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**THE BLIND BARD AND THE UNFLAGGING HIERARCH:
MEMORIES OF WAR AND SELF-REPRESENTATIONS
IN FASCIST ITALY**

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The aim of this paper is to study two different and conflicting memories of the Great War developed in fascist Italy. In particular, an attempt will be made to focus on the cases of Carlo Delcroix and Roberto Farinacci. They were both born in 1890's and took part in the war, during which Delcroix was severely mutilated. Alongside the few traits they had in common, many differences divided their political lives. Farinacci soon joined Fascism, became one of the leaders of the radical wing and, in the second half of 1930s, supported the alliance with Nazi Germany. Delcroix, who led one of the most important veterans associations, defined himself in the public debate mainly as a war invalid and by doing so managed to find his own space in the fascist liturgy.

As we will try to see, differences and similarities reflected on how they incessantly rethought the Great War. Through an analysis of their books, their public speeches and their participation in the commemorations, the paper tries to describe the connections between memories of the War and political needs. Indeed, not only were there many differences between Farinacci's memory and that of Delcroix, but also the way in which they respectively recollected events changed over time, according to their relationship with the Regime and Mussolini. Thus, their attitudes toward the official ceremonies became an interesting perspective through which their interaction with the political framework can be studied.

Key words / Ključne riječi: Commemorations of war in Fascist Italy, Roberto Farinacci, Carlo Delcroix, radical fascism.

Introduction

Through the study of different semantic fields, historiography has examined the ways in which Italian culture, politics and society have presented the Great War.¹ It has already been shown how fascism, which came into power in 1922, tried to control the collective memory of that event by describing the interventionists (i.e. pro-war activists of 1915) as fascist precursors, appropriating the cult of the Fallen Soldier, and depicting itself as the only force able to safeguard the victory.²

The aim of this paper is to investigate some different and conflicting war narratives developed *within* the fascist world.³ To do this, I will focus on Roberto Farinacci (1892-1945) and Carlo Delcroix (1896-1977), two war veterans and prominent public figures, both related to the memory of the Great war, who were linked by some common traits as well as divided by many differences. In fact, not

1 Even though this essay is not as comprehensive as one would wish, here is a list of the works which have majorly influenced its contents: Andrea BARAVELLI, *La vittoria smarrita. Legittimità e rappresentazioni della Grande Guerra nella crisi del sistema liberale (1919-1924)*, Rome: Carocci, 2006; Patrizia DOGLIANI, "Redipuglia", in *I luoghi della memoria. Simboli e miti dell'Italia unita*, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2010 (1996), 421-435; Antonio GIBELLI, *La grande guerra degli italiani*, Milan: Sansoni, 1998; Antonio GIBELLI, *L'officina della guerra. La grande guerra e le trasformazioni del mondo mentale*, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2001; Antonio GIBELLI, "Culto degli eroi e mobilitazione politica dell'infanzia tra Grande guerra e fascismo", in *La morte per la patria. La celebrazione dei caduti dal Risorgimento alla Repubblica*, ed. by Oliver JANZ-Lutz KLINKHAMMER, Rome: Donzelli, 2012, 81-99; Mario ISNENGHI, *Il mito della grande guerra*, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1970; Mario ISNENGHI, "La grande guerra", in *I luoghi della memoria. Strutture ed eventi dell'Italia unita*, ed. by Mario ISNENGHI, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1997, 273-309; Mario ISNENGHI, *L'Italia in piazza. I luoghi della vita pubblica dal 1848 ai giorni nostri*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004; Oliver JANZ, "Grande guerra, memoria della", in *Dizionario del fascismo*, ed. by Victoria DE GRAZIA-Sergio LUZZATTO, Turin: Einaudi, 2003, s.v.; Oliver JANZ, "Lutto, famiglia e nazione nel culto dei caduti della prima guerra mondiale in Italia", in *La morte per la patria*, 63-79; Vito LABITA, "Il milite ignoto. Dalle trincee all'altare della patria", in *Gli occhi di Alessandro. Potere sovrano e sacralità del corpo da Alessandro Magno a Ceaușescu*, ed. by Sergio BETRTELLI-Cristiano GROTTANELLI, Florence: Ponte alle Grazie, 1990, 120-153; Marco MONDINI, *La politica delle armi. Il ruolo dell'esercito nell'avvento del fascismo*, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2006; Marco MONDINI, Guri SCHWARZ, *Dalla guerra alla pace. Retoriche e pratiche della smobilitazione nell'Italia del Novecento*, Verona: Cierre edizioni, 2007; Renato MONTELEONE, Pino SARASINI, "I monumenti italiani ai caduti della grande guerra", in *La Grande Guerra. Esperienza, memoria, immagini*, ed. by Diego LEONI-Camillo ZADRA, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1986, 631-662; Giorgio ROCHAT, "Il soldato italiano dal Carso a Redipuglia", in *La Grande Guerra. Esperienza, memoria, immagini*, 613-630; Bruno TOBIA, *L'Altare della patria*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998; Angelo VENTRONE, *La seduzione totalitaria. Guerra, modernità, violenza politica*, Rome: Donzelli, 2003; Laura WITTMAN, *The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Modern Mourning and the Reinvention of the Mystical Body*, Toronto Buffalo London: University of Toronto Press, 2011.

2 Emilio GENTILE, *Il culto del littorio*, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1993, 47; Mabel BEREZIN, "Commemorazioni", in *Dizionario del fascismo*, s.v.

3 See: Claudio FOGU, "Fare la storia al presente. Il fascismo e la rappresentazione della Grande Guerra", *Memoria e Ricerca*, January-June 2001, 49-67; Jeffrey T. SCHNAPP, *Anno X. La mostra della Rivoluzione fascista del 1932, Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali*, Pisa-Rome, 2003, 142 ff.

only did they belong to the same generation, but they both also first took part in the war and subsequently lived in the hot spots of the Fascist action squads (Delcroix in Florence and Farinacci in Cremona). However, the similarities end here, as the war played a very different role in their lives. Having been severely mutilated, Delcroix turned the Great War experience into an opportunity for self-promotion, whereas Farinacci was often blamed for having kept well away from the front and from the actual fighting. Moreover, Delcroix did not acquire prominence as a fascist, rather as first a member, and later president, of the National Association of War Invalids and Maimed Veterans (ANMIG), maintaining for years a fluctuating relationship with fascism that only in 1925 evolved into complete affiliation. Farinacci instead, had been involved in fascism from the very beginning, thus became Secretary of the National Fascist Party (PNF), leading the radical faction throughout the regime years and thus opposed Mussolini when the latter took more moderate stances.⁴

It is precisely this interchange between the (few) similarities and (many) differences that makes the comparison particularly interesting. While for Farinacci reference to the war experience responded to cogent political needs, for Delcroix it was a way to enter the political language of fascism. Nonetheless, they both approached the matter in books and speeches and they both took part in the two annual public commemorations of the Great War: on May 24th, for Italy's anniversary of entry into the war in 1915, and on November 4th, to celebrate the 1918 armistice. These were two major anniversaries only after fascism rose to power,⁵ and Delcroix's and Farinacci's attitude towards these events changed over time, according to their political needs and their relationship with Mussolini.

Farinacci and Delcroix had asymmetrical trajectories. For many years, the former almost minimized the role of the First World War in Italian history, emphasizing instead the importance of the violent period that followed and that led, in 1922, to the triumph of *squadrismo* (the Italian fascist paramilitary movement) and to the March on Rome. This post-war period, which according to some historians can be defined as a "civil war"⁶ became a key element of self-

4 Claudia BALDOLI, *Bissolati immaginario. Le origini del fascismo cremonese. Dal socialismo riformista allo squadrismo*, Cremona: Cremona books, 2002; Matteo DI FIGLIA, *Farinacci. Il radicalismo fascista al potere*, Rome: Donzelli, 2007; Harry FURNARY, *Mussolini's Gadfly. Roberto Farinacci*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971; Giuseppe PARDINI, *Farinacci. Ovvero, della rivoluzione fascista*, Florence: Le Lettere, 2007; Lorenzo SANTORO, *Roberto Farinacci e il Partito Nazionale Fascista (1923-1926)*, Venice: Marsilio, 2008; Albertina VITTORIA, "Carlo Delcroix", in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 36, Rome: Treccani, Roma, 1988, s.v.; Barbara BRACCO, "Carlo Delcroix", in *Gli Italiani in guerra. Conflitti, identità memorie dal Risorgimento ai nostri giorni, IV, Il ventennio fascista*, ed. by Mario ISNENGHI-Giulia ALBANESE, Turin: Utet, 2010, 278.

5 Maurizio RIDOLFI, *Le feste nazionali*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003, 62-63; MONDINI, SCHWARZ, *Dalla guerra alla pace*, 43.

6 Guido CRAINZ, Padania. *Il mondo dei braccianti dall'Ottocento alla fuga dalle campagne*, Rome: Donzelli, 2007 [1994], 188 ff.; Renzo DE FELICE, "La 'guerra civile 1919-1922' in un documento del Partito comunista d'Italia", *Rivista storica del socialismo*, aprile 1966, IX, n. 27, 104-125; Fabio FABBRI, *Le origini della guerra*

representation and self-promotion of radical fascists.⁷ The Great War contributed towards Farinacci's self-representation again in the second half of the 1930s, when the fascist regime inaugurated a new foreign policy of friendship with Germany, and fascist radicalism was back in fashion. By contrast, Delcroix suffered from Italy's new alliance, being unable to adapt his memory of the First World War to the Duce's new discourse and strategy. The outbreak of the new conflict and, above all, Italy's entrance into the war (1940) marked the breaking point of Delcroix's Great War narrative canon and produced a new outburst of 1915-18 representations that he continued to elaborate during the Italian Republican era.

Radicalism and (civil) war

As soon as World War I war was over, Farinacci became politically active in a group of social reformers and democrats. As many of them had been interventionists and enlisted as volunteers as Italy had entered war, the war itself remained at the center of their discourses and mental horizon.⁸ For instance, on November 4th, 1920, Farinacci took part in the commemorative events held in Cremona, as a speaker among many others.⁹ In fact, as he was trying to acquire independent political exposure, he engaged with the topic of war only marginally. Instead, he preferred to focus on the local class struggle,¹⁰ which at the time was the paramount for Cremona's fascist movement, which he led.¹¹ However, Farinacci knew that the victory claims were an unavoidable challenge for fascism's self-representation. Thus, on November 4th, 1921, having gained recognition and

civile. L'Italia dalla grande guerra al fascismo. 1918-1922, Turin: Utet, 2009; Massimo LEGNANI, "Due guerre, due dopoguerra", in *Guerra, guerra di Liberazione, guerra civile*, ed. by Massimo LEGNANI e Ferruccio VENDRAMINI, Milan: Franco Angeli, 1990, 37-57; Gabriele RANZATO, "Un evento antico e un nuovo oggetto di riflessione", in *Guerre fratricide. Le guerre civili in età contemporanea*, ed. by Gabriele RANZATO, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1994, XXXVIII; Simone NERI SERNERI, "Guerra civile e ordine politico. L'antifascismo in Italia e in Europa tra le due guerre", in *Antifascismo e identità europea*, ed. by Alberto DE BERNARDI e Paolo FERRARI, Rome: Carocci, 2004, 78-105.

⁷ Roberto FARINACCI, *Squadrisimo. Dal mio diario della vigilia*, Rome: Edizioni Arditia, 1933; see, above all: Cristina BALDASSINI, "Fascismo e memoria. L'autorappresentazione dello squadrisimo", in *Contemporanea*, July 2002, V, n. 3, 475-505; Emilio GENTILE, *Storia del partito fascista. 1919-1922. Movimento e milizia*, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1989; Mario ISNENGHI, *L'Italia in piazza*, 302 ff.; Mario ISNENGHI, "La marcia su Roma", in *I luoghi della memoria. Strutture ed eventi*, 311-329; Adrian LYTTTELTON, "Fascismo e violenza: conflitto sociale e azione politica in Italia nel primo dopoguerra", in *Storia contemporanea*, December 1982, XIII, n. 6, 965-983; Pietro NEGLIE, "Seconda ondata", in *Dizionario del fascismo*, s.v.; Paolo NELLO, "La violenza fascista ovvero dello squadrisimo nazionalrivoluzionario", in *Storia contemporanea*, December 1982, XIII, n. 6, 1009-1025; Jens PETERSEN, "Il problema della violenza nel fascismo italiano", in *Storia contemporanea*, December 1982, XIII, n. 6, 985-1008; Roberta SUZZI VALLI, "The Myth of Squadrisimo in the Fascist Regime", in *Journal of Contemporary History*, April 2000, vol. 35, n. 2, 131-150.

⁸ BALDOLI, *Bissolati immaginario*.

⁹ "L'Imponente Manifestazione", in *La Voce del Popolo Sovrano*, 8 November 1920, 1-2.

¹⁰ Roberto FARINACCI, "A Dieci Giorni di Distanza", in *La Voce del Popolo Sovrano*, 8 November 1920, 1.

¹¹ Francis J. DEEMERS, *Le origini del fascismo a Cremona*, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1977.

legitimation in the city, thanks to their squad activity, the fascists of Cremona countered the ex-interventionist's ceremonies with their own commemorations. Farinacci, who coordinated the event, was the most prominent speaker of the day. Thanks to the role played by his squads, the *ras* (i.e. the local fascist leader) could now celebrate the anniversary by placing fascism, and himself, at the centre of the ritual.¹²

From then on, the association between war and civil war was always skillfully used by Farinacci. We can observe that he insisted on the memory of the Great War when his goal was to define himself as a fascist who was set against anti-fascists. Conversely, he insisted more on evoking the post-war "civil war" when he wanted to come across as an intransigent hierarchy that is when he was engaging with a dispute within fascism. In these cases, the memory of the war was always almost completely avoided.

Probably, he gave his most significant contribution to the fascist monopolization of the collective mourning for the war during the 1924 crisis which followed the kidnapping and the assassination of the socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti, who briefly became an icon of anti-fascist martyrdom.¹³ During the war, however, Matteotti had been anti-militarist and had publicly hoped for a grass roots socialist insurrection, therefore he had been accused of being on the side of the Austrians on more than one occasion.¹⁴ So, the centrality of the war in the public debate pushed some anti-fascists to formulate a different image of Matteotti's conduct during the war, as his pacifist past could have dimmed the symbolic value of his sacrifice. Soon after the assassination, Piero Gobetti consecrated Matteotti as a martyr to anti-fascism trying to publicly rebuild his role during the First World War.¹⁵ According to Gobetti, Matteotti had been different from other Italian pacifists who were "cowardly and servile to avoid being singled out, hidden and silent in their units or employment, emulating the nationalists by taking refuge in low profile work". He had never deserted or hidden but had accepted "the logic of his 'subversion', the consequences of his heresy and his unpopularity. Although against the war, he had been a 'generous soldier'".¹⁶ In this passage Gobetti distinguished Matteotti from the "draft dodgers", from those who had kept far from the front without even claiming to be against the war. It was

¹² "L'Adunata Fascista del 4 Novembre Segna il Trionfo della Nostra Forza", in *La Voce del Fascismo Cremonese*, 15 November 1921, 2.

¹³ Stefano CARETTI, "Matteotti", in *I luoghi della memoria. Personaggi e date dell'Italia unita*, ed. by Mario ISNENGHI, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1997, 187-205; Mario ISNENGHI, "Il corpo del duce", in *Gli occhi di Alessandro*, 176-177; Roberta SUZZI VALLI, "Il culto dei martiri fascisti", in *La morte per la patria*, 109.

¹⁴ Mauro CANALI, "Giacomo Matteotti", in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, Rome: Treccani, vol. LXXII, 2008, s.v.

¹⁵ Piero GOBETTI, Matteotti; Roberto FARINACCI, *In difesa di Dumini*, Rome: Libreria dell'800 Editrice, 1945; these two texts were originally published at different times (1924 and 1926). In 1945, after several issues, they were re-published in the same book.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 20.

evidently necessary for Gobetti to rethink Matteotti's experience during the First World War if he wanted to define him as a "combatant", albeit atypical. It was a necessary step in order to consecrate him definitively into the ranks of voluntary martyrs.¹⁷

This argument was completely reversed by Farinacci. In the period following the kidnapping, he often referred to the *neutralist* (i.e. 1914-15 anti-war campaigner) past of Matteotti. Then, as a lawyer, Farinacci defended one of the Matteotti's fascist assassins. In his final requisition at the trial, he described Matteotti as a traitor to the homeland in arms, someone who had sold himself to the enemy and a man incapable of feeling pity for wounded Italians.¹⁸ On this basis, Farinacci overturned Gobetti's reasoning, denying Matteotti the martyr's aura. The man who had not understood the need to risk his life for the homeland in the Great War would certainly not have sacrificed himself for any ideal, be it nationalism or socialism.

"When one talks about Matteotti's struggle with his abductors, when certain newspapers report Matteotti's last words 'No, I am not surrendering, I die willingly for my socialist convictions, my children will glorify my martyrdom, my sacrifice will serve for the redemption of future generations', this is brazen falsehood and nonsense. All the eyewitness accounts of the abduction describe how Matteotti did not resist when he was lead into the car and his words were not 'I die a hero' but 'Help! Help!'"¹⁹

The Matteotti affair was crucial to Farinacci's political career. Due to his intransigence, he was considered one of the fascist *ras* who had contributed to save the Mussolini government. That is why Mussolini named him Secretary of the PNF in February 1925. He held office little more than one year, and was removed immediately after the trial (April 1926). A new phase was starting, and his intransigence became an obstacle to the "normalization" Mussolini was trying to impose.²⁰ Since then, Farinacci was often asked, sometimes told forcefully, not to insist on using a radical rhetoric, and on menacing a part of public opinion through the intimidating memory of the civil war. Nevertheless, the golden age of *squadristo* continued to play a central role in radical fascists' self-representation, a representation in which the Great War was relegated to an increasingly negligible role.

This was the significance of a play written by Farinacci in the month

17 Ibid, 38.

18 Ibid, 57.

19 Ibid, 47-48.

20 Salvatore LUPO, *Il fascismo. La politica in un regime totalitario*, Rome: Donzelli, 2005 (2000), 257.

following the trial of Matteotti's assassins, which was significantly titled *Redenzione* (Redemption).²¹ A quick reading of the plot enables us to understand how, despite the fact that the war was mentioned frequently, it was really nothing more than an echo. The first scene takes place in a socialist co-operative where the person at the counter is presented as a typical example of the cowardice attributed to antifascists. He invites his companion to not even think about reacting against the fascists, as they would respond by burning the co-operative in which he lives. "I don't care about being a hero like those idiots who got themselves killed on the front."²² On hearing these words, one of the people present recalls his son who died in the war and, starting with this mournful memory, criticises the fascists "who continue to glorify the War". Then the main character, Madidini, enters and he is presented as a socialist and particularly as a "deserter". He explains that the son should have done what he had done, that is to desert at the first opportunity, to give himself up to the enemy: "If all our pals had deserted, the War would have finished in a few days and today the fascists would not talk about the same old five hundred thousand who had died. (*Chorus of socialists*: Bravo! Well said!)." ²³ However, after a skirmish with a group of fascists, Madidini begins a gradual conversion to the cause.²⁴ After a dramatic period of life he has changed his mind: when he thinks again about his desertion he sees it as a disgrace to make amends for. He tries to join the fascists but they refuse to let him because they know he is a deserter.²⁵

Absolutely determined he nonetheless follows them and fights in the conquest of Cremona in October 1922. The last scene takes place in a hospital with fascists who were wounded in the victory. Madidini is dying. To console his parents the doctor explains that "if greatness belongs to those who died at the front then it also belongs to those obscure blackshirts who continued to fight for the same cause even in times of peace."²⁶ Then the dying Madidini himself ponders his conversion aloud, resorting to all the symbolism of public grief developed after the war, from the cemetery with the remains of the perished to the mystical bond which unites the dead and the living.²⁷

"When I returned home in the evening and passed the cemetery where soldiers who had died at the front were buried, human shadows seemed to follow me and shout: 'Where were you in

21 Roberto FARINACCI, *Redenzione (episodio cremonese della rivoluzione fascista)*. *Dramma in tre atti*, Cremona: Società editrice Cremona Nuova, 1927.

22 Ibid, 12.

23 Ibid, 13.

24 Ibid, 30.

25 Ibid, 48.

26 Ibid, 61.

27 Giorgios ANTONIOU, "Introduzione", in *Memoria e ricerca, special issue: Commemorando le guerre civili*, January-April 2006, n. 21, 17.

those days when we were shedding blood for the homeland? Where were you when our companions were raising the flag on new frontiers? You abandoned Italy in the hour of danger, how can you look our mothers in the face, our fathers, our children?... Deserter, our enemy's ally... Shame on you! Shame on you! May our curse be on you for the rest of your life'. I was determined, I would arrive, dead or alive, at redemption."²⁸

"That blood that I shed for the fascist revolution and for the homeland," concluded Madidini, "is considered shed in the trenches."²⁹ We can notice that Farinacci used his play to reaffirm how the drama of war, the memory of which defined the identity of at least one generation of Italians,³⁰ should not have been considered an integral part of a national ideology, but only and exclusively as part of the fascist political experience. In doing so, he was not original at all: several fascists had already elaborated an ideological thread in which the sacrifice of Italian soldiers in the trenches was considered redeemed by that of the blackshirts.³¹ Anyway, *Redenzione* was specifically suitable for the political battle fought by Farinacci in that period. He suggested in his play that the only memory of the Great War which deserved legitimacy was that of the squad members and fascists who were then re-evoking 1915-18 to sanctify the civil war of 1920-22 and to radicalise the fascism of 1927.

Narrate the war, join the regime

As we noticed in the first paragraph, on November 4th, 1921, the fascists organised their own commemoration of the war in Cremona, precisely to compete with the ceremony of those who, after supporting intervention in 1915, had not joined Mussolini's movement in 1919. Special guest of the non-fascist commemoration at that time was Carlo Delcroix, who had already become famous for the speeches he had delivered all over Italy since 1918, developing an intense mystique of martyrdom related with his own experience at the front. A great number of his discourses were collected in *I dialoghi con la folla* (Dialogues with the Crowd), a book published in 1922.³² It is remarkable that neither in the parts written in 1922 nor in the speeches of the previous years did Delcroix make any reference to fascism. He returns to this subject in *Guerra di popolo* (War of

the People, 1923),³³ *Il sacrificio della parola* (The Sacrifice of the Word, 1925)³⁴ and *Sette santi senza candele* (Seven Saints without Candles, 1925).³⁵ Again, his relationship with Mussolini was still undefined, and fascism was not mentioned in these speeches. The political frame changed dramatically in 1924 when he became a member of parliament with the National Bloc which comprised the Fascist party and was led by Benito Mussolini. Consequently Delcroix had to clearly define his attitude towards Fascism, so that at the end of the year he decided to support the government.³⁶ In his gradual approach to fascism, we can focus on a process made up of "unintended consequences."³⁷ Although the wide range of Delcroix's writings was published in order to increase the political weight of Italian veterans, and especially disabled veterans, he ended up using the memory of the war to legitimate the regime and his own decision to support it. The decisive step was taken by Delcroix in 1928 with the publication of his book on Mussolini *Un uomo e un popolo* (A Man and a People). A comparison with his first books is at this point necessary. Both in *Guerra di popolo* and *I dialoghi con la folla* he had mentioned the most famous Italian soldiers who had died on the front.³⁸ In those two books these fallen soldiers had not been considered precursors to Mussolini's movement, but "apolitical" Italians who had died for their homeland. The first part of *Un uomo e un popolo* again included heroic descriptions of several Italian soldiers killed by Austrians.³⁹ The difference with the previous books is that they were now specifically placed in relation to the aftermath of fascism and, going beyond mere descriptions of the life of a few "martyrs", he talked about the role that their death had in the making of Mussolini's moral and political maturity.⁴⁰ In this biography of Mussolini Delcroix also placed strong emphasis on the war years, as though with the "redemption" of Mussolini at the front a dead homeland was resurrected under the banner of fascism.⁴¹ Obviously, *Un uomo e un popolo* can also be considered a *captatio benevolentiae* for the most powerful man in Italy. Nevertheless, it is also possible that by 1928 Delcroix had elaborated this new narrative approach to meet the tastes of a regime which he identified with. In any case it is interesting to note that his argument started with a re-evocation of the front.

Delcroix drew extensively from the symbology of religious martyrdom. In

33 Carlo DELCROIX, *Guerra di popolo*, Florence: Vallecchi, 1923.

34 Carlo DELCROIX, *Il sacrificio della parola*, Florence: Vallecchi, 1923.

35 Carlo DELCROIX, *Sette santi senza candele*, Florence: Vallecchi, 1925.

36 VITTORIA, "Carlo Delcroix".

37 Jay WINTER-Emmanuel SIVAN, "Setting the framework", in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. By Jay WINTER-Emmanuel SIVAN, CAMBRIDGE: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 30.

38 DELCROIX, *I Dialoghi con la folla*, 33, 34, 85, 101, 136.

39 Carlo DELCROIX, *Un uomo e un popolo*, Florence: Vallecchi, 87-96 and 193.

40 Ibid, 177.

41 Ibid. See also, Luisa PASSERINI, *Mussolini immaginario. Storia di una biografia (1915-1939)*, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1991, 81-85; Luisa PASSERINI, "Mussolini", in *I luoghi della memoria. Personaggi e date dell'Italia unita*, ed. by Mario ISNENGI, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1997, 165-185.

28 FARINACCI, *Redenzione*, 67.

29 Ibid, 69.

30 Giovanni SABBATUCCI, "Le generazioni della guerra", in *Parole Chiave*, 1998, n. 16, 115-127.

31 GENTILE, *Il culto del littorio*, 42.

32 Carlo DELCROIX, *I dialoghi con la folla*, Florence: Vallecchi, 1922, passim.

his book, just to give an example, the descriptions of mothers/madonnas crying for their sons' suffering at the front occurred frequently, as well as wounded soldiers depicted as the dying Christ of Catholic iconography.⁴² They were narrative modules that were already well known in the Italian nationalism of the 19th century⁴³ and revitalised all over Europe after the World War.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, Delcroix was able to adapt that tradition to the specific context of Fascist Italy. Above all, the bard of patriotic sacrifice had to justify the civil war of 1920-1922, a struggle that had caused the death of about 3000 Italians. He explained it by going back to the symbolism that had already been used by squad members such as Farinacci. Obviously, Delcroix was conscious that some of the former interventionists, volunteers and war veterans had fought in the anti-fascist squads in 1921 after exposing themselves to death at the hands of the Austrians in the long winter of 1917-18. Nevertheless, he himself emphasised continuity between the Italian soldiers who had fought at the front and the fascist squads, whose actions was described in his book as a clear continuation of the "bellicose impetus" accrued at the front, almost a spiritual continuation of May 24th, 1915.⁴⁵ In the late 1920s, Farinacci minimized the memory of the Great War by considering it a necessary anticipation of the civil war. At the same time, Delcroix almost denied the cruelty of the latter by describing it as a natural continuation of the former. The experience of war and its narration was the instrument he used to find his place in fascist ideology.

Period of commemorations

The strategy Delcroix chose was successful and in the second half of the 1920s, still acting as president of the ANMIG, he became an important figure during commemorations of the Great War. Let us now look at the events that took place in Rome on November 4th, 1928. Among the main initiatives of the day was the inauguration of a House of Maimed Veterans and Delcroix led the group of guests of honour. In the symbolism of the day, the maimed figure of Delcroix,

42 DELCROIX, *Un Uomo e un popolo*, 17, 80, 81, 143, 411-412.

43 Alberto Mario BANTI, *La nazione del risorgimento. Parentela, santità e onore alle origini dell'Italia unita*, Turin: Einaudi, 123 ff.; Alberto Mario BANTI, Paul GINSBORG, "Per una nuova storia del risorgimento", in *Storia d'Italia. Annali, XXII, Il risorgimento*, ed. by Alberto Mario BANTI-Paul GINSBORG, Turin: Einaudi, 2007, XVIII-XIV.

44 JANZ, KLINKHAMMER, *La morte per la patria in Italia. Un percorso secolare*, XV; George L. MOSSE, *Le guerre mondiali. Dalla tragedia al mito dei caduti*, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1998 (Fallen Soldiers. Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 84; SUZZI VALLI, *Il culto dei martiri fascisti*, 104; Jay WINTER, *Il lutto e la memoria. La grande guerra nella storia culturale europea*, Laterza: Rome-Bari, 1998 (Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European Cultural History [1995]), 130-132.

45 DELCROIX, *Un uomo e un popolo*, 224-245.

whose body was direct testimony of the Great War, acted as a link between the King and the Duce. Delcroix explicitly laid claim to this interconnecting role in his speech that day. His words were addressed exclusively to the king. With a reference to 1915-18, he thanked him for "having brought the people to suffer and die", but also reminded him of the foundation of Fascism that, since 1919, had prevented the devaluation of victory. Delcroix, who never mentioned Mussolini or Fascism in his books, even as late as 1925, concluded his celebratory speech of November 4th, 1928 by reminding the King and the public that "today we can stand together to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the battle and the sixth anniversary of the March."⁴⁶ Exactly one year later, attending the inauguration of sculptures of Mussolini and Vittorio Emanuele III at the House of the Maimed,⁴⁷ Delcroix emphasized his ability to fit into the symbolic duality Duce/King that characterized these types of fascist rituals.⁴⁸

From different points of view, Delcroix was at the centre of a few prominent and symbolic issues regarding the liturgy of the regime. The prose which he had used with insistence in his descriptions of Mussolini's wounded forehead seemed to glorify the entrance of the Duce, presented by "Il Popolo d'Italia" as "a maimed veteran" at the seventh national congress of war invalids and maimed veterans. The congress met on November 4th, 1929, and thus its work was considered an integral part of the commemorations of that year. It was also suitable to the rhetoric that the regime aimed at the young. "Ours," he proclaimed on November 4th, "is an array whose ranks are closed so that at least until next time there will be no more victims, but this should not prevent us from making contact with the younger generation."⁴⁹ In this phase, the desired contact between the generations did not draw strength from the past, but rather turned to the future. Significantly, Delcroix returned to the subject more clearly on May 24th, both because the anniversary of the nation's entrance into war was more suited to the promise of future wars and because it accompanied the ritual of the *Leva fascista* ("Fascist recruitment"), when the components of the youth organizations of the regime were promoted to a higher rank.⁵⁰ Delcroix contributed to transforming the commemoration of this past event into a celebration that could give a vision of the future.⁵¹ At the meeting

46 *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 6 November 1928, 1-2.

47 *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 5 November 1929, 1.

48 RIDOLFI, *Le feste nazionali*, 83.

49 *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 5 November 1929, 1.

50 Renzo DE FELICE, *Mussolini il duce. Gli anni del consenso*, Turin: Einaudi, 1974, 228 ff.; Tracy H. KOON, *Believe, Obey, Fight. Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Italy, 1922-1943*, Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1985, 106-107; see also Daniella GAGLIANI, "Giovinezza e generazioni nel fascismo italiano: dalle origini alla Rsi", in *Parole Chiave*, 1998, n. 16, 129-158; Bruno WANROOIJ, "The Rise and Fall of Italian Fascism as a Generational Revolt", in *Journal of contemporary history*, July 1987, XXII, n. 3, 407-408.

51 Mabel BEREZIN, *Making the Fascist Self. The Political Culture of Interwar Italy*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997, 36-37 and 108.

of May 24th, 1931, for example, the need was felt to reassure young people that future wars would reward them for their non-participation due to their young age, in the World War that ended in 1918:

“You who did not arrive in time to experience the big day, you should not be jealous of our labours, for the future is stronger than the past, because the hope of participating in the battles to come is worth the remembrance of having done your duty and the joy of having been victorious. You who have not experienced war can and must relive it.”⁵²

In the transition between the late Twenties and the early Thirties, at the height of the regime, Delcroix was indeed one of the greatest interpreters of the official memory of the war. He participated in the most important commemorations of anniversaries, his articles on the subject were published by the leading national newspapers and even the Duce's masters of ceremony recognised that he occupied a role that could no longer be relegated to pro-fascist reductionism. In 1932, on the occasion of important celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome, the fascist daily news “Il Popolo d'Italia” devoted ample space to Delcroix, who was considered living testimony of the link between the suffering endured at the front and the stabilisation of the now ten-year-old regime.⁵³

In the same period, Farinacci's participation in war-related anniversary commemorations was inversely proportional to that of Delcroix. In perpetual conflict with the Duce and at the margins of fascist life, Farinacci used the intransigence of his characterisations as his main weapon.⁵⁴ Acknowledged leader of fascist radicalism, he insisted constantly on underplaying the memory of the war in the name of an equally constant exaltation of *squadristo*, the real legitimising myth of “his” Fascism. Of course, each May 24th and November 4th, “Il Regime Fascista” – the newspaper he founded – ran editorials on the front page that were perfectly in line with the liturgy of the regime.⁵⁵ At a local level, however, things happened in a different way. Let us now retrace the commemorations of May 24th and November 4th that were held in Cremona, where Farinacci continued to exert an enormous influence. In many cases, between 1926 and 1935, Farinacci was not present at the events or else stayed on the sidelines, and the chronicles of the day only mention his name as one of the authorities present.⁵⁶ A newspaper account

52 “L'appassionata orazione di Carlo Delcroix”, in *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 26 May 1931, 1-2.

53 “Fino alla Vittoria”, in *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 28 October 1932, 13.

54 Di FIGLIA, *Farinacci*, 135.

55 “XXIV Maggio”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 24 May 1929, 1.

56 “L'austera celebrazione dell'XI anniversario dell'entrata in guerra”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 26.5.1926, 4; “L'omaggio della cittadinanza cremonese ai gloriosi caduti della grande guerra”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 5 November 1926, 4; “La giornata coloniale celebrata solennemente”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 25 May 1928, 4; “La

of what happened on November 4th, 1929 stands out in that, alongside a rather bare chronicle of the events programmed for the anniversary of the armistice, we find news of Farinacci's participation, that same day, in an event that was entirely unrelated to the national commemoration: the “festival of savings sponsored by the Cassa di Risparmio delle provincie lombarde (Savings Bank of the Lombardy provinces).”⁵⁷

On those rare occasions where he played a significant role in ceremonies, he always delivered speeches that reaffirmed the central role of the civil war in the collective memory of Fascism. Let's focus on what seems to me are the two most significant moments of his participation in such rituals between 1926 and 1935, and observe specifically what happened in May 1927 and on November 4th, 1930. In 1927, the anniversary of the intervention was celebrated in Cremona on Sunday, May 29th, on the occasion of the visit of Prince Umberto, the son of the King. Given the high rank of the guest, Farinacci could not refrain from participating nor from giving a speech. In his discourse he embarked on a historical overview which spanned the period from the Risorgimento to 1918. No mention was made whatsoever of interventionism and war, except for a brief reference to the victory. The merits of *squadristo*, however, were central in his address:

“Cremona therefore could not remain an indifferent and passive spectator to the struggle that raged in Italy after the auspicious day of Vittorio Veneto [...] Cremonese Fascism rose up and defeated red Bolshevism and white Bolshevism, pursuing in a tremendous struggle two supreme objectives: the establishment of social order and the safety of the glorious Savoy monarchy.”⁵⁸

This is no reinterpretation of the symbolic dualism King/Duce, to be considered opposed to that of Delcroix. In this case, the emphasis was not so much on Mussolini as it was on Fascism and, even more so, on *squadristo*. The same idea was reiterated on November 4th, 1930, with words even more closely linked to the contemporary political struggle. Augusto Turati, his arch enemy, had recently been replaced at the helm of the PNF by Giovanni Giuriati. Blatantly violating the ritual of the ceremony, Farinacci explicitly saluted Giuriati and expressed

giornata sacra alla storia d'Italia”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 5 November 1931, 7; “La celebrazione del XVII annuale dell'entrata in guerra”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 25 May 1932, 7; “La solenne, commossa celebrazione cremonese”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 5 November 1932, 7; “La celebrazione del XVIII annuale dell'entrata in guerra”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 25 May 1933, 7; “Solenni riti rievocati nel XV annuale della vittoria”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 5 November 1933, 7; “Le giovani camicie nere della Rivoluzione inneggiano al duce”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 25 May 1934, 7; “La gioventù cremonese celebra la IX leva fascista”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 25 May 1935, 6.

57 “La giornata del risparmio a Cremona”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 5 November 1929, 7.

58 “Cremona ha accolto trionfalmente il principe Umberto simbolo vivo della patria rinnovata”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 31 May 1927, 1.

his certainty that the new secretary would fight against the “arrivistes” and the “profiteers”, emphasizing the value of the few men who had been “fascists of the first hour”, which meant the squad members. It was an argumentation typical of the factional struggle between the followers of Farinacci and Turati. The theme of war was forced to take a back seat to the efforts to legitimise the intransigent current: “Only a few of us in ’15 and in ’19 found ourselves up against forty million Italians. And only a few of us will nevertheless be enough in the year IX to lead the people who trustfully follow the work of Mussolini and Fascism.”⁵⁹ This approach was taken by Fascism in the city and it characterised the commemorations in Cremona for a long time. Often, in the chronicles of the parades organized for May 24th or November 4th, “Il Regime Fascista” gave emphasis to how the crowd paid tribute not only to those who had fallen in war, but also to “fascist martyrs” who had died in the civil war, and who were now called, in a language borrowed from the front,⁶⁰ those “who fell for the Revolution.”⁶¹

In Farinacci’s case, in short, the myth of the Great War was the reflection of the deep gulf that separated the Cremona *ras* from Mussolini. Yet, just as Delcroix managed to draw strength from that myth to find a role in the totalitarian utopia of Fascism, in the second half of the Thirties Farinacci himself developed a new liturgy in connection with the Great War that would facilitate his return to an active role in the politics of the regime.

New myths for old rituals

In the books published between 1927 and 1935, Farinacci avoided talking about the war almost entirely. Even in those books that contained articles and speeches of the previous period, he emphasized his role as a guard of the revolution. Frequently used expressions such as “our Dead”,⁶² indicated only the fascists killed in the civil war, and even in speeches given at the inauguration of monuments to those who had died in the World War, his references were to the fascists who died in 1921-22.⁶³ The sole exception was *Da Vittorio Veneto a Piazza San Sepolcro*, a booklet published in 1933, in which he spoke only of what happened between the victory of the Italian army at Vittorio Veneto (1918) and the

59 “Il discorso dell’on. Farinacci”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 5 November 1930, 1-2.

60 JANZ, “Grande guerra, memoria della”.

61 “Il decimo annuale della vittoria”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 6 November 1928, 5; “L’austera celebrazione della vittoria”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 5 November 1929, 7; “Omaggio alla memoria dei caduti nell’anniversario dell’entrata in guerra”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 27 May 1930, 7; “La celebrazione del XVIII annuale dell’entrata in guerra”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 25 May 1933, 7; “Combattenti e camice nere festeggiano l’annuale della vittoria”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 5 November 1934, 7.

62 Roberto FARINACCI, “Il VI Congresso Provinciale cremonese”, in Roberto FARINACCI, *Un Periodo Aureo del Partito Nazionale Fascista*, Foligno: Campitelli, 1927, 7-20.

63 Roberto FARINACCI, “Contro i Delinquenti Politici”, in FARINACCI, *Un periodo aureo*, 75-83.

birth of Fascism. In the book, the *ras* of Cremona abandoned lemmas typical of an intransigent discourse on the Great War and adopted those of an official liturgy. The enemies of Fascism were presented here not as red or white Bolsheviks, but as the successors of neutralism,⁶⁴ opposed to the “interventionist old guard” represented by Fascism.⁶⁵ The text constitutes a revival of the theme of Mussolini as a fighter,⁶⁶ that is to say, Mussolini in the years of the intervention and the war.⁶⁷ The “martyrs” were no longer the *squadristi* who had died in 1920-22, but those who had fallen in the Great War. As a result, “the fascist intolerance,” which in 1927 would be called intransigence, was presented here not as an admonition of those who had died in the civil war, but as a “command given by the dead,” signifying here those at the front.⁶⁸ The book was published “under the auspices of the PNF” and in fact marked the beginning of a political season that saw Farinacci again at the forefront. We can now jump to 1937, when his *Storia della Rivoluzione Fascista* began with a long preamble on World War I and extended the chronological limits of the “revolution” to the period 1914-1922.⁶⁹ This decision was clearly a result of the political context in which the book was located. This is demonstrated by Farinacci’s reflections on the link between the peace of Versailles and the international situation in 1937: “Would the great German people,” he wrote, “have resigned themselves to slavery?” Or again: “Could powerful Japan ever deny its ambition, every day more viable and threatening, of supremacy over the peoples of Asia and the expulsion of all Europeans from Asia and Australia?”⁷⁰ This use of the theme of the Great War in support of the new phase of fascist foreign policy, which was fully supported by Farinacci, is evident in his new way of celebrating the dates of May 24th and November 4th. In 1935, Italy celebrated the anniversary of the armistice a few weeks after going to war for the conquest of Ethiopia, condemned by the League of Nations, and especially by Britain. For the first time, “Il Regime Fascista” devoted an editorial to the anniversary written by Farinacci himself. It proposed an expedient argument that Farinacci would use widely in subsequent years.⁷¹ The allies of the past, it read, were demonstrating their ungratefulness by hindering the Ethiopian campaign so as “to starve our women and children.” For this reason, the connection between the memory of the past war and that of a future conflict which the *ras* looked forward to hopefully had become clear: “This experience will make us wiser. We will face the future

64 Roberto FARINACCI, *Da Vittorio Veneto a Piazza San Sepolcro*, Milan: Mondadori, 1933, 23.

65 Ibid, 62.

66 Ibid, 18.

67 Ibid, 70.

68 Ibid, 79.

69 Roberto FARINACCI, *Storia della rivoluzione fascista*, Cremona: Società editrice cremona nuova, 1937, I, II 1919, 71.

70 Ibid, 80-81.

71 Roberto FARINACCI, “Introduzione”, in Maurizio CLAREMORIS, *Noi e la Francia*, Cremona: Società editrice Cremona Nuova, 1939, 5.

as we wait for history to give vent to our hatred and our revenge. Only with these intentions can we today celebrate our victory and honour our fallen.”⁷²

From that moment on, May 24th and November 4th became occasions to which Farinacci gave great importance. Already in 1937 the *ras* was at the centre of the commemorations in Cremona. He inaugurated schools and hospitals, and with a carefully studied symbolism, he celebrated the first anniversary of the victory after the birth of the Italian Empire in Africa, by going to Robecco d’Oglio, a small town where the first *fascio di combattimento* in the Cremona province was founded in 1919. In his speech, he pushed this event back to 1914, actualised it in the light of the colonial war that had just ended and projected it towards an undefined future war.⁷³

“The people of Robecco were the first, in 1914, to welcome the sacred interventionist mission and rise up to demand intervention; in 1919 they rose up again to ask that the victory not be diminished in value; in 1922 they gave their valuable contribution to the triumph of the revolution. [...] And the armies of legionaries who stand out among the amassed crowd are the living proof that the campaign for the conquest of the Empire has found Robecco d’Oglio in the front lines [...] so that just like yesterday, everyone will be ready tomorrow, too, to donate their efforts to the advancement of the empire and to rise up in arms if someone dares to lack the respect that even beyond our borders must be paid to Italy and the Duce”.

On the following May 24th, reflecting the new political fortunes of the *ras* – and therefore the local community – the Secretary of the PNF, Achille Starace, arrived in Cremona. In his speech, Farinacci did not even mention those who had died in the period 1915-18, but only those of the war in Ethiopia.⁷⁴ These references were essential to finding a solution to a significant ideological short circuit. As was the case at the national level, young people were at the centre of the commemorations in Cremona on May. In Farinacci’s case, this appeal to the younger generation also represented a contradiction. “As the so called *intransigenti* (hardliners) based their plans for the future of fascist society on the hierarchy that had been established during the revolutionary period, they were unable to convince the young fascist who had not participated in this action.”⁷⁵ In the rituals linked to the Great War, however, this theoretical impasse dissolved in the search for new founding myths.

72 “4 novembre”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 4 November 1935, 1. See also “Dal manipolo all’Impero”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 24 May 1936, 1; and “IV novembre”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 4 November 1936, 1.

73 “Gagliardetti, scuole, ospedali inaugurati dall’on. Farinacci”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 5 November 1936, 6.

74 “Cremona accoglie il segretario del partito”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 25 May 1937, 1-2.

75 WANROOIJ, “The Rise and Fall of Italian Fascism as a Generational Revolt”, 407-408.

Mussolini impeded at every turn the creation of a martyrology of the fallen in the war against the Negus.⁷⁶ The expedition in Africa and the one in Spain, however, represented a new legitimising myth for the radical fascists. These were Italian and fascist conflicts desired by the regime and openly sponsored both by the intransigent wing and by Farinacci himself. In his speeches, as in the rites of Cremona, interventionism and the civil war were now treated as similar objects,⁷⁷ but they belonged to a past that was increasingly overwhelmed by a certain tension in regard to the wars of the Thirties. On November 4th, 1938, for example, in Cremona, the procession of former *squadristi* was led by the “veterans of Africa and of Spain,” who, significantly, were “highly acclaimed”⁷⁸ there on the twentieth anniversary of the armistice of 1918.

Layers of discourse

Delcroix doubtlessly welcomed the creation of the Empire with enthusiasm. The new fascist wars, however, broke its set of symbols, which had been assembled around the myth of the First World War. Testimony to this is perhaps the difficulty the Empire had in playing an active part in the evocative binomial King/Duce. At a few of the commemorations of the Great War in which he spoke in the presence of Mussolini, Delcroix did not even mention the monarch, as he did not quote Mussolini at rituals in which he participated where the King was present.⁷⁹ He had brilliantly managed to hold these two semantic lemmas together within a single discourse on the past war. He had difficulty reconciling them when speaking about the present wars, and even more so about those of the future. In fact, even the call to young people became more and more like a vindication of the blood that had been shed than an omen for the sacrifices of tomorrow: “Unique and inalienably ours,” he told the *Leva fascista* on May 24th, 1936, “was the spilled blood from which this youth germinated, and which every year surges anew.” In a comparison with Farinacci it was possible to see, in short, the difference between a fascist hierarchy that reinterpreted the war as part of a totalitarian project and a former fighter who was very close to the regime, and for years within its rhetoric, but one who was basically extraneous to its political language. This inability to bend the symbolic legacy of the Great War to the needs of the regime made it impossible to accept the alliance with Germany and perhaps the very idea of a war to be fought not in the name of Italy but in the name of the new fascist order.⁸⁰ Indeed it was on

76 Nicola LABANCA, “Morire per l’Impero. Su cifre e parole per i caduti italiani di una guerra coloniale fascista”, in *La morte per la patria*, 124.

77 “Guerra o rivoluzione”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 24 May 1938, 1.

78 “La solenne celebrazione della ricorrenza del IV Novembre”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 5 November 1938, 7.

79 *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 5 November 1937, 1.

80 Emilio GENTILE, *La grande Italia. Il mito della nazione nel XX secolo*, Rome-Bari, Laterza 2011. See also ISNENGI, “La grande guerra”, 306-307.

this level that a clash with the duce occurred. On November 11th, 1939, just after the outbreak of the Second World War and with Fascist Italy still neutral, Delcroix travelled to Udine to preside over a meeting of maimed veterans. The newspaper of the local fascist federation reported the events of the day and also the speech that he delivered in public, in which he affirmed the similarity between the spirit of the war and the spirit of the revolution. The chronicle also spoke of a “meeting open only to [their] association’s directorate,” about which no details were given.⁸¹ In the following days, Mussolini, obviously informed by someone about the content of what had been said by Delcroix at that private meeting, complained. His letter was not found so it is impossible to know exactly what he considered objectionable. But we can base our ideas on the response of Delcroix. “I did not say,” he wrote to the head of the government, “that Germany is our natural enemy, because I do not think it is so.” He thought, however, that foreigners were “all enemies” and that, in any case, fascism – at that time still neutral – did not want war. That same war, he added, might lead to fascist supremacy because Italy would watch, from the outside, the other powers destroy each other.⁸² In this way he revealed his unbridgeable distance from that aesthetic of the war that was now part and parcel of the “fascist self”.⁸³

The reorganization of the national holidays, which began in July 1941 and which in practical terms voided the date November 4th of the meaning that it had had until then,⁸⁴ did not harm the rituality of Farinacci’s initiatives in the least. Already in 1940, a rather dull demonstration had been held in Cremona⁸⁵ and there is no evidence of any commemoration the following year. Besides, Farinacci was already well versed in the warmongering aesthetics of the latest period of Fascism. He remained entangled therein until his death, at the hands of partisans, as the war was ending. With the devaluation of November 4th, Delcroix was deprived of his main channel of access to fascist mysticism. We find him once again on November 4th, 1941 in Milan, while visiting a centre for the rehabilitation of maimed veterans. However, there was no longer any talk of those maimed in the Great War, but only of those who began to arrive from the front lines where the Italian troops were engaged.⁸⁶ The core of the ceremony was obviously neither a parade nor an assembly, but the marriage of a soldier who had just lost his eyesight on the Greek front. As far as I know, it was the last time that “Il Popolo d’Italia” reported any of Delcroix’s activities on November 4th.

The maimed veteran Delcroix did not die in the conflict and was active

81 “Il vibrante rapporto dei mutilati presieduto da Carlo Delcroix”, in *Il Popolo del Friuli*, 14 November 1939, 3.

82 Delcroix to Mussolini, 29 November 1939, in Archivio centrale dello stato (Italy – Rome), Segreteria particolare del duce, Carteggio riservato, 62.

83 BEREZIN, *Making the fascist self*, 7.

84 RIDOLFI, *Le feste nazionali*, 165.

85 “Austera celebrazione”, in *Il Regime Fascista*, 4 November 1940, 5.

86 JANZ, KLINKHAMMER, *La morte per la patria in Italia. Un percorso secolare*, XVI-XVII.

in politics, with the National Monarchic Party, in Republican Italy.⁸⁷ I think valid research could be derived from an analysis of the ways in which, after 1945, he revised the memory of the Great War and the way in which these re-elaborations had led him to adhere to the fascist liturgies. “If the king was great in the fall of 1917,” he would say in 1949, “when, on behalf of every soldier, he vowed to strike back, he was no less great in the summer of 1943, when he assumed on behalf of an entire people the disgrace of surrender.”⁸⁸ It was, we should note, a rhetoric approach that had already been advanced in the monarchist camp in September 1943, when the history of the First World War had been taken as example to legitimise the armistice that had just been signed with the Allies.⁸⁹ In 1949, however, the monarchy had already fallen and the memory of what had happened between July 25th and September 8th, 1943 was the main obstacle to a revision of the recent past that could be shared by neo-fascists and royalists alike. We should seek to understand whether and how much Delcroix’s close attention to the Great War was also functional to a contemporary political strategy and was not merely the revival of a faded image of himself.

87 VITTORIA, “Carlo Delcroix”.

88 Carlo DELCROIX, “La tragedia del Re. Discorso pronunciato al politeama di Palermo per il secondo anniversario della morte di Vittorio Emanuele III a iniziativa del comitato regionale siciliano dell’unione monarchica”, in *Quando c’era il re*, Milan: Rizzoli, 1959, 30.

89 Dino GRANDI, *25 luglio: quarant’anni dopo*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1983, 292; Alberto DE STEFANI, *Gran consiglio, ultima seduta. 24-25 luglio 1943*, Florence: Le Lettere, 2013, 90-91; MONDINI, SCHWARZ, *Dalla guerra alla pace*, 120.

SAŽETAK

SLIJEPI BARD I VJEČNI VOĐA, SJEĆANJA O RATU I SAMO-PREDSTAVLJANJIMA U FAŠISTIČKOJ ITALIJI

Matteo DI FIGLIA

Cilj ovog rada jest istraživanje dva različita i suprotstavljena sjećanja na Prvi svjetski rat, koja su se razvila u fašističkoj Italiji. Posebice, pokušat će se staviti fokus na slučajeve Carla Delcroixa i Roberta Farinaccia. Obojica su rođena 1890-ih godina i sudjelovali su u ratu, tijekom kojeg je Delcroix teško osakaćen. Uz poneke osobine koje su im zajedničke, mnoge razlike dijelile su njihove političke živote. Farinacci je uskoro pristupio fašističkom pokretu, postajući jedan od vođa radikalnog desničarskog krila i, u drugoj polovici 1930., podržavao je savez s nacističkom Njemačkom. Delcroix, koji je vodio jedno od najvažnijih udruženja veterana, definirao se u javnoj debati uglavnom kao vojni invalid te je na taj način uspio pronaći svoje mjesto u fašističkoj liturgiji.

Kao što ćemo nastojati pokazati, razlike i sličnosti bacale su svjetlo na to kako su oni često promišljali o Prvom svjetskom ratu. Putem analize njihovih knjiga, njihovih javnih govora i njihovog sudjelovanja u komemoracijama, ovaj rad pokušava opisati poveznice između sjećanja na rat i političkih potreba. Doista, ne samo da je bilo mnogo različitosti između Farinaccijeva sjećanja i onog Delcroixa, već se i način, na koji su oni pojedinačno ostvarili sjećanja na događaje, mijenja u skladu s njihovom vezom s režimom i Mussolinijem. Dakle, njihov odnos spram službenih ceremonija jest postala zanimljiva perspektiva kroz koju se može proučavati njihova interakcija s političkim okvirom.