian influence until recently, Speranza explores one nursery, established for little children of the neighbourhood in a hayloft next to the village church, where, according to the two countrywomen in charge, their efforts "are rapidly being transformed them from 'gente selvatica' into civilized children" (Ibid., I, 246-247). On May 6, instead, the trip to Adamello begins.

Ascending with short even step the path that winds and winds in its skyward course was an endless line of soldiers laden with muskets and supplies, and descending were lines of stretcher bearers, carrying the wounded and sick or dragging sleds upon which lay men in the delirium of fever or figures, strangely still, wrapped in great blankets, bound perhaps for the little field of soldier's crosses at Temù. (Ibid., I, 253)

After two hours of walking, Speranza and the others arrive at *Rifugio Garibaldi* and the following day, in the middle of an alpine storm, they reach the *Passo di Brizio*. To guide them is a colonel, so self-confident that he claims that he is able to “furnish supplies to any number of mountains posts, even though a snowstorm or a glacier confronts him” (Ibid., I, 254) and who “seemed to know just when and where we should encounter this or that *corvée*, for the ascending and descending file of men keeps its daily schedule with almost clocklike precision”. “As a mariner steers his ship on the trackless sea, so does this officer lead battalions of men on altitudes where vegetation ceases and even stout-winged birds dare not to come” (Ibid., I, 256) Speranza pointed out. The journalist transcripts about the soldiers of this front area and their effort in the mountain war:

They must be fed, sheltered, and kept up to fighting scratch; they must be housed, rested, medically cared for, and munitioned. Guns must be mounted on dominating heights and kept in readiness, and all parts of this icebound region must be held in constant and living connection by telephone and signaling devices. Every smallest item, every wheel and pulley of the huge but precarious mechanism erected on it must be carried by hand up precipitous paths, over snow-drifted passes, and across the desert wastes of the glacier. (Ibid., I, 254-255)

When they arrive at the pass, they finally meet “picturesque-looking men awaiting their turn for medical inspection”.

Their faces, unshaven, bronzed black by the *tormenta*, were almost distorted from exposure, but their eyes, clear and gentle, grew keen and interested when they heard we were newspaper men come to write of their deeds. They all asked when the war would end. An oldish man uttered the only complaint, if complaint it can be called, that I heard on our long trip. “Fortunate they who died early in the war – they did not have to bear our hardships”. (Ibid., I, 255)

The journey to the front continues in the following days to Monfalcone and the sector of the Karst where days before there has been a violent battle.

After passing three *posti di corrispondenza*, rough huts protected by sandbags and baskets of *vimini*, filled with stones, such as one sees in old battle pictures, we reached the upper edge of the wood [...]. Then we sprinted up an absolutely bare stretch of sandy rock rising steeply out of the cruel Carsic heights [...]. Here we entered the Trincea Joffre, a rock-hewn trench with a brave name, shaped like a wide, irregular corkscrew [...]. It was held by the Brigata Napoli, composed mostly of southerners. Although shrapnel was bursting about them and shells were whizzing incessantly over their heads, they were merry a lot, chaffing and joking about the cavalry they had replaced. [...] “Where are you from?” one of them called out to me and soon I learned, as English or, rather, New Yorkese became the language of Trincea Joffre, that nearly every other man in that trench was an “Americano” [...] There we stayed for forty minutes during a bombardment in which I really saw death as it is faced in battle, waiting for better or worse. (Ibid., I, 271-273)

In June 1916, after a period of work at the American Committee for War Relief in Florence, Speranza is again at the front, this time with his wife who has moved with him to Vicenza, which in the eyes of Speranza appears as “a fine old lady leaning on a gallant’s arm” (Ibid., I, 318). In his journey on the Trentino front, he also sees the King, “small, almost badly shaped, dressed in a general’s field uniform [...] carrying a camera that seemed too big for him” (Ibid., I, 321) and from the visit, the opinion he draws is that in the Trentino, after the Austrian offensive which had taken place in May and June “Italians have now learned to fight [...] they cannot economize either in men or materials” (Ibid., I, 328).

In July 1917 he returns to the front and records a certain lowering of morale. Even though the letters written home by the men are, as a major told him, “as good propaganda as could be desired” (Ibid., II, 61), on the reverse side, on a sign giving directions how to reach a certain *dolina*, Speranza notices the words “Vogliamo la Pace” (We want peace) scratched in pencil (Ibid., II, 59) and a meeting on the train with some officers makes him understand how the discontent is growing (soon some riots break out against the high cost of living in Turin and other Italian cities). In the summer, the front appears to Speranza “so defensively impassable, so well stocked, so perfectly manned, and, at the same time, so placid”

(Ibid., II, 79). There is nothing to suggest what will happen within a few months, the defeat of Caporetto. However, Speranza, between October 16 and November 1, due to an illness, does not write anything in the diary. Starting from November, he reports that “every large city is raising funds and organizing relief for the refugees from Friuli, and patriotic manifestations are taking place throughout Italy” (Ibid., II, 97).

4. Italian Politics: a live fresco

The city is full of “influences” bad for the country, influences not directly traceable, perhaps, to German sources, but certainly turned to profit by the Germans. All the pacifists, all the followers of the old régime, all the seat-warmers, all the papists, all the petty and most of the big *affaristi*, all the disappointed deputies and all the seekers after office and personal advantages are up early and late – mostly late. (Ibid., I, 125)

Even though Speranza will never get intimate with Rome, it is there that he will carry out much of his activity, meeting different personalities of the time and having the opportunity to decipher Italian politics, by attending parliamentary debates on several occasions and by talking directly with some of the protagonists. At the beginning of his Italian stay, he does not spare criticism of Giolitti, with the conviction that it is not probable that his followers, as he wrote on February 1, 1916,

are actually conspiring with the Germans, and, certainly, they are not in Germany’s pay, but they are so politically prostituted that, even in this historic moment, they have their fears and interests more at heart than the destinies of their country. (Ibid., I, 163)

Instead, Speranza is less harsh towards Salandra and Sonnino.

As I looked at Salandra, whose general expression is very serene, but in whose deep-set eyes there is a light indicative of possibilities and at Sonnino, whose very brow expresses the power of his intellect, so obviously muscular are the mark of deep thought – as I looked at these two men and pondered on how they have stood at the helm for almost two years, despite the parliamentary majority against them, I thought that Italy’s citizens might well be proud of their leaders. (Ibid., I, 200)

But it is above all with Nitti and Bissolati that Speranza seems to have many more points in common. He had already met Bissolati at the front and he will describe him as a "man of ability, foresight, courage, and independence" but "well up in years" and "sapped by a long and strenuous political career and by wound received in the war" (Ibid., II, 168). Speranza instead considers Nitti "a very able modern man, the only of the Cabinet for whom the United States exists" but without character and full of ambition (Ibid., II, 160). Speranza also records the various changes of government, as during the trying days of the Austrian offensive in the Trentino, in Summer 1916, with Salandra's fall and the new government lead by Boselli and, in particular after Caporetto, in Autumn 1917, with the appointment of Orlando as Prime Minister and Nitti as Minister of Treasury.

In the summer of 1918 Orlando "seems to be at his political apogee" although in Speranza's view it is Sonnino that kind of man to whom people, "although unpopular because of his austere, pedantic, and unapproachable attitude" (Ibid., II, 176), turn in that national emergency because they trust his integrity and sense of duty. Meanwhile, new characters take the stage, including Mussolini, "fighting editor of the *Popolo d'Italia*", who is first named by the diary on December 4, 1917 and then again on June 29, 1918 when he is defined "man of vision, but more successful as a ferment and "battle cry" than as a quiet as telling organizer" (Ibid., II, 168).

In 1918, Speranza states that "never, perhaps, have the Italian people been so united about the war as since the Caporetto disaster, not in a common enthusiasm, but in agreement on the necessity of carrying it to a successful finish". However, he anticipates the crisis of parliamentarianism, which a few years later will emerge in a violent way, when he says that "Italian Chamber does not reflect this spirit" and that "despite the fact the enemy is now on Italian soil, the Chamber continues to be unrepresentative and misrepresentative of the nation-at-war" (Ibid., II, 129-130). A concept that he will resume, when the end of the war is approaching, affirming that the Italian political parties "do not appreciably shape public opinion in Italy, largely because, with the exception of the Regular Socialist Party, they are factions, not disciplined groups" (Ibid., II, 188).

In September 1918, a questionnaire from Washington on the liberal, imperialist, and social-revolutionary forces in Italy sets Speranza to “pondering on the lack of political development in Italy”. In Speranza’s view, most of Italians are liberal: “The essential temper of Italians, mental, spiritual, and political, rests on the principle of “live and let live”. Among the imperialists Speranza puts the Nationalists that, at the beginning of the war, “enlisted the support of a number of young, earnest, and active men of patriotic impulses who awakened the people and initiated the movement that coerced an unwilling and pacifist Giolittian Parliament to listen to the will of the nation and declare war [...]” and that, together with the Big Business, “aim at a “greater Italy,” a military and commercially strong Italy capable of imposing her civilization on backward peoples and opening new markets to Italian trade”. Eventually, the “social-revolutionists” according to Speranza are all members of the Regular Socialist Party while the Independent and Reform Socialists could not be defined as social-revolutionary “for they not favor decisive and intransigent international class warfare”. On the potentialities of the explosive threat of the future political life, Speranza questions himself without reaching a certain answer but with the conviction that peasants and laborers “will rebel against an unfair adjustment at the peace conference but they will accept a just peace, though they will demand and deserve infinitely better social and economic conditions than they had before the war” (Ibid., II, 184-186).

In January 1919, Speranza interviews Salandra and Bissolati. He looks favourably on both, the former because he had been able to be the interpreter of the people in 1915, with his refusal to submit to the parliament majority and the latter because he seems “the most convincing Italian politician”, “the most modern and sensitive to the rights of masses” (Ibid., II, 250). While Speranza accounts the born of the *Partito Popolare Italiano*, founded by Father Luigi Sturzo, he is well aware, on March 15, 1919, that “the hope of the new and complete Italy, which is throbbing with life, lies in the men who fought the war. What political material there may be in these young men no one knows, but it is certain that many of them feel the “call” to lead and put their ideas into effect” (Ibid., II, 274). In the meantime, the liberals try to “reform” themselves, but the country “does not want its present representatives, even though “reformed”;

it wants new men. If it cannot have the right men, it will have the wrong" (Ibid., II, 286). Speranza does not believe that this renewal can come from Bolshevism, since that "class spirit is incompatible with the Italian temperament" (Ibid., II, 295). Just few days later Mussolini decides to arrange the Trench Fighters, *Trinceristi*, moulding a political movement (*Fasci di Combattimento*) which asks for "suppression of the Senate, universal male and female suffrage, selective and proportional electoral reforms, annexation of Dalmatia and Fiume, and acceptance of the League of Nations" (Ibid., II, 281). It is the first step towards the conquest of power by Fascism, which will gradually change its skin and will write a new page in the Italian history that Speranza, however, will not witness in first person.

5. America's entry at war and Wilson's parable

When the United States is going to wage war on Germany Speranza writes: "It is the happiest Sunday of my life. [...] The United States, my country, has finally found itself". (Ibid., II, 10). On April 10, 1917 Gino Speranza entrusts to the diary his joy for which his country "has made the great decision" (Ibid., II, 24-25) and tells he has written "with some difficulty" an article in Italian on *La Nuova Antologia* (Speranza, 1917). America's declaration of war makes the occasion of an Italian demonstration of sympathy under the Embassy. Nevertheless, Ambassador Page is curt in his most intimate comment with Speranza. "Both Italy and America – he asserts –, stand for freedom and constitutional government; but at this point the similarity and even the sympathetic relations between them cease".

"Ships go back and forth between Italy and America, but there is no bridge over the waters upon which the two people may walk and meet." He uttered these words in connection with my request to him to make use of me now that my country is at war and American material in Europe may be mobilized. "You," he said, "should continue the efforts you have been making in the press to bridge this sea of mutual misunderstanding and ignorance that divides the two countries". (Speranza, 1941, II, 25)

On September 21, 1917 Speranza begins officially his duties as volunteer in the office of the Military Attaché at the embassy and in

July 1918 still remains at the service of the embassy entering this time as an assistant for the diplomatic service. United States popularity is very high. When the US declares war on Austria, in December 1917, “Rome expressed its appreciation [...] by a procession and demonstration in front of the chancellery of the American Embassy”. On that occasion, Ambassador Page, Rome mayor Prince Colonna, deputy Salvatore Barzilai and congressman La Guardia give a speech (Ibid., II, 111). However, when, in January 1918, Wilson addresses to the Congress on the “14 Points”, the issue of “readjustment of the frontiers of Italy in accordance with clearly recognizable lines of nationality” arouses a great deal of comment. Speranza reports the appeal made by the *Giornale d'Italia*, “semiofficial Sonninian organ” to Ambassador Page “to make the Italian aspirations clear in Washington” (Ibid., II, 123).

In September 1918 Speranza predicts the stalemate: “Italian policy is bound to be vacillating and uncertain; for the Italian Government cannot relinquish the claims guaranteed by the Pact of London until it negotiates a more up-to-date and perhaps more liberal, but equally binding agreement” (Ibid., II, 189). Meanwhile, he is asked to write a report on Italian views on Jugo-Slavia (Ibid. II, 192). It is not the only report he wrote: in addition to this, Speranza for more than two years had sent weekly reports on the evolution of the Italian political situation that never reached Wilson or his chief advisor on European politics and diplomacy, Colonel Edwards House, and whose lack of knowledge certainly contributed to the fact that the American delegation arrived at the Paris peace conference largely ignoring the real geopolitical situation and the real will of the Italian government (Rossini, 2000, 144; Saiu, 2003, 245-246).

The conquest of Trieste and the end of the war catches him while he is in Sorrento, looking for some fresh air to heal from his chronic illnesses.

Trento e Trieste! I found myself American enough not to be stirred to the depths by the announcement – a proof that my heart is not Italian. But I did grasp the tremendous significance of what these words mean tonight to millions of Italians. I thought of my father – what they would have meant to him. I thought especially of my mother and found pleasure in the visualization of the joy they would have given her. [...] She had seen the Austrians charge the Veronese in Piazza Brà, and she hated them with an undying hatred. (Speranza, 1941, II, 206)

After the end of the war, the “Adriatic question” assumes daily more importance. When in January 1919, Wilson is in Rome, Speranza is among the architects of his meeting with the former minister, the reformist socialist Bissolati, who had recently resigned from the Orlando cabinet and expressed a more dialogical position on the Adriatic question. Of Wilson’s visit to Rome, Speranza is most impressed by the “obstructive measures taken by the Italian Government to prevent the President from speaking to the people. [...] After the President left Rome, the government circulated reports that Wilson had a phobia for crowds; also that it feared some one might throw a bomb” (Ibid., II, 238-239).

The “parable” of Wilson, to whom success had so much contributed the “speakers” sent along the country by the branch office of Committee on Public Information in Italy, organized by Charles Merriam (Rossini, 2000, 127), was being consumed. Speranza himself questions how to communicate the American message to the masses (Speranza, 1941, II, 181) and how to persuade them about the goodness of the League of Nations proposed by Wilson (Ibid., II, 268-269). In the background there are the strikes and the protests of the first half of what will then be called “Red Biennium”, while an anti-American sentiment mounts that makes itself more access after the failure of the negotiations in Paris, the appeal of Wilson of 23 April 1919 in which he asks the support of the Italians against that of their government, and the return of Orlando in Italy in a “sad sight, empty and silent” capital, very different from the time of “America’s entrance into war when all Rome, cheering wildly for Wilson, was assembled on it” (Ibid., II, 310-311).

Conclusions

Speranza’s diary is a real “den” of impressions about Italy of the time. Word limits do not allow to consider many other fundamental issues on which the attention of the journalist-lawyer rests. I can just remember the role that art plays in the text: Speranza and his wife travel through much of central and northern Italy aboard a Ford model T and visit several cities. Over the years spent in Italy, the

diary presents a detailed account of the visit of many places of art and history: it is a journey of Italy's time, of what he defines as "the loveliest country on God's earth" (Ibid., I, 25). In Venice, in particular, Speranza will feel like being home, affirming: "I spoke the language of these people as I had never spoken it, and they accepted me as one of themselves" (Ibid., I, 84). Here he will return several times, thanks to the help of the American consul, Harvey Carroll, making friends with the archpriest of St. Mark Basilica, and will be a direct witness of an air attack and the destruction of some works of art, like the fresco by Tiepolo at the Scalzi Church. Speranza will pay particular attention to the treasures of art, following the relationship with the journalist and critic Ugo Ojetti.

The diary also presents a portrayal of the religious component: on the one hand, as Elizabeth Lynskey noted in her review appeared on *The Catholic Historical Review*, "Speranza opposed the restoration of the pope's temporal sovereignty, thought Vatican diplomacy inspired by a desire to save the Hapsburgs, and tended to look upon papal pronouncements as politically rather than doctrinally oriented" (Lynskey, 1941, 360); on the other, he is an acute observer of the most humble practices of worship of the people (such as the procession of the Day of the Dead in Venice or the Holy Thursday in Florence) and states that he wish he could "believe and practice simply a religion of such lovely expression" (Speranza, 1941, II, 305). Another theme to take into consideration, only mentioned but which appears to be fundamental to the current historiography, is that of the complete unpreparedness towards the Spanish Flu that emerges, for instance, in the tale of the visit to the small village of Tuscania, near Viterbo, whose many inhabitants had been killed by the pandemic.

The pharmacist, one may say, died at his post, with a long line of persons waiting for him to fill prescriptions. There was only one doctor in the town and no caskets. A soldier, whose two sisters died while he was at home on leave, placed the body of one in a casket he made but he could not finish for lack of materials and carried the other in a shroud on his shoulders to the cemetery. He himself died afterwards. A touching story was that of a young man and a girl, devoted lovers always. He went to the war, was wounded, and came home. While ill of the *peste* in their marriage bed, they agreed that whichever felt the end approaching should make a sign to the other to close his or her eyes. The husband gave the sign and died. His wife, who had closed her eyes as agreed, died a few days later, without having opened them

again, even to see her children. [...] There were so many orphans in the town that the surviving mothers divided their breasts between the motherless babes and their own. (Ibid., II, 297)

With the departure on the steamer *Giuseppe Verdi* on April 28, 1919 on board of which they befriend the former first lady Mrs. Edith Roosevelt, Speranza's "three years of danger and troubles" end, always beside his wife, his "Captain and Hope" (Ibid., II, 220). As the *New York Times* reviewer noticed in 1941 (though mixing past expectations with present attitudes), the diary "ends a few months after the Armistice, when already the shadow of coming events is cast upon the scene by evidence of incipient fascism. Talking with a soldier one day in 1918, Speranza heard expounded the completely developed theory that England was a decadent nation that owned the past, while Italy and Germany were young and virile and destined to inherit the future" (Brooks, 1941). The country he left indeed was about to experience turbulent upheavals but in Speranza's opinion, Italian civilization had "always presented surprising contrasts of greatness and mediocrity, of saints and rascals, of geniuses good and bad".

Its many manifestations of greatness blind us to the mediocrity always accompanying them – the same commonplaceness, shrewdness, patience, provincialism, and adherence to custom that is markedly noticeable in the Italian middle class of today. The war, by emphasizing these typical qualities of the Italian people and by bringing to the surface their latent genius for organization, has shown that Italy is the same today as it was yesterday and a thousand years ago. (Speranza, 1941, II, 32)

Speranza believed that he had nevertheless made his own contribution to ensure that Italy and the United States did not look at each other with hatred or incomprehension but instead that the war had for the first time removed the barriers, and that unlike what Ambassador Page had told him, there was truly a bridge "over the waters" upon which the two people could "walk and meet". For Speranza, who clearly could not, at that moment, imagine that American foreign policy in the following years would instead pursue an isolationist policy, this meeting was irreversible and was represented plastically by the many American soldiers who had come to fight in the Old Continent.

These boys symbolize the great, new spiritual brotherhood that will surely come out of the war. The Atlantic was not crossed by our two million men for anything less than this. Europe will call not only to their souls and spirits but to those of their children. The ocean is bridged. Europe and America become adjoining territories, with just enough of No Man's Land in between to keep up some of the romance and excitement of detachment. (Ibid., II, 214-215)

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The myth of planning. The Allied Control Commission and the UNRRA in the Italian laboratory

Abstract

The article, through the study of sources from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and the Allied Control Commission archives analyses, in a transnational perspective the use of the American myths of planning and technical expertise during the second world war. Allied military authorities and the UNRRA agents, using Italy as a laboratory of experimentation of their policies, played an essential role in integration of the Mediterranean area, building infrastructural, social, economic and cultural premises for a new geopolitical order, and giving their contribution to the rise of an anti-party attitudes in some Republican Italian élites.

Keywords: UNRRA, Planning, Mediterranean, Anti-party attitudes

El mito de la planificación. El Consejo de Control Aliado y la UNRRA en el laboratorio italiano

Resumen

El artículo analiza, en perspectiva transnacional, el uso de los mitos norteamericanos de la planificación y de la competencia técnica durante la segunda guerra mundial, por medio de las fuentes de la Administración de las Naciones Unidas para el Auxilio y la Rehabilitación (UNRRA) y del Consejo de Control Aliado. Las autoridades militares aliadas y los equipos de la UNRRA utilizaron a Italia como un laboratorio para experimentar sus políticas, desempeñaron un papel fundamental para la integración del área del Mediterráneo, construyeron las premisas infraestructurales, sociales, económicas y culturales de un nuevo orden geopolítico y ofrecieron su

contribución para el nacimiento de una actitud antipartido en algunas de las élites de la Italia republicana.

Palabras clave: UNRRA; planificación; Mediterráneo; antipolítica.

I mito della pianificazione. La Commissione Alleata di Controllo e l'UNRRA nel laboratorio italiano

Sinossi

L'articolo, basato su fonti della United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration e della Commissione alleata di controllo, analizza in prospettiva transnazionale l'uso del mito americano della pianificazione e delle competenze tecniche durante la seconda guerra mondiale. Le autorità militari alleate e il personale dell'UNRRA, usando l'Italia come un laboratorio sperimentale delle loro politiche, giocarono un ruolo essenziale nell'integrazione dell'area mediterranea, costruendo le premesse infrastrutturali, sociali, economiche e culturali per un nuovo ordine geopolitico e contribuendo a far sorgere un atteggiamento antipartitico in alcune élite della Repubblica italiana.

Parole chiave: UNRRA, pianificazione, Mediterraneo, antipolitica

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The myth of planning. The Allied Control Commission and the UNRRA in the Italian laboratory

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Introduction

In 1944 in the July issue of the *Reader Digest*, there was an article about the civilian conditions in Southern Italy during the Allied Military Government's occupation. Kwang Yuan Chen, head of the Far East Division of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, asked the UNRRA Division officers in Europe and in the Far Eastern countries to read it, to "avoid the mistakes of the officers of AMG".

The editorial, written by the American war correspondent Frederick Painton, had an evocative title *Naples: City of Panic and Famine*, and an even more explicit explanatory: "Can we do better for the rest of Europe than we have for the starving Italians?". The journalist described the discouraging story of people from Southern Italy rescued from Fascism by Anglo-American troops but hungry, ragged, bankrupt. Many promises had introduced and accompanied the Allies landing in Sicily: it was a redemptive occupation, and the USA was a friendly-enemy, engaged in a paternal mission of recomposing the community life¹. However, the need for help in Southern Italy seemed to overwhelm them and compromise their control of the occupied territories:

The Allies have made a complete flop here. We said we came as liberators, but failure to meet obvious food shortages is not an act of a liberator. Here in Italy we

¹ Rosario Mangiameli talked about "recomposing the community life" as a goal of the American occupation in his pivotal essay on the Allies in Sicily (R. Mangiameli, 1987).

have a vicious circle in which nothing much gets done; and Communism rushes in here, as it did in France and North Africa, because it fills a vacuum left by our failure. We've got to do better. If we do elsewhere in Europe what we are doing now in Italy, then the peace is lost before the war is won².

The article used a recurrent argument in the American debate about the second world war from 1941: establishing globally better living standards was the only way to win and guarantee enduring peace and social order. The military experience in Italy had an exemplary value and it corroborated that belief. As Andrew Buchanan pointed out (2008, p. 219), it "made an important contribution to the formation of the redemptive, muscular and interventionist ideologies that would coalesce in Cold War internationalism". Landing in Sicily, the Allies opened a breach in the Mediterranean³, which became a field of experimentation of the education to democracy. Relief programs and development projects were tools to instill democracy as the philosophical movement of the democratic activism by John Dewey had taught since the beginning of the century⁴. Many committees made by American, British and local scholars were created in those years to reorganize different aspects of the administration and reeducating occupied territories. In the Mediterranean, the Allies tested what Kurt Lewin in 1945 called "action research", boosted by the war:

Applying cultural anthropology to modern rather than primitive cultures – he said – experimentations with groups inside and outside the laboratory, the measurement of sociopsychological aspects of large social bodies, the combination of economic, cultural, and psychological fact-finding, all of these developments started before

² F. Painton, *Naples: City of Panic and Famine*, in Reader's Digest, July 1944, p. 28 in United Nations Archive (UNA), S-1242-0000-0107-00001, Missions, Italian-preliminary.

³ In the last years the Allies occupation of Sicily and Southern Italy has been object of several studies with a social and political approach (S. Lupo & R. Mangiameli, 2015); (M. Patti, 2013); (I. Williams, 2013); (M. Porzio, 2011); (E. Di Nolfo & M. Serra, 2010).

⁴ John Dewey's strongly critical stance towards Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal policies is well known: the American philosopher criticized in particular the improvisation of social reforms and their inability to affect the conditions of the working classes. However, precisely during the war, there was a convergence on the president's positions on foreign policy issues: in the 1944 elections Dewey voted Roosevelt for the second term (H.W. Brands, 2008).

the war. But, by providing unprecedented facilities and by demanding realistic and workable solutions to scientific problems, the war has accelerated greatly the change of social sciences to new development level (K. Lewin, 1945, p. 5).

American and British scientists and activists arrived on the southern shores of Europe in the Army ranks or in the pay of international humanitarian organizations, to administer the occupied territories, to give assistance, and to start to figure out a transnational welfare system and a future of global cooperation.

After the great closure of the totalitarian age, the total war turned into a global integration process⁵. Violence, famine, poorness, and diseases leveled societies, equalized enemies and partners, and the observers from armies and humanitarian agencies pushed the Allies to plan solutions for peace and relief on a world scale. The Mediterranean area became that space of integration, crossed by people and ideas, as it has already happened during the 19th century, in the age of European revolutions. It is why a social history⁶ of the total war needs a transnational approach, useful to highlight the intellectual and political contamination that involved both institutions and agents of the international community. Historians have been so focused on the Allies intervention and their imperialist attitude towards the Mediterranean that they have often ignored the allied planners' internationalist spirit. Looking at the correspondence from the war theatre is possible to grasp the cosmopolitan activism of technicians and the global perspectives of agents, dialoguing with local *élites* in the Italian transition to democracy

This article will consider that integrated context, focusing mainly on Sicily and Southern Italy, as a laboratory of education to democracy through first assistance and development plans projected both by the Allies Control Commission and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA). In those regions, living their early post-war in the slow awakening of political parties after fascism, the military authorities and the UNRRA agents played an essential role in planning the future. They showed a paternalist

⁵ Sheldon Garon recently pointed out that even if a growing number of historians analyze the globalization movement after the second world war, few of them “contributes to a more global understanding of total war” (S. Garon, 2020)

⁶ A decisive historiographical turning point is the social history approach of Gabriella Gribaudo (G. Gribaudo, 2004).

attitude toward the local population, often refusing the political mediation⁷ and teaching the primacy of pragmatism to establish democracy. This stance of refusal of the Italian political interlocutor resulted from the long-lived American stereotypes about Italian people and the *Italianess*, their backwardness and political immaturity, which had thrown them into the arms of fascism, and their affinity with anarchist and communist movements (M. Patti, 2013). Moreover, the inability to afford the wheat requisition demonstrated by the new local administrators, chosen according to principles of the indirect rule, worsened the American judgment on the indigenous ruling classes:

The Amg in Sicily devoted most of its energies to breaking this situation and getting more of this invisible wheat into the market. The most effective method was simply to take a squad of soldiers and some trucks and go from farm to farm making a search, and in this way in 4 days, 2 Amg officers succeeded in extracting 400 tons of wheat. For obvious reasons, and in addition because of lack of personnel, AMG could not pursue this method on a wide scale. Nor did in this situation any civilian group, organization or party in the Sicilian population to whom it could appeal as a responsible agency to persuade the wheat hoarders to disgorge⁸.

Therefore, the category of *anti-politics*, the label that seems to reveal the sense of the whole Italian Republican history, shows transnational references. The American anti-party stance resulted from the fear of the growing influence of the Communist Party in Northern Italy and a paternalist intolerance towards the local ruling class in the Southern area of the Country. However, it was coherent too with anti-ideological democratic activism.

In this perspective, the anti-party feeling found a political direction in technocracy. It was the "third road" of the operative critics' technical competence chosen by various intellectual *élites*

⁷ According to Rosario Mangiameli "Più che sulla ricerca e l'apprezzamento di interlocutori politici locali, l'approccio americano si fonda sul tentativo di instaurare un rapporto diretto tra le forze di occupazione e la società: un rifiuto della mediazione politica che porta ad accentuare toni di crociata contro il vecchio mondo nel suo complesso e che offre suggestioni a chi in Europa spera in un rinnovamento radicale provocato dallo sconvolgimento bellico" (R. Mangiameli, 1987, p. 487).

⁸ *Confidential. Excerpts from report of the Fea Survey mission to Italy of march 1, 1944*, in UNA, S-1253-0000-0553-00001, Missions, Italian-preliminary.

made by economists, anthropologists, architects, sociologists, and educationists looking for new political models outside ideologies. The goal was a global welfare, and the strategy to reach that result was planning any aspects of the future in cooperation.

Of course it is not just a matter of global social justice. As well as during the Cold War, international organizations for relief and economic development, included the UNRRA, had a strong "colonial pedigree" (D. Webster, 2011, p. 250). However, it is time to move over that kind of analysis. As Jessica Reinisch pointed out (2011, pp. 258-274), historians should consider as crucial in those years "internationalism itself", and adding an analysis of the democratic experimentalism could be useful too. It is evident in the variety of USA planners' perspectives and origins, in their frequent transition among different Government, military, humanitarian agencies, in the comparative analyses of their experiences. If we look at that contamination, we can better understand Italy's consolidation of some postwar debate's *topoi*, such as the glorification of planning as the only way to realize public action and reach the right development and modernization stage.

1. The century of the common man

In Summer 1942, Hugo Gellner, Hungarian-American painter, muralist, illustrator, and antifascist activist in New York, received a letter from the Office of War Information. The agency asked his participation in a plan to enlarge the scope of government war posters "by new pictorial images which come from the free expression of the artist's creative talents"⁹. He agreed to illustrate with nineteen pop-like pictures the celebrative edition of an inspirational speech delivered by Vice-President Henry Wallace at a Free World Association's dinner, calling to a new egalitarian future. He chose to depict people of different cultures, genders, ages, all working, studying, discussing together. They were the "Common men" evoked by Wallace in his rousing lecture, where he appealed to avoid the mistakes of the first post-war:

⁹ *Thomas D. Mabry to H. Gellert* in Archives of American Art (AAA), Hugo Gellert papers 1916-1986, Box 1, Folder 33, Correspondence, 1942, 9 July 1942.

After this war, we shall be in position to utilize our knowledge in building a world which is economically, politically and, I hope, spiritually sound. Modern science, which is by-product and an essential part of the people's revolution, has made it technologically possible to see that all the people of the world get enough to eat [...]. The peace must mean a better standard of living for the common man, not merely in the United States and England, but also in India, Russia, China and Latin America – not merely in the United Nations, but also in Germany and Italy and Japan. Some have spoken of the "American Century". I say that the century on which we are entering – the century which will come out of this war – can be and must be the century of the common man (H. Wallace, 1942).

Common men, educated in science and technologies will change the world. In this claim, the American Pragmatism resounds, and the primate of technics seems to be the only way to avoid totalitarianism's ideological tethers. It was the first launch of the plan for a World New Deal, based on what John Lamberton Harper defined "a basic article of faith", the belief that "communism and fascism would disappear in an environment of economic wellbeing and liberal democracy" (J. L. Harper, 1986, p. 10).

At the beginning of the war, both the British and the American Government engaged in initiatives to handle civilian populations' relief in wartime. In 1941 the British Government called at the St. James Palace in London a meeting where the Allies, including nine exiled governments, declared their commitment for the future peace:

The only true basis of enduring peace is the willing cooperation of free peoples in a world in which, relieved of the menace of aggression, all may enjoy economic and social security; It is our intention to work together, and with other free peoples, both in war and peace, to this end"(United Nations Documents 1941-45, 1946, p. 9).

In the same year in North Africa and Middle East, the British set up the MERRA, the British Middle East Relief and Refugee Administration, an agency administrating camps to rescue European refugees escaping from Iran, Russia, Syria, the Dodecanese Islands and the Dalmatian Coast into the Middle East.

The American Government gave even more attention to the humanitarian support during the war. The *Four freedoms speech*¹⁰ President Roosevelt pronounced to Congress in 1941 had started designing the utopian vision of global wellbeing. A few months later, the Atlantic Conference with Churchill launched the Charter claiming for a "better future for the world" and "a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want"¹¹. Step by step, the New Deal's rhetoric was reaching the international stage, and it was legitimizing an engagement in World War Two. The idea of welfare as the best policy to afford a crisis, applied on a national level during the Thirties, seemed applicable to the global context. Out of the rhetoric, it was a way to guarantee the social order on an international stage and avoid a postwar depression, saving the American goods market.

Moreover, a "human-centered approach" was useful to legitimize the military intervention, suggesting that "Americans fought the war for righteous, compassionate ends" (J. Bodnar, 2010, p. 6). With this awareness, in 1942 President Roosevelt established inside the State Department the Office of Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation Operations (OFRRO) and called Herbert Lehman, governor of New York, to lead it. The main task was to carry on a relief program in French North Africa, making plans simultaneously for large-scale post-war rehabilitation. The relief plan was the other face of the military march in the American propaganda, and it soon became a strategic issue in Italy's military occupation. The high cost of living, the famine, the condemnation of the war had been the main causes of the fall of the fascism and the hope for a change would make crossing Italy easier. For this reason, the rhetoric of the redemptive

¹⁰ The *Four freedom speech* delivered on January 6, 1941 called for an American effort producing armaments for European democracies and it evoked a better global future founded on freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear for the citizens of every nations. The freedom from want implied a stable economic life

¹¹ "For delivery to Press and Radio at 0,900 EST on Thursday August, 14" in Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum (FDR), Papers as President: The President's Secretary's File (PSF), Series 1: Safe File, Box 1, *Atlantic Charter* (1).

target of the Allied mission had an even more intensive tactic value in Sicily, the first step to reach Europe.

On 10 July 1943 a British-American force of 160.000 men arrived in the island. They established Amgot, the Allied Military Government of occupied territories, led by an English aristocrat, Lord Francis Rennell of Rodd, an expert of colonial matters. Since the appointment of Rennell as Chief Civil Affairs the distance between Roosevelt universalism and the classic British doctrine of the indirect rule had been clear. They shared some stereotypes about local backwardness and the underestimation of Southern society's level politicization.

That condescending was mixed with an experimental attitude in the case of the Americans, more inclined to catch the local community consent to protect their military operations¹². Moreover, in the USA, the democratic Government had started using the old xenophobic code of the Italianess in a friendly manner, designing a friend-enemy picture, too weak to resist fascism and unable to establish a democratic self-government. This grammar let the USA reach a double result: hold the Italian American community's consent, indispensable in a total war's collective effort¹³, and make negotiable Italy's enemy status in the international community. This last aim made the first moments of their expedition a pretty "negative" mission, focused on removing all fascists from public or semi-public office and accepting the British project of choosing administrative managers from the local prefascist *notabilato*.

On 11 November 1943 the Allied Control Commission was established to implement the Armistice and it became the right place for experimenting with new policies towards the occupied territories. General Alexander, Commander in chief of the Allied Armies in Italy, called it the "Third Army", explaining that the ACC was first and mainly a military organization and that the Allied

¹² According to Rosario Mangiameli Americans looked for a direct relation between military forces and the local community (R. Mangiameli, 1987, p. 487).

¹³ Historians have extensively studied the American narrative of the "good war" in the World War II and the rhetoric of the occupation-liberation addressed to the Italian American community (M. Patti, 2015); (A. Buchanan, 2008); (D. Ellwood, 1977).

liberation did not mean the end of the war¹⁴. The Headquarters' staff was divided in twenty-six sub-commissions covering such questions as Public Health, Public Safety, Legal, Food, Monuments and fine arts, Labor, Public Works and Utilities, Education. The peninsula was partitioned in different regions (Sicily was Region I, Sardinia Region VI, Calabria Region VII). Each region was supervised by a commissioner responsible to the chief-commissioner who carried a staff of expert advisers drawn from the Sub-Commissions at Headquarters. The issue of the experience was crucial in an organization that always claimed its experimental approach.

What has the ACC accomplished in Italy? – asked rhetorically an ACC press release in 1944 – It must be remembered that its organization and activity have been, and to some extent must be empirical. The attempt to restore democracy and freedom to a conquered people while the war still continues in their Country is a new experiment in history [...]. The Allied Control Commission was established to make that opportunity possible. Part of its job therefore is to allow the freest play consistent with the war effort to public opinion in Italy – through the Press, through free assembly, through the formation of labor unions, and through the untrammelled evolution of an Italian Government based on the most representative elements of the population¹⁵.

The experimental attitude needed the strongest logistic effort and the organization of intense trainings. The meetings of the Post Husky Planning Committee were in Algeria, where the Allied had established a training and planning centre for Civil Affairs Officers in Tizi Ouzu. The activities of military agents on the field, the ones of the Committee and the ones of the Planning center should be strongly intertwined according to the Military Government Section. Every project elaborated by the Centre should be submitted to the Committee, and every plan should be "amended from time to time in the light of experience"¹⁶. The importance of flexibility in planning

¹⁴ Even today the American rhetoric of the World New Deal and the label of the "other postwar", or "early postwar", talking about Southern Italy, causes reductionist attitude towards the war in the Southern Italy, hiding the violence experienced by the local population during the total war.

¹⁵ *Italy Developments dating from Armistice Negotiations, 12 June 1944* in FDR, PSF, Series 3: Diplomatic Correspondence, Box 41, p. 56b.

¹⁶ *Minutes of P.H. Planning Committee, meeting No.2, 16 August 1943, Part II, Planning* in Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Allied Control Commission (ACC),

and the value of the direct experience were highlighted by the military authorities, as well as the necessity of trained civil staff in the regions of the occupation.

Major Rowell reported that lectures which were being given by personnel who had experience in the field were proving most valuable. Major Rowell urged that in order to give new personnel the proper background and general working knowledge, they had to be turned over completely to the Director of Studies for intensive training for one week after arrival. The points were raised as certain regions needing men most urgently and as to special cases but it was agreed in principle that new arrivals should wherever practicable be completed such training under the Director of Studies¹⁷.

Planning and educating were the keywords, according to the Allies, to take real control of Italy and its population. As the historian Stephen White pointed out (1991, pos. 118), "the Allied Control Commission's Education Subcommittee was among the most energetic agencies operating in liberated territory". Purging the Italian State from Fascist started from the renewal of schooling and this aim addressed the action of American and British Allies since their arrival in Sicily. However, this process was deeply conditioned by the usual bias about that land as a backward and pre-political territory. Moreover, both American and British Allies held a diffident attitude toward the antifascist parties that should contribute to the school system's reconstruction. This distrust pushed them to a haphazard organization of the Italian people re-education, taking sometimes questionable decisions, like when they called George Robert Gayre to manage Sicily's educational matters.

Gayre was a Scottish anthropologist, an Army Educational Corps officer, surely anti-communist, just maybe antifascist. He arrived in Sicily as Educational Adviser in 1943, and in 1944 he became director of Education in the ACC, despite his troubling past as a supporter of racist theories. Already in 1939, the War Office had collected a file about him under the heading "Personnel suspected of

10000/100/302, Headquarters Allied Commission-AMG (includes Allied Information service), Conferences and Planning Committees (P.H. Post Husky).

¹⁷ *Minutes of P.H. Planning Committee, meeting No. 7, 15 September 1943, Training in ACS, ACC, 10000/100/302, Headquarters Allied Commission-AMG (includes Allied Information service)*¹, Conferences and Planning Committees (P.H. Post Husky).

Espionage" because he was "in touch with Dr. Dieckhoff of Ribbentrop's Bureau" and he received "correspondence from Germany"¹⁸. In Sicily, he pretended to be an Oxford Professor and started a dialogue with local *élites*, who sought to be credited in his eyes by offering him honorary degrees. He spent his time on the island evaluating university professors' profiles and deciding whether they were fascist or not. In the meantime, his personal file continued to swell up with letters describing him as a fanatic more hostile to the Soviets than the Nazis.

AMG has come under a good deal of criticism – an agent of the British Secret Service wrote about him - most of it no doubt unjustified, for being "fascist". I think that if we had been consulted on the case, we should not have approved of GAIR's employment by AMG, having regard to the facts that he holds some of the views usually associated with fascism is at the same time boastful and indiscreet. He is the kind of man I should imagine will make trouble for AMG in the future¹⁹.

However, Gayre, who was recalled in London after eight months to plan a re-education program for Germany (D. R. P. Weiner, 2020, pp. 121-145), was one of the few British men in the Subcommittee staff. The eighty percent was American, as well as all the successors of Gayre. They were exponents of the Deweyan movement, promoting progressive education as an agency of democratization.

Among them, Carleton Washburne, an American active educationist who had traveled during the Twenties in Europe to discover and learn from "the New School in the Old World" (Washburne, 1926). Moreover, as Superintendent of Schools in Winnetka, he had "transformed the school into an educational laboratory, working on and applying new ideas and advanced methods with gratifying success"(New York Times, 1926, p. 50). He perfectly embodied projects of democratic universalism and pragmatism in the didactic field, and he was one of the founding members of the John Dewey Society. He had adhered to Francis Parker's inclusive school model as a democratic educative community and a space of active and experimental learning. Another

¹⁸ *Register No. PF47408* in The National Archives, Kew (TNA), KV 2/2472, Minute Sheet No. 9, 26 April 1939.

¹⁹ *Register No. PF47408* in TNA, KV 2/2472, Minute Sheet No. 78, 31 January 1944.

supporter of the John Dewey pedagogy was Major Robert Koopman, responsible for the Education in Sicily, who collaborated with Washburne to establish a dialogue with Sicilian intellectuals, including militant antifascists. Among them, Gino Ferretti, socialist, Professor of Pedagogy at the University of Palermo, director of the Literature and Philosophy Faculty, called by Koopman in the Commission for school work. In a Commission meeting report, the Dewey's active school seemed to meet socialist principles. The reconstruction should start from children after twenty years of fascism:

La scuola d'ogni ordine e grado debba organizzarsi come una società di ricerca e di attività integrale e produttiva in un passaggio spontaneo individuale e collettivo dell'interesse, dal giuoco ad un lavoro considerato e che si svolge come libera esplicazione e come educazione concreta e libera²⁰.

Nevertheless, education was just a part of a rebuilding project in a Mediterranean region devastated by war, famine and diseases. Planning the future in that area could not ignore Italy's wellbeing, the first step towards the liberation of Europe. But focusing on innocents was the only way to afford the opposition of those refusing that the global reconstruction plan could include the first totalitarian Country. Between August and September 1944 a press campaign, favored by the ACC itself, clamored for an Italy's Relief scheme. Anne O'Hare McCormick, a correspondent of the New York Times, was a voice of that chorus, and she wrote from Rome:

The gravity of the food and health situation in Italy convinces many of the Allies officials here that a revision in the program and administration of relief is urgently necessary. They argue that if large-scale rioting and social disintegration occur in the first Country placed under Anglo-American control, the blow to the democracies' prestige would have repercussions throughout Europe (A. O'Hare McCormick, 1944).

It was time for UNRRA to arrive.

²⁰ *Relazione della seduta della Commissione per il lavoro nella Scuola*, 12 gennaio 1944, ACS, ACC, 10000/144/496, Education, Reconstruction January 1944, p. 3

2. *A new Deal for Italy*

In September 1944 Franklin Delano Roosevelt received a letter from Rome. It was signed by Myron Charles Taylor, the President "personal envoy" to Pope Pius XII. The American diplomat had visited Caserta, and there he had had a conversation with General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, who had succeeded General Eisenhower as the Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean. They discussed the opportunity that "some single agency should be in control of the whole field of relief, simplifying procedures and accomplishing objectives with a minimum of overlapping"²¹. The lack of personnel suffered by the ACC and the underestimation of Italy's political and social complexity by the allied military authorities made evident the need for a coordinated recovery plan for Italy entrusted to a specialized agency. All the observers thought that the UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, should be the most suitable organization for the purpose, but there were some points in its statute which prevented his intervention in enemy-occupied territories. The agency was founded in November 1943 by forty-four allied governments in Washington

to plan, coordinate, administer or arrange for the administration of measures for the relief of victims of war in any area under the control of any of the United Nations through the provision of food, fuel, clothing, shelter and other basic necessities, medical and other essential services (Agreement for UNRRA, 1946)

and its original scope was the relief of invaded friendly nations. Even if there were no prohibitions against its intervention in occupied enemy territories, the Country's new national authority should request assistance, with the local Allied Military Government's approval and the Government receiving aid should assume the operation's cost.

In March 1944 the Marshall Badoglio addressed a letter²² to the General Director of the UNRRA, Herbert Lehman to ask for an

²¹ *Vatican – Taylor, Myron C., September October 1944, Myron C. Taylor to the Presidente*, 1 September 1944 in FDR, PSF, Series 3: Diplomatic Correspondence, Box 52.

²² *Badoglio to Lehman*, 15 March 1944 in ACS, ACC, 10000/132/74, Political, UNRRA, March-November 1944.

intervention of the agency in Italy, but the possibility of Italian inclusion in Western nations' great family came closer only in summer 1944, after the advent of Ivanoe Bonomi's Government. The new President of the Ministers Council wrote to Roosevelt immediately after the inauguration of his government, asking for the easing of Allies control over the Country:

The Italian people have undergone indescribable sufferings and will continue to suffer. However, they are a sane, honest and solid people to whom credit can be given. Their activity and industriousness will be necessary to the reconstruction of Europe. Every aid and assistance which will be given them in this dark hour will certainly be a constructive deed towards the free world of tomorrow²³.

The implementation of a softer policy toward Italy in the following months (M.M. Aterrano, 2020, pos. 1946) made the UNRRA mission in Italy more likely. The USA, the agency's major lender, had been at the forefront of promoting the possibility of a UNRRA mission in Italy. In July 1944 an UNRRA Observer mission, led by Spurgeon M. Keeny together with Guido Nadzo and Antonio Sorieri, had landed in Naples in order to collect information about the Italian background and with the official aim of giving support just to displaced people in the Country (S. Salvatici 2011, p. 84). In their reports, they described a devastated territory, crowded by starving barefoot people and malnourished children, but at the same time, as Silvia Salvatici pointed out, they tried to use a critical approach towards the stereotypes about Italianness, making prevail the rational language of planning against the pietism that had been the milestone of traditional caritative attitude.

While the United Nations' observers were dialoguing with the local ruling classes to discover the most urgent needs of the territory, the American Government's lobbying activities for a global responsibility for Italy's future continued. On 1 August, the USA's Foreign Economic Administration took over from the Army financial responsibility for essential civilian supplies to be furnished to Italy, thanks to lend-lease funds available upon Army Certification. In a

²³ *Italy, August 1944-1945, Ivanoe Bonomi to President Roosevelt, 2 July 1944 in FDR, PSF, Series 3: Diplomatic Correspondence, Box 41.*

confidential report, analysts from FEA described with these words the meaning of the mission in Italy and its experimental value:

The only safe assumption is that the factors of devastation, hunger, inflation, confusion and demoralization of economy and administration which have characterized Italy will be found in varying degrees behind the retraining German armies throughout Europe. Food and civil order will be the first requirement, but beyond this limited military objective there are other goals [...]. Delivery of adequate civilian supply on schedule in our future military operations is not merely a notion of altruists; it is basic to our economic and political objectives²⁴.

Finally, in September 1944, the UNRRA second council meeting in Montreal accepted the requests for an intervention of the agency in Italy and made available 50 million dollars for specific relief categories. The pressure of the American representatives in the agency, and the "surrender" of the British ones, had been decisive. On 15 September, Roosevelt had released a memorandum for the Press. He had announced the travel to Italy of one of the most famous Italian Americans: the mayor of New York, Fiorello La Guardia, to "make a quick survey of the relief situation in the area south of the combat line"²⁵. A few days after, Roosevelt and Churchill lastly signed at Hyde Park a common statement that marked "the advancing political and diplomatic rehabilitation of the Italian government under Allied tutelage, but it also marked the unambiguous ascendancy of Washington's approach to the key political and economic questions in Italy" (A. Buchanan, 2014, p. 195):

The Italian people freed of their Fascist and Nazi overlordship have in these last twelve months demonstrated their will to be free to fight on the side of the democracies and to take a place among the United Nations devoted to principles of justice and peace²⁶.

²⁴ *Confidential. Excerpts from report of the Fea Survey mission to Italy of march 1, 1944* in UNA, S-1253-0000-0553-00001, Italy, Background.

²⁵ *Italy August 1944-45, Memorandum for the press*, September 15, 1944 in FDR, PSF, Series 3: Diplomatic Correspondence, Box 41.

²⁶ *Comunicazione del testo della dichiarazione di Hyde Park* in Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Commissione per la pubblicazione dei documenti diplomatici, *Documenti diplomatici italiani. Decima serie: 1943-48*, Vol. I (9 settembre 1943 - 11 dicembre 1944), doc. 439, p. 527

The UNRRA resolution established that the millionaire fund could finance the provision of medical and sanitary aid and supplies, assistance in protecting and returning to their homes of displaced persons, and welfare services for children and expectant mothers. The UNRRA would also provide further special welfare services for homeless, orphans, and children with physical or emotional disabilities. The UNRRA agents had prepared the missions through careful observation of the Italian society, and they decided to use the "considerable experience"²⁷ existing there collaborating with indigenous agencies and institutions, like the Onmi (Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia), the Ente Comunale Assistenza, and the Italian Government. Cooperating with local institutions was a fundamental part of the agency idea of rehabilitation: the relief program served to provide competencies and skills to the welfare administration workers and introduce "scientific methods and standard procedures for the recognition of needs" (S. Salvatici, 2015, pos. 3401).

The novelty of the UNRRA arrival in Italy was welcomed with enthusiasm by Myron Taylor. In the meantime, he was attempting to create an over-all Italian procurement and supply agency: the National Agency for distribution of relief in Italy (ENDSI) which was "intended to cooperate and correlate all distribution of donated material and supplies in Italy"²⁸.

Myron Taylor's idea of assistance seemed to be too far from the UN's agency's aims, which pursued the myth of plan and technics to "help people help themselves" (Silvia Salvatici 2015, pos. 3355). They were in fact, quite critical toward the ENDSI in a report addressed to Fiorello La Guardia, general director of the UNRRA in 1946:

ENDSI is not an official Italian Government agency. According to observations of the Mission, the church and members of the Italian aristocracy seem to play a dominant role in the organization, and the agency cannot be said to be truly representative of the Italian people either on its national board or local committees. Active participation by the persons receiving ENDSI contributions is not encouraged, and ENDSI operations seem to be characterized by the old line philosophy of private

²⁷ *Limited Child Welfare Program for Italy, Statement of program*, 6 October 1944 in UNA, S-1254-0000-0553-0099-000001, Italy, Child Welfare Program.

²⁸ *Italy August 1944-45, incoming telegram received in UNRRA*, 27 September 1944 in FDR, PSF, Series 3: Diplomatic Correspondence, Box 41.

philanthropy in which a few privileged persons "do good" for a large number of underprivileged²⁹.

UNRRA instead was devoted to more profound and long-term aims. To pursue them, it needed a carefully selected staff of welfare specialists. According to the Montreal resolution, small teamwork would be enough: a few executives and some technicians, like the medical personnel. They started reaching the original group of Keeney, Nadzo and Sorieri in December 1944. Keeney recounted their arrival with precision and profusion of details, and he was able to restore in his letters the internationalist spirit of the reconstruction in the worst time of history. On 30 December, he wrote grateful words:

The Friends Units from our Yugoslav mission are tackling their job in the refugee camps near here. Tony, Guido and I had dinner with them the other night in company with the representatives of the Italian Government. The rooms were chilly, the light had failed, and the little temporary stoves smoked away like mad, but the spirit of the group was perfect. The Italians are delighted with them although they have been working only a few days together. We need more people like this³⁰.

As Jessica Reinisch stated, the relief work was "testing ground of cooperation after the demise of the League" (J. Reinisch, 2011, p. 263). The agents looked at different work styles, production traditions, economic behaviors in the different regions of their camps, and their reflections turned the mission into a laboratory of technics and development strategies in the agricultural and industrial fields. Moreover, most UNRRA staff had past experiences in different areas of the world, pushing them to put in practice a notion "of cultural relativism as it radiated out from academic anthropology" (J. Reinisch 2013, p. 77). The international standing of the UNRRA employee was one of the reasons for the pride of the agency. In a final balance of the UNRRA activity in 1947, Keeney brought to the fore that had been performed "with about 400 imported United Nations personnel plus about ten times the number of Italian

²⁹ *Comment on the American Relief for Italy* in UNA, S-1253-0000-0553-00001, Italy, Background.

³⁰ *Keeney to Menshikov*, 30 December 1944 in UNA, S-1242-0000-0104-00002, Italy, Keeney Letters.

employees. About one imported employee for every twenty-five thousand tonnes of imported supplied". In the midst of the war the humanitarian organization was an accelerator of goods and men flows in the Mediterranean. Even if its focus was on traditional caritative issues, like children, mothers and displaced persons, the operations became an occasion to think about the postwar recovery. Relief and recovery were two sides of the same coin, and during the two years of the UNRRA's program, Italy became an attractor of planners who crossed the peninsula looking for resources and needs. The country's democratization and its inclusion among the United Nation had to pass through the economy recovery. For this reason, from 1946 the program was enlarged to enhance the recovery of industrial and agricultural production. According to the Keeny final balance, "contribution of supplies from the United Nations had helped Italian industry recover from 28% of 1938 production in January 1946 to 70% in may 1947"³¹.

The agents' observative stance produced a bulk of documents and reports about the devastated Italian society, full of human resources, but in need of reinforcing the link between science and social progress. Looking at agents' letters in continuity, the war disappears in the background and the desire to rebuild emerges strongly. Moreover, the connection between the war and the post-war seems more robust, and it compels historians to look at the Italian transition to democracy considering the whole period of the long European Civil War. In that period in fact plan-based thought developed, "challenging the di-vision between economics and politics, rethinking the position of individuals in society, the connection between science and social progress, and consequently the political meaning of freedom and equality" (R. Ferrari 2019, p. 10).

The UNRRA's correspondence represents the portrait of a country that, in the tragic experience of the years of the crisis, found the decisive reason for reaching democracy. It is the story of the Italian collective trauma that marks a part of the Republican ruling class's political formation. It is the story of the maturation of a national intelligentsia with a robust global inspiration, but somewhat sceptical of mass parties, which will make the myth of the plan the hallmark of

³¹ Una, S-1259-0000-0035-00001 – *Information Interviews S. M. Keeny*, June 24, 1947

the third road to democracy. The UNRRA held a deep antipolitical attitude during its permanence in Italy. "Our success – wrote Keeney to Lehman – depend on our acceptance by the Italians of us as a civilian organization with as few military and political connections as possible"³².

3. *The third road*

During the third meeting of the UNRRA in London, the council approved the USA's proposal of a new plan of aid for Italy of 450.000.000 dollars a year, which was no longer limited to medical and food provisions. Some months later, on 19 January 1946 the Italian Government signed a supplementary agreement "to undertake a program of relief and rehabilitation assistance adequate to meet the urgent needs of the Italian population" and without "the limitation previously imposed"³³. The main consequence of that new course was the institution of the Casas (Comitato Amministrativo Soccorso ai Senzatetto), an executive program of housing of the Italian government, strongly wanted by Guido Nazdo.

The new plan, better known as UNRRA-Casas, is the meeting point between the Italian American technicians, who had lead the Italian relief during the war, and a group of antifascist intellectuals ,architects, economists, sociologists, educationists, involved in enquiries about the Italian society and looking for a third road between liberalism and communism for the development in the next thirty years. Among them were Adriano Olivetti, commissioner of the UNRRA-Casas from 1947, Gustavo Colonnetti, director of the agency's technical sector, and several scholars and urbanists involved in recovery programs until the 1970s, transforming Italy in a laboratory of welfare. It was the third force gathering a various liberal democratic world, including figures of different political origins, usually belonging to the actionist movement, contraposing

³² Una, S-1242-0000-0104-00002 - *Italy - Keeney Letters, Keeney to Lehman*, December 2, 1944

³³ Una, S-1479-0000-0001-00001, *Displaced Persons Operations - Italy*, Supplementary Agreement between the Italian government and the UNRRA, Rome, January 19, 1946.

the idea of the "Planning-party" against the one of the "Apparatus-party" (Lupo 2004, p. 136).

A political group unable to share its proposal outside the Italian elites, but which is representative of a great long-lived anti-party attitude. It was a group that had received from years of the Roosevelt planners the legacy of this stance, but also the myth of plan, the universalist idea of wellbeing, the experimental attitude, the enhancement of technical skills against professionalism in politics, the preference towards the rational language of economy rather than the irrational grammar of ideology. Reconnecting the history of the Italian republic to the decade of the crisis, avoiding rigid periodizing compartments, like Fascism, War, Cold war, lets historians put in evidence this inheritance and to realize the global integration of the whole Twentieth Century and the international dimension of the Italian transition to democracy.

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The “American Way of Mobility”. The influence of the American model on traffic and mobility planning in Italy (1920-1960)

Mobility and traffic planning was an issue first tackled in Italy between the two major world conflicts as part of the broader theme of urban organization and with especial attention to the American model. It is in this moment that a significant change in the balance of urban planning culture takes place between Europe and the United States, with the latter becoming the model of reference. A typical example of this “importation” can be seen in the hierarchization of road users, a process that led to the exclusion of the weaker ones (pedestrians and bicyclists) in favor of the car. Following the Second World War, these tendencies are accentuated further as mass motorization, and its infrastructural frame, become an integral part of that ‘American way of life’. The present contribution aims to identify the most significant moments of this process as well as the dynamics stemming from the interaction between Italy and the United States in the exchange of the mobility planning model, in order to verify if the adoption of the American system, and consequently its infrastructural model for mobility, can be considered as a form of cultural subordination.

Keywords: mobility, traffic, planning, Americanization

“American way of mobility”. La influencia del modelo norteamericano sobre la planeamiento del tráfico y de la movilidad en Italia (1920-1960)

Resumen

En los años entre las dos guerras mundiales se afrontó por primera vez el tema de la planificación de la movilidad y de la circulación, como parte de la cuestión de la organización urbana con especial énfasis en el modelo norteamericano. En ese

momento se transformó profundamente la cultura de la planificación urbana en Europa y en Estados Unidos; estos últimos se convirtieron en el modelo de referencia. Un ejemplo típico de esta “importación” puede localizarse en la jerarquía entre los usuarios de la calle, lo que llevó a la discriminación de los más débiles (peatones y ciclistas) en beneficio de los coches.

Después de la segunda guerra mundial, estas tendencias se acentuaron, porque la motorización masiva – y su marco infraestructural – se apoderó del estilo de vida americano.

Este ensayo pretende identificar los momentos más destacados de este proceso y las dinámicas derivantes de la interacción entre Italia y Estados Unidos a la hora de compartir el modelo de planificación de la movilidad, para comprobar si la adopción del sistema norteamericano, y por consiguiente de su modelo infraestructural de movilidad, puede considerarse una forma de subordinación cultural.

Palabras clave: movilidad, circulación, planificación, americanización.

“American Way of Mobility” L’influenza del modello Americano sulla pianificazione del traffico e della mobilità in Italia (1920-1960)

La pianificazione della mobilità e del traffico fu affrontata per la prima volta tra le due guerre mondiali, come parte di un più ampio discorso sull’organizzazione urbana e con speciale attenzione al modello Americano. In quel momento ebbe luogo un cambiamento significativo nella cultura della pianificazione urbana tra Europa e Stati Uniti e questi ultimi divennero il modello di riferimento. Un tipico esempio di tale “importazione” può essere rintracciato nella gerarchizzazione degli utenti della strada, che portò alla discriminazione dei più deboli (pedoni e ciclisti), a vantaggio delle automobili.

Dopo la seconda guerra mondiale, queste tendenze furono ulteriormente accentuate, perché la motorizzazione di massa, e il suo quadro infrastrutturale, divenne parte integrante del modello americano di vita. Il presente contributo mira a identificare i momenti più significativi di questo processo, nonché le dinamiche che provengono dall’interazione tra Italia e Stati Uniti nella condivisione del modello di pianificazione della mobilità, al fine di verificare se l’adozione del sistema americano, e di conseguenza del suo modello infrastrutturale di mobilità, possa essere considerata una forma di subalternità culturale.

Parole chiave: mobilità, traffico, pianificazione, americanizzazione.

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*The “American Way of Mobility”.
The influence of the American model on traffic and
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Introduction. Planning traffic and mobility: a “modern” theme

With the appearance of the bicycle, followed by the automobile at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the road was definitely transformed from a social space to a space of contested mobility (Moraglio, 2009).

This was an epochal revolution, both from a practical and cultural point of view. Such change, in fact, brought about others: from the progressive marginalization of certain players (the first of these is the pedestrian, singled out as an intruder and as such sidelined), to the planning of this place of mobility and, consequently, the need to create specific technical knowledge capable of carrying out this work.

The process was of course gradual and multifaceted. However, it can certainly be said that, from the 1950s, cities ceased to be built for people and their development was entirely delegated to professional designers and, in the case of the road system, traffic planners, according to whom the city had to be adapted to (motorized) traffic, effectively overshadowing its human dimension (Gehl, 2017).

While this course is common, albeit with different times, to the whole Western world, the way in which this process took place nevertheless outlines different models of mobility and land management. Such models are, in turn, partly the result of national processes and partly of international influences and cultural exchange.

* Translated by Alexander Agostini.

While well-established studies on the history of transport and mobility already exist in Italy, with particular focus on the dynamics that witnessed the birth and consolidation of the model of mass motorization¹, there is nevertheless still a lack of research that emphasizes, on the one hand, the role “experts” of urban and traffic planning played in this matter, and on the other, the extent to which their actions were inspired by principles deriving from the international circulation of ideas. On the contrary, this subject has been at the center of a series of studies, especially involving the models of mobility of several northern European countries. Among these it is worth pointing out work carried out for the Netherlands (Buiten, 2010) and Sweden (Emanuel, 2012; Lundin, 2010). The debate can be set between the socio-material approach to the study of urban infrastructures (Coutard et al., 2005; Farias & Bender, 2009; Graham & Marvin, 2001) and the new lines of research inaugurated by the *mobility turn* (Maggi, 2018; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2008).

What we will try to do here is to see how the issue arose in Italy, highlighting the extent to which the mobility planning model was subject to foreign, and in particular Atlantic, influences. To do this, in addition to the specialized journals of reference where the debate took place, we will use as source materials the proceedings of the National Conferences for Traffic and Circulation as well as those from the Permanent International Association of Road Congresses (Piarc), a valuable but often overlooked source on the transnational movement sharing road management practices and models.

1. The birth of the planning question in the aftermath of the First World War

In 1911 the first National Road Conference was held in Turin (*Convegno nazionale della strada a Torino*, 1912; “Il primo convegno nazionale della strada”, 1911a, 1911b, 1911c, 1911d), followed by the one in Florence the year after (“Il secondo convegno nazionale

¹ See, for example: Giuntini & Pavese, 2004; Gorgolini, 2013; Maggi, 2005; Maggi, 2006; Maggi, 2021; Paolini, 2004; Paolini, 2005; Paolini, 2007.

della strada”, 1912a, 1912b, 1912c, 1913). The first International Road Congress had been held in Paris in 1908 (Tedeschi, 1908), followed by the Brussels Congress in 1910 and the London Congress in 1913 (Tedeschi, 1920)². In 1909, following the Paris meeting, the French capital witnessed the birth of the Permanent International Association of Road Congresses (Piarc).

The institutionalization of these meetings demonstrated the extent to which, by the end of the first decade of the 20th century, road management had changed from a sanitary matter regarding urban organization to a real battle concerning the rationalization of public space for circulation purposes. This was first fought with a flurry of municipal resolutions, followed by the drawing up of plans by urban and traffic designers. In this context transportation became the focus of a struggle for the conquest of the city’s public space. At the same time, the emergence of a body such as the Piarc marked the internationalization of the road question, opening the way to a wider transnational dissemination of practices and models of traffic management and planning.

Nevertheless, it was with the Great War that a first major change took place. By its end, it became of paramount importance in Italy, as in much of the Western world, to promote motorization at all costs. Set “al centro della strada” and presented as a “mezzo di trasporto indispensabile e insostituibile” (“La nuova tassa sulle automobili”, 1920), the car during the war seemed to be on its way to fast becoming a central part of both public and sector policies.

Statements of this kind began to appear in specialized journals:

Se non vogliamo restare in coda alle altre nazioni e perdere il terreno guadagnato nell’industria dell’auto, se non vogliamo inaridire sorgenti che possono diventare poderose per le finanze dello Stato, dobbiamo favorire l’automobilismo in ogni modo. Antiquata è l’opinione che l’auto sia un lusso [...] Guardiamo a quegli stati che hanno un’auto ogni 50, perfino ogni 30 abitanti! (“Relazione del Consiglio per l’esercizio 1918”, 1919, pp. 42-61)

To further reinforce the concept it was reiterated that: “I trasporti delle masse, che avranno bisogno di essere rapidi, di godere di quella libertà di movimenti che una ferrovia non consentirà mai,

² On the network of international and transnational relations developed around the Piarc and the management of the road problem see Mom, 2015, pp. 572-590.

non potranno operarsi che con automobili” (“I nuovi destini dell’automobile”, 1919, p. 115).

The first corollary of this change was that America, along with Great Britain, became the model to emulate in terms of motorization and mobility planning aspects (Albertini, 1919a, 1919b; Segre, 1919). The number of cars circulating overseas – a car every 14 inhabitants, according to a 1919 American study (Groni, 1920), a car every 11 inhabitants in 1921, compared to Italy with a car every 1.125 inhabitants (Vandone, 1921) – was read as an indicator of the wealth of the United States.

At the same time, the idea of a hierarchy in the right of access to road traffic began to clearly emerge, with the pedestrian relegated to the role of “il bastone tra le ruote dell’ordine circolatorio” (Pironti, 1920, pp. 32-34). Likewise, also the bicycle appeared as increasingly marginalized, with cyclists having to deal with an ever increasing number of proscription measures, restrictions, inadequately punished cases of theft, and both public and private facilities refusing to accommodate bicycles in their entrance halls. The presence of different vehicles on the roads, capable of different speeds, was cited as the cause of traffic disturbance. It is obvious how the idea behind this “orderly” traffic was that of a road dominated by the car.

In light of these facts one can read the changes that took place in Italy with regards to road planning. In 1916 the Touring Club’s Road Commission proposed that the obligation for each Municipality to set up a “piano regolatore organico per la viabilità” (“Relazione del Consiglio per l’esercizio 1916”, 1917, pp. 169-179) should be regulated by law. Policies in favor of improving the roads were seen as a necessary premise for:

l’avvento di una umanità che reputerà la ferrovia, l’esponente del progresso del secolo decimonono, come una specie di male necessario, e riporterà sulla strada *ordinaria* la maggior parte del traffico. Sarà una umanità che cirolerà raramente a piedi, il più sovente trascinata in velocissimi veicoli a trazione meccanica (“Strade americane in calcestruzzo di cemento”, 1917, pp. 202-207).

At the head of this modernizing movement was a new class of engineers and technicians with a privileged view of what was taking place on the other side of the Ocean. In 1918 the Experimental

Institute for Road Materials was founded³, financed by the Milanese engineer Piero Puricelli and directed by Italo Vandone, with the aim of tackling the problem of improving roads, an issue that was fast becoming central in the post-war agenda of the Italian Touring Club (“Il problema stradale preso alla base”, 1918).

But the war also brought about a shift in the international balance. If in the first decade of its life the Piarc, despite being born and characterized as a strongly supranational institution, had been dominated by European delegations – above all the French – after the war (the first post-war conference is that of Seville in 1923) things began to change. As shown in an interesting piece of research carried out by Gijs Mom (Mom, 2015, pp. 572-590), Europeans continued to dominate these international events, both in terms of participating delegates and reports submitted, while American presence saw a gradual but steady increase.

This was obviously reflected both in the choice of conference themes and in the outcomes of the debates. As Mom rightly points out (2015, p. 577), what emerged quite early on was a tendency to identify the “road problem” as a “car problem”, relegating other users to a marginal role, well exemplified by the theme of separated lanes (pedestrian, cycling, etc.) designed for these users. These balances were likewise also reflected in the dominant themes of the meetings. If in the first three pre-war conferences (Paris 1908, Brussels 1910 and London 1913) issues such as road surfacing and signaling were centre stage (Piarc, 1910, 1913), from the Seville Conference of 1923 themes such as motorization, traffic and road congestion began to emerge (Piarc, 1923), soon followed by traffic planning (Milano 1926, Washington 1930) and the construction of roads reserved or expressly designed for motorcar circulation (Milano 1926, Monaco 1934, L’Aia 1938) (Piarc, 1926, 1930, 1934, 1938).

Lastly, an additional trend that clearly emerged from the proceedings of the Piarc was that of a technicalisation (and in part a quantification) of road planning. The 1930 Washington Conference represented a watershed in this respect, as it enabled many

³ The Institute’s activities were supported and publicized through the journal “Le Strade”, which carried on the work of the homonymous journal published in Turin from 1898 and directed by Massimo Tedeschi.

European delegates to come in contact with American traffic engineers, learning of the different traffic schools and laboratories that had sprung up across the United States in the previous decade⁴. Furthermore, the war had also contributed to a reevaluation of technical and specialized knowledge, bringing the figure of the “expert” to the forefront. This trend became more pronounced over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, with a significant impact on urbanization and, more generally, on everything related to the planning of urban realities, including communication⁵. In truth, the first signs of this tendency had already been felt in Italy even before the war. Specialized journals such as “Le strade” or the “Rivista mensile del TCI” had started to view with interest at the development taking place overseas of schools specialized in the training of engineers and road technicians destined to make their contribution to public administration offices responsible for solving urban and road issues. These were still only sporadic cases in which, nevertheless, the first hopes began to emerge that “presso le Pubbliche Amministrazioni aventi governo di strade, il relativo servizio tecnico vada progressivamente informandosi a quello spirito scientifico e sperimentale” (Vandone, 1912, pp. 1-4) occurring elsewhere. In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, it was above all the journal “Le strade” that reintroduced the urgency of the problem of traffic in large urban centers. It did so, once again, by looking at solutions from abroad: England in particular (Vandone, 1920) but also France and the United States (Tedeschi, 1921).

In 1923 the question of traffic planning as an aspect of general urban development began to be systematically addressed by the Italian Touring Club (Barbieri, 1923).

⁴ The figure of traffic engineer was, of course, first born in the United States in 1921 although a Foundation for the study of road traffic had already been instituted in 1904; in 1931 the Institute of Traffic Engineers was finally created, accompanied by numerous undergraduate and post-graduate courses. See Bolis, 1956.

⁵ On the new role played by technicians and experts between the 1920s and 1930s see Kohlrausch, 2015.

2. *Italian uniqueness or Atlantic model?*

From the outside, the association seemed to want to adopt an innovative approach to the matter: avoid blatant imitations of foreign models; take into account the unique environmental and historical characteristics of many Italian cities; establish a medium-term strategy capable of regulating services and communications with foresight. Such a process was not easily achievable in a context, as the Italian one, where urban development legislation dated back to 1865, contemplating urban planning only in cases where urgent interventions aimed at solving immediate issues were needed. This led to exclude, on the one hand, any medium-long term programming and, on the other, any planning that took into account in a simultaneous and coordinated way different aspects regarding urban layout, including those related to mobility (Albertini, 1942).

The idea was to avoid a centralization of services and consequently of traffic in large urban realities, in order to encourage the development of delocalized centers, coordinated with one another and the main center through a well-organized network system. Decentralization and the birth of peripheral districts had, however, the effect of increasing travel distances, therefore legitimizing even further the automobile as a means of transport.

In addition, the urban road system was imagined as responding to a precise "differenziazione del traffico secondo la diversa natura di esso": essentially it was a matter of assessing the different actors involved (tramways, light and heavy vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians), reserving for each one his proper space (Albertini, 1923); or, as stated otherwise, to "differenziare il traffico a seconda della sua natura" (Albertini, 1925, pp. 95-97). One of the consequences of these valuations was the need to clear the city centers of tramways; therefore, if on the one hand the importance of public transport was effectively recognized, on the other there was a tendency to consider the road as a superior means of transport compared to the rail.

A strong advocate in the cause for traffic separation was the engineer Cesare Albertini, the future creator of Milan's 1934 urban development plan and promoter of that technicalisation of the mobility problem which was to become dominant after World War II. During the conference of the engineers and technical administrators

of the municipalities and municipalized companies held in Vercelli on the 29th and 30th of October 1924, Albertini proposed an agenda that read as follows:

Il Congresso, ritenuto che l'agevolare la circolazione delle città congestionate dal traffico è problema per sua natura di carattere prevalentemente tecnico, esprime il voto che con acconce provvidenze di piano regolatore, con opportune sistemazioni e coordinamenti di mezzi di trasporto, collo studio di strade differenziate per pavimentazione e per ampiezza a seconda del tipo di veicoli a cui sono destinati [...] i tecnici e gli amministratori comunali collaborino nel modo più efficace a risolvere il problema della circolazione stradale nel nucleo centrale delle nostre città (Albertini, 1925, pp. 95-97).

What clearly emerged from Albertini's analyses was the need for a complementarity between urban and traffic planning. Starting from the assumption that Italian urban centers presented a unique characteristic in the form of a high concentration of historical buildings, where it was oftentimes difficult if not impossible to imagine solving the issue of circulation by widening the roads via building demolition, it followed that the problem of traffic had to be faced through a long-term program that identified an adequate policy aimed at decentralizing not only housing, but also services and working areas, so as to relieve the urban centers of traffic congestion (Albertini, 1926). Apparently this was the criterion that inspired Rome's new development plan (Albertini, 1932). In the meantime, in 1926, the first road engineering course was inaugurated at the Milan Polytechnic, modelled on those that had already been in operation abroad for years and that the Touring Club had promoted on numerous occasions.

In those years the problem of urban circulation began to be systematically addressed by a journal such as "Il Politecnico", demonstrating the technical scope mobility was reaching. The allusion to the American model was, once again, explicit:

Sotto l'assillo insistente delle nuove necessità, che il volume sempre crescente dei traffici e della circolazione crea alle nostre congestionate città, i tecnici sono stati richiamati ad una più diligente osservazione e meditazione di questi fatti e delle loro manifestazioni [...] ed è doveroso riconoscere che il merito di questo nuovo indirizzo di studi spetta in primo luogo agli Americani (Chiodi, 1930, pp. 665-677).

A not irrelevant aspect of this new direction was the attention reserved to the statistical recording of traffic and circulation:

Il rilevamento del traffico stradale è divenuto oggi nelle attuazioni di piano regolatore una necessità non ancora sufficientemente sentita da tutti, ma che è indispensabile entri nella coscienza degli urbanisti, concorra nelle decisioni degli Amministratori, ai quali incombono ben gravi responsabilità nella gestione della cosa pubblica (Conte, Di Rienzo & Napoli, 1937, p. 6).

In contrast with rail and maritime traffic which had already been subject to accurate periodical statistical surveys since the second half of the 19th century, road traffic was by its very nature difficult to measure. With the exception of a few statistical recordings carried out by municipal technical offices and thus attributable to local initiatives⁶, the first large-scale national traffic survey dates back to 1925, with the *Statistica del traffico lungo le strade di prima classe* commissioned by the then Minister of Public Works, Giovanni Giuriati. At that time the measure was hailed with great enthusiasm by the Touring Club, for it finally seemed to fill-in those gaps that could be ascribed to a lack of reference points for measuring the circulation of different vehicles on the national territory (Vandone, 1925). However, the survey, in addition to covering only a single road category, was limited to gathering data for only a week (September 1925), choosing to survey only animal or mechanically driven vehicles while excluding, for example, bicycles (Vandone, 1927). This was followed by three other surveys in 1928, on first class roads in spring and on national roads in the autumn (Azienda autonoma statale della strada, 1929a, 1929b), in 1933 (Azienda autonoma statale della strada, 1934) and again in 1938 (Azienda autonoma statale della strada, 1939; Ministero dei Lavori Pubblici, 1939). A further limit of these recordings, already noted by contemporary observers, was the tendency to concentrate data on tonnage (stemming from the need to assess the type of maintenance that had to be carried out on the road surface), often leaving a marginal role to surveys aimed at providing the number of vehicles circulating for the various categories (Santini & Biffi, 1937).

⁶ For the first recordings of local traffic see Vandone, 1910. This was the communication given at the second International Road Congress (Bruxelles 1910).

In this sense the example of what was taking place overseas surely had a positive influence in demonstrating the importance of quantifying traffic for subsequent planning.

Nevertheless, these principles once again had as corollaries on the one hand the centrality attributed to the automobile and the consequent marginalization of other forms of mobility; on the other, the tendency to see the American model as representing a certain and inevitable future for the European continent:

Lo sviluppo ancora limitato dell'automobilismo in Italia non offre sufficienti dati di esperienza, i quali possono essere invece opportunamente forniti dai paesi che avendo già raggiunto un elevatissimo sviluppo automobilistico rappresentano approssimativamente la situazione alla quale noi pure tendiamo nel futuro (Chiodi, 1930, pp. 665-677).

The spread of the car, therefore, continued to be touted as the only possible way forward for the mobility in the future as well as the main indicator of a nation's progress:

L'impiego del veicolo a motore nei viaggi isolati è un indice della ricchezza e del benessere individuale di una nazione per cui ove l'automobile privata è poco diffusa è da ritenersi che esista una proporzionale minor ricchezza individuale nella popolazione (Riparbelli, 1931, pp. 346-357).

And this in spite of the fact that statistics confirmed the very slow development of motoring in Italy compared to both the United States and other European countries. A 1928 statistic indicated that 172.000 cars circulated in Italy compared to almost 25 million in the United States and over 1 million in Great Britain, France and Canada (Riparbelli, 1931).

As a consequence, the circulation and planning model emerging from the United States was looked upon with a mixture of admiration, skepticism and concern. A model in which “non circolano motociclette e tantomeno biciclette”, while the car asserted itself as “il mezzo più comune di locomozione e di trasporto”:

Moltitudini di pedoni di ogni razza e di ogni qualità e ridde di autoveicoli di ogni forma e di ogni colore invadevano le strade, dove – con ‘umorismo americano’ – Henry Ford annunciava che nell'arco di dieci anni ogni cittadino avrebbe avuto un'automobile di proprietà, e le metropolitane avrebbero lasciato posto a posteggi per le vetture private (Tegani, 1925, pp. 671-680).

Therefore, the constant reference to the American model led to the affirmation of the idea that the car and speed were identifying signs of progress. It was from this idea that, as we have seen, the International Road Congresses took shape, putting the issue of urban traffic congestion on the agenda from the 1920s onwards.

Therefore, the model that soon established itself was that of a hierarchical, non-shared road. As Gijs Mom (2015, pp. 594-606) rightly points out, the reasons why traffic planners were so easily converted to this hierarchical and self-centered vision can be found partly in the “mito del progresso tecnologico” that seemed to be already well established in Europe at the start of the century, and partly in the fact that the experience of other infrastructural plans, starting with the railway, tended to testify in favor of a monopolized rather than a shared infrastructure. Nevertheless, this can only go so far in explaining the ease with which those that until a few years earlier had championed the interests of other means of transport agreed to bow so readily to the diktat of the car. In assessing these dynamics one should probably not overlook a kind of “cultural subordination” that Italy was beginning to have towards the American economic model, a process that would find its definitive affirmation after the Second World War when, during the reconstruction process made possible by the Marshall Plan, the country made its definitive shift in favor of that system inspired by the ‘American Way of Life’.

3. The “American Way of Mobility”

The Italy that emerged from the Second World War was a country brought to its knees by five long years of war, two decades of dictatorship and a lacerating war of Liberation that had broken-up the unity of the nation’s social fabric. The governments of National Unity first, and then the centrist governments, found themselves entrusted with the task of reconstruction in order to clear the debris – not only the material one – left by the conflict. First and foremost, there was the issue of reconstructing the road and railway infrastructure, a problem that concerned mobility but also the

possibility of mending the entire social and economic life of a nation. 38% of the overall functionality of the transport system was compromised. In terms of infrastructure, 50% of the 17.000 kilometers of railway lines existing in 1940, 19.000 kilometers of bridges and 42.000 kilometers of roads (half of the public highways, a third of the provincial roads and a sixth of the municipal roads) had been damaged (Gorgolini, 2013).

If in the immediate aftermath of the war priority appeared for a moment to be reserved for the reconstruction and development of the ordinary road network (municipal, provincial and public highway), by the early 1950s a clear shift in favor of a highway policy began to take shape, testified by the birth of what would turn out to be two important motoring lobbies: the Italian Road Federation (1952) and the parliamentary group Friends of the Car, the latter made up of senators and deputies from various parties (with the exception of communists and socialists) (Paolini, 2007).

However, the problems of the urban road system had to be confronted with the lack of regulation in Italy of the urban planning issue (based on law n. 1150 of 1942, the implementing regulations for which had never been approved) and the building speculation that followed, partly due to the need for reconstruction and labor absorption. In terms of mobility this resulted in traffic congestion in the most densely built areas of the city, lack of adequate pedestrian and bicycle routes, a tendency to sacrifice pedestrian or green areas and the absence of a plan for mobility infrastructures. The 1942 urban planning law, which came into being in a context where less than 74.000 cars circulated in the country, merely stipulated in article 7, that the town plan should also indicate the network of main roads. Urban expansion and the increase in motorization also led to a crisis in the public transport sector, to which the authorities responded by simply dismantling the tram networks and replacing them with buses (Paolini, 2005).

Urban and traffic engineers began to give absolute priority to the car while transports such as the bicycle, and to some extent the public transport, were destined to disappear or remain residual. The proceedings of the annual Conference on circulation held in Stresa

(Piedmont)⁷ offer insight in the internal debate and demonstrate how, once the reconstruction emergency and the need to provide the road system with new, updated and unified standards had passed⁸, traffic and mobility planning resumed along the lines that had already been partly highlighted in the period between the wars: construction of traffic⁹ and parking facilities¹⁰; traffic measurement for mobility planning purposes¹¹.

In the spring of 1954 a 32-member delegation from the OECE, four of whom were Italian (Bottaro of the Ministry of Transport, Cusani of the Rome Tramway Agency, De Rossi of the Traffic Police and the urbanist Ruspoli), traveled to the United States in order to study American roadway organization. Basically, the principles that emerged, and which were used as a model for the organization of the Italian road system, were: urban decentralization, with a development of the suburbs; construction of express-ways, large high-speed communication routes capable of connecting business districts to urban centers; traffic surveys (often carried out door to door and quite rare in Europe); building of new roads (rather than adapting the old) with wide carriageways; construction of car parks, preferably in the center (suburban car parks, supplemented later-on by buses or subways, were defined as "non convenienti"); marginalization of the public transport (Bolis, 1956).

⁷ The "Conferenza del traffico e della circolazione", promoted by the Automobile Club d'Italia, represented an annual meeting on the theme of mobility and transport: founded in 1930, it was interrupted from 1938 to 1949, resuming annually from 1950 with its seat in Stresa.

⁸ In reality, it was not until 1959 that the new Traffic Code was introduced (approved with the D.P.R. n. 393 of the 15th of June 1959).

⁹ The themes were those of roadway and highway development. See, for example, the Conferences held in 1951 (Automobile Club d'Italia & Automobile Club di Milano, 1951), 1953 (Automobile Club d'Italia & Automobile Club di Milano, 1953), 1954 (Automobile Club d'Italia & Automobile Club di Milano, 1955a), 1955 (Automobile Club d'Italia & Automobile Club di Milano, 1955b) and 1961 (Automobile Club d'Italia & Automobile Club di Milano, 1961).

¹⁰ The issue of parking spaces is brought up again in the Conferences held in 1950 (Automobile Club d'Italia & Automobile Club di Milano, 1950), 1955 (Automobile Club d'Italia & Automobile Club di Milano, 1955b) and 1961 (Automobile Club d'Italia & Automobile Club di Milano, 1961).

¹¹ The theme returns, for example, in the 1951 Conference (Automobile Club d'Italia & Automobile Club di Milano, 1951).

The lesson was clear: “in Europa si pensa ancora troppo alla casa e troppo poco alla strada; in America si verifica ormai l’opposto” (Bolis, 1956, pp. 53-64), complemented by the statement that “una strada è tanto più efficiente quanto più traffico può sopportare [e] a parità di capacità sarà più efficiente quella strada che consentirà velocità più elevate” (Zambrini, 1961, pp. 183-210). It was therefore a system where the road, as quintessential infrastructure for individual motorized mobility, became central while the home and consequently the quality of city life, intended as a space for the citizenship, fell in the background.

The OECE delegation ended its trip with a series of recommendations, from which the takeover of the American model of mobility planning appeared to be clear and explicit. In particular, recommendation number 8 stated: “le norme previste per la sistemazione della futura rete stradale europea potrebbero essere messe a punto in maniera più precisa alla luce degli insegnamenti della tecnica americana”; number 9 “quando le strade esistenti sono sature, converrebbe domandarsi se, come gli Americani si sono accorti, non sia quasi sempre più economico costruire una strada interamente nuova, con accessi controllati, che allargare la strada esistente” and number 26: “bisognerebbe fare un più grosso sforzo per ridurre il traffico dei trasporti pubblici nelle ore di punta” (Bolis, 1956, pp. 53-64).

In fact, the trip to the United States and the subsequent recommendations set the benchmark for all future planning. The debate that featured in all of the major specialized journals in the following years shows the extent to which the United States were looked to for new urban and traffic planning. What is remarkable is that, in the case of the journal “Le Strade”, this was a periodical directly managed by the Italian Touring Club, demonstrating the extent to which the Touring Club had long since abandoned its role as a reference body for cycling interests, rather favoring the interests of mass motorization.

The themes of the debate were those that had already emerged from the report of the OECE delegation: the construction of large expressways and highways (Bolis, 1957; Zambrini, 1961); the building of large interstate highways (Podestà, 1962, 1963); the design and construction of car parks, especially for commercial

activities ("Caratteristiche del traffico ", 1962; "Parcheggi riservati ai clienti", 1963). Often these articles were reports, but invariably they always ended with the recommendation that Italy should also look at what was being done overseas regarding traffic planning and road design.

What followed, in terms of infrastructural development and, more generally, mobility planning and management choices, is well-known history¹². Basically, the roads (and especially the highways) were seen as the infrastructural instrument in service of mass motorization, that in turn became one of the pillars on which the country built its economic miracle. Historiography, both on transport and economic and territorial development in the years of the economic miracle, is basically unanimous in recognizing the phenomenon of mass motorization, or rather the mobility system based on private motorized transport, as a strategic and conscious choice made from above to place the car and its industry at the center of country's economic recovery project.

What has been emphasized here is, on the one hand, the "cultural" importance that overseas influences had in these choices, destined to have such a strong and long-lasting impact on the national mobility model; and on the other, how this process did not exclusively originate in the aftermath of the War, as a consequence of economic and political dependence in what was then a bipolar framework, but rather its roots can be traced back to the period between the wars, as demonstrated by the changes of balance that took place within the Piarc, the most important body for international debate on issues of traffic and mobility planning.

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¹² On transport and mobility in Italy after the Second World War see: Giuntini & Pavese, 2004; Maggi, 2005; Menduni, 1999; Paolini, 2005.

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North African migration in the Colombian Caribbean: political and commercial influence in the city of Barranquilla

Abstract

This article will analyse the influence of Arab migration in the Colombian Caribbean and in particular in the city of Barranquilla, a city that at the end of the 19th century constituted the main and only important sea and river port in the country, through which many migrants entered, including the first ones coming from the Mediterranean in North Africa to Colombian soil. Through a qualitative methodology based on secondary sources and corroborated with primary sources, this study will allow us to verify how this important and historical meeting of cultures has exerted a level of influence from the political and commercial point of view in the Colombian Caribbean and in particular in the city of Barranquilla, highlighting their forms of commercialisation, identity adaptation, roles, social ascent and their institutional political positioning. The purpose of this study is to critically unravel what this meeting of cultures has meant for the evolution or regression of the city of Barranquilla, to achieve this it is undoubtedly required to make a tour of the most important aspects of this cultural confluence, delve into its causes and effects. It will surely be enveloping to highlight the influential dynamics in commercial and political matters, their social contexts at the time of this encounter, as well as their significance and value for the country of origin and city of destination.

Keywords: Migration, North African, Colombian Caribbean, political-commercial influence, Barranquilla.

La inmigración de norte África en los Caribes colombianos: influencias políticas y comerciales en la ciudad de Barranquilla

Resumen

En este artículo se analizará la influencia de la migración árabe en el Caribe colombiano y en particular en la ciudad de Barranquilla, ciudad que a finales del siglo

XIX constituía el principal y único puerto marítimo y fluvial importante del país, a través del cual ingresaron muchos migrantes, entre ellos los primeros provenientes del Mediterráneo en el norte de África a suelo colombiano. A través de una metodología cualitativa basada en fuentes secundarias y corroborada con fuentes primarias, este estudio nos permitirá comprobar cómo este importante e histórico encuentro de culturas ha ejercido un nivel de influencia desde el punto de vista político y comercial en el Caribe colombiano y en particular en la ciudad de Barranquilla, destacando sus formas de comercialización, adaptación identitaria, roles, ascenso social y su posicionamiento político institucional. El propósito de este estudio es desentrañar críticamente lo que ha significado este encuentro de culturas para la evolución o retroceso de la ciudad de Barranquilla, para lograrlo se requiere sin duda hacer un recorrido por los aspectos más importantes de esta confluencia cultural, ahondar en sus causas y efectos. Seguramente será envolvente resaltar las dinámicas influyentes en materia comercial y política, sus contextos sociales en el momento de este encuentro, así como su significado y valor para el país de origen y la ciudad de destino.

Palabras clave: Migración, norteafricanos, Caribe colombiano, influencia político-comercial, Barranquilla.

L'immigrazione colombiana nei Caraibi colombiani: influenze politiche e culturali nella città di Barranquilla

Sinossi

L'articolo analizza l'influenza della migrazione araba nei Caraibi colombiani e in particolare nella città di Barranquilla, che alla fine del XIX secolo costituiva il principale e unico porto marittimo e fluviale del Paese, attraverso il quale entrarono numerosi migranti, tra i quali i primi provenienti dal Nord Africa nel territorio colombiano. Attraverso una metodologia qualitativa basata su fonti secondarie e corroborata con fonti primarie, questo studio consentirà di provare come questo importante e storico incontro di culture ha esercitato un'influenza politica e commerciale nei Caraibi colombiani e in particolare a Barranquilla, dando avvio a processi di commercializzazione, adattamento identitario, ascesa sociale e posizionamento politico-istituzionale. Il proposito di questo studio è analizzare criticamente il significato di questo incontro di culture per la evoluzione di Barranquilla. A tale scopo si esamineranno gli aspetti più significativi di questa confluencia culturale, prestando attenzione alle cause e agli effetti e si metteranno in evidenza le dinamiche commerciali e politiche, il contesto sociale al momento dell'incontro, nonché il significato e il valore per il Paese di origine e la città di destinazione.

Parole chiave: Migrazioni, Nordafricani, Caraibi colombiani, influenza politico-commerciale, Barranquilla.

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North African migration in the Colombian Caribbean: political and commercial influence in the city of Barranquilla

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Introduction

The phenomenon of migration has been the subject of studies and analysis from different perspectives and theoretical frameworks. Synthetically, in reference to classical theorisations, Smith and Malthus (cited in Gomez Walteros, 2010) considered emigration as something necessary for productive development, in such a way that they argue that it is important to allow the free “mobility of factors”, opposing governments to restrict and penalise the mobility of people because the right to welfare is what they seek. In particular, Smith refers to emigration “as part of the individual's choice in the exercise of his individual liberties”, in the same way other thinkers coincide in their approach “by the motivation of wage differentials”, “by population growth, understood for this case as overpopulation (Malthus)”, “by substitution of economic activities” according to (Marx)¹, and as a search for welfare (Smith), and as a search of welfare (Marx). and as a search for welfare (Smith, Malthus). In this respect, Malthus adds that, although migration can be beneficial in the short term for welfare, the problems of population explosion in the long term must be taken into account. Similarly, Stuart Mill, who from his perspective sees migration as a

¹ Karl Marx was “unconvinced of the free market and argued that the migration of people was largely due to the accumulation of capital and the concentration of rural property in the hands of the new landowners, as well as to economic and political dependence and competitive inferiority vis-à-vis an external power. This is how he puts it in the first volume of Capital when he talks about the expulsion of the Irish from their lands to the United States, in the face of the advance of cattle raising by the English” (Gomez Walteros, 2010).

vital opportunity to expand colonialism, considered that the state should intervene in the migration process and finance it². In the Austrian school we also highlight Hayek's emphasis on the importance of tolerance towards migrants, the diversity that is generated being appropriate for productivity, eliminating border barriers, promoting competition and trade, and the success of population growth. It is also interesting to mention Ravenstein's approach, who focuses on the reasons for the attraction of the host country. Neoclassical theorists base their view on the criterion that international migration and its origins are "economic in nature and its causes are to be sought in the wage differential between countries, reflected in the level of income as well as in the disparities in social welfare", and that the decision to migrate is based on a "rational choice", to obtain or expect maximum returns and profits. In this sense, for example, according to Lewis (1954, cited in Gomez Walteros, 2010), workers migrate from the primary to the industrial sector because of wage differentials. This explanation can be extended to the field of international migration. According to "the individual decision approach (Todaro, 1969, cited in Gomez Walteros, 2010) the individual decision to migrate is part of an "economic rationality" choice and Sjaastad (1962, cited in Gomez Walteros, 2010) adds that this "migration constitutes an investment of human capital". Despite the absence of a single theory on migration, but of a set of theories anchored to the limits and specificities of the macro area in which they are inserted, in recent years the phenomenon of migration has been observed according to new and interesting visions. In this perspective, we find, for example, the most recent analyses that focus on the potential of sport as a means to develop intercultural dialogue and integration of migrants,

² John Stuart Mill (1978) "believed that emigration was an important opportunity to expand the scope of colonialism and advocated state intervention to ensure the proper direction of migratory flows and, therefore, should be committed to their financing. To undertake this task, he outlined a series of formulas, as he saw emigration as a profitable activity for the country as a whole, as well as guaranteeing the colonialist country natural resources and the opportunity to make investments taking advantage of its advantages". International migration: theories and approaches, a current look (Gomez Walteros, 2010).

thus betting on the creation of more inclusive societies (Fonzo, 2019; D'Angelo, 2019). This synthetic premise represents an interesting basis for the purposes of analysing the case study presented in this essay, since it will often observe the interaction and interconnection of the different items considered by the aforementioned schools of thought, and, simultaneously, it allows us to highlight more precisely the socio-political perspective through which we will approach the evaluation of these items. More specifically, our aim is to provide a reading of the North African migratory flow towards the Colombian Caribbean that goes beyond the numbers and that rather allows us to focus on the historical-political events, the socio-cultural life praxis, and the economic-institutional influence. Clearly, it is a reading from which different aspects of the same phenomenon can be glimpsed, linked by a relationship of complementarity, and which is fully expressed in what is underlined by Mangone (2015, p. 7), who stresses that “migratory flows cannot be avoided, nor can they be enclosed in a material sphere (...) the 'place' becomes the social structure through which people can acquire the necessary strength to overcome the trauma of abandoning their country of origin”. Over the centuries, societies have been characterised by profound transformations stemming from new socio-political and cultural conflicts linked to migration, which therefore become a scenario that requires a clear vision, in which the image of the migrant is a two-way process, in which the social representation of the migrant and immaterial resources are fundamental (Mangone, 2018). Undoubtedly, these types of analysis lead to bilateral evaluations, i.e., on the one hand, a narrative that may reflect national governmental interests, and thus influence the decision of policy makers, but on the other hand, open a significant margin for reflection on the gap between the values and visions of the society of origin and the society of destination, or rather, on the identification of the actions and strategies that the migrant will implement to integrate but simultaneously maintain his or her differential element, in a constant tension between inclusion and linkage with one's own roots. A tension that is condensed in an “incontro, 'disincontro', e scontro” (D'Angelo, 2009), and that flows between hopes, nostalgia, exclusion, integration, for which a multicultural and respectful dialogue of differences remains

fundamental, allowing harmonisation of all the elements - cultural, identity, economic, social etc. - that compose it.

1. The North African migratory flow to the Colombian Caribbean: the arrival in Barranquilla

“The years have passed. I have not returned and I don't think I will ever return to Barranquilla. Nobody around me even knows its name. When they ask me what it is like, I limit myself to saying that it is next to a river, very close to the sea” (Moreno,1987).

Barranquilla, a city located in the continental Caribbean of Colombia, which at the end of the 19th century constituted the main and only important sea and river port in the country, was the reception channel for the first emigrants from the Mediterranean. The construction of a port “without a bay, which nevertheless grew” (Posada Carbó, 1987), increased the relevance of the city of Barranquilla, particularly in terms of commercial movements, since its urban and architectural conditions did not offer the best amenities as a city. Pierre d' Espagnat, traveller, defined Barranquilla as “The true modern South American city, vulgar and too young, concerned only with trade, industries, maritime relations, created by the force of necessity under the economic pressure of the rich country that flows into it” (Posada Carbó, 1987, p 13). Likewise, the French scholar Eliseo Reclus defined the city as “the true commercial capital of the state of Bolivar³. to which migrations came to “a natural port that developed on the banks of the most important river artery of Colombia, access to the Caribbean Sea” (Robinson, quoted in Posada Carbó, 1987). It is precisely in this sense that the narration of the Barranquilla writer Palacios is significant:

Barranquilla has always had a rare privilege: that of having not only the love or the consecration of those who were born there, but also of those who came there to pitch their tent. The “barranquillero” is not selfish, he does not look with suspicion and distrust to anyone. The “Mister” was never looked down upon by the

³ Reclus refers to the Federal State of Bolivar, which was part of the United States of Colombia and which had been constituted between 1857 and 1885.

people of Barranquilla with disdain and even less with disgust because he had blue eyes and blond hair. The city absorbed and assimilated North Americans, English, Germans, Italians, Spaniards, Venezuelans, Jews, and even the Syrian migration that began to arrive at the beginning of the century, Barranquilla has been benevolent and welcoming. All the foreign colonies have been able to reciprocate such a cordial welcome. (Villalon 2008).

In general, it is considered that after the Spanish colonisation, one of the most important migrations in terms of their migratory flow in Colombia were the “Arabs”. Since the 15th century, the meeting of two cultural worlds between the old continent and what was called the new continent (European and native) led to relations of obedience, enslavement, humiliation and progressive extinction of the indigenous culture (De Josep, 2019); however, in comparison with the European presence, the “Arabs” entered these lands almost in a “timid” or “low profile” manner. They were labelled indistinctly as “Turks” by their passports, but their nationality came from Middle Eastern territories such as Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan, territories that at that time (XVI- XIX) were under the political domination of the Turkish-Ottoman Empire (Wabgou, Carabali, Vargas, 2011). The conquest of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 marked a path of domination extending to territories in Asia Minor, parts of Eastern Europe and control of power over Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. For more than three centuries approximately without interruptions in the dominant power which, although it was besieged by attempts to overthrow it by France and Egypt with ups and downs of defeats and reconquests, was maintained “from the beginning of the 16th century until the end of the First World War” (Viloria, 2003). Fractures and deterioration of relations generated all these wars, in such a way that it fuelled clashes between Maronite and Druze Christians, deepening discord between these communities, violence, persecution and destruction of villages, which forced many to abandon their territories.

According to other estimates, the massacre cost the lives of some sixteen thousand Christians, of whom eleven thousand died in Lebanon and another five thousand in Syria. The above elements show a chain of events from the 1840s onwards, politically, economically, socially and religiously, that triggered the first wave of

Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian migration from the 1860s, and then massively from the 1880s onwards (Viloria, 2003).

The state of precariousness and crisis generated by the outrages suffered⁴ by “their political manoeuvres to keep the Syrian-Lebanese people in ignorance and illiteracy” (Wabgou, Carabali, Vargas, 2011), constituted one of the main reasons for this migration to the Americas, including also that by 1914, the First World War broke out and the Ottoman Turks forced young men to do military service and take on battle fronts⁵. The arrival of the Arabs to the Colombian territory, had as an entrance the city of Barranquilla, a city that due to its strategic location allowed subsistence advantages to many population groups of the past, due to its conditions in its ecosystems, both coastal and fluvial, typical of the characteristics of the lowlands of the northern Caribbean of Colombia. During the Spanish colonisation, it was not considered of relevant importance as a place like Cartagena and Santa Marta, where the colony established a city. It seems to have been a place of low control by the Spanish colony, which allowed it to be a refuge for many mestizos, mulattos, zambos and indigenous people who survived the extermination and displacement, which is why its origin

⁴ The conflicts in the Middle East have had historical constants (Aguado, Vazques, 2019) and have continued at different times to expel Eastern immigrants: “People do not know what it is to be an immigrant or displaced person until they have experienced it. My parents had no other alternatives. Education in Lebanon was for the privileged and my father was a sheikh and was dedicated to religion. There were few resources and it was difficult to go to university because we were eight siblings. As the war was starting, we only had the alternative of joining the army or emigrating. Since there were no job opportunities, my parents decided to support me; it was hard for them, but they preferred that I not fight in a crazy war. An absurd war that they called religious, when in fact it was political. The French divided Lebanon and in each sector a different religion was practised. Fortunately, in the Bekaa Valley, where we are from, the war did not survive because my father and other priests of different religions united and prevented the arrival of the enemy’, interview with Talel Cassem Karawi, Syrian consul (Karawi, 2010).

⁵ “At that time, when a young man was conscripted, his relatives cried for him, as if he were dying. The service had no time limit and was also cruel” (Behaine, 1989, quoted in Viloria, 2003). To avoid conscription of their sons, Arab-Christian families paid the Ottoman authorities in money or in kind, such as olive or cedar wood, which had great commercial value. But when these families could not afford to evade military service, the only way out was emigration, sending their young men on an adventure to America” (Yidi, 2003 interview cited in Viloria, 2003).

was spontaneous, far from the “control” of the Spanish jurisdiction and configured in its own way as a settlement that was mostly of neighbours and legally free people (Villalón, 2008). The independence period favoured pressure from a group of progressive traders, who took on the challenge of overcoming the lags that Colombia was lagging behind other countries in the region in terms of opening up to foreign trade. It was precisely these traders put the authorities of the time in a dilemma regarding the adoption of free export policies, especially for products from agricultural economies, or the creation of an independent industry with a policy of protection against external competition; a fundamental decision was forced to be taken (Fischer, 1997). In this sense, the free trade policies that took place at the beginning of the construction of the republic undoubtedly favoured Barranquilla, opening up international trade in the bay of Sabanilla⁶.

The first wave of immigrants from Syria and Lebanon encountered a population that seemed to have many things in common bringing an influence from Europe, as subjects of the French empire, and although some of the migrants practised the Islamic religion, the vast majority were former Muslim converts or Maronite Catholic Christians, and thus “found it relatively easy to become accustomed to Catholic religious beliefs” (Karawi, 2010, p. 14) in a deeply Catholic country, which was in the midst of the crucial debate on secularisation⁷. At that time Colombia was in search of reaffirmation of its recognition as a republic, but that was as far as it went, because the essence of civilisation was still colonial in its praxis. In any case, the American continent became a destination for this

⁶ “Since 1829, Sabanilla, a fishing village located in a bay barely 10 miles from Barranquilla, had officially opened up to the export trade. In a few years, Sabanilla's exports surpassed those of Cartagena, the traditional port of the Colombian Caribbean, which was already in decline, in contrast to the recent boom of Santa Marta, which was now joined by Sabanilla” (Posada, 1987, p.17).

⁷ According to Álvaro Tirado Arciniegas (2021): “The secularisation of the country has been an aspect that was addressed in 1850, which sought the configuration of a secular state, breaking the historical legacy of influence on power by an official religion, which in the Colombian case is Catholicism. This reform, which was called the mid-19th century reform, sought to separate religion from state affairs, but this issue was not resolved; on the other hand, this reform also sought to overcome the colonial condition that still survived in New Granada”.

ethnic group, either by attraction to some countries, or by chance and error⁸, in a period in the world of migration that some have called “the golden century of relevant⁹ inter-oceanic migratory movements”. It is worth noting that although there were macro-social factors that give greater importance to the reasons for this migration-immigration in its socio-economic and political aspects, we could also have other understandings of these immigration processes, through other perspectives given the labyrinthine and multidimensional nature of these phenomena. In Colombia, the Arabs arrived in different migratory flows, which can be synthesised in at least three different moments¹⁰ and in different social and political contexts, perhaps motivated by the purpose of better welfare and

⁸ According to Wabgou, Carabali, Vargas (2011, no p.) “Many of these vendors arrived with the intention of “doing the Americas”, that is, working for about six months and then returning to the East with their earnings. Others arrived by chance; that is, they arrived by mistake, since many times, those heading to the United States or Argentina thought they had reached the end of the journey and got off the boat before realising their mistake”.

⁹ “The golden century of significant inter-oceanic migratory movements is considered the one between 1814 and 1914. During that time, more than 60 million migrants moved from their places of origin to seek greater opportunities in life” (Karawi, 2010).

¹⁰ Fawcett De Posada (1991): “The first arrivals of identified Syrian-Lebanese immigrants date from the 1880s. Among the first to arrive were the Marun brothers from Lebanon, Meluk and Rumie from Damascus and Muvdi from Betjala, generally shopkeepers who advertised their wares in the local press, they were young single men, distributed mainly along the Caribbean coast and cities such as Bogota and Cali. They were mainly engaged in trade (Buhoneros)”. Sadya Karawi (2010): “The first Arabs who arrived in Colombia were Christians or Orthodox who lived in the territory of the Ottoman Empire, economic reasons were the main cause for their emigration”. The second wave occurred roughly between the two world wars. In this period, it is important to mention the economic rise of the Syrian-Lebanese in Colombia. As they settled here, “aid chains” developed to maintain their businesses. These consisted of sending money or a ticket for a family member to travel to Colombia and, at the same time, this relative would take care of the business upon arrival. Those who emigrated by their own means found fellow countrymen living in Colombia, which facilitated their integration and adaptation. Between 1945 and 1950, a new wave of migration began and continues to this day as a result of the complex situation in each of the countries of emigration. In Lebanon, conflicts arose in connection with the Syrian government's invasion. Syria was singled out as a country of the “evil empire”. Palestine, on the other hand, presents a difficult situation for its citizens: they have had to deal with Israel's constant invasion and pressure since the mid-20th century.

better life opportunities, the commercial dynamics being carried out in a port called Sabanilla, defined, in the words of the traveller Professor Issac Holton, “the most insignificant town” he had seen in New Granada (Posada Carbó, 1997, p. 18). Between 1853 and 1857 Barranquilla was to play a crucial role, breaking a kind of blockade of communication with the world that had not been possible during the colonial period. From then on, the city began a struggle to become the most important port for imports and exports. The export of raw materials of all kinds of forestry wealth and plants for the European pharmaceutical industry, perfumery, medicines, alligator skins, cattle skins, medicinal flora and plants and others used for dyeing fabrics began. From the last 30 years of the 19th century, Barranquilla became a port and developed an interesting dynamism of communication and trade with the world. It was in this context of commercial drive that the Arab presence took place, but it should be noted that it was also a context in which there was no institutional regulatory framework to enable rapid integration into the new territory:

The Syrian-Lebanese also had to face at times a particularly hostile environment in some official circles, as in the case of the impediments to entry into the country by the port of Cartagena in 1913 and in the late 1920s the increasing policies of placing restrictions on Syrian-Lebanese immigration, following in part the example of the United States where, through the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, a quota system was established for immigrants of certain origins, including Syrian-Lebanese (Fawcett De Posada & Posada Carbó, 1992, p. 6).

If we would like to return briefly to the theorisations summarised in the preceding section, and restricting our gaze to more specific theories on migration, we dare to consider, with reference to the context surrounding these first Arab emigrants, an approach that may be more widely accepted, namely the “push and pull” theories, which describes factors of expulsion from the place of origin due to the conditions of indignity experienced by migrant populations from a social, economic and political point of view, and factors of attraction due to the advantages that the place of destination may offer in contrast, with the understanding that these circumstances are causal factors that define the dimension and direction of migratory flows (Lacomba, 2001). In fact, with reference to our

case study, if we look at the factors of attraction, at first glance we can invoke mainly economic motivations, since the new continent represented a place of convenience. In this perspective, “many of these newly arrived Syrians, Lebanese and Palestinians arrived in the coastal lands and opened their businesses there. They settled mainly on the northern coast of the country, and then arrived in cities such as Cali and Bogotá, and when they began to earn money, they brought wives from their countries of origin. Only a few of them married Colombian women” (Karawy, 2010, p. 13). However, the limitations of this approach have led to the search for other theoretical and methodological speculations which, in our opinion, are complementary when interpreting migration. In this sense, it is appropriate to take up the multiplicity of conceptual approaches that consider structural aspects from the macro to the micro, individualisation, the family and social networks¹¹. In this aspect are inserted factors that from the macro point of view influenced the decision of the Arabs to emigrate that refer us to the socio-political conditions previously mentioned that many families lived in the country of origin linked to the historical constants of political and religious conflicts, but also the support networks established by relatives in the places of destination¹², finding work options by the families that were already established in Barranquilla and other cities of the country. In addition, the decision to emigrate was most likely supported by age, as many of the emigrants were young and social

¹¹ Joan Lacomba (2001, 38). “As Charles Wood describes them, “they have drawn on survey-based methodologies and ethnographic studies and have adopted conceptual approaches that pay as much attention to structural contexts (global, regional and local) as to individual behaviour, family organisation and social networks”.

¹² “Once the immigration process began, the transit of Syrian-Lebanese to Colombia was facilitated by the existence of a network of relatives and friends. Through these ties of fraternity, for example, Elías Saer Kayata found immediate hospitality and work. After his arrival in Barranquilla in 1924, the help of a policeman led him to the warehouse of the Palestinian immigrant Elías Muvdi, who, on his arrival, took him to the Victoria Hotel, “owned by an Arab called Chamie”. The next day, Saer Kayata took the steamer to Calamar, where his relative Bechara Saker was waiting for him and accompanied him on the train to Cartagena. In Cartagena he stayed with the Chagui family, and from there he continued to Cereté, where he stayed for three months with an aunt before opening the store in Ciénaga de Oro” (Fawcett De Posada & Posada Carbó, 1992, p.14).

networks were often established through colony organisations, clubs and cultural¹³ centres. In addition to these macro-factors, it is also important to highlight the micro-level variables, which are identified in the condition of an open, receptive and hospitable city, which facilitated access to Caribbean culture. The process of immersion by the Arabs in a new culture, and taking into account their vocation as traders, involves the detachment of some aspects of their own culture in order to enable a level of adaptation and intercultural integration. In this sense, for example, their typical clothing disappeared from the immigrants' wardrobe, or the learning of the language, which was a priority because it allowed them to survive, so much so that the new generations born in the new continent lost the Arabic language, and, unlike previous generations, many married Colombian¹⁴ women. Another important factor was their ability to adapt very quickly to their new environment, often because of their open and generous attitude to share their tastes, in this case for food, and their hospitality. Evidently, the phenomenon of Syrian-Lebanese immigration coincided with a period of booming global economic growth and the opening up of the country's economy during that period, which provided the objective circumstances for the implementation of an "outward" economic development model. At that time, Barranquilla offered advantages and opportunities, since the articulation of its market (initiating the implementation of industrial sectors and transport) allowed the Syrian-Lebanese to develop all their assets and recognised commercial experience, and, as will be discussed in the following section, to integrate into cultural and political life. Indeed, "as in politics, in commerce, industry, agriculture and services, the Syrian-Lebanese found in Colombia the dream of every immigrant: opportunities" (Fawcett De Posada & Posada Carbó, 1992).

¹³ One of the mechanisms of dissemination of their culture and interaction with Colombian culture was the establishment of clubs and organisations, and also through publications" (Yidi, 2012, p.1).

¹⁴ "At least one in six of the Arab parents registered in the Mattar directory in 1945 was married to a Colombian" (Fawcett De Posada & Posada Carbó, 1992, p.14).

2. Commercial dynamism, cultural integration and the socio-political rise of migrants.

Elías Saer Kayata, an emigrant who had survived the tyranny of the Ottoman Empire, on arriving in Colombia and finding a less hostile scenario, with a newly born and albeit imperfect democratic system, acquired a special significance for him, since “we knew that we would be moving away from foreign domination and going to a country where there was ... freedom” It is considered a migratory group that managed to adapt due to their open vocation towards the receiving society of Barranquilla, perhaps because of their love of commerce, which allowed them a wide range of exchanges as they got to know each other. Precisely in reference to this interpenetration, we highlight the mixture of tastes and influences that these migrants have left us in gastronomy¹⁵, but also in architecture and in the names of buildings and landmarks (cfr. Yidi-Stevenson, 2018). Undoubtedly, when these emigrants arrived, they found a weakly cohesive Colombian society as a result of the tensions inherent in the civil wars of the federal states. However, Barranquilla and a large part of the Caribbean coast offered other conditions that made a more peaceful life possible, precisely because of what the sociologist Orlando Falsh Borda in his cultural interpretation of the Caribbean coast has called the “peaceful ethos” of the Caribbean man¹⁶. Since then, the Syrian-Lebanese, given their pre-eminent fondness and preference for trade and “their diffuse pattern of territorial settlement” which is made possible according to the accessibility of business, found an ideal place to settle mainly

¹⁵ An example of an Arab dish that is well known and popular is the quibbes or kibbes, a croquette made of wheat dough mixed with ground meat, stuffed inside with ground meat mixed with ground onion, hot pepper to taste and ground nuts. They are fried, roasted or baked.

¹⁶ Although the civil wars of the 19th century in Colombia have been widely studied from different perspectives, the subject has been practically unexplored in the north of the country. This is mainly due to three reasons: first, because the analysts who initially approached the subject approached it from a sociological point of view or guided by a certain geographical determinism, which led them to suggest the historical existence on the coast of a supposedly peaceful ethos, that was based on the natural condition of the Caribbean man for embracing freedom and being tolerant and anti-violent” (Alvarez, 2014, p.531).

in Barranquilla and expand throughout the rest of the Colombian Caribbean. As a priority, “the Syrian-Lebanese were thus a fundamental driving force in the strengthening of the national market while they participated, and with good success, in the enormous opportunities offered during those years by economic expansion to non-traditional social groups” (Fawcett De Posada-Posada Carbó, 1992, p. 21).

The main commercial interest kept them away from political conflicts in the early days, so much so that “it was even argued that the “portentous secret of the fortunes of Syrians and other foreigners in Colombia” was the security they could enjoy away from the political conflicts that, in turn, decimated the Colombian economy. Indeed, the anecdote of Elías Zureck, who apparently managed to get rich by selling goods to both the government and the insurgents during the Thousand Days War” (Fawcett De Posada & Posada Carbó, 1992, p. 18)

The “prosperity due”¹⁷ was underway, the beginning of a good economic success that was building a social ascent in Barranquilla - as well as in other cities and municipalities of the Caribbean -, they were incorporated into the local elites, facilitated in this by the permeability of these, which did not have more traditional consistency. As they achieved economic success - in particular through their participation in trade organisations such as the Chambers of Commerce - they simultaneously constituted their own spaces of social and cultural representation, such as the “Unión Siria”¹⁸ (Villalón, 2008), which was set up to promote the mutual assistance of its associated members. It is worth noting that their commercial strengthening was consolidated through the

¹⁷ A phrase by Alfonso Lopez Pumarejo, referring to a kind of bonanza that the country experienced in the 1920s, which sought an expansion of public spending based on the compensation given to Colombia for the surrender or theft of Panama, accompanied by an international loan. In this respect, Alejandro Lopez, in agreement with and inspired by this phrase of Lopez Pumarejo, coined it to his protest against the control exercised by emigrants in national trade and expressed “Everything, everything is foreign in Colombia”.

¹⁸ The Syrian Union was made up of several people, among them the Lebanese Juliam Chams, who married Isabel Eljach, also an immigrant. They had three children, William, Alicia and Olga, born in 1922 and currently the most important poet of the 20th century in Barranquilla, known by the pseudonym of Meira Delmar.

implementation of businesses in many remote places of the national geography, far from the urban centres of power where social position mattered little in the face of seduction and commercial success, but with the clarity that their ascent and social positioning depended in a strange country, on their accumulation and economic success “these immigrants made their economic consolidation the central element to break the social barriers and racial stigmas that weighed on them” (Rhenals, 2018). Thus were established, among others, the Sociedad Siria de Beneficencia de El Banco (1929), the Unión Libanesa de Beneficencia in Barranquilla (1934) and the Unión Libanesa-Siria in Cali (1935)” (Posada Carbó, 1991, p. 15). It is worth noting that their commercial strengthening was consolidated through the implementation of businesses in many remote places of the national geography, far from the urban centres of power where social position mattered little in the face of seduction and commercial success, but with the clarity that their ascent and social positioning depended in a strange country, on their accumulation and economic success “these immigrants made their economic consolidation the central element to break the social barriers and racial stigmas that weighed on them” (Rhenals, 2018).

They established new trade practices through the implementation of sales on credit “they implemented personal credit: they went from house to house and from village to village selling cloths, fabrics, combs, jewelry, mirrors and perfumes”. Commercial relations enabled them to learn our culture and in particular the Spanish language, they were industrious, good savers and austere in their spending, which is why they gained the reputation of being “stingy”¹⁹, and they consolidated their economic power in Spain. They were consolidating their economic power in the city and the country and were incorporated in different axes of the economy, such as transport, clothing stores, buying and selling, real estate mortgages, loans, industries, in short, their level of commercial influence was connected in different areas of the local and national economy. Such was the power they gained that they began to generate outbreaks of discontent with a kind of economic monopoly that was being exercised by this immigrant population. In this

¹⁹ Resisting or reluctant to give or spend, but also applies to their status as usurers of interest on loans; moneylenders.

respect, there is some research and writings that provide information on the origins of the fortunes of the Arabs in Colombia and their commercial practices, in an interview with Professor Álvaro Antonio Tirado Arciniegas:

But there is a text-book: “La orientalización del comercio Colombiano (Author book: Zuares Aeser),” which warns how these orientals, so he called them, are becoming the most important land of the main municipalities of Colombia, the author points out that these foreigners entered the trade and broke the structures of trade that existed and where he warns about some dangers for trade, because trade before this competition or novelty was an absolutely elitist trade that despised the majority, it was only a trade for the wealthy, so when the Arabs arrived here we called them “Turks” because of their passports, says the author, the people acquired goods that were only for the exclusive sectors (silk, perfumes, etc.) and the most striking thing is that it was only a trade for the wealthy, so when the Arabs arrived here we called them “Turks” because of their passports, says the author.) and the most striking thing is that they acquired them on credit, and in this way the capital of these Arab lords grew. These Arab traders, as they consolidate, he warns, are buying up the centres of the municipalities and departmental capitals, an aspect that he sees as a danger.

In the same vein, other literature shares some reflections on the subject and in this case refers to land grabbing, based on the analysis of what was a policy implemented by the Colombian government with the aim of improving the country's economic development and at the same time promoting immigration, the “colonisation of land considered as wasteland by the nation”²⁰ was stimulated. These lands were granted to nationals and foreigners, an aspect that generated a series of conflicts due to the demands that arose throughout the country “for the titling and appropriation of land and vacant lots by both large entrepreneurs and small settlers” (Rhenals, 2018).

Some Syrian-Lebanese immigrants were involved in land grabbing in this case of rural land, as Rhenals²¹ points out, relying on the

²⁰ According to the State, these were uncultivated lands, belonging to the nation, suitable for agricultural and/or livestock exploitation.

²¹ The Syrian-Lebanese were no strangers to this reality. One of the first forms of land grabbing used by these immigrants was to extend their properties by enclosing the territories near the marshes. According to Orlando Fals Borda, one of the researchers who has most studied the conflicts surrounding the possession and accumulation of land in the Sinú area, the Syrian immigrant Miguel Calume was

measures established by the government in a legal manner, but the access to property was not legal, the author illustrates the different practices and undue strategies that were used to illegally obtain these lands and the use of them. While there was a process of economic ascent that was linked to experienced commercial ability, a vocation for thrift, austerity, support among their family networks, and innovation in business methods, it is also clear that there was a practice of careerism that bordered on illegality in their business dealings.

In the experience of Barranquilla they end up dominating the trade and in the present they continue to dominate it, from the economic and political consolidation of the first and second generation coming for the case of the Lebanese from cities such as: “Zable, Akkar, Tripoli, Batel, Beirut, Jarlein and Miniara; the Palestinians came from Bethlehem and Betjala, as well as the Syrians from Damascus” (Igirio-Gamero, 2008), had a low cultural level with respect to their schooling, were mainly traders engaged in street vending (hawkers), farmers and jewellers, but in general had a command of languages other than Arabic, such as Italian and French, perhaps inherited from the processes of colonisation and protectorate that these countries exercised in those territories. Mostly young people²² were located in

involved in this activity. Fals points out that Calume accumulated at least 1,200 hectares of land, as a result of land grabbing on vacant land and land adjacent to the marshes, which was destined for agriculture and livestock farming. In the Sinú province, in addition to Calume, there were Ángel Manzur and Barbara Issac, who were denounced for hoarding and fencing off large tracts of land. The complaint established the formal claim for abuses against the settlers committed by the aforementioned Syrians, since “[...] they have usurped a large amount of land, hills, beaches, marshes, alluvium and palm groves, which they have fenced with wire; some of which were dedicated to natural pastures for livestock and others to agriculture. This led a group of 40 citizens to file a complaint to the Ministry of Industry, declaring themselves directly affected by the illegal land grabbing, and demanding that the rights of national farmers and settlers be protected against the abuse of the Syrian-Lebanese immigrants.

²² Most of them were young, adventurous, risk-taking bachelors who were fleeing the war, the constant mistreatment and plundering committed by the Ottoman Empire “Turks “17 and the ignorance to which they subjected their population in order to exercise total control over them, as well as to “escape from the bad political, social and economic situation caused by the different wars and conflicts that had taken place in the Middle East” (Vargas, 2007, cited in Gamero, 2008).

the San Roque²³ neighbourhood, the centre of downtown Barranquilla, others spread throughout the rest of the towns of the Caribbean region, mainly, highlighting their incomparable business skills as part of their cultural tradition as traders, they managed to prosper and become the mainstay of commercial development initially with the creation of commercial houses, as well as instruments for the organisation of commercial interests, such as the chambers of commerce²⁴.

The vigorous economic boom of Barranquilla at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, which consolidated Barranquilla as the main point of foreign trade, at the same time as it opened the way for industrialisation, invited many of these merchants and small traders of the first and second wave of immigrants to assume a new profile as entrepreneurs, With the new generation of descendants of the immigrants (third wave), many of them already professionals and with their great sense of family ties, they formed “family companies” that allowed them to enter strongly into economic activities, with new ideas and innovations that influenced the business, political and socio-cultural development of Barranquilla and the Colombian Caribbean.

On the other hand, the need to give Barranquilla the appearance of a modern city without equal in the country, as well as its rapid population growth stimulated by its economic growth, gave rise to new urban developments and that is when the offer of the

²³ The Roqueño neighbourhood, as it is also known, was called the Arriba neighbourhood because it was populated up the Auyama pipe (a pipe fed by the waters of the Magdalena river). Later, in 1849, it was given the name of San Roque, in honour of the patron saint of Montpellier (France), worshipped by the devotees of the Arriba neighbourhood.

²⁴ With street vending, Arab traders switched from the traditional selling strategy of waiting for the buyer to come to the store to the innovative way of going out door-to-door to offer goods. This new strategy increased sales as well as profits for the Syrian-Lebanese traders, who “had the magic and charm of the snake to sell anything”. It should come as no surprise then that the oldest commercial firm registered in the Barranquilla Chamber of Commerce was that of a Palestinian, Bichara Jassir & Cia. in 1895, while the Syrian Carlos Rumié is listed as one of the founders of the Cartagena Chamber of Commerce (Zambrano, 1995, cited in Vilorio, 2003).

Urbanization of the Prado²⁵ neighbourhood for the wealthiest population groups of the city arose. This neighbourhood became a symbol of power from 1920 onwards and many wealthy families relocated there, including immigrants who had already accumulated capital²⁶. After the great success and prosperity obtained from their incursion in commercial matters and their positioning in the circles of the elites of the time, parallel to the fulfilment of dreams such as having professional children, “from the 30s and 40s, the children of the first immigrants left Loricá and other towns of Córdoba, to advance their university studies in cities such as Bogotá, Medellín, Cartagena or Barranquilla” They decided to go beyond commercial success to become a factor of power, which made it necessary to enter politics “in 1936 Cesar Fayad was elected councillor of Cartagena, in 1941 Abraham Jabib councillor of Loricá 95, in 1962 José Miguel Amín was appointed Governor of Córdoba and in 1963 Jorge Jattin Dumett Mayor of Loricá. In the last 40 years (1963-2003) Loricá has had 13 mayors of Syrian-Lebanese origin, who have governed the municipality for a period of 148 months, which corresponds to 12.3 years and represents a little more than 30% of the time elapsed during the four decades” (Viloria, 2003).

From the 1950s onwards, the strong penetration into politics began, particularly during the period of the National Front²⁷, a factor that was taken advantage of by this immigrant population, in such a way that they were promoted until they achieved a powerful

²⁵ El Prado was designed in 1921 by the American brothers Karl and Robert Parrish, and was consolidated between 1945-1960 as a modern development of wide avenues, gardens and majestic mansions, whose architectural grandeur and richness was intended for the city's elite.

²⁶ The rise of the new elite it housed also required endowing it with the symbols of power that represented: the security of the triumph of economic success, social-cultural prestige and the reception of divine blessing, through the preservation of the aristocratic instinct of its own superiority, lineage and exemplarity (Consuegra, 2017).

²⁷ In Colombian history, the period between 1958 and 1974 is known as the “National Front”, during which, thanks to a grand bargain, the main Colombian political parties alternately divided all state power. The division went beyond a simple presidential alternation, as the political party whose turn it was to govern would be obliged to appoint members of the other party to half of the ministerial cabinet and, in general, to half of the entire state apparatus. This is how Liberals and Conservatives divided power, excluding from power all other political movements that existed at that time in Colombia's history (Mesa García, 2009).

political, economic and social control. Already at the national level, a Liberal leader of Lebanese origin, born in Colombia, stood out, who reached such dignities as “congressman, minister of various portfolios in different governments, ambassador of Colombia in various diplomatic missions and, finally, candidate for the presidency of the republic” (Fawcett De Posada & Posada Carbó, 1992). Gabriel Turbay, a leader of great oratory, considered one of the best of his time and nicknamed “the Turk” by his detractors, marked a path for the political incursion of Syrian-Lebanese descendants in Colombia. Since then, the level of political consolidation has been maintained due to the ties of camaraderie and compromise in this community.

Its commercial and political positioning of course generated some acts of rejection²⁸ in some of the country's cities, such as the department of Antioquia, where there were more generalised rebounds, in contrast to the Caribbean coast, where, although there have been some expressions of social rejection, these were due more to elites who were dissatisfied with the trajectory and rise that had been occurring in this Arab population.

The political pragmatism resulting from the National Front model, which incorporated the custom of clientelist political management, strengthened them as family political clans, making them very powerful in addition to commerce, the media and local and regional institutional politics, thus establishing true monopolies that exert significant influence over the population:

So they drifted into politics relying mostly on the circumstances offered by the national front, which was very easy, easier than today to reach a collegiate body through votes that were negotiated in the “tugurio”²⁹, which coincides with the growth of Barranquilla's slum, they are not the “civilising factor” is what I want to tell you, they did not defend, they are not a civilising dynamic from the point of view of their participation in politics, they bowed to milimetrism, it was easy enough that you were liberal or conservative and you proclaimed yourself and you had posts, attached to milimetrism (Tirado, 2021).

²⁸ Del rechazo a la integración, *Revista Semana*, 25 de mayo de 2007. <https://www.semana.com/del-rechazo-integracion/86187-3/>

²⁹ Small, squalid room, dwelling or establishment

There are many examples of clans of Syrian-Lebanese descent that have exercised political control over Barranquilla since then. In recent decades, for example, economic and political power in the city and the Colombian Caribbean region has been concentrated in a single family of Syrian-Lebanese origin: the Char family with their holding company Olímpica, with a fortune and political representation that today makes them hegemonic in the management of power, progressively configured with methods, according to other “legal and illegal”³⁰ narratives. The arrival of this Arab family is given by the return of the sons to the city from a municipality in the department of Córdoba³¹ called Lorica, after abandoning the goldsmith business, its genesis is part of the second wave of Syrian-Lebanese, which were configuring groups of families from which a third wave that for the case of Barranquilla, To mention some of the most recognised surnames in recent times, there are the Names, the Gerleins, the Char, a generation born in Colombia, who quickly emerged, disputing the spaces of power previously managed by a Europeanised Barranquillera oligarchy. They gained access to positions of power and symbols of the city that gave them inclusion and recognition as Barranquilleros, as in the case of the El Prado neighbourhood, where they acquired properties that gave them social, political and cultural status:

The planners of the Urbanización El Prado took on the project as a social, political and cultural programme. The rise of the new elite that it housed also required it to be endowed with symbols of power that represented: the security of the triumph of economic success, social-cultural prestige and the reception of divine blessing, through the preservation of the aristocratic instinct of its own superiority, lineage and exemplarity. The Church of Nuestra Señora del Carmen, first, and the Church of the Immaculate Conception, a little later, complete, as far as ecclesiastical architecture is concerned, the religious symbolism of the El Prado Urbanisation. A clear demonstration that this modernisation, a selfish materialisation of personal and family self-esteem, did not alienate its beneficiaries from official Catholic religiosity. Rather, it reinforced it through enthusiastic, persevering attendance at the celebration of the liturgy and the calculated practice of charitable assistance (Consuegra, 2017).

³⁰ Las dos orillas magazine. Six heavyweights without visas for the USA

³¹ Córdoba is a department in the Caribbean region of Colombia.

The new emerging Arabs began to form part of influential and decisive organisations in local power, as in the case of the Barranquilla club (Yidi-Stevenson, 2018), which had a social and political significance because it constituted a centre of power where the mayor of the city, the queen of the Barranquilla carnival³² and the manager of the city's football team made decisions³³ (Tirado, 2021).

Conclusions

Intercultural integration constitutes the foundations of a great citizenship, one that can cross borders and enable the encounter with the other in their difference, in dialogue, respect and valuation of identities, verbigracia of the strengthening of what diversity means today because it understands that there are no superior cultures, nor worse “is an eminently polyphonic process where the harmony and harmony of the diverse voices is achieved by the continuous contrast with the other and the continuous learning of their opinions and experiences” (Fornet, 1994).

Undoubtedly, cultural integration is a challenge, because it is full of hesitations, of problems that we must accept, because they are processes that require us to take time to understand that these social phenomena allow us mutual enrichment and the construction of conditions of equality.

The presence of Arab immigrants in Barranquilla allowed the exchange of similarities due to the characteristics of an open,

³² The 7th of November 2003 went down in history as the date on which for the first time Colombia obtained a declaration of intangible heritage in the country, and as has been the custom, Barranquilla was the pioneer with its Carnival and opened the way for new folkloric and cultural manifestations to also be declared world heritage. The Carnival of Barranquilla, a living heritage for the world. Ministry of Culture of Colombia

³³ In 1924 Micaela Lavalle founded one of the milestones in the history of Colombian football. The history of the Barranquilla team that overcame various adversities before becoming one of the greats of Colombian professional football. Cfr. <https://especiales.semana.com/futbol-profesional-colombiano/junior-de-barranquilla-el-tiburón-asi-se-hizo-grande.html>

cheerful and communicative spirit, but also differences initially marked in language, geography, dress, among others. But there is no doubt that this integration leaves us a pedagogical balance from the commercial and cultural point of view read in such a way as an enrichment and an opportunity for the two nations, in this respect (Baumann, 1999) considers that “Multiculturalism is not the old concept of culture multiplied by the number of existing groups, but a new, and internally plural, implementation of culture applied to oneself and to others”.

However, aware that any process of intercultural integration is not perfect, it is worth noting that in terms of the political rise of this migrant population, it has degenerated into a concentration of political and economic power that exercises dominion/monopoly over the local and even national scene. It is striking how a group of immigrants who were once persecuted, excluded by an empire that expelled them from its territory to the Americas and who today hold power in the Caribbean region and in the case that concerns us in this article, as is the city of Barranquilla, in one way or another, have caused a level of undervaluation of the human.

In this respect we bring to mind the Italian author Donati (2006) when he describes that the aforementioned situation expels the person as a human subject from the factors that explain the social and cultural dynamics and, therefore, it is increasingly difficult to attribute the quality of being human to the social. All these circumstances are generated by the configuration of a hegemonic-cultural system/structure that has made the territory into a machine of exclusion, expulsion and poverty for the vast majority of the population, with poverty rates that exceed 52% in the whole region and 41% in Barranquilla, and a “public” socio-political model controlled by a family clan of Arab origin.

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COMMENTS AND DEBATES



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Between local and general history. On the writings of Luigi Staibano (1822-1877)

Abstract

The contribution left by Luigi Staibano to the local history of the Amalfi coast is the main theme of this paper. In the past his works were not appreciated but today we can affirm the value of his micro – historical researches as a container of interesting anthropological suggestions about these lands.

He was born into a wealthy family of lawyers and he lived between Maiori and Salerno during the second half of 19th century. Staibano was much more than a ‘failed historian’, he was a man of his time. The century of romanticism and Italian national unification influenced his works. Furthermore, the observation of his family’s coat of arm is also an important element in order to understand his behavior and point of view as a member of a certain community.

Keywords: Local history, Maiori, Historical identity, Amalfi coast, Romanticism

Entre historia local y general. Sobre los escritos de Luigi Staibano (1822-1877)]

Resumen

La contribución de Luigi Staibano a la historia de la costa de Amalfi es el tema principal de este ensayo. En el pasado su obra no fue muy apreciada, pero actualmente se reconoce el valor de sus investigaciones de microhistoria, llenas de interesantes sugerencias antropológicas acerca de su tierra natal.

Nació en una familia adinerada de abogados y, en la segunda parte del siglo XIX, vivió entre Maiori y Salerno. Staibano es mucho más que un “historiador frustrado”, es un hombre de su propia época. El siglo del Romanticismo y de la unificación nacional italiana influyeron en sus trabajos. Además, el origen de su familia

constituye un elemento relevante para comprender su actitud y su perspectiva de miembro de un determinado grupo humano.

Palabras clave: Historia local, Maiori, identidad histórica, Costa de Amalfi; Romanticismo

Tra micro-storia e grande storia. Sugli scritti di Luigi Staibano (1822-1877)

Sinossi

Il contributo di Luigi Staibano alla storia della costa di Amalfi è l'argomento principale di questo lavoro. In passato i suoi lavori non sono stati particolarmente apprezzati ma oggi si riconosce il valore delle sue ricerche di micro-storia, ricche di interessanti suggestioni antropologiche su queste terre.

Nacque da una famiglia benestante di avvocati e, durante la seconda metà del XIX secolo, visse tra Maiori e Salerno. Staibano è molto più che uno "storico mancato", è uomo del suo tempo. Il secolo del romanticismo e dell'unificazione nazionale italiana influenzarono i suoi lavori. Inoltre, l'osservazione del blasone della sua famiglia rappresenta un elemento importante per la comprensione del suo atteggiamento e del punto di vista di un membro di un determinato gruppo umano.

Parole chiave: Storia locale, Maiori, Identità storica, Costa d'Amalfi, Romanticismo

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*Between local and general history.
On the writings of Luigi Staibano (1822-1877)*

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Introduction

Luigi Staibano was a man of the 19th Century who exclusively lived, according to the sources, in the territory of Amalfi Coast. From this Mediterranean world, placed in a not yet unified and pacified Italy, he took some attitudes, some points of view and some ways of doing that we can find in his works. In this way these works convey historical elements and localized anthropological suggestions. Staibano was born in Scala on October 17, 1822¹ and he died in Salerno on March 12, 1877². He devoted his entire life to forensic activity and to Maiori and Salerno, adoptive homelands to which he always remained strongly attached.

His interest in history turned into a constant cultural production, focused on the Mediterranean world with its changes and its people. The Tyrrhenian coast remained the focal point of his pen but the cultural contaminations in the history of Amalfi, Maiori or Salerno often gave rise to some *excursus* on other lands and civilizations. This happened in the unpublished *Raccolta di memorie storiche su Maiori città di Principato Citra* (in which Staibano discusses, among other topics, the siege of Salerno by the Saracens) and in the *Il pellegrinaggio degli Armeni in Salerno*.

The latest studies produced by Domenico Taiani (2020) in the *Memorie genealogiche delle famiglie di Maiori* highlighted again the

¹ *Atti di nascita* 1822, in Archivio Comunale di Scala (from now AC Sc), prot. 32.

² *Atti di morte* 1877, in Archivio Comunale di Salerno (from now AC SA), prot.183, c. 47.

figure of Staibano, a lawyer and scholar from the Amalfi Coast. His name returns to the contemporary world thanks to the interest of historians who often mention him in their works, glorifying him and giving him a new visibility. In fact, for various reasons, the intellectual landscape of the second half of the 19th century in Amalfi often reduced the weight and value of his studies. For this reason, the author left many works unpublished or unfinished, depriving them of the possibility of an effective appreciation and excluding them from the immediately subsequent historiographical bibliography.

Otherwise, other illustrious names, such as that of Marcantonio Oliva, still have fame thanks to the mentions of scholars. However in this case the writings of the author had already been lost at the time of Staibano. On the other hand, Staibano's passion for his city was relevant and it was recognized by his contemporaries.

The obituary written by Giovan Battista Crollanza (1877, pp. 339-400), director of the *Giornale araldico genealogico diplomatico italiano* at the time, on the occasion of Staibano's death is emblematic.

The nobleman Mr. Luigi Staibano of Scala, a member of our Academy, a scholar in archeology, numismatics and paleography is no longer alive. He ceases to live ... in Salerno where he had lived for several years and which he had illustrated with works of his uncommon talent. ... All of his works reveal with how much love and industriousness he worked for his second homeland.

From these words it is possible to detect the esteem of his fellow citizens, an appreciation that today consolidates with new references. Together with others, Staibano is a monument for Maiori and beyond: his memory is a fundamental element of identity and it is an important instrument of recognition for all the inhabitants of this context. In this way they, directly or indirectly, recognize in his legacies past glimpses of current urban spaces and perhaps historical information about their family.

Obviously, the unconscious assonance between the scholar and the coastal city also develops in the new generations of students. An iconographic suggestion consolidates the relationship of young people with the scholar since childhood: at the middle school in Maiori, there is a portrait of Staibano proudly holding a copy of *Guida*

al Duomo di Salerno: composta ad uso dei viaggiatori in his right hand. It is one of his late publications, probably the most famous. The author's name is mainly linked to this title. The popularity of this work even reached the interest of the sovereign Vittorio Emanuele II; a copy belonging to him and dating back to the same year of disclosure, is now kept at the Royal Library of Turin. It was printed by the National printing house in 1871 and, in the contemporary age, it has been a model for all the authors who dealt with the subject (Speranza, 2018).

Furthermore, the descriptive effectiveness and the archaeological attention to details led many tourists to visit the city, all eager to admire the sacred building described in these pages. It was a particular event for Salerno, a city that has never been able to count on tourism as a primary source of livelihood.

Among his publications, there are many other writings, both of historical-archaeological³ and economic interest. In particular, there are many articles published in newspapers and magazines such as *Il Picentino*, *la Gazzetta delle campagne*, *Economia Rurale*, *il Raccoglitore* and *l'Orticolto* (Moscati, 1933, p. 6).

1. Is Staibano a failed historian? the case of the Raccolta di memorie storiche

It is evident that his works do not end in extracts and small dissertations but that the soul of the author must be sought in that project full of attention, study and complexity of content entitled *Raccolta di memorie storiche per Maiori, città di Principato di Citra*.

This is a complete and finished paper which has never been published. Today it is found as a manuscript at the Library of the Neapolitan Society of Homeland History. Vitagliano's 1985 research explains the editorial history of this work and makes us understand the reasons for the inglorious shadow related to the Staibano case.

It is important to note that the notary Filippo Cerasuoli, an important point of reference in the intellectual panorama, was at the

³ Just remember the *Salerno epigrafica* or the *Catalogo degli uomini illustri della provincia di Salerno*.

same time in the same area. They both needed access to registers, deeds and testamentary documents to reconstruct the past with accuracy and rigor. The common goal soon generated a conflictual relationship that produced a closed and uncooperative environment. Not surprisingly, Vitagliano (1985, p. 111) speaks of Cerasuoli as an “a fierce collector of papers and news of historical interest”.

In fact, in order to be the bearer of unpublished news, he made it difficult for Staibano to access the archives which instead he easily reached both for his profession and for the fame he achieved. Staibano mainly consulted documents related to the forensic activity carried out by his family over the years and to the consultation of historical and geographical treaties.

Then, in 1853, thanks to Avallone’s typography, he published the *Indice alfabetico di tutto ciò che sarà esposto da L. Staibano nella Raccolta delle memorie storiche di Maiori*, in which he illustrated all the topics that would be treated in the *Raccolta*.

It was a clearly advertising and wisely designed action, with the aim of directing the attention of the public towards the imminent publication of the text. Staibano in this way was able to interact with his readers during the construction process of the work: on the one hand he asked them for confirmation regarding the accuracy of the historical investigations, on the other he tried to make them protagonists and to direct them at the time of sale. Naturally, having been deprived of the possibility of collating his sources with others, he was worried about the accuracy of the study. Not surprisingly, Staibano never talks about the *Storia di Maiori* or *Scrutazioni storiche* but, always, about *Raccolta di memorie*, as if it were a set of unpretentious information (Vitagliano, 1985, p. 118).

When the *Indice* came out, Cerasuoli rejected the future collection in its entirety, defining it as inaccurate and full of serious historical errors. In the *Scrutazioni* (Cerasuoli, 1865), there is no trace of the previous Staibano's publication.

Staibano was so mortified that he gave up on continuing with the work arrangement. In his correspondence he explains why he abandoned his job. Staibano claims to be tired and tried by excessive forensic and family commitments, so much so that he interrupted the edition of his text which, with evident regret, he defines “strenuous papers” (Vitagliano, 1985, p. 120) or, in Italian, *sudate carte*.

The abandonment of the project earned him the label of "failed historian" (Vitagliano, 1985), not only because such a publication could have consecrated him as a full-fledged scholar, but also because, not working on the correction of these drafts, he could not review errors and oversights

Vitagliano reproaches the author for the absence of unpublished or original sources, capable of explaining "exaggerated" and "improbable" facts (Vitagliano, 1985, p. 118). In addition, it highlights, by way of example, an "attribution error" (Vitagliano, 1985, p. 119) related to the list of people in charge of the *Collegiata di Maiori*, which appears in the third chapter of the *Raccolta*⁴. However, some arguments that differ from those made by parallel authors emerge. This is the case of the disquisition regarding the denomination of the *Casale delle Paje* located in Maiori⁵.

⁴ Staibano places the cardinal S. Giorgio after D. Guido de Bonaventura (1505 - 1508) and D. Giliberto Senile (1508 - 1510) claiming that, later, the provostship was ruled from 1510 to 1512 by a vicar: D. Pietro Mariotti di Urbino. Vitagliano brings up the *Series Praepositorum a fundatione*, kept at *Archivio Capitolare della Collegiata*, with whose attestation the notary Filippo Cerasuoli also agrees in his *Scrutazioni storico - archeologiche*. Here it is stated that the succession of provost was: 1505 G. Bonaventura, 1508 G. Senile, 1510 C. Cumbalo, 1537 P. H. Miracapilli. In fact, Cardinal S. Giorgio held the role of commendatory and not of provost at the Rectorate of the church of Santa Maria a Mare in Maiori and in 1505, he requested and obtained from Pope Julius II, his uncle, that the Rectorate be elevated to Collegiate "with a chapter made up of sixteen priests ... and chaired by a Superior, awarded episcopal attributes." (Vitagliano, 1985, p. 120).

⁵ Together with the *Cronica* of 1836 quoting the lost text by Marcantonio Oliva, Staibano states that the Casale dei Pappasogna subsequently changed its name due to the Calabrese sailor Antonio Paia, who settled there with his family. In the *Scrutazioni storiche*, on the other hand, Cerasuoli moves away from this reading by stating that the Casale would have taken its name from a local Etruscan divinity called Pale, since the family who lived there was exclusively that of the Pappasogna. Camera helps refute this thesis by showing that "in 1485, there were some individuals in the Casale with the surname Paia and not Pappasogna" (Camera, 1881, p. 504).

2. *The scholar and his time. The 19th century between romanticism and national unity*

It would seem that Staibano is a "failed historian" also because he was completely absent from the history of his time. The scholar was born in 1822 and died in 1877. This biographical detail contains in itself an important chronological parenthesis for the entire history of Italy. The achievement of national unity dates back to 1861, but it is known that historical processes require a certain period of gestation. The Mazzinian and Garibaldi spirit, which inspired students, scholars and men of culture, began to expand in the 1830s.

With different priorities, everyone concentrated first on the fight against foreigners, then on the realization of the new Kingdom of Italy. In Southern Italy this was a much more complex process and it produced a division between the unitarians and the loyalists to the throne of Naples, including many notables, who, in order to protect their interests, would have accepted the collapse of the Bourbon kingdom only with the replacement of the crown (Pinto, 2019). At that time Staibano had a correspondence with Demetrio Salazar, known as a patriot painter. Today the letters sent by Staibano to Salazar are kept in Naples by the *Biblioteca della Società Napoletana di Storia Patria*. He was a figure who operated, like Staibano, right in the heart of the unitarian conflict: the Kingdom of the two Sicilies.

Despite this, he does not pronounce himself on the issue and he does not take sides for any front. It is assumed that his consent was given in a minimally invasive and extremely confidential manner, with the only purpose of ensuring his own peace of mind. Surely the adjective "silent" does not go well with the myth of the Risorgimento made up of colors, music, hymns and flags. What is astonishing is the fact that a man not far from the forum, not far from politics and culture has remained inert in such a delicate and overwhelming moment. Furthermore, the micro-historical research efforts of his work are carried out in a strictly localized perspective that does not help to explain the reasons and causes that led to the institutional upheaval of the unitary age. In the work, everything is born and dies within certain geographical boundaries and cannot be diverted into a more complex analysis of the present.

After all, the celebration of that romantic feeling of connection between land and people that pushes the authors to engage in proud patriotic writings is also fully nineteenth-century. With the Risorgimento uprisings there is the practical implementation of a fermented process in the reflections of the intellectual world. It is clear that, before being realized, the great historical upheavals also pass through the letters. Just think of what happens with the Protestant Reformation conveyed by Luther, the outbreak of the French Revolution supported by the productions of the Enlightenment or the massive propaganda carried out regarding the National Socialist theories of the twentieth century.

Literary romanticism is based on the famous *Sturm und drang*: in this era at the center there is no longer the ratio, but the instinct. In fact, the protagonists of this current are always driven by totalizing and overwhelming feelings. In his small way, Staibano shows himself sensitive to these attitudes and inextricably linked to his roots. This earth - man relationship is nourished by πάθος: it is deep, unconditional, visceral, so that the polygraph concentrates all its resources on it⁶. We can even hypothesize some sort of parallelism between his writings and therapeutic writing.

In this case, the practice would not eliminate a doubt, a fear or a memory that generates anxiety or sadness, but it could relieve the soul of the author from those pervasive sensations of enthusiasm and passion that can weigh on the heart and mind as much as their opposites. However, first of all, we must remember that Staibano is a man of the law and, as such, hardly conditioned by the irrational.

Therefore, his ardor is more staid and celebrates his origins in a delicate process that brings his fellow citizens together, embracing

⁶ The scholar celebrated this intense feeling by consecrating every line of his to Maiori, the coast and the city of Salerno and it is a clear and unequivocal fact not only about the entire printed production, but also for all that manuscript: *Memorie storiche per Maiori* volume I and II, *Appendice I° alla Raccolta di Memorie storiche di Maiori*, *Saggio per servire la storia di Maiori* volume I and II, *Famiglie di Maiori*, an unfinished text focused on the main lineages of the place, *Notizie e fatti notabili di Maiori*, *Dissertazione Storico- Archeologica- Critica sulla fondazione di Santa Maria dell'Olearia*, *Lettera a Demetrio Salazaro*, *Memorie sulla nobiltà salernitana*, *Memorie storiche dei comuni di Giffoni Vallepiiana, Seicasali e di Cava dei Tirreni*.

them in a single body as a single and proud identity. At this point, it is clear that the Staibano case has a certain complexity.

3. *An unsolved problem*

The animated discussion involving him in the possible authorship of the *Cronica di Maiori* of 1836, considered as a sort of draft for the subsequent *Raccolta di memorie*, is still an open parenthesis.

Once again, the protagonists of this dispute are Vitagliano and Taiani who, in 2002, dealt with the critical edition of the unpublished text and who was the first to hypothesize the link between the work and the author. According to Taiani, the writer certainly comes from Maiori, as he shows a detailed and, in some cases, direct knowledge of the people, topography and events of the place. Furthermore, the handwriting of the anonymous is “is very similar to that of Staibano and it presents the same guide lines and style in the exposition of facts and events” (Taiani, 2002, p. 17). Therefore, although he was only fourteen at the time, it is possible that he was the boy exhorted in the poem found in the last pages of the Cronica.

Among these verses, written by a third hand, Taiani finds an explicit invitation, addressed to the author of the text, to “claim the wrongs suffered by the homeland Maiori due to hypothetical rascals” (Taiani, 2002, p. 18)⁷.

Despite the suggestion of this hypothesis, Vitagliano underlines his skepticism regarding the fact that a young man of such tender age, almost inexperienced in the field, could conduct such meticulous research work. Furthermore, it is possible that the drafting began even before 1836 as it is a very complex piece of writing. However, there is no evidence confirming one or the other position. Therefore, we approach this fascinating unsolved question with caution.

⁷ There is reason to believe that the name was addressed to the historian Matteo Camera who, in 1836, published a work that was not very flattering towards the city.

4. *Social and cultural roots behind Staibano: genealogy and heraldry of the Staibano family. Latest acquisitions.*

In *Memorie genealogiche delle famiglie di Maiori*, Taiani also reconstructed the lineage of the Maiori branch of the Staibano family. Research shows that this branch would have originated from the marriage between Andrea Staibano and Diana de Ponte (Taiani, 2020, p. 607).

By comparing the genealogical tree in question with the descendants illustrated by Staibano himself in the *Raccolta*⁸, it was possible to go back a few steps in the lineage of the family. Unfortunately, within the volume, the family tree outlined by Staibano was lost due to the removal of some papers⁹.

Moreover, the pages of the manuscript dedicated to this topic cannot be defined as exhaustive and complete: trees often have deletions and corrections. In fact, although the schematization of the de Ponte family, "line of the Duke of Casamassima"¹⁰ (Staibano, 1853, p. 152) is quite detailed, there are also lineages without an actual progenitor. However, at the bottom of the page, we can see a removed area of the text in which the names of Diana and Andrea appear.

The small tree is evidently part of an independent corpus that does not have any ancestry with the other lines. In particular, the most evident names refer to 1400 and are those of Pietro and Bencivegno de Ponte. The third of Pietro de Ponte's four children, Giacomo, married Giacoma Miracapilli from Maiori. The first son of this union, Matteo, in 1522 will be the first of the lineage to unite his branch with that of the Staibano, marrying Laura. From this

⁸ The first volume of the unpublished *Raccolta di memorie storiche* on the city of Maiori dedicates 59 pages to the genealogical trees of the noblest families of Maiori. In order of appearance : d'Aruca, Aurisicchio, Camaldolese, Amato, di Bianco, Bombace, Buonocore, Campanile, Citarella, Cinnamo, Cumbalo, Confalone, Cava, Crispo, Crisconio, Farina, Ferraro, Ferrigno, de Grado, Imperato, Lanario, Lantaro, Landola, de Maio, Mandina, Mezzacapo, Mostacciolo, Oliva, Miracapilli, De Ponte, Russo, de Riso, Scafogliero, Venosi, Volpicella, De Fiume, Pisanello, Ferraioli and Pisacano.

⁹ From paper 156 dedicated to Scafogliero family we go directly to paper 167 with Venosi family.

¹⁰ He claims that also exist "different lines known as D'aponte or Deponte".

marriage Diana de Ponte, wife of Andrea Staibano, will be born in 1565. Hence the long lineage that reached Luigi Staibano, who, in 1860, joined Cristina Casalbore¹¹ and, after just one year, gave birth to her first son, Ernesto, who was followed by Paolo after ten years (Taiani, 2020, p. 607).

A heraldic study on the coat of arms of the family would allow us to better understand the mentality and common values in force in this family context.

In this way it is possible to “bring to light the origins of a family, of a municipal or religious body” analyzing symbols, because men have an “inherent need ... to communicate exploiting the visual element, arousing passions and symptoms of belonging” (Ciarletta, 2020, p. 51).

Often, even the social position and faith of a certain character can be derived from the blazon study. Reflecting on heraldry, Bascapè even goes back to the ancient banners connected to the Israelite tribes (Bescapè et al., 1999, p. 10). This shows that there is an ancient human need to reveal their affiliation to a specific human group, which can be ethnic or social: an instrument of recognition, a guarantee of brotherhood.

This discourse is easily updated: just think of the ancient tattoo culture which, having changed in value and meaning, can now be found on the bodies of millions of people.

In these symbolic representations, each sign and each color has its own precise explanation and tells, to the observer, of the link between its bearer and an intimate past experience, of the subjection of the same to a dream or a future ideal, as if it was a haunting thought or, again, the declared and reciprocal ownership of two people. The symbolic element continues to be part of everyday life and to fascinate the new generations, incorporating them into a very ancient mechanism.

In his *Memorie genealogiche*, speaking of Amalfi heraldry, Taiani shows that, with a certain frequency, it is possible to encounter many noble weapons attributable to the same lineage.

These variables also involve the Staibano. Among the sources that mention their coat of arms we can find the description

¹¹ *Atti di matrimonio*, 1860, in AC SA, prot. 100.

produced by Giovan Battista Crollanza (1888, pp. 559-560) in the *Dizionario storico blasonico delle famiglie nobili e notabili italiane estinte e fiorenti*. In the second volume of the work, the genealogist describes it: “Silver, with the blue band, embellished with three gold stars, accompanied by three red roses, two in the head and one in the tip”. This version is also found “on a pillar of the Staibano noble chapel, dedicated to the Deposition of Jesus” (Taiani, 2020, p. 651) placed in Maiori. Instead, it is “Di azzurro, con la fascia d’oro, impreziosito da tre stelle d’azzurro ed accompagnata da tre rose di rosso con gambi e foglie verdi, due in capo, una in punta” (Taiani, 2020, p. 655) in the version of an eighteenth manuscript, *Notizie, ed Armi Gentilizie delle Famiglie nobili del Ducato Amalfitano cogli stemmi dé suoi particolari Comuni* (Taiani, 2019, p. 84).

Finally, a third further possibility of interpretation is the Italian shield “carved in marble on an ancient baptismal font, in the parish church of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Maiori” (Taiani, 2020, p. 651). The elements are the same but they are differently arranged: there are three roses and three stars, two in the head and one in the tip. These are three similar interpretations; the substantial difference, in truth, concerns the colors. The second description, in photographic terms, seems to be the negative of the first: the silver of the background darkens into blue, the stars and the band exchange their tones with each other; not to mention the presence of green in the foliage and stems, completely absent in the first coat of arms. In general, the coat of arms uses a palette with precise symbolic values: silver, blue, gold and red dominate the shield¹².

Between the 12th and 14th centuries a.C., white was associated with the Guelph party with logical consequences of meaning. Among the Staibano there were many men of the Church and people loyal to religion. Therefore, silver would represent a public manifestation of secular loyalty to the Church of Rome. Furthermore, it is a color that recalls spiritual virtues close to the historical attitudes of the family: truth, justice, temperance and clemency. According to this, the blue band¹³: in heraldry, it relates directly to the sky and is associated

¹² Gold and silver are the two heraldic metals par excellence, usually reproduced by the two corresponding colors: yellow and white.

¹³ For band we indicate a horizontal strip about 2 modules high (2/7 of the width) which in heraldry has a predetermined and invariable position on the shield. They are

with the highest spiritual virtues. It is a color that speaks of devotion, fidelity and nobility. Not surprisingly, it also represents the Guelph side (Taiani, 2020, p. 641). The three gold stars refer, in shape and color, to ambitions, sublime actions and the achievement of higher things¹⁴.

Therefore it could represent the wish for a bright future for the descendants of the family. The star is also among the major Christian symbols and it often appears in ecclesiastical heraldry. Roses are a well-known symbol of beauty, but also of nobility, honor and merit. Their heraldic depiction uses red or white¹⁵. The choice of purple would reproduce the blood of Christ's wounds, shed to save humanity, as a manifest of love for God and for the other people.

Together with the hexagram and the pentalfa, the triangle is among the favorite symbols to highlight the relationship with the divinity. The triangular figure does not appear explicitly on the shield, but it is given by the arrangement of the elements on it and by the number of times each image appears. The three roses or the three stars, two at the top and one at the tip, build this geometry by reproducing its angles. In conclusion, the coat of arms that emerges seems almost a warning not to forget, over the centuries, the priorities, morals and tradition of this family; values which then find interpretation in an educational line of rigor, discipline and observance. It is a manifesto of faith and identity that has lasted for generations.

Conclusions

Staibano himself regulated his life on those parameters, common to a specific social class to which his family belonged: the local upper middle class.

figures formed by dividing lines and, by way of example, we can point out the pole, the fascia, the band, the bar, the cross, the decusse, the pergola, the echelon, the head (Manno, 1907, p. 29).

¹⁴ Gold is part of the two heraldic metals and it spiritually symbolizes faith, clemency, temperance, charity and justice as well as splendor, joy and sovereignty.

¹⁵ Other symbolic values related to red are: generosity, greatness, nobility, audacity and valor.

In this community, as a privileged subject, he was able to develop a course of classical studies aimed at the forensic career, very dear to the tradition of the family. In fact, Moscati remembers the Staibano as “illustrious men in science, in arms, in robes, in church dignitaries, in letters and philanthropic” (Moscati, 1933, p. 376). Staibano graduated at the age of twenty-five from the Federico II of Naples, in December 1851 he was already a conciliator in Maiori and in October 1852 he was promoted to alternate judge in Salerno¹⁶. Well inserted in this social environment, he forged relationships with various personalities of his time linked to the world of culture, such as: Matteo Camera, Pecori, Trara Genoino, the aforementioned Salazar and Linguiti.

His texts prove to be a treasure chest of further information useful for the reconstruction of the Staibano mosaic. The illustrative additions tell us about a certain inclination for art and drawing. His hand uses ink and graphite to give depth and three-dimensionality to the figures. However, these sketches cannot be defined as valuable works: he mostly reproduces monuments and inanimate objects, all useful to give feedback to his words, so none of them have an effective artistic value.

Moreover, between the lines of his works there are interesting signs on the mentality of the time. Just think of what happens with family trees, all of which share a fundamental element: the indication of social status at the top left of the page. These are adjectives or nouns such as: nobles, landowners, gentlemen etc. that identify a group in which the members act protected and comforted by their own social etiquette. This expresses the characteristics and needs of an era in constant fluctuation between the directives of the Ancien régime and the affirmation of new social classes that emerged from the industrial upheavals of the nineteenth century.

In accordance with this logic, Staibano reconstructs the noble lineages that contributed to the greatness of the city, projecting the elite memory of a certain number of lineages into the future.

The popular whispers, handed down from generation to generation and appearing in the pages of the *Raccolta*, are a further

¹⁶ To confirm this, a printed text by Staibano with collocation DIV.SAL.I.3.97. is preserved in the Provincial Library of Salerno (Staibano, 1852).

opportunity for reflection. This is bizarre news from a purely historical point of view. However, in anthropological terms, they provide an interesting and detailed overview of the area. For example, there are the foundation chronicles of the eleven churches in the Maiori area, collected in the third chapter of the first manuscript.

It is not possible to prove the truthfulness of the facts, but the multiplicity of popular narratives is undoubtedly fascinating. The stories concern miraculous facts and supernatural events involving churches, statues and sacred objects and they provide a privileged point of view on a society that sinks its pillars in the humblest world, the one populated by farmers and fishermen. Each of them has a fundamental role in economic growth, traditions, uses and customs. Such miraculous events are inevitably linked to the historical needs of these people, continually seeking divine protection for their own difficulties. Dealing with entire fishing seasons, away from home, means starting from a safe harbor without being sure of returning. Therefore, it was a great comfort for all of them to know that they could count on the watchful, benevolent and merciful eye of the Virgin Mother who watched them lovingly from the Church of Santa Maria a Mare, whose facade was wisely turned towards the sea.

In conclusion, considering the critical points of Staibano's work and reflecting on his figure and the content of his writings, it is still possible to appreciate some elements of great value. In fact, his texts often become descriptive caskets of peculiar elements of the reference context. The value of Staibano is therefore linked to the collection of fascinating traces on the taste and needs of the men of this area, caught in a specific historical period, influenced by the legacy of the previous ones.

All this restores dignity to his profile. With his works we can reach a higher level of understanding by opening windows with a different perspective on the facts, useful for any type of investigation.

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Historiography and Covid-19. Some considerations

Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the interest of public opinion and historians in epidemics and infectious diseases. These topics have been often overlooked by the “general” history, receiving attention only in the history of medicine, but from the beginning of the pandemic the interest has soared. Historians have participated in the media debate and have wondered how history can be helpful to cope with the current emergency.

Answering this question is, of course, difficult and subjective. Speaking very broadly, the numerous epidemics that have affected mankind over the centuries feature significant similarities, mainly in regard to social behaviour, but history cannot be viewed as a handbook providing answers and solutions to the present problems. In any case, in the current pandemic history is all but useless, as it helps to understand social dynamics and peculiarities.

The paper first proposes a short summary of the contributions made by historians to the understanding and the study of the current pandemic; then, it briefly examines the main recurring elements in the history of epidemics; finally, it addresses the question of the “usefulness” of history in the present emergency.

Keywords: Covid-19, Pandemics, Epidemics, Historiography, History of medicine.

Historiografía y Covid-19. Algunas consideraciones

Resumen

La pandemia de Covid-19 hizo crecer el interés de la opinión pública y de los historiadores por las epidemias y por las enfermedades infecciosas. A menudo estos temas han sido ignorados por la historiografía “general”, y estudiados solo por la historia de la medicina. Pero desde el principio de la pandemia el interés ha aumentado. De hecho, los historiadores han participado en el debate mediático y se

han interrogado sobre el papel y sobre la utilidad de la historia para abordar la emergencia actual.

Responder a esta pregunta, por cierto, es difícil y subjetivo. En términos muy generales se puede afirmar que las numerosas epidemias que afectaron a la humanidad a lo largo de los siglos presentan muchas características comunes, sobre todo por lo que atañe a los comportamientos sociales, pero no se puede entender la historia como un manual con respuestas y soluciones a los problemas de la contemporaneidad. Sin embargo, en la actual situación pandémica la historia está lejos de ser inútil, porque puede ayudar a comprender dinámicas sociales y peculiaridades.

El artículo ofrece antes que todo una rápida síntesis de las contribuciones de los historiadores para el entendimiento y el estudio de la pandemia de Covid-19; luego analiza sucintamente los elementos recurrentes más destacados en la historia de las epidemias; por último, aborda el tema de la “utilidad” de la historia en la emergencia actual.

Palabras clave: Covid-19; Pandemias, Epidemias, Historiografía, Historia de la medicina.

Storiografia e Covid-19. Alcune considerazioni

Sinossi

La pandemia del Covid-19 ha fatto crescere l'interesse dell'opinione pubblica e degli storici per le epidemie e le malattie infettive. Tali argomenti sono stati spesso trascurati dalla storia “generale”, ricevendo attenzione solo nella storia della medicina, ma dall'inizio della pandemia l'interesse verso di loro è aumentato. Gli storici, infatti, hanno preso parte al dibattito mediatico e si sono interrogati su come la storia possa essere utile per affrontare l'emergenza in corso.

Rispondere a questa domanda è, naturalmente, difficile e soggettivo. In linea molto generale, le numerose epidemie che hanno colpito il genere umano nel corso dei secoli presentano molte caratteristiche comuni, soprattutto a proposito del comportamento sociale, ma la storia non può essere intesa come un manuale con risposte e soluzioni ai problemi attuali. In ogni caso, nella pandemia in corso la storia è tutt'altro che inutile, poiché può essere di aiuto nel comprendere dinamiche sociali e peculiarità.

L'articolo propone una rapida sintesi dei contributi forniti dagli storici alla comprensione e allo studio della pandemia del Covid-19; in seguito analizza brevemente i principali elementi ricorrenti della storia delle epidemie; infine affronta la questione dell' “utilità” della storia nell'emergenza presente.

Parole chiave: Covid-19; Pandemie, Epidemie, Storiografia, Storia della medicina

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Historiography and Covid-19. Some considerations

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1. Historians and epidemics. From Thucydides to Covid-19

Pandemics and epidemics affect all human activities. Therefore, human and social sciences, including historiography, are called to wonder about them and make their own contribution of analysis, mainly in regard to social impact and behavioural dynamics.

Not by chance, historians have been interested in epidemics since the ancient world. In the fifth century BCE, Thucydides narrated the pestilence that affected Athens during the Peloponnesian war; other ancient authors addressed the same or other epidemics.

In recent times, historians have not ignored the outbreaks of infectious diseases, but their interest has not been steady, having been influenced by two factors:

- Evolution of historiography. As is well known, in the 1930s the “historiographical revolution” due to *Les Annales* “school” greatly increased the attention for social history; in the 1970s, a more specific interest arose in environmental history and social history of medicine, finding a breakthrough with the publication of William McNeill’s *Plagues and Peoples* (1976). This evolution has enhanced the attention for epidemics and, since then, the studies on the subject have been more and more numerous.
- New outbreaks. Generally, when infectious diseases hit humankind, the interest of historians (and of public opinion) in previous pestilences rises. For example, the first historical studies on the 1918 “Spanish” influenza were published after the “Asian” flu outbreak of 1957; the recent epidemics (SARS,

Swine flu, MERS, Ebola) and the “discovery” that infectious diseases do not belong only to the past, have further enhanced the attention of historians for previous pestilences (Philip, 2004, pp. 121-134; Heaton & Falola, 2006, pp. 205-230; Vagneron, 2018, pp. 21-43).

Overall, the interest of historians in epidemics has been belated. For example, the majority of the studies on the fourteenth-century Black Death¹ have been published in last three or four decades, although the research on the topic had begun in the nineteenth century (Benedictow, 2006, pp. 5-9). In recent times, countless studies have been published and, logically, they have proposed diverse narratives and interpretations of the pestilences that have followed one another over the centuries. Some studies have mainly focused on demographic data, others on social and economic impact, others on the responses of governments and local authorities, others, usually written by physicians or historians with medical background, on epidemiological factors (pathogens, transmission of infection, etc.). In last years, the history of epidemics has been better contextualized in the history of science and scholars have addressed new topics and posed new questions. On the whole, local studies are more numerous, but historians have also published several general histories of the major pandemics².

The research on past epidemics has to cope with some difficulties. First of all, sources are often partial and incomplete and, for the most ancient events, even the most basic data are unknown. For example, the pathogens of the Greek-Roman pestilences have never been identified; for the Black Death, the mechanisms of

¹ The so-called Black Death – which, as is known, in the years 1347-1350 killed between 30 and 60% of the European population – marked the beginning of the Second plague pandemic, lasted, with continual outbreaks, until the eighteenth century. The Black Death was the first occurrence of bubonic plague since the First plague pandemic, begun with the Justinian’s Plague of 541-43 CE and lasted until about 750. The Third (and last) plague pandemic occurred between the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, mainly hitting India and other underdeveloped countries.

² See, among the others, Spinney (2017) and Barry (2004) on the Spanish flu; Benedictow (2006) and Byrnes (2004 and 2012) on the Black Death; Harper (2017) on the first-millennium epidemics. For a more general overview of the history of pandemics, see Naphy & Spicer (2004), Snowden (2020a).

infection are not clear and there is not unanimous consent about the kind of disease (some scholars have disputed that it was a bubonic plague outbreak, provoked by the *Yersinia pestis* bacterium, although it remains the most common wisdom) (Byrne, 2004, pp. 15-32; Benedictow, 2006, pp. 35-34). In all cases, providing exact figures of victims and mortality rate is very difficult and, therefore, estimates are always approximate, even for the twentieth-century outbreaks. Today historians can benefit from the “genomic revolution”, thanks to which scientists, recovering DNA from archaeological rests, are able to shed light on old diseases, but this, of course, does not provide all the desired answers, particularly about the social impact of epidemics.

Moreover, the history of epidemics is rarely included in the “general” history. Research reaches only specialists and the historians with different expertise usually have only a superficial knowledge of the impact of infectious diseases. The “general” histories devote very little room even to pandemics, which are frequently overlooked in national narratives and schoolbooks, despite their deep impact and long-lasting consequences.

This is true for both ancient and modern history. Important events of the Greek-Roman era, such as the “Antonine Plague” of 165-180 CE (possibly an outbreak of smallpox) and the “Cyprian’s Plague” of 249-262 (perhaps an haemorrhagic fever) are usually neglected in the accounts of Roman history, also for the shortage of sources.

With regard to modern and contemporary age, the case of the 1918 influenza – the event most often compared to Covid-19 – is emblematic, as it is likely the most “removed” pandemic in history. Indeed, at the material time the influenza found very little room in the public discourse, because of the war censorship. In recent decades (mainly since the 1980s), the attention of historians has grown, many interesting studies have been published and several international congresses have discussed the issue (the first was held in Cape Town in 1998) (Philip, 2004; Vagneron, 2018), but the influenza is often neglected in the general histories of the twentieth century and, with some exceptions, is relegated to a footnote or few lines in the chapters on World War I.

Other events benefit from more attention. For example, the Black Death usually receives an adequate coverage in the books of

medieval history, because of its terrific impact, but most epidemics are frequently overlooked.

Not surprisingly, the outburst of the Covid-19 pandemic has increased the interest in the history of epidemics: “All history is contemporary history”, Benedetto Croce said, as generally the past is searched to answer questions posed by the present.

At the onset of the pandemic, the first thing has been to reprint some books previously published, not only historical studies, but also novels, such as *La Peste* of Albert Camus (1947), and works of popular science, among which the well-known *Spillover* (Quanmen, 2012).

However, historians could not ignore the “demand” of knowledge of past epidemics and have endeavoured to provide the public with the desired information. Particularly, historians of medicine have written articles for the general press and have been interviewed by newspapers and magazines, addressing diverse topics: containment measures enacted during the past pestilences, economic and social consequences, communication, stigmas and scapegoats, experiences of individual physicians and sufferers. Medical historians, who are little used to address a broad audience, have been catapulted into the media debate – a “Warholian moment of celebrity”, according to Lachenal & Tomas (2020) – albeit not to the same extent as microbiologists and epidemiologists.

More generally, both specialist and non-specialist historians have endeavoured to make their contribution. Many research groups have launched projects, sometimes aimed at the general public, on the history of communicable diseases. Just to give some examples: the American Association for the History of Medicine [AAHM] in May 2020 organized a two-days webinar on *Pandemic, creating a Usable Past: Epidemic History, Covid-19 and the Future of Health*³, during which many scholars discussed the role of history in the face of Covid-19; the online journal *Origins. Current events in historical perspective*, published by the Ohio State University and the Miami

³ <https://www.histmed.org/epidemic-history>. The AAHM has also proposed a collection of online resources on pandemics: <https://www.histmed.org/covid-19-teaching-resources-and-materials-for-historical-research>.

University, has created a special section on the history of pandemics⁴; in Brazil, the Foundation Oswaldo Cruz, aimed at promoting research on history of science, has devoted a section of its website to *O olhar dos historiadores* (the historians' gaze)⁵; the Consejo Mexicano de Ciencias Sociales [Mexican Council on Social Sciences] has organized a series of webinars on the role of human and social sciences, including history⁶; in Italy, the University of Turin has held some conferences on the infectious diseases in the ancient world⁷

Furthermore, several academic journals of human and social sciences, among which the *Journal of Global History* (Frankema & Tworek, 2020) and *Centaurus* (Charters & Vermeir, 2020), have published special issues on pandemics; the American Historical Association [AHA] and the Paris Institute for Political Sciences [Sciences Po] have compiled bibliographies of historical articles on Covid-19 and previous pandemics⁸; the Harvard Library has revived a virtual exhibit, *Contagion. Historical Views of Diseases and Epidemics*, first appeared in 2008, with materials on the history of infectious diseases⁹.

Scholars have also discussed how to carry out research in time of pandemic (mainly in regard to the inaccessibility of archives and libraries) and have launched projects to preserve the memory of Covid-19. For example, some German universities have created *Coronarchiv*, a database aimed at collecting materials and personal memories of the pandemic, and the University of Arizona has

⁴ <https://origins.osu.edu/coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic-1918-flu-hiv-vaccination>. Similar initiatives have been proposed by other U.S. universities, such as that of Minnesota: <https://cla.umn.edu/history/news-events/story/covid-through-eyes-historians-3>.

⁵ www.coc.fiocruz.br/index.php/pt/todas-as-noticias/1768#.YFqo7i2h3BJ.

⁶ www.comecso.com/category/las-ciencias-sociales-y-el-coronavirus.

⁷ www.unito.it/eventi/le-pandemie-nella-storia-ciclo-di-conferenze-cura-del-dipartimento-di-studi-storici-e-della

⁸ AHA: www.historians.org/news-and-advocacy/everything-has-a-history/a-bibliography-of-historians-responses-to-covid-19; Sciences Po: <https://sciencespo.libguides.com/covid-19/approches-historiques>.

⁹ <https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/contagion>.

launched a similar project, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (echoing the title of a Daniel Defoe's book)¹⁰.

The Covid-19 outbreak has also increased the interest for environmental history, as Sars-Cov-2 – the virus responsible for the pandemic, which spilled from animals to humans – raises a serious ecological issue. The environmental historians, who were used to study pandemics and infectious diseases since before Covid-19, have proposed new reflections about the relations between humans and environment, often stressing the unsustainable exploitation of nature (Alagona *et al.*, 2020).

The interest in past pandemics has also arisen among the general public. Newspapers and magazines of the entire world have argued that policy makers have to learn lessons from history. Generally such idea is proposed in very loose terms, based on the assumption that the past can be somewhat repeated.

Against this background, many historians have wondered how history can be helpful in the ongoing emergency. For the historians of medicine, the question is not completely new, because, since before the current pandemic, they have compared past and present epidemics and discussed the “lessons” that history can provide¹¹. Covid-19 has exponentially increased the interventions on the topic. Countless articles have appeared in newspapers, blogs and websites, and also prestigious medical journals, such as the *New England Journal of Medicine* and *The Lancet*, have addressed the question (Jones, 2020a; Peckam, 2020; White, 2020). Generally, historians have suggested being cautious when comparing past and present events or have denied that such comparisons can be done¹².

¹⁰ Coronarchiv: <https://coronarchiv.geschichte.uni-hamburg.de/>. A Journal of the Plague Year: <https://covid-19archive.org/s/archive>. For a list of other projects see <https://histnum.hypotheses.org/3274>.

¹¹ For example, in 1989, the Harvard historian Charles Rosenberg published an influential article about AIDS, outlining a pattern of the social reactions to epidemics (Rosenberg, 1989). Among the more recent debates, see Forum on Microbial Threat (2007).

¹² See, for example, Arnold (2020), Charters & McKay (2020), Corbellini (2020), Deligny (2020), Harper (2020), Jones (2020b), Lindemann (2020), Newfield (2020), Snowden (2020b), Taylor (2020).

2. Recurring elements in the history of epidemics

The “usefulness of history” in regard to pandemics is generally sought in the “examples of the past”, namely in the recurring elements of social behaviour and social patterns of infection, which have emerged during many past pestilences. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a short overview of these elements. Of course, they have not characterized all past epidemics in the same way and have taken different forms in each individual case. In fact, social behaviour and popular reaction to infectious diseases are influenced by many factors: not only mortality, morbidity and case-fatality rate of each epidemic, but also symptoms, acquaintance with the disease, modes of transmission, etc. (Snowden, 2020a, pp. 83-87).

In any case, many recurring elements of past pestilences can be found, in varying degrees and diverse forms, in the current pandemic. The most important are the following.

a) Tension between collective interest and individual rights

Very often, during epidemics a tension arises between individual freedom and “non-pharmacological interventions”, such as quarantine, physical distancing (improperly called social distancing), isolation of the infected, etc.

Such measures, rudimentarily implemented for the first time in Central and Northern Italy by the time of the Black Death and then improved in the following centuries (Cipolla, 2012, pp. 11-20; Cosmacini, 1988, pp. 112-118), have had a different impact depending on the circumstances. However, some events prove that, when correctly implemented, they are able to limit epidemics. For example, in the pre-industrial age some Italian States managed to contain several outbreaks of plague, as did the Lordship of Milan in 1348 and the Republic of Venice in subsequent centuries. Also in more recent times, the “non-pharmacological interventions” have produced encouraging results. Just think to the 1918 Spanish influenza: in the U.S., some cities implemented effective measures and, in such a way, managed to contain the epidemic; other cities, where the measures were not enacted, experienced a higher mortality rate (Spinney, 2017, pp. 99-124); in Oceania, whereas New Zealand suffered a severe outbreak, Australia was able to limit

the damage, at least in the first two waves of the pandemic, thanks to the rapid implementation of quarantine (Chandra, Christensen & Likhtman, 2020, pp. 418-419).

Nevertheless, during all epidemics many people, mainly those belonging to the sectors most damaged by the measures, such as merchants and traders, refuse to comply with them. Furthermore, the enactment of “non pharmacological interventions” often gives rise to upheavals and mass protests. Just to give some examples, in 1771 Moscow’s citizens rioted against the measures enacted to contain a bubonic plague outbreak (Alexander, 2002, pp. 177-201); in Naples, during the cholera epidemic of 1884, many inhabitants of the popular (and most affected) neighbourhoods strongly protested against the health officials sent by the municipality to sanitize their houses and on some occasions they ostentatiously ate forbidden foods, such as unripe and overripe fruit (Snowden, 2020a, pp. 250-255). Likewise, in 1973, when in Naples scattered cholera cases were reported, fishermen publicly ate mussels, although authorities had forbid their consumption. Quite often, revolts and riots have been triggered by the brutality of the officials charged to enforce the measures, mostly when there was a pre-existing distrust of public authorities, as happened during the Third plague pandemic in the colonial India, and, more recently, in Liberia during the 2014-16 Ebola outbreak.

In the current pandemic, the “non-pharmacological interventions” are roughly the same as in the preindustrial age and their disregard is still common. In addition, demonstrations and protests against the measures have been organized in almost every country, often by owners of shops and restaurants or by deniers. A further problem is the politicisation of measures, whose respect sometimes depends on political ideas: often, populist-nationalist parties oppose the enactment of “non-pharmacological interventions”, while moderate and leftist politicians back their implementation. This is logical, because usually the right supports the *laissez-faire* policy, whereas the left gives priority to collective interest and societal needs. In any case, the politicisation of “non pharmacological interventions” is a serious danger, as it spurs many people not to comply with them. The good news is that, unlike in the past, today the measures are associated to vaccinations and treatments.

Another frequent reaction to epidemics is flight: when a town is infected, many inhabitants, among those who can afford it, seek refuge elsewhere, escaping from both the disease and the containment measures. Flights have occurred countless times in history, even when moving was discouraged or forbidden by health institutions. The Covid-19 pandemic has been no exception. For example, in some countries, such as Italy and India, internal migrants moved back to their places of origin after the announcement or the enforcement of containment measures. However, as the pandemic has a global reach, it is difficult to find a safe place.

b) Scapegoats and stigmatization of ethnic and social groups

Very frequently, specific ethnic and/or social groups have been considered responsible for epidemics, particularly in the cases of sudden outbreaks (the endemic infectious diseases usually do not provoke reactions of this kind). People have often searched for scapegoats, believing that epidemics were intentionally caused by specific individuals, or have stigmatized some groups, regarded as potential, although not intentional, infectors. Not infrequently, these prejudices have provoked heavy discrimination and even physical assaults.

The most known case of scapegoating is that of Jews, who during the Black Death were blamed of provoking plague by poisoning the wells; based on this allegation, hundreds of Jewish communities were ravaged by Christian fanatics (frequently, with the support of the authorities) and thousands of people were killed (Winkler, 2005; Byrnes, 2012, pp. 193-196). Physical assaults also occurred in other cases. For example, by the time of the Italian plagues of the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, some people, labelled “untori” (plague-spreaders), were accused of spreading the infection by applying poisonous ointments in specific places and several of them were executed. Some evidence suggests that also in more ancient times scapegoating was not unknown. For example, the Cyprian’s plague was one of the sparks that triggered the Decian persecution against Christians, occurred in 250 CE, because the “blasphemy” of Christians was thought to have unleashed the wrath of the Gods (at the same time, the plague eased the spread of Christianity, as many

people found that the traditional Gods were powerless) (Harper, 2017, pp. 136-159).

Generally, scapegoats belong to weak and defenceless groups. Furthermore, scapegoating is usually based on pre-existing prejudices. For example, the accusation of poisoning wells relied on allegations against Jews arisen since the eighth century CE.

Sometimes, the prejudices emerged during epidemics have had long-term consequences. The Black Death, for example, accentuated the attitude of “othering”, which lasted for centuries.

In addition, often people endeavour to identify the “patient zero” or the carrier that has triggered an epidemic. For epidemiologists it is a vital insight, as it allows them to explore the features of infections. For the rest of population, the “patient zero” is often nothing but a scapegoat. The most known case is that of Gaëtan Dugas, a Canadian flight attendant that in the 1980s was unfoundedly blamed of having brought AIDS to North America (in truth, the disease had been circulating in the continent since at least the 1970s). The search for the “patient zero” has also taken place in the current pandemic. In Italy, for example, in February 2020 a man was wrongly identified as the first carrier of Sars-Cov-2 in the country. Though super-spreaders actually exist, often the discovery of “patients zero” proves unfounded.

Along with scapegoating, stigmatization is frequent in time of epidemics. Specific groups are laden with the stigma of being responsible for infectious diseases because of their behaviour or their features. For example, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European and American citizens considered Asians as the sick *par excellence* and potential spreaders of plague and cholera, because of their alleged poor hygiene¹³.

Stigmatization, like scapegoating, has also provoked outbursts of physical violence. For example, in the preindustrial age the idea that infectious diseases were a chastisement of God suggested that eliminating the sinners would have hastened the end of the epidemic and, therefore, the violence against prostitutes, alleged witches,

¹³ The fear of the diseases coming from the Orient is very ancient: even some texts of the Egyptian and Greek civilizations mention the health risk represented by the peoples of Asia (at that time, roughly equivalent to the present Middle East) (Cosmacini, 2011, pp. 48-49).

etc., including lynching and pogroms, was quite common (Snowden, 2020a, pp. 62-64).

In the current pandemic, there is no shortage of stigmatisation and attempts to identify scapegoats. The Chinese are the first suspects and the discrimination against them has increased throughout the world (even in China, cases of ostracism have been reported towards citizens from the Hubei province). Physical assaults against people of Chinese descent have occurred in many countries. Sometimes political authorities have endorsed the discrimination: former U.S. president Donald Trump repeatedly called Covid-19 “the Chinese virus” and other European and American politicians have made similar accusations. The stigmatization is eased by the centuries-old “sanitary distrust” of Asian people and, above all, by the more general xenophobia, widespread in Europe and North America.

In many countries, mostly in Europe, the search for scapegoats diminished after that the pandemic spread worldwide. Indeed, pointing the finger at China – one of the most powerful countries in the world – is not like attacking defenceless minorities; after the initial errors in communication, the Chinese government has proven to be one of the most capable in the containment of the epidemic. Nevertheless, in some countries, such as the U.S., discrimination and violence against people of Asian descent have not ceased.

The Chinese, furthermore, are not the only victims of xenophobia. Xenophobic and populist leaders have seized the opportunity to claim the enforcement of anti-immigration policies, though the countries of origin of migrants, for example those of Africa, are averagely less affected by Covid-19 than the Western world. The “sanitary fear” of migrants relies on pre-existing xenophobic feelings: since before Covid-19, accusing immigrants of “bringing illness” was not unusual among the supporters of populist parties. The pandemic has increased fear and hate. In some countries, such as India, even internal migrants have been blamed as potential infectors and many cases of abuse and discrimination have been reported. In the same country, the pandemic has also heightened the pre-existing tension between Hindus and Muslims. The latter, viewed as potential spreaders, if not as intentional propagators of the virus, have been

suffering stigmas and discrimination since the beginning of the emergency (Roy, 2020; Bhanot *et al.*, 2021).

c) Stigmatization of infected individuals and health workers

Also the infected are often victims of stigmatization. Stigma, in this case, must not be understood as purpose to keep physical distance from sufferers, which for many communicable diseases is recommendable, but as considering them somewhat responsible for their own illness. In the past, the sick were often regarded as sinners and their diseases were considered a chastisement meted out by God. This did not occur only in the preindustrial age, but also in more recent times, for example in the 1980s-1990s towards the sufferers of AIDS and the HIV-positive individuals, viewed as culprits of homosexuality and drug use (and heavily ostracized as potential infectors). Stigmatization has also occurred for reasons other than the divine punishment, like in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries against people affected by tuberculosis, since when the transmission by contagion was discovered (Snowden, 2020a, pp. 322-323), and against sufferers of plague and cholera, often regarded as filthy and backward people.

Paradoxically, on some occasions a sort of stigma hit the groups less affected by epidemics, such as Jews in the medieval epidemics of plague and affluent people during the cholera outbreaks¹⁴, as their lower susceptibility to infection appeared suspicious.

Today, in many countries the sufferers of Covid-19 are usually regarded as victims, rather than as sinners or culprits. Nevertheless, they have experienced some forms of stigmatization, sometimes because people believe that they have exposed themselves to unnecessary risks or simply because they are viewed as potential spreaders of the disease.

A similar kind of stigma is directed at health workers. In the past, physicians and health officials were often regarded with suspicion, due to the widespread (and often justified) distrust of medicine (Cipolla, 2012; Cosmacini, 1988, 114-118). Today, this distrust is less common than in the preindustrial age, but it is dangerously

¹⁴ Cholera is provoked by contaminated food or water and has always been a disease of poverty, as the rich, living in healthier housing condition and consuming better aliments, are less susceptible.

increasing in some sectors of public opinion. Also for this reason, sometimes the health workers employed in Covid-19 wards are ostracized as potential spreaders. In some cases, physicians have been forced to spend some days in the restrooms of their hospitals; verbal abuses and physical assaults have been reported in several countries (Islam *et al.* 2020, p. 1622-1623; Bhanot *et al.*, 2021). Fortunately, for now such irrational attitude belongs to a minority of population.

d) Proliferation of irrational theories, charlatans and denialism

Irrational and antiscientific theories have accompanied epidemics since the dawn of time. In the preindustrial age, such theories were mainly based on religious beliefs and often gave rise to counterproductive actions, such as processions and ceremonies. Today, the religious interpretation of the events is less common, but in several countries the organization of ceremonies and rites has contributed to spread the contagion.

Moreover, not all anti-scientific theories rely on religious beliefs, in the present like in the past. For example, during the Middle Age and Early Modern Era, the use of talismans against plague was widespread. Ideas of this kind have never disappeared and not even the mass alphabetization and the multiplication of information sources, occurred in last decades, have thwarted their dissemination. In 2002, for example, in China the theory that vinegar prevented SARS was quite common. Today, the social media (and, sometimes, even the “traditional” media) are full of weird ideas on covid 19: facemasks would be harmful to health; the pandemic would have been purposefully unleashed to reduce the world population; the 5G technology would hasten the spread of infection; etc.

These beliefs are endorsed only by minorities, but they are not rare and may be very dangerous, as their supporters tend not to comply with the containment measures and to refuse vaccination, thus making it difficult to reach herd immunity. Furthermore, those who believe hoaxes are inclined to follow useless and dangerous “measures of prevention”, such as drinking alcohol or even swallowing bleach (Teovanović *et al.*, 2020; Islam *et al.* 2020).

The dissemination of such theories is eased by charlatans and scammers, who during epidemics have always thrived. Over the

centuries, these pseudoscientists have proposed the most bizarre treatments, either for personal interest or because they actually believe in the effectiveness of alternative medicine. This did not happen only in the preindustrial age, but it has also been frequent in more recent times. At the time of the Spanish influenza, for example, newspapers often published advertisements of products that claimed to be able to fight the disease (not only tablets, but even toothpastes and other hygiene products) (Tognotti, 2016; Spinney, 2017, pp. 133-139).

Today, in many countries the law forbids misleading advertisements, but “alternative” treatments are still proposed. Among them are, for example, the proposal to treat the Covid-19 infections by hydroxychloroquine (a drug used for other diseases), which the World Health Organization [WHO] and many scientists have declared ineffective against Sars-Cov-2; the claim of home care instead of vaccination, etc., as well as many bizarre treatments, such as eating garlic or hot peppers.

Also denialism, which today infests social media, has always accompanied epidemics, above all in their first stages. Many people – sometimes for economic interest – refuse to accept the reality of the epidemic, frequently stating that it is a hoax disseminated by governments to control citizens or for other evil reasons. Sometimes these theories have provoked violent reactions and physical assaults. Just to give an example, in 1630, in the town of Busto Arsizio (close to Milan), the physician who confirmed the presence of plague was shot to death (Naphy & Spicer, 2004, p. 86).

The worst scenario occurs when pseudoscientific theories and denialism are endorsed by institutions and rulers. Unfortunately, this is not rare. Often local authorities have sought to hide the outbreaks and have responded very slowly. For example, institutions, citizens and even some physicians were very reluctant to admit the occurrence of plague in Marseille in 1720, (the last great outbreak of plague in Europe, which killed about half of the city’s population), thus easing the spread of infection (Naphy & Spicer, 2004, pp. 135-150); more recently, former South-African president Thabo Mbeki, in office from 1999 to 2008, repeatedly denied the presence of AIDS, although in the country it claims tens of thousands of victims every year.

During the present pandemic, several political leaders have sought to conceal the truth or minimize the impact of the virus. In the first days of 2020, Chinese authorities concealed the first cases of infection and informed the WHO belatedly. Later, several rulers, such as Donald Trump, Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro and many local authorities in the entire world, have repeatedly underestimated the impact of the pandemic.

Also the opposition to vaccination, which today is widespread, is an old story, dating back to the “variolation” in the eighteenth century (Williamson, 2007).

e) Social inequality

The social impact of past epidemics, that is how infectious diseases affect the diverse social groups, is difficult to be defined, because of the shortage of data. However, it is certain that, on average, the marginalized and the poor experience the highest rates of morbidity, fatality and mortality; the upper classes are less likely to contract infectious diseases and have more opportunities to recover when infected. Indeed, they usually live in better housing conditions, whereas poor citizens and socially excluded groups are often relegated in overcrowded and unhealthy neighbourhoods (if not in slums). Furthermore, the affluent people have more chances of isolating themselves, as they have enough resources to survive without earning money; they are averagely more educated, which allows them to understand the reality of the epidemic and take countermeasures.

Furthermore, when the members of the upper classes are infected, their better nutrition and better health, along with the easier access to care, improve the chances of recovering.

This does not mean that the affluent and powerful people are immune from microbes: the history of infectious diseases is full of wealthy businessmen, rulers, monarchs, etc. died from the contagion; in the past, the access to care was not always beneficial and some commonly used treatments, such as bloodletting, are nowadays known to be counterproductive (Cosmacini, 1988, pp. 23-27); many epidemics sowed death in all social classes.

However, it is certain that generally the upper classes risk less than the poor. For example, plague was not a disease of poverty,

but poor and socially excluded groups were affected more severely. Some evidence suggests that, although the Black Death swept through all social classes, the poor experienced higher morbidity and mortality rates; all the following plagues hit the low-income citizens, mostly those living in the popular urban districts, more severely than the rich (Benedictow, 2006, pp. 258-266; Alfani, 2013; Alfani & Murphy, 2017, pp. 323-326); the Third plague pandemic not only affected the low-income countries almost exclusively, but the population of European descent living in those places suffered lower mortality rates than the natives; at the time of the Spanish flu, in the U.S., Native Americans experienced a greatly higher death rate than Whites; some infectious diseases, such as cholera, are specifically diseases of poverty.

Quite often, the susceptibility of the poor to infections has also raised stigma against them, as they have been viewed as potential spreaders.

With regard to Covid-19, data show that the marginalized are suffering more¹⁵, mainly in developing and emerging countries. In Brazil, Sars-Cov-2 is sweeping through the citizens of African descent and those living in *favelas* with particular virulence; in India the lower social classes are paying the highest price. The housing conditions and the need to earn money, indeed, prevent the inhabitants of popular neighbourhoods and slums to protect themselves. Also in the Western countries the pandemic is affecting the poor and the marginalized more severely. For example, in the U.S. the mortality rate is particularly high among Blacks, Native Americans and Hispanics (but ethnicity has a minor impact than education, given that the citizens with lower education degrees are experiencing a much higher mortality rate, also due to their jobs) (Chen *et al.*, 2021); in the entire world, the mortality rate is higher in the low-income neighbourhoods (OECD, 2020). However, in the industrialized countries, access to care and proper nutrition are today more available than in the past and thus, under the sanitary point of view, the differences among social groups are smaller.

¹⁵ As is known, covid-19 has hit the industrialized world harder than the low-income countries, but this is a separate issue, probably due to environmental and climatic factors and, in regard to the case-fatality rate, also to the age structure of population (not to mention the unreliability of the data of many countries).

Unfortunately, these are not the only inequities, because for the marginalized and the poor also the social-economic consequences of epidemics are harder. The impact of the past pandemics on economy has been diverse, depending on the circumstances: some events, such as the Black Death, caused a reduction of economic inequality, but in many other cases (for example, the outbreaks of plague in the early modern Europe) the gap between the rich and the poor grew (Alfani & Murphy, 2017).

Nowadays, Covid-19 is causing a further increase in the social and economic distance: brutally speaking, the rich is becoming richer and the poor is becoming poorer. The economic crisis due to the virus is affecting the marginalized, such as racial minorities and precarious workers, more than the other citizens, and the expected collapse of the Human Development Index will likely damage vulnerable countries and groups more seriously (UNDP, 2020; Oxfam, 2021). Of course, foretelling the long-term consequences is impossible, but it is highly unlikely that, after the pandemic, the distribution of wealth will be fairer: Sars-Cov-2, which has hit an already unjust world, is increasing injustice.

f) Overexposure to risk of health workers

Health workers are always one of the categories most affected by epidemics and experience the highest mortality rates. Just to give some examples, during the Early Modern Age in Italy health officials were forbidden to leave the cities affected by plague, while many other inhabitants sought to save themselves by fleeing (but sources also report cases of doctors who fled the infected cities) (Cosmacini, 1988, pp. 113-114). More recently, physicians and nurses were overrepresented among the victims of the 2014-16 Ebola epidemic in West Africa, mainly because of the poor condition of hospitals and medical facilities (Evans, Goldstein & Popova, 2015).

The current pandemic has in turn claimed the life of numerous health workers, particularly in the first months: according to Amnesty international, by August 2020 at least seven thousand physicians and nurses had died of Covid-19¹⁶. Main symbol of this

¹⁶ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/09/amnesty-analysis-7000-health-workers-have-died-from-covid19/>.

sacrifice is Li Wenliang, a Chinese ophthalmologist that in December 2019 first identified some “strange pneumonias”, later dubbed Covid-19, in the city of Wuhan, then he was infected and died on 7 February 2020.

3. History and historians faced with the Covid-19 pandemic

The presence of similarities among the epidemics that followed one another over the centuries must not suggest that history is a handbook containing responses and advice for our behaviour. History is not *magistra vitae* in this sense.

This is not the place for a discussion on the “usefulness of history” – an issue that intellectuals and scholars have debated since the ancient world. However, it is important to take into account some crucial assumptions: they are banal, above all for professional historians, but it is worth connecting them to the current pandemic, as in many cases newspapers and other media have recommended learning lessons from history. First of all, it is necessary to remind that events do not repeat themselves exactly like in the past and, consequently, historical analogies are complex and never perfect. History can be “useful” in several ways, but its “usefulness” is indirect and mediate. The main element of “usefulness” is likely collective memory, not the conscious knowledge of past events: memory is unconscious, but essential in determining behaviour and actions, whereas a deep knowledge of the past belongs to very few people.

With regard to epidemics, the memory of centuries of battles against infectious diseases influences our actions and the past experiences affect social behaviour and political decisions. However, the inappropriate “use” of such experiences, based on the assumption that they can be replicated, may lead to unexpected outcomes. An example comes from the antimalarial campaign: as the Yale historian Frank Snowden (2020a, pp. 357-384) pointed out, the eradication of malaria in Sardinia, carried out after the World War II, suggested that the disease could be worldwide eliminated; consequently, the WHO and other institutions launched a broad anti-malarial campaign, but it was unsuccessful, as the “victory” in Sardinia had been due to peculiar factors, not present elsewhere.

Moreover, the present pandemic is different, under many points of views, from the past epidemics, not only from those of the pre-industrial age, but also from those of last centuries.

Compared to the diseases of the pre-industrial age, the current pandemic is, of course, completely different. Just to highlight two elements, think to mortality rate and collective imagery. The mortality rate, as is known, in the pre-industrial age was enormously higher and infectious diseases provoked huge demographic collapses, which have never occurred again. Even admitting that the Spanish influenza had a higher death toll than the fourteenth-century plague, as some scholars have suggested¹⁷, its impact on demography was starkly lower: for the Black Death, the estimates of deaths range from 30% up to 60% of the European population (from 75 to 200 million deaths in Europe and Asia in absolute data); for the 1918 flu, they range from 1% to 5,4% of the world population (from 17 to 100 million deaths worldwide). In the case of Covid-19, to date (June 2021) the death toll is between 0,04 and 0,1% of the world population (that is between the 3,5 millions reported deaths and the maximum estimate of 7,6 millions¹⁸). This does not mean to underestimate the drama of the ongoing events, but only that the comparisons with the epidemics of the past, which sometimes appear in the media, are not founded.

Furthermore, in the preindustrial age, epidemics were a central element of the collective imagery. The dread began to diminish in the nineteenth century (also with a shift from plague to cholera as most feared infection) and nowadays people is much little scared by infectious diseases, mainly because their place as first cause of death has been taken by chronic-degenerative illnesses, thanks to the “mortality revolution” occurred between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is true that, in the 1980s, AIDS increased the concern for communicable diseases, demonstrating that they were not defeated, but the level of fear did not even remotely reach that

¹⁷ Johnson & Muller (2002) raised the death toll of the 1918 influenza, arguing that it killed no less than 50 million people worldwide. For the epidemics of the pre-industrial age see the data provided by Alfani & Murphy (2017, pp. 316-317), based on the most recent scholarship.

¹⁸ See the data of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, <https://covid19.healthdata.org/global?view=cumulative-deaths&tab=trend>.

of the preindustrial age. Today, Covid-19 has raised the concern again, forcing human beings to change many of their habits, but, of course, in the collective imagery it has not the place that belonged to plague and other infections of the past.

The current pandemic also appears different from the epidemics of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Indeed, it features several unique (or uncommon) elements, not only because the pathogen is novel, but also in regard to social and cultural impact, due to the context in which it has erupted. Let us see some of these peculiarities.

- It is one of the rare epidemics of last centuries to affect the rich and industrialized part of the world more than the developing countries. In recent times, epidemics have usually hit low-income areas far more severely (think to cholera, Third plague pandemic, AIDS, and, more recently, SARS, Ebola, Avian influenza, etc.); some infectious diseases (tuberculosis, malaria, rabies, etc.), almost eradicated in the industrialized world, are still endemic in the developing countries, where the “mortality revolution” has not fully accomplished; the deadliest epidemic of the twentieth century, the 1918 influenza, did not spare the Western countries, but Asia, Africa and Latin America experienced higher mortality rates (Patterson & Pyle, 1991, pp. 4-21); the main exception of last years, the 2009 Swine flu, which primarily hit the industrialized countries, had lower mortality and case-fatality rates than most other epidemics.

Covid-19, if the official data are reliable, has affected Europe, North America and some emerging countries, such as Brazil and India (where, however, a significant percentage of population lives below the poverty threshold) more severely than the rest of world. The developing countries are not immune from the virus, but in many of them, particularly in those of Equatorial and Southern Africa, morbidity is low. This has very significant consequences, first and foremost the greater attention of scientists, international institutions and media, as well as the availability of large funds to face the emergency.

However, foreseeing the future paths of the disease and its impact on low-income countries is impossible, also for the rise of

variants. India, particularly, risks becoming the worst scenario, making Covid-19 more similar to the epidemics of last two centuries.

- It is the first pandemic associated to an infodemic, namely “too much information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments” (WHO definition¹⁹). Rumours have always accompanied epidemics; the recent outbreaks (for example, the Ebola epidemic of 2014-16) were already characterized by the multiplication of sources of information. Today, the problem is more serious because, thanks to the web 2.0 and the global reach of the pandemic, everybody has become a medium and, overestimating their own understanding of the events, they feel entitled, if not compelled, to publicly disseminate their views. Often, this leads to the dissemination of misleading information, which may have disastrous outcomes. The infodemic, however, has also been caused by the “traditional” media, such as TV networks and newspapers, which have devoted huge space to Covid-19 and sometimes have provided fake or misleading news. Unfortunately, more information does not mean better information.

- It is the pandemic with the most rapid and effective response of science. In the past, epidemics represented the most stinging defeats of medicine, which was almost completely powerless. During the medieval and early modern epidemics, many physicians felt ashamed of their helplessness and the popular distrust of science grew (Cosmacini, 2011, pp. 216-221). In more recent times, the Spanish influenza constituted another defeat, as physicians, despite the enormous scientific progress of the nineteenth century, were almost completely unable to treat sufferers and did not grasp the etiology of the disease. Nowadays, the situation is different: shortly after the first Covid-19 cases, the scientific community has embarked on a huge effort to analyse the pathogen; although Sars-Cov-2 is a novel virus, vaccines have been produced in record time. Some countries (Israel, U.K.) have begun to recover a year after the

¹⁹ https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic#tab=tab_1

emergence of the disease and there is hope that it can be defeated in the whole world. The main problem is not represented by scientific research, but by the distribution of vaccines, which privileges specific countries and social groups, and by the possible evolution of the pathogen.

- As Covid-19 has mainly spread in the industrialized countries, on average people enjoy better health than in the past; healthcare and public hygiene are more advanced. However, there are a number of shortcomings, mainly in the countries where the health system is based on private enterprise and does not provide all citizens with equal access to care. Furthermore, the “advantage” is not broad-based (think to countries such as India and Brazil, which are undergoing serious problems for the limits of their health system and the lack of oxygen) and it risks being lost if the pandemic hit the low-income countries harder.
- The world is much more rapidly interconnected. Long-distance trades and exchanges have always existed and have often fostered the circulation of diseases (as is known, many pathogens were carried by cargo ships); already in the early twentieth century, the Spanish flu was a really global pandemic, reaching every corner of the world. However, today the exchanges are faster, mainly thanks to air transport, and this influences the spread of the infection and will likely have impact on its social and economic consequences.

Also because of these peculiarities, history cannot be used as a formulary with answers and solutions. As Marc Bloch pointed out, history is the “science of change”, not the science of repetition.

Moreover, if the errors of the past are repeated, at first glance it might seem that history has taught nothing. In truth, history is all but useless and it is thanks to previous experiences that incommensurable progress, although not perfect, has been achieved. During a pandemic, medicine and other sciences involved in the direct and “immediate” management of the emergency play a primary role, but also human and social sciences, including historiography, can be useful, as they help to understand the

dynamics of social behaviour and the impact of the disease on society. Indeed, although research is directed to very few people, in the medium term it can reach the general public, through schools and other channels, improving the understanding of pandemics, helping people to face them.

Indeed, history can create awareness of the risks and the potentialities inherent in social behaviour and can provide a general framework of trends (which, however, in each individual case features its peculiarities). For example, history shows that, since the early twentieth century, epidemics have no longer provoked mass hysteria and outbursts of religious fanaticism, at least not to the same extent as in the previous centuries, but also that irrational and anti-scientific attitudes have not disappeared and still jeopardize the efforts to contain epidemics.

Furthermore, the history of epidemics proves that the dissemination of proper information is a vital need. In the past, the failures in communication have produced catastrophic outcomes, easing the spread of diseases and creating stigmas and discrimination.

History also shows the importance of international coordination, which enables to share medical protocols and research results, as well as to harmonize containment measures. Microbes know no borders and, to effectively fight them, men must sweep any “health nationalism” aside. The Covid-19 pandemic is demonstrating that much progress has been achieved, mainly in the field of scientific research, but also that many shortcomings persist, for example in the distribution of vaccines and for the little transparent relations between some governments and the international organizations, *in primis* the WHO. These shortcomings mainly endanger the low-income countries, but they may have negative effects in the entire world.

In addition, history proves that that it is necessary to be vigilant and ready to cope with possible future pathogens. Unfortunately, new viruses and bacteria may affect humankind, the existing microbes are able to mutate and old communicable diseases may re-emerge. Plague, disappeared from Europe in the eight century CE, re-emerged after about six hundred years with extreme virulence; in the second half of the twentieth century, many scientists were confident that the world was going towards the complete

eradication of infectious diseases, but then AIDS, SARS, Ebola, Covid-19 and other illnesses came to remind that the “war” against microbes is by no means won and that they will “accompany” human beings for a long time to come.

Moreover, history shows the limits of science, but also that it is the only way to overcome the pandemic. This is likely the crucial point. Today the distrust of medicine is growing (just think to the widespread opposition to vaccination) and social sciences could help to give confidence to people. The problem is not scientific research, as many studies on the history of medicine exist, but the more general knowledge of history. Usually, pandemics and communicable diseases are not part of school and university programmes of history (with some exceptions) and they are almost completely ignored by the general public. However, a better knowledge could teach people that, although medicine has not the magic bullet, there are not alternatives to fight an infectious disease. For example, teaching students the eradication of smallpox and the impact of vaccination on many other diseases might reduce the distrust; likewise, explaining that in 1918 medicine was totally unable to fight the Spanish flu, whereas today many tools, albeit not perfect, allow us to cope with infectious diseases, could teach to welcome the progress of science. Of course, it would be a slow and mediate process and its impact could be seen only after years.

In any case, the current pandemic will have serious and long-lasting consequences, first under the psychological point of view. Covid-19, like the Spanish influenza in 1918-19 and the AIDS in the 1980s, has demonstrated that man is weaker than he was thought to be.

As far as historians are concerned, they will likely devote more attention to epidemics and infectious diseases. The challenge is not to publish new studies on epidemics, which medical and environmental will certainly do, but to integrate the outbreaks of infectious diseases into general history (think, for example, to the Spanish influenza in relation to the World War I and the post-war crisis). Probably, after the current pandemic also the non-specialist historians will be more interested in the relations between society, environment and illness: pandemics, as said above, affect all human action, and, therefore, social, political, economic, and cultural

historians should take them into account, when necessary, in their studies. In such a way, the history of infectious diseases would gradually reach the general public, improving the more general knowledge of the subject.

Also Covid-19 will become soon a history topic. Of course, there is no telling how much room it will find in books and collective memory, but it is certain that at present it is having a huge cultural impact and, in the media of the entire world, it has overshadowed any other topic. Therefore, it may not be forgotten or relegated to a footnote.

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