

# The reception of the Spanish Civil War in the Italian elementary school during fascism (1936-1943)\*

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**ABSTRACT:** This article attempts to trace the presence and the repercussion of the Spanish civil war in Italian grade schools during the final years of fascism. Beginning with the Italian intervention in the war in 1936, we continue through 1943, when Mussolini ceases to preside the Council of Ministers. In our study we examine textbooks, school notebook covers, children's literature and children's press. Three categories of analysis are used: first, the understanding of war as a struggle of identities and values; secondly, the understanding of war as a confrontation of weapons; and finally, we delve into the emotional, social and patrimonial consequences of the war.

**EET/TEE KEYWORDS:** History of school; National identity; Spanish Civil War; Fascism; Francoism; Spain; Italy; XX<sup>th</sup> Century.

## *Introduction*

Europe was a battle ground for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The continent witnessed two kinds of wars: those fought in various countries, with

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multiple states and sides, such as was the case with the two world wars (from 1914-1918 and 1939-1945, respectively); and those that, notwithstanding the participation of other powers, were fought within a single country, as was the case of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).

Spain's case was especially dramatic. A civil war implies the fracture of a country, a fight between two sides, two national models, two opposing conceptions, in this instance, of what Spain was – or what it was supposed to be. The conflict originated when the general Francisco Franco revolted against the Second Republic, a government that had been voted in democratically in the municipal elections of 12 April, 1931. This was an especially turbulent time in Spanish history, when tensions and changes fueled a complex democratic trajectory in which governments of different ideologies were subjected to myriad internal and external pressures.

The influence and determination of fascist Italy's intervention in Spain during this period deserves special scrutiny, from its half-hearted support of the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera to various initiatives aimed at liquidating the Second Republic to its direct – and in the eyes of some historians, decisive – involvement in the *Guerra di Spagna*, that is, the civil war. Comprehending the course of Spanish politics in the twenty-year span between the dictatorships of Primo de Rivera and Francisco Franco requires us to adopt an international or transnational perspective, especially given the copious literature that approaches the issue from an exclusively nationalist viewpoint. In this sense, Italy and Mussolini were key factors in understanding historical developments in Spain.

The situation was especially harsh in schools. During the war many children were moved to cities and areas that were considered safe, far from the bombing going on near the fronts. The consequences of the war on education have been studied in depth from the perspective of educational historiography in Spain. What we propose is an approach to these events from a perspective that goes beyond the national borders. We believe that by studying the international and transnational dimensions of these historical developments – along with the way they were reflected in curricular contents and their impact on other countries – we can reach a better understanding of these events from the distance afforded by time and place.

With this premise, our study attempts to analyze the way that the Spanish Civil War was presented and received in Italian elementary schools from 1936, when the war broke out, through 1943, when Mussolini ceased presiding the Italian Council of Ministers. To this end, our study resorts to the analysis of school textbooks, notebook covers and children's press and literature<sup>1</sup>. This

<sup>1</sup> The study of the reception in Italy of the Spanish Civil War has been researched above all in the realm of the press and literature. (A.J. Marqués Salgado, *La Guerra Civil española en la literatura italiana: desde el final del conflicto hasta nuestros días*, «Archivium. Revista de la Facultad de Filología», n. 60, 2010, pp. 199-212; Id., *Los brigadistas italianos en la guerra civil española. Un puente entre la realidad y la ficción*, in M.J. Calvo, F. Cartoni (edd.), *El tema del viaje: un*

will help us to achieve a panoramic vision of the significance in Italy of an event that was presented as a conflict of identity, inexorably tied to the legitimization of a fascist dictatorship at a time of profound tensions and with the looming threat of World War II.

With a basis in the historical-educational method, we use as our principal source the school textbooks published in Italy in the time period indicated above. As a complementary source – and one which serves to triangulate the information obtained from the textbooks – we have also analyzed notebook covers as well as the children's press and literature.

In studying these sources we have as a rule applied the technique of content analysis. This technique relies on the creation of content units or categories, a practice we have carried out exhaustively with this material<sup>2</sup>. For the study described here we have three categories of study: the war as a struggle of identities; the war as a military struggle; and the war as a barbarism, focused on the emotional, social and cultural consequences. As a complement to the analysis we have included the study of the images and illustrations included in the same sources, placing an emphasis on the context and the dialogue established between the image and the accompanying text. Our study therefore includes an iconographic analysis, as developed comprehensively by authors such as Peter Burke or Edwin Panofsky<sup>3</sup>.

*recorrido por la lengua y la literatura italianas*, Cuenca, Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2010, pp. 723-737; M. Matly, *L'image de la Guerre civile espagnole dans la bande dessinée entre 1936 et 1975. Le bande dessinée étrangère et le temps du franquisme*, «Cahiers de civilisation espagnole contemporaine», n. 15, 2015, <<https://doi.org/10.4000/ccec.5922>>).

<sup>2</sup> The following studies, carried out in Spain and in Italy, serve as references: E. Castillejo, *Mito, legitimación y violencia simbólica en los manuales escolares de historia del franquismo*, Madrid, UNED, 2001; K. Mahamud, *Adoctrinamiento emocional y socialización política en el primer franquismo (1939-1959). Emociones y sentimientos en los manuales escolares de enseñanza primaria*, Doctoral Thesis, Department of History of Education and Comparative Education (Supervisor: Manuel de Puelles Benítez), Madrid, UNED, 2012; R. Sani, *Education, School and cultural processes in contemporary Italy*, Macerata, eum, 2018; R. Sani, A. Ascenzi, *Il libro per la scuola tra idealismo e fascismo. L'opera della Commissione centrale per l'esame dei libri di testo da Giuseppe Lombardo Radice ad Alessandro Melchiori (1923-1928)*, Milan, Vita e Pensiero, 2005; C. Betti, G. Chiosso, *Il libro per la scuola tra Sette e Ottocento*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2000; R. Sani, «Discovering the best and most ignored Italy». *The regional Almanacs for the primary school introduced by the Gentile Reform and the use of the cultural and natural heritage for the promotion of a national identity and a sense of citizenship*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. 12, n. 1, 2017, pp. 85-113; L. Pomante, «Italy, the land of beauty and art». *The Italian landscape and cultural heritage in the books and the primary school textbooks from the Fascist period to the II postwar period. Between national identity and sense of citizenship*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. 12, n. 1, 2017, pp. 157-211; D. Caroli, *L'insegnamento della storia antica e medioevale nelle scuole fasciste e sovietiche fra le due guerre mondiali: manuali di scuola elementare a confronto*, «Historia y Memoria de la Educación», n. 2, 2015, pp. 321-352.

<sup>3</sup> P. Burke, *Visto y no visto. El uso de la imagen como documento histórico*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2001; E. Panofsky, *Estudios sobre iconología*, Madrid, Alianza, 2012.

Regarding the sources used here, the majority were consulted in the *Centro di documentazione e ricerca sulla storia del libro scolastico e della letteratura per l'infanzia* (CESCO) at the University of Macerata during 2018 and 2019.

### 1. *Fascist Italy arrives in Spain. The intervention of Mussolini in the civil war*

The arrival of Italian troops in Spain, coinciding with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, was remarkably premature. Mussolini's first soldiers, grouped in the *Corpo Truppe Volontarie* (Corps of Volunteer Troops) – referred to by the initials CTV from here forth<sup>4</sup> – marked the beginning of Italy's participation in a war that split Spain in two.

And yet, this was not the first time that Mussolini had set his eyes on Spain. The *Duce* had maintained a cordial relationship with the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923-1930), who, though himself an admirer of the Italian dictator, did not envision for Spain a fascist state like the Italian one. Nor did Mussolini, at least in 1928, consider that his system could be exported to other countries. Their respective kings, however, seemed to enjoy a closer relationship. Alfonso XIII, then the king of Spain, even commented to his Italian counterpart, Vittorio Emanuele III, that Primo de Rivera was his own Mussolini<sup>5</sup>.

The relationship between the two dictatorships was not long-lived. The fall of the Spanish king in 1930 was followed by a transition that led to the birth of the Second Republic, a democratic regime that governed from 1931 until 1936. Mussolini, who considered this government a satellite of Russian Communism, attempted to subvert it three different times. The first occasion took place in 1932, when he provided arms for the failed coup by general Sanjurjo. Two years later, under the biennial of CEDA (a confederation of conservative parties), he pushed for an alliance of right wing and Catholic political parties considered close to fascist ideals, consisting primarily of Monarchists, Alfonsists and Carlists. This somewhat rag-tag coalition was made up of a diversity of conservative families, making it quite different from Italy, where the fascist movement was concentrated within the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (National Fascist Party, PNF from here forth). Finally, the last attempt by the *Duce* to do away with the Spanish democracy took place a year later, in 1935, when Mussolini decided to provide direct financial support for the Falange Española de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista – known by its acronym, FE de las JONS. The Phalanx was led by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the son of

<sup>4</sup> J. Rodríguez Iturbe, *El fascismo italiano. Mussolini y su tiempo*, Chía, Universidad de La Sabana, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> S.G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain (1923-1977)*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1999.

the dictator who had ruled before rise of the Republic<sup>6</sup>. Mussolini's attempts at abolishing democracy in Spain were unsuccessful – at least the first two –, yet in a sense they laid the groundwork and help explain his future interest in taking sides in the civil war<sup>7</sup>.

When the war broke out the insurgents turned to Germany and Italy for help. Mussolini's initial opposition to providing support seems to have stemmed from the doubts he harbored about the chances of the uprising's success. Additionally, the recent victory of Italian fascism in Ethiopia made the Spanish offensive somewhat of a gamble; the triumphant wave of Italian imperialism risked being tarnished by embarking on a foreign war whose outcome was dubious<sup>8</sup>, especially with France intending – initially – to help the republican government militarily<sup>9</sup>. However, the Italian dictator quickly changed his mind and Italy made a decisive entry into the conflict. Information sources from the Italian military had concluded that the uprising had a good chance of succeeding, and this seemed to make it a worthwhile venture for the Italian regime. Mussolini initially opted for furnishing aerial support to the rebels, contributing in a way that historians such as Paul Preston have described as decisive<sup>10</sup>.

But, what are the real reasons that led the *Duce* to participate directly in the Spanish conflict? The fact is that historians have not come to a consensus, and we find multiple hypotheses and interpretations regarding Benito Mussolini's interest in becoming involved in the war. It seems that his intentions – coming on the heels of his recent victory in Africa – had to do with imperial and ideological motivations<sup>11</sup>, with the opportunity for internationalizing fascism<sup>12</sup> and for demonstrating his objective of creating a satellite-state in the Mediterranean that would serve to counter the influence of the French-British axis<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> P. Preston, *Italy and Spain in Civil War and World War, 1936-1943*, in S. Balfour, P. Preston (edd.), *Spain and the Great Powers in the twentieth century*, London, Routledge, 2002, pp. 151-184; I. Saz Campos, *Mussolini contra la II República. Hostilidad, conspiraciones, intervención (1931-1936)*, Valencia, Alfons el Magnànim, 1986; C. Venza, *La Italia fascista en la tormenta española (1934-1939)*, in G. Francone, M. Francone (edd.), *Francone. La mirada de Mussolini en la guerra de España*, Zaragoza, Gobierno de Aragón, 2009, pp. 31-40.

<sup>7</sup> As the historian Emilio Gentile has pointed out, the Phalanx, like the rest of the philo-fascist parties and movements that emerged in Europe, came about after the rise of Italian fascism to power. While the goals and ideologies did not all necessarily coincide with those in Italy, they did share a mystical, militaristic concept of politics, and a model of activism that was revolutionary, anti-democratic, anti-liberal and anti-marxist. They also had in common a cult and exaltation of the nation and the race, in which ceremonies and symbolism served to express a distinct identity (see E. Gentile, *Il fascismo in tre capitoli*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Venza, *La Italia fascista en la tormenta española (1934-1939)*, cit.

<sup>9</sup> Preston, *Italy and Spain in Civil War and World War*, cit.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Saz, *Mussolini contra la II República*, cit.

<sup>12</sup> Gentile, *Il fascismo in tre capitoli*, cit.

<sup>13</sup> M. Heiberg, *Emperadores del Mediterráneo. Franco, Mussolini y la guerra civil española*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2003; Preston, *Italy and Spain in Civil War and World War*, cit.

If one were to draw a map describing Italy's participation in the Spanish war it would focus on three main lines or fronts. The first of these was the in the south. Early in 1937 there were some 6,000 Italian volunteer troops who, under general Edmondo Rossi, made up the 1<sup>st</sup> Division of the *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale* «Dio lo vuole». These soldiers saw their first action in one of the principal battles of the civil war: the Battle of Málaga (from the 3<sup>rd</sup> until the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, 1937). Under the rebel general Queipo de Llano and his subordinate Mario Roatta, the Italians calmed their first great victory when the Andalusian city was taken in a matter of three days<sup>14</sup>.

The battle of Málaga also served as a first contact between Franco's rebel troops and the Italian soldiers. At the conclusion of this first confrontation the Italians were very taken aback by the harsh repression inflicted on the citizens by the insurgent forces:

A very strong point [...] was made in the denouncements that the officers of the Italian army formulated in the days following the conquest of Málaga, describing the tremendously repressive actions that Franco's army and his Falangists were taking against the civil population of Málaga, executing some five thousand of them, with thousands of prisoners in jail for banal reasons, without trials, for simple personal accusations or old quarrels or simply because their ideas were contrary to the national ideology. The Italian army has nothing to do with this cruel repression, beyond the humanitarian intervention of the consul Bianchi<sup>15</sup>.

The next southern battleground was Extremadura, where the first Spanish-Italian military alliance was formed, that of the *Frecce Azzurre* (Blue arrows). It was here that the Pozoblanco offensive took place in March of 1937, with considerably fewer casualties than in Andalusia. Some 41 Italians lost their lives<sup>16</sup>.

The second front in which the Italian CTVs played an important part was in the north. Prior to this, and following on the heels of their resounding victory in Málaga, the rebels and Italians had suffered a defeat in the battle of Guadalajara near the center of Spain. At this point, Franco turned his attention to the northern rim of Cantabria, particularly the Basque provinces and Santander, along with Castilla la Vieja. The CTV, reorganized after its defeat at Guadalajara, intended to occupy the province of Vizcaya under the orders of general Bottari, aided by the Italian aviation under general Mola<sup>17</sup>.

The most tragic event at this stage of the war was the battle of Santander (from the 14<sup>th</sup> of August to the 17<sup>th</sup> of September of 1937). In the attack on this city, which at the time had Castille's only port, the rebel army managed

<sup>14</sup> A. Viñas, J.A. Blanco (edd.), *La Guerra Civil española, una visión bibliográfica*, Madrid, Marcial Pons, 2017; D. Vaquero Pérez, *Creer, obedecer, combatir... y morir. Fascistas italianos en la guerra civil española*, Saragossa, Institución «Fernando el Católico», 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Vaquero, *Creer, obedecer, combatir... y morir*, cit., p. 198.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Preston, *Italy and Spain in Civil War and World War*, cit.

to cut the republican territory in two, albeit with many Italian casualties. On September 18<sup>th</sup> the rebel forces took the city and six days later, with the Santoña Pact, the Basque government surrendered to the Italian army. The Basques then arranged for the evacuation to France of their principal leaders. A total of 473 political and military figures boarded two British ships on August 26<sup>th</sup>, but the next day Franco ordered the suspension of the evacuation. Despite promising to honor the conditions of the treaty signed with the Italians, hundreds of summary trials and death sentences ensued<sup>18</sup>. Once again, the cruel repression surprised the Italian army.

The third front was the country's center. One of the crucial battles – if not the most important one – was that of the Ebro (from July 25<sup>th</sup> until November 16<sup>th</sup> of 1938). By this time the relationship between Franco and the head of the CTV, general Bastico, had deteriorated; Franco suspected that the Italians were appropriating arms, while the Italians still resented the treatment that the rebels had inflicted on the Basques. In order to avoid further tensions, Bastico was substituted by general Berti. At this point there were close to 42,000 Italian troops in Spain<sup>19</sup>.

Benefitting from their position in the battle of the Ebro, the Italians prepared a new offensive on the city of Guadalajara, part of a strategy to surround Madrid. The attack was launched from the city of Teruel. It was in the nearby municipality of Alcañiz<sup>20</sup> that the Italian aviation carried out one of its most portentous actions, unleashing some 10,000 kilograms of bombs on a town that at the time had a population of about 12,000 people. About 200 people lost their lives<sup>21</sup>.

From the Ebro the Italian troops headed towards Valencia. They had to abort their mission, however, when the republican troops succeeded in crossing the Ebro River at various points east of Gandesa on the night of the 24<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> of July of 1938. In response to the circumstances the CTV was reorganized once again, with Gambarà substituting Berti as commander. The most important action taken by Gambarà was the Catalunyan offensive, carried out between the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 24<sup>th</sup> of December, 1938. From the Pyrenees to the Mediterranean, Franco's rebel troops crossed the Cinca, the Segre and the Ebro rivers. At this point the Italians were in Serós. Gambarà divided the CTV into three columns: the *Frecce Nere*, who were sent towards Granollers, the *Littorio*, who were dispatched to Girona, and the *Frecce Azzurre*, who remained in the reserve. Although the battle resulted in a victory for the insurgent army, the Italian

<sup>18</sup> P. Preston, *El holocausto español. Odio y exterminio en la Guerra Civil y después*, Barcelona, Debolsillo, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Vaquero, *Creer, obedecer, combatir... y morir*, cit.

<sup>20</sup> J. Casanova, *The Spanish Republic and Civil War*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> A. Beevor, *La guerra civil española*, Barcelona, Crítica, 2005.

troops suffered nearly five hundred casualties<sup>22</sup>. After the offensive, the Italian soldiers were incorporated into the Ejército del Centro (Army of the Center), situated in Toledo. The CTV then occupied Aranjuez, Ocaña, Albacete and Alicante, and when the rebel army finally entered into Madrid the CTV took Alicante, whose port was full of thousands of fugitives desperate for a way to flee. They did not find it, and Franco did not help their situation; he aborted the evacuation, and the tragic events of Santoña were repeated<sup>23</sup>.

This would be Italy's last intervention in the Spanish Civil War. It was April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939, two days before the war was officially over. The Italians took part in the victory parade in Madrid before being repatriated to Italy from Cádiz on June 1<sup>st</sup>, with Serrano Suñer as acting minister of Governance<sup>24</sup>. In Naples the troops were greeted by the king, Vittorio Emanuele III and by the minister of foreign affairs, Galeazzo Ciano. A delegation of the troops was met in Rome by Mussolini himself<sup>25</sup>.

All told, 3.796 Italians lost their lives fighting for the insurgent army in Spain. Most of these casualties, 2.262, died in combat on the central front. On the northern and southern fronts they lost 910 and 168 soldiers, respectively. Italy lost 74 soldiers in the Balearic Islands, while those who died in Italy or went missing in action accounted for 382 lost lives<sup>26</sup>.

## *2. The Spanish Civil War in Italian elementary schools in the final years of fascist rule*

Describing an armed conflict in school material poses a challenge from the point of view of educational policy, requiring great care and consideration in the strategies used. It involves carefully weighing the appropriateness of what the future generation is to be told about their country's actions in a foreign war; in this instance, it is about Italy's taking part in the armed conflict in Spain. In the case of victory, the story is quite simple: a triumphant tale of Italy's decisive contribution to the Spanish war, with the resulting victory and establishment of a political regime that, while not identical, was at least generally akin to Mussolini's fascist project. It is noteworthy that in less than two years the fascists had already begun introducing in their curricular contents the actions and exploits carried out by the voluntary militias in the battles in which Italian

<sup>22</sup> Vaquero, *Creer, obedecer, combatir... y morir*, cit.

<sup>23</sup> J.M. Campo, *La ayuda de Mussolini a Franco en la Guerra Civil española*, Madrid, Arco Libros, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> J.F. Coverdale, *La intervención fascista en la guerra civil española*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1979.

<sup>25</sup> Campo, *La ayuda de Mussolini a Franco en la Guerra Civil española*, cit.

<sup>26</sup> Vaquero, *Creer, obedecer, combatir... y morir*, cit.

soldiers had fought. They did not even wait until the war was finished to narrate and illustrate their fellow countrymen's conquests on Spanish soil.

Based on this premise, the analysis of the sources explained above revolves around three central categories of analysis related to the civil war. The first of these categories deals with the question of identity and of the understanding of the armed conflict as a struggle of ideas and of differing conceptions of the nation. The second category looks at the war from the point of view of a competition of military armament and engineering. The third and final category takes up the question of the war's consequences from an emotional, social and patrimonial perspective<sup>27</sup>.

But first, we would like to offer some reflections regarding the nationalization processes, the educational policies of fascism and the school materials used here. During the 1930s a paradigmatic change took place in the nationalizing aspect of education in Italy. As professor Anna Ascenzi has pointed, beginning in 1934 we find a growing convergence between the sense of national belonging and adherence to the principles espoused by Mussolini's regime; these principles had started to become fundamental elements in the construction of the proper, full-fledged fascist and, by extension, of national identity and patriotic sentiment<sup>28</sup>.

This evolution is reflected in the changes in the contents of school materials, especially in textbooks<sup>29</sup>. In this sense, and in keeping with the observations of professor Ascenzi, Eden McLean appreciates a curricular change from around

<sup>27</sup> The study of emotional discourse in school texts represents an emerging line of research in recent years, one introduced by professor Kira Mahamud (Mahamud, *Adoctrinamiento emocional y socialización política en el primer franquismo (1939-1959). Emociones y sentimientos en los manuales escolares de enseñanza primaria*, Cit.; M. Somoza, K. Mahamud, H.H. Pimenta, *Emociones y sentimientos en los procesos de socialización política. Una mirada desde la Historia de la Educación*, «Historia y Memoria de la Educación», n. 2, 2015, pp. 7-44; A.M. Badanelli, K. Mahamud, *Entre la ruptura y la continuidad de esquemas socioemocionales en los libros de lectura de la escuela primaria en el tardofranquismo (1959-1975)*, «Historia y Memoria de la Educación», n. 2, 2015, pp. 125-160).

<sup>28</sup> A. Ascenzi, *Metamorfosi della cittadinanza. Studi e ricerche su insegnamento della storia, educazione civile e identità nazionale in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, Macerata, eum, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* As Ascenzi has also pointed out, starting with the academic years 1930-31 Italy imposed the policy of the single text. While school textbooks were subject to this process of standardization, the same was not true of other materials such as notebooks. Although an effort was made to confer uniformity on these as well, it was never carried through. (J. Meda, "Contro il tanto deprecato mercantilismo scolastico". *I controversi rapporti tra produttori di quaderni, insegnanti e cartolai e l'intervento del regime fascista*, in J. Meda, D. Montino, R. Sani (edd.), *School Exercise Books. A complex source for a History of the Approach to Schooling and Education in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, 2 vols., Florence, Polistampa, 2011, Vol. I, pp. 507-552). And while the fascist regime was interested in controlling children's literature, the nature of the source itself implied a necessary variety of readings for children. (M. Colin, *I bambini di Mussolini. Letteratura, libri, letture per l'infanzia sotto il fascismo*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2012.). What the authorities did strive to do, in the case of both textbooks and notebooks, was to adapt the illustrations to the children's reality, avoiding the unreal representations found in textbooks and notebooks prior to the fascist period. (F. Tancini, *Fiabe illustrate sui banchi di scuola: le copertine dei quaderni tra dittatura e ricostruzione*, in Meda, Montino, Sani (edd.), *School Exercise Books*, cit., Vol. I, pp. 585-602).

the middle of the decade in the approach taken towards nationalization. From evoking its imperial Roman past, we now find an exaltation of Italy's eternal and immortal character. As we will see below, this view is also reflected in the way that the Spanish Civil War is chronicled after the intervention of Mussolini and his fascist regime.

### 2.1 *War as a struggle of identities. Different sides and the values of fascism*

The Spanish conflict represented an opportunity for Mussolini to vindicate and underscore fascism's fight against its enemies: communism and bolchevism. What we have, then, is a struggle of identities, between models and conceptions of a country – and of a continent – at the threshold of the Second World War.

Interestingly, the texts offer reflections on the particular harshness of a civil war. Piero Bargellini<sup>30</sup>, in a book of readings used in the fifth grade, compiled writings about the Spanish war. In the one titled *Logroño* the author reflects upon this fact:

The civil war allows no one to rest, not even the dead. It envies their peace.

Of all wars, the civil war is the saddest, the most bitter, the most atrocious. It divides and arms men against other of the same nation, residents of the same city, often even children from the same family.

The civil war is fought street by street, plaza by plaza, house by house. It is fought within the country and within families. This is why it is also called an internal war.

In fact, in the war of 1938 [*sic*] it was the Spaniards themselves who ruined their own cities. With the same set of hands they destroyed in the war what they had built in peace<sup>31</sup>.

The interpretation of a civil war as a fight between compatriots reflects a struggle of identities. These identities were defined by the features and values that, in this case, Italians and insurgent Spaniards showed in the war against the republicans and their allies.

In this sense, one value that the Italian texts considered fundamental was that of loyalty. Throughout the materials, and particularly in the readings, we find great emphasis placed on fidelity, nobility and a willingness to fight for

<sup>30</sup> Piero Bargellini began as a primary school teacher in 1920, taught intermediate school from 1929 until 1931, served as director between 1931 and 1936 and finally, worked as inspector from 1937 until 1948. A native of Florence, he was fully devoted to the fascist cause. His ideology and writings, which appeared in journals such as «Critica fascista» and «Primato», attest to his profound antisecularism and his harsh critiques of both European liberalism and Russian communism (J. Dagnino, *Faith and fascism. Catholic intellectuals in Italy, 1925-43*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017; F. Leoni, *El disenso católico en Italia durante el fascismo*, «Revista de Estudios Políticos», n. 35, 1983, pp. 235-255).

<sup>31</sup> P. Bargellini, *Logroño*, in Id. (ed.), *Letture per la quinta classe elementare dei centri urbani*, Rome, La Libreria dello Stato, 1942, p. 118.

one's country and one's family. The text *Le campane di Malaga* [The Bells of Málaga], by Alfredo Petrucci, probes this idea<sup>32</sup>. The story centers around an Italian soldier named Stefano Berta, who has resided in Málaga for the last twelve years. There he had started a family, meeting his wife – who was also Italian – and having a child, Dreuccio. After a brief presentation, the story moves into the context of the Spanish Civil War. And it does so tragically; Stefano's wife, the mother of his child, is assassinated by the republican army – referred to here as the *reds* – while she is praying in a church.

The young man finds himself in a traumatic situation: Dreuccio has no mother, no news from his father and his grandmother is not even aware of what is going on. He takes over the family business, a small cafeteria. One day two soldiers from the *red* army come in and are about to attack the grandmother when Dreuccio plants himself in front of them, in order to protect her. When the soldiers discover that he is Italian, they try to humiliate him by forcing him to say: *Down with Italy*. He refuses and instead says: *Long live Italy*. The story reaches its end when the bells of Málaga begin to chime; the city has just been liberated – or occupied – by the insurgent army and its allies<sup>33</sup>.

This text is illustrative for several reasons. In the first place, it emphasizes the idea of loyalty, to the country as well as to the family. The protagonist is brave enough to stand up to two robust soldiers who are threatening his grandmother and who try to make him humiliate his own country. This value carries considerable emotional weight and induces the reader to identify with the protagonist. We have a child who has lost his mother, who has no news of his father and whose grandmother is missing. In contrast to the bravery shown by the story's main figure, the author projects onto the republican characters qualities that are quite the opposite: cruelty, insensitivity and cowardice. The moral of the story is clear: if children have to fight and put themselves in harm's way for their family or for Italy, they should do so bravely.

A similar moral, albeit with a different plot, can be found in the book of infant literature by Pina Ballario *Ragazzi d'Italia nel mondo* [Italian children in the world]. A fascist critic<sup>34</sup> describes this book as being written with «a pleasant liveliness and sincere sentiment»<sup>35</sup>. This story tells of a young Italian boy who

<sup>32</sup> Alfredo Petrucci, considered one of the preeminent poets and authors of school texts in fascist Italy, was a prolific writer of school literature whose better-known works include *L'italiano nuovo* (1937) and the story analyzed here (E. Brandani, G. Di Genova, M. Duranti, "L'uomo della Provvidenza". *Iconografia del Duce (1923-1945)*, Bologna, Edizioni Bora, 1997).

<sup>33</sup> A. Petrucci, *I racconti della sera. Le campane di Malaga*, in Id. (ed.), *L'aratro e la spada. Letture per la III classe dei centri rurali*, Rome, La Libreria dello Stato, 1938, pp. 196-200.

<sup>34</sup> Istituto Nazionale di Cultura Fascista. Sezione di Milan, *Il libro del fanciullo*, «Rassegna di Cultura», n. 3, 1938, p. 83.

<sup>35</sup> Pina Ballario, a renowned defender of Mussolini's cause, was one of the main authors of infant and children's literature during the fascist period in Italy. She enjoyed considerable success after the dictatorship and during the republican period. Her work – generally fiction – includes romantic, colonial and social novels. Children's literature represents an important part of her professional

lives in Barcelona and harbors profound fascist values, despite the fact that his father has no special sympathy for Italy or for Mussolini's fascism. When the boy falls ill, his father undergoes a catharsis of sorts, finding a renewed love for his country and for the fascist cause. Father and son then return to Italy<sup>36</sup>. These values are reiterated throughout the text, with special emphasis placed on the defense of Mussolini's figure and on the social virtues of fascism and the way it takes care of the neediest. The tale's ending coincides with the story of *Grande dramma, piccoli eroi* [Grand drama, small heroes], by Maria Rossi Gentile<sup>37</sup>. Here the main characters are two Spanish children who have been adopted by an Italian couple and educated in a Catholic school. The father joins Franco's movement, while the mother is arrested by the republicans. The two children escape and witness death first-hand, when during a mass they are attending the priest is killed. They are arrested and locked up in a concentration camp with other children, soon to be sent off to Russia. However, they manage to escape and the family is able to leave for Genova, where they are received by Mussolini<sup>38</sup>.

In addition to loyalty and bravery, another virtue that appears repeatedly is religiosity. Catholicism in particular is defended from the perspective of its representing the resurgence of the Roman and Catholic empires<sup>39</sup>. Its patrimonial implications are touched on as well, with the emphasis on the destruction of churches by the republicans and their lack of faith<sup>40</sup>. In Petrucci's story, the mother of Dreuccio is killed while praying in a church<sup>41</sup>. The texts found within the children's literature also stress the importance of defending the Catholic religion. *Voragine rossa* [Red Abyss], by Renzo Chiosso<sup>42</sup>, considered one of the principal works of fascist propaganda in Italian literature, does just this<sup>43</sup>.

production, in which she emphasized its educational function and advocated traditional values such as respect for one's country, religion and the family. (L. Barbera, *L'opera di Pina Ballario*, tesi di laurea in Lettere Moderne, rel. Giovanni Tesio, Università degli studi del Piemonte Orientale, Vercelli, a.a. 2002-2003, disponibile dal 2016 in ebook Kindle col titolo: *Pina Ballario. Lungo viaggio di una scrittrice novarese*; P. Sambuco, *Pina Ballario's Colonial and Travel Writing: Desserts, Breastfeeding and Pleasure as Opposition to Fascism*, «Italian Studies», vol. 73, n. 3, pp. 257-273).

<sup>36</sup> P. Ballario, *Ragazzi d'Italia nel mondo*, Milan, La Prora, 1938.

<sup>37</sup> Maria Rossi Gentile was a Genoan author of children's literature and press articles. She was especially prolific in the 1930s and 1940s and began to publish on her own in 1937. Among her writings, in which patriotic and religious sentiments are central, the best-known are *Un balilla non trema. Storia vera di un bimbo di Liguria* (1937) y *Grande dramma, piccoli eroi* (1938) (see A. Levi, *Storia della "Biblioteca dei miei ragazzi"*, Pisa, Bibliografia e informazione, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> M.R. Gentile, *Grande dramma, piccoli eroi*, Florence, Adriano Salani, 1940.

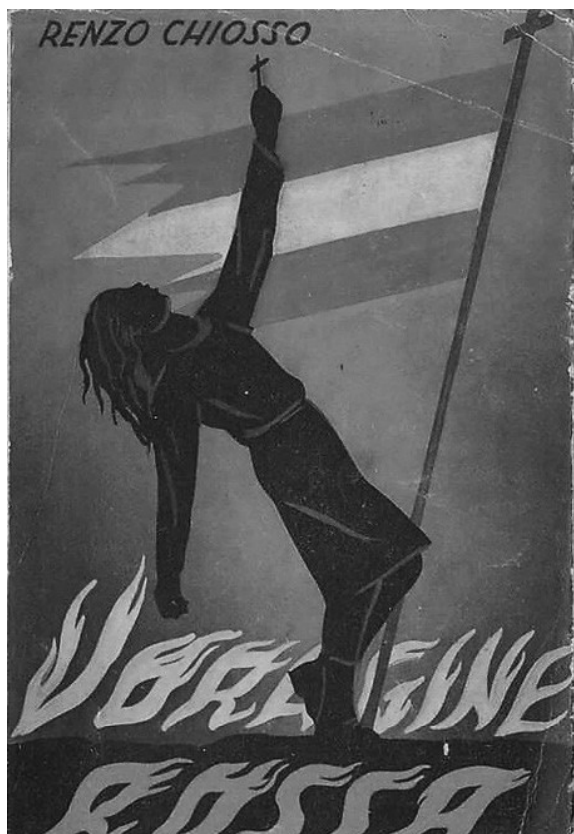
<sup>39</sup> C. Cottone, *Spagna*, in *Il libro della quinta classe elementare. Aritmetica, Geografia, Scienze*, Rome, La Librería dello Stato, 1941, p. 162.

<sup>40</sup> Bargellini, *Logroño*, cit.

<sup>41</sup> Petrucci, *I racconti della sera. Le campane di Malaga*, cit.

<sup>42</sup> Renzo Chiosso was an important literary figure as well as a set designer for numerous films, especially between 1913 and 1919; his literary work took on greater importance in later years, particularly towards the end of the fascist period (see R. Poppi, *I registi: dal 1930 ai giorni nostri*, Rome, Gremese, 2002).

<sup>43</sup> Marqués, *La Guerra Civil española en la literatura italiana*, cit.; Marqués, *Los brigadistas*



Pic. 1 and Pic. 2. Cover of *Voragine rossa*, and illustration of the death of the protagonist, Álvaro<sup>44</sup>

The cover itself clearly underlines the important role of religion in defending Spain against the *red chaos* (Pic. 1).

In this story, Álvaro is a young republican who, upon witnessing the savagery of his army, repents and embraces the insurgent cause. In the end he dies, kissing a crucifix (Pic. 2)<sup>45</sup>. The religious theme also appears in the story *Il capellano navarrino* [The Navarran chaplain], contained in the work *La fiammata* [The flame], by Agostino Poma<sup>46</sup>. The story, which takes place in the context of the battle of the Ebro, narrates the exploits of a priest, father Ciordia. After the republicans cut off all contact with other insurgent forces, father Ciordia

*italianos en la guerra civil española*, cit.

<sup>44</sup> R. Chiosso, *Voragine rossa. Una storia commovente di amore e di eroismo. Il Popolo spagnolo muore per difendere la sua fede, le sue tradizioni, il suo onore*, Alba, Pia Soc. S. Paolo, 1939; Chiosso, *Voragine rossa*, cit., p. 161.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Agostino Poma was a prolific author of infant and children's literature in fascist Italy. In a similar line to those described here, his 1944 work *Giosuè Borsi* stands out. Borsi was an important Italian writer who fought and died in the First World War and whose sacrifice for his homeland fits in perfectly with the stories of father Ciordia and the son of general Moscardó in his work *La fiammata*. (N. Turi, *Raccontare la guerra. I conflitti bellici e la modernità*, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2017).

single-handedly succeeds in crossing the occupied zone to reestablish telephone communications between the rebel factions that have been separated. He accomplishes the mission with serenity and determination and is received with celebration for his deed<sup>47</sup>.

Closely associated with religiosity is the virtue of sacrifice. In a story by Poma titled *Più che l'amore* [More than love], we find what may be the most explicit demonstration of the values espoused by Italian fascism. The tale relates the conversation between general Moscardó, from the insurgent army, and his son, who has been captured by the republicans. After the son tells his father that the republicans will spare his life if his father surrenders, the father, in a demonstration of his loyalty to the rebel cause, responds:

My son, in order to save your life, which means more to me than my own, I am being asked to sacrifice the honor of many soldiers. This is impossible! Can I take such a decision, knowing that all of nationalist Spain would curse my action? My dear son, you are a Spaniard and a Christian. Prepare yourself to die, shouting: Long live Spain! Long live Christ!<sup>48</sup>

This idea is reiterated in the text *L'eroe della Falange* [The heroes of the Phalanx], by Paola Bologna<sup>49</sup>. Here we learn the story of Pedrito Alonso, who participated in the war mainly in Madrid. Like Poma, Bologna shows in many of his passages the value of sacrificing one's life. He states that «Italian soldiers know that moving forward often means offering to your country the supreme sacrifice of your life»<sup>50</sup>. We can see how fascist Italy took care to incorporate into its school materials ideas that would encourage in its students resignation in defense of their country and their family, a mission that they should face with courage, loyalty, religiosity and sacrifice. At the same time, as we mentioned above, these texts provided a studied portrayal of the enemy, who was represented fundamentally by Russian communism. At the conclusion

<sup>47</sup> A. Poma, *Il capellano Navarrino*, in Id., *La fiammata*, Alba, Pia Società S. Paolo, 1940, pp. 163-171.

<sup>48</sup> Poma, *Più che l'amore*, in Id., *La fiammata*, cit., p. 152.

<sup>49</sup> Paola Bologna was an author whose principal activity was in the realm of illustrations, beginning in the 1920s. Her most important contributions were for *Tanti cuori, tanti rubini* by Adriana Enriques (Paravia, 1924), *Il cuore nascosto* by Enrico Carrara (Paravia, 1924) and *La vita che ci fa forti*, by Michele Mastropaolo (Paravia, 1949). *L'eroe della Falange* was published by Anonima Veritas Editrice, a publisher established in 1935 under the presidency of the Società della Gioventù di Azione Cattolica (GIAC). During its early years this publisher mainly produced books and pamphlets of propaganda. After this it became consolidated as a publisher of spiritual, theological and pastoral writings, an activity that began in the 1920s and continues to the present day (G. Chiosso, A.V.E., *Anonima Veritas Editrice*, in Id. (ed.), *TESEO '900. Editori scolastico-educativi del primo Novecento*, Milan, Editrice Bibliografica, 2008, pp. 46-49).

<sup>50</sup> In fact, towards the end of the story, Pedrito Alonso's best friend and battlefield companion, Alonso, dies. The distress that this causes for the protagonist reinforces the idea of sacrifice as sometimes being necessary for the defense of one's honour and country (P. Bologna, *L'eroe della Falange. Romanzo spagnolo*, Rome, AVE, 1938, p. 58).

of the war, Ezio Bonomi and Luigi Rinaldi brought together two chapters in textbooks – of literature and readings, respectively – about the Spanish Civil War and the figure of the enemy<sup>51</sup>. The first of these, in a section called *I legionari italiani e la guerra di Spagna* [Italian Legionnaires and the Spanish Civil War], states that «the communist territory of Spain continues to be a shameful page in the history of old Europe»<sup>52</sup>. Rinaldi dedicates a reading text to the civil war titled *La guerra di Spagna è terminata* [The Spanish Civil War is over]. The passage contains several allusion to, and attacks against, the enemy:

Russia had incited Spain for the purpose of leading it into evil Bolchevism and its negation of faith, its hatred of healthy energy and of order, its opposition to all decent peoples and civil governments. Having planted hatred in the hearts of innumerable miscreants from the wretched classes in France, England, Russia and Spain, they armed them and sent them off to combat for the red flag<sup>53</sup>.

The text even includes allusions formulated by the *Duce* about the enemy in the Spanish Civil War:

The Bolsheviks pompously declared «Spain will be the tomb of fascism». Mussolini, in the speech he gave in Geneva, responded: «It is infinitely more likely that Spain will be the tomb of communism». As always, He was right<sup>54</sup>.

Fascism not only promoted a set of ideals associated with the insurgence and the Italian troops that children were meant to identify with. It also portrayed those characteristics and values that students should *not* imitate and that were represented above all by Russian communism. These included cruelty, cowardice, Bolchevism, anti-Catholicism, disorder and hate.

<sup>51</sup> Luigi Rinaldi and Ezio Bonomi were two of the most representative authors of the fascist regime. The former, whose stories were used mainly in the subjects of history and readings, was known for his filo-fascist ideology and his exaltations and praises of Mussolini (M. Colin, *Les livres de lecture italiens pour l'école primaire sous le fascisme (1923-1943)*, «Histoire de l'Éducation», n. 127, 2010, pp. 57-94). Ezio Bonomi was a prolific author of writings. While he continued his school writings after the Second World War, we find in the *Elenco dei libri di testo per le scuole elementari* (1945) a note attached to his name expressing reservations about the author, reservations which presumably have to do with the latent fascism of his texts (AINSMLI, fond «CLN regionale della Lombardia», series «Commissariati», subseries «Commissariato Scuola», folder 79, dossier 271; quoted in: P. Genovesi, *Il manuale di storia in Italia. Dal fascismo alla Repubblica*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2009, p. 108).

<sup>52</sup> E. Bonomi, *I legionari italiani e la guerra di Spagna*, in *Il libro della quinta classe elementare. Letture*, Rome, Libreria dello Stato, 1940, p. 125.

<sup>53</sup> L. Rinaldi, «La guerra di Spagna è terminata», in *Il libro della quinta classe elementare. Letture*, Rome, La Libreria dello Stato, 1939, p. 154.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

## 2.2 *War as a military struggle. Equipment and armament*

With the outbreak of the war and Mussolini's decision to become involved, school texts and materials were quickly brought up to date to reflect the *Duce's* support for Franco. From this point on, textbooks, notebooks, the children's press and children's literature all begin to feature abundant military chronicles and illustrations, while Italian war machinery becomes a source of pride and exaltation for young Italians instructed in fascist elementary schools.

The immediacy of Italy's support for Franco and the emphasis placed on armament can be observed in a text by Ezio Bonomi. His description of the historical event and the challenge it posed to the Italian military culminates in a glorification of their virtues:

As soon as the war for the conquest of the empire was over, a new battlefield appeared for the valiant Italian legionnaires.

Spain was involved in a heroic war of independence against communist intrusion. Italian volunteers rushed to the aid of Generalísimo Franco's extraordinary soldiers: and over the land and sky of Spain the brilliant virtues of the Italian warriors shone once more<sup>55</sup>.

The prompt support for the insurgent army led by general Francisco Franco, together with the praise for the Italian soldiers – accompanied, again, by contempt for the enemy – marked the beginning of the wartime chronicles. In this sense, the three fronts described above where the Italian forces played an important part are fully covered in the school materials at this educational stage. The school texts describe the battles that took place in Málaga – on the southern front –, in Albentosa, Barcelona, Barracas, Guadalajara, Madrid and Tortosa – on the central front – and in Bilbao and Santander – on the northern front<sup>56</sup>. From a geographic point of view, therefore, Italian participation in the civil war was recounted in its entirety.

The subject of arms and armament, on the other hand, was reflected more in the illustrations than in the texts. The school textbooks and literature narrated battles and specific or general events, but without going into excessive detail about the arms, which were dealt with in the illustrations.

With regard to the battles that took place on land, the notebooks include color illustrations (Pic. 3) as well as photographs (Pic. 4). These images show situations of direct combat. In the first image, we see the Italian militia seeking cover in the shrubbery near Cherta, in Castellón. They are carrying rifles and accessories for their munitions. They are also wearing helmets and gloves for their protection. On the back cover of the notebook is a commentary meant to accompany the illustration on the front cover:

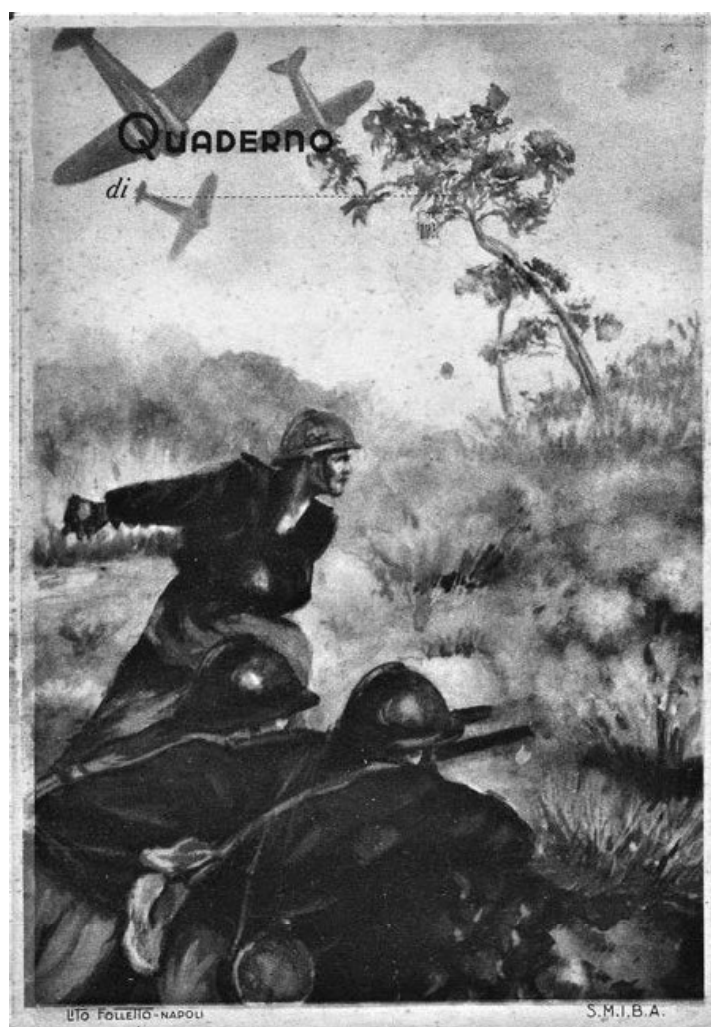
<sup>55</sup> Bonomi, *I legionari italiani e la guerra di Spagna*, cit., pp. 125-126.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126; Partito Nazionale Fascista, *Il primo e secondo libro del fascista*, Rome, Partito Nazionale Fascista, 1942, p. 12.

With the fraternal help of the *Ala Legionaria* [Legionnaire Wing], that descends to a very low altitude to attack the enemy, the legionnaires hold their ground in Cherta against violent attacks without giving an inch, before counter-attacking and sending the reds running, leaving Cherta firmly in the hands of the legionnaires<sup>57</sup>.

The second image, taken on the northern front, shows a photograph of four militiamen in a trench made of bales of straw, their rifles poised. The third image, from the Aragon offensive, portrays a similar scene, with five soldiers holed up in a trench, pointing their rifles towards the horizon<sup>58</sup>.

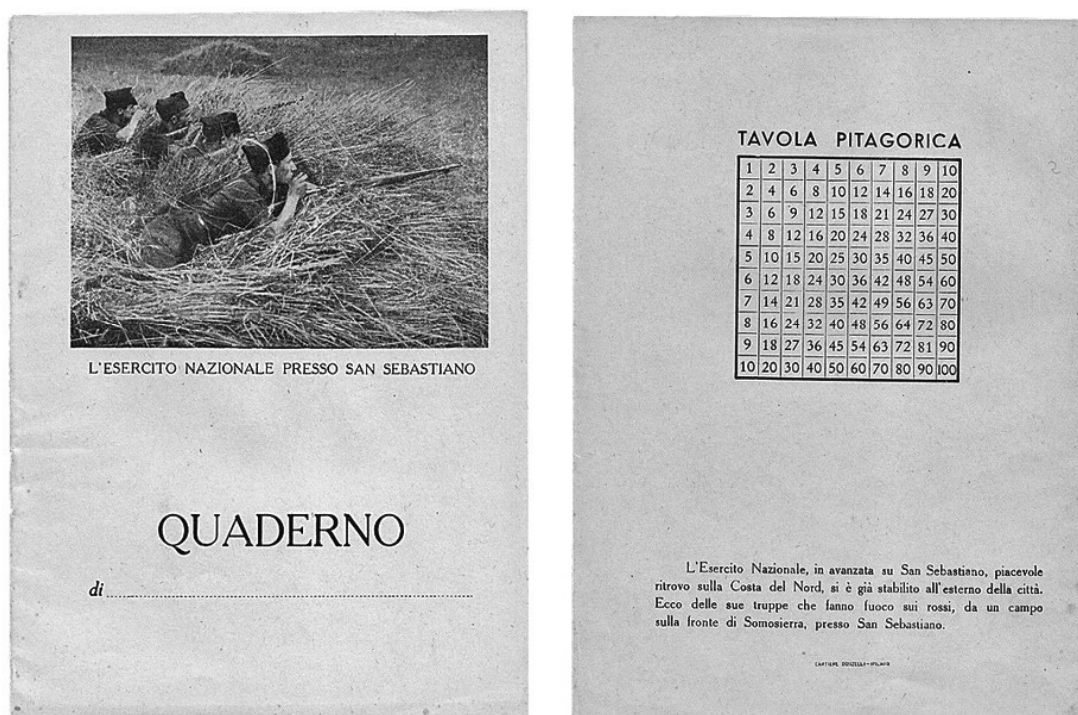
We can see how the notebooks made an effort to convey the idea of cooperation between Spaniards and Italians on the battlefield. Such images were invariably accompanied by a triumphant, belligerent language that sought to ridicule and humiliate the actions of the republicans and their allies.



Pic. 3

<sup>57</sup> *Eroismo italiano sui campi di Spagna*, Naples, S.M.I.B.A., c. 1930-1940 (see Museo del Quaderno <<http://www.museodelquaderno.it/>>, quaderno AB406).

<sup>58</sup> *In Aragona*, Milan, Cartiere Donzelli, c. 1938-1943.



Pic. 4

Pic. 3 and Pic. 4. Two notebook covers showing Italian army in combat in Cherta (Castellón, Valencia) and San Sebastián (Guipúzcoa, Basque Country)<sup>59</sup>

Italy's main contribution in the domain of military technology, however, was its aviation. With its base in Mallorca (Balearic Islands) it was, as mentioned above, used on different fronts during the conflict, and in fascist schools and educational materials it was a recurring theme. It was especially conspicuous in the children's press<sup>60</sup>. In 1938 and 1939 the «Corriere dei Piccoli»<sup>61</sup>, published two weekly comics titled *L'eroe di Villahermosa* [The hero of Villahermosa],

<sup>59</sup> *L'esercito nazionale presso San Sebastiano*, Milan, Cartiere Donzelli, c. 1937-1943; *Eroismo italiano sui campi di Spagna*, cit.

<sup>60</sup> As Michel Matly notes, the Spanish Civil War did not receive in the Italian children's press an especially massive divulgation, due principally to the influence of imports from the United States, which were prohibited in July of 1938 (see Matly, *L'image de la Guerre civile espagnole dans la bande dessinée entre 1936 et 1975*, cit.).

<sup>61</sup> Founded in 1908, this publication was directed by Silvio Spaventa Filippi as part of the *Corriere della Sera*. The children's edition of Spaventa sought to promote «enthusiasm, the chance to dream, to have fun, to believe in fantasy and in positive feelings» (G. Bono, A. Castelli, *Gli anni del "Corriere dei Ragazzi". Quando il "Corriere dei Piccoli" diventò grande*, Milan, BUR, 2009, p. 13).



Pic. 5. Detail of Italian aviation in the Balearic Islands in *Il nibbio delle Baleari*, in the «Corriere dei Piccoli»<sup>64</sup>

and *Il nibbio delle Baleari* [The miracle of the Balears], written by Giubra and illustrated by Vittorio Cossio<sup>62</sup>. Of these two, the second in particular focuses on Italy's aerial participation over the islands, with two images of their aircraft in combat (Pic. 5)<sup>63</sup>.

Aerial warfare also appears in children's literature, and in stories such as *La fiammata* and *L'eroe della Falange* aviation plays a central role. The cover of the first of these shows an Italian airplane crashing into a mountain, with a plume of smoke that seems to suggest the colors of the insurgents' flag (Pic. 6). The second publication features illustrations at the beginning of each chapter. One of these, shown below, is a print of a combat plane flying by a town that has been taken by Franco's rebels (Pic. 7).

<sup>62</sup> Giubra was the nickname of Giuseppe Brancolini, a recognized writer who despite his production for the children's press, was known above all for his activity as a composer, with works such as *Redenzione! Inno a Trento e Trieste* (1915), *Novella di Natale* (1930) o *Mamma, il tuo cuore!* (1931). Vittorio Cossio was an important illustrator for the children's press in Italy. He and his brother Carlo Cossio began their work as illustrators for children's books in 1928, contributing to magazines such as «Rin-Tin-Tin», «Primarosa», «Corriere dei Piccoli». His best-known stories were *Furio Almirante* (1941) and *Raff, Pugno d'Acciao* (1945) (see M. Horn, R. Marschall, *The World Encyclopedia of Cartoons*, 2 vols., Chelsea House Publishers, 1983).

<sup>63</sup> Both *L'eroe di Vallehermosa* and *Il nibbio delle Baleari* dealt with wartime situations in the Spanish context. The illustrations in the latter tale highlight the military aspect and continue to chronicle the conflict through to Franco's victory. These publications had a considerable repercussion, and Umberto Eco himself tells of how, before learning to read, he pored over the illustrations of *Il nibbio delle Baleari* (see U. Eco, *Il superuomo di massa. Retorica e ideologia nel romanzo popolare*, Milan, La nave di Teseo, 2016).

<sup>64</sup> Giubra, V. Cossio, *Il nibbio delle Baleari*, «Corriere dei Piccoli», vol. XXXI, n. 16, 16 April 1939, p. 16.



Pic. 6 and Pic. 7. Cover of *La fiammata*, by Agostino Poma, and a print heading the chapter of the work *L'eroe della Falange*, by Paola Bologna<sup>65</sup>

And finally, the school notebooks give us a good idea of the importance attached to Italian aviation at this stage of the childrens' schooling. It was common for the notebook covers to feature battle scenes of the Italian planes in action (Pic. 8 and Pic. 9).

In summary – and coinciding with the story by Ezio Bonomi – school materials focus principally on situations of direct attacks by land and air. The maritime domain is limited to images of republican ships under attack by the Italian aviation (Pic. 9).

<sup>65</sup> A. Poma, *La fiammata*, Alba, Pia Società S. Paolo, 1940; Bologna, *L'eroe della Falange*, cit., p. 95.



Pic. 8 and Pic. 9. Cover of the notebooks *Regia Aeronautica Italiana. Bombardatori legionari* (Turin, Carlo Ranotti & C., c. 1930-1940) and *Battaglia aereo-navale nei cieli di Spagna* (Naples, S.M.I.B.A., c. 1930-1940); see Museo del Quaderno <<http://www.museodelquaderno.it/>>, quaderni AA868 and AB408

### *2.3 War as barbarism. The emotional, social and cultural consequences of a civil conflict*

The materials used for schooling children in the final years of Italian fascist rule give us a clear idea of the interest that Mussolini's regime had in creating a triumphal atmosphere at the conclusion of the civil war. However, many of the texts go a step further, relating the aftermath of each battle. We find descriptions of chaos and anguish, of the devastating scenarios and dire poverty that are a direct result of the war. The texts tell of broken families – albeit always from the perspective of the Italian intervention and the insurgent camp –, of republicans who had no qualms about killing the loved ones of the Italian children or of laying to ruin their cities and their belongings.

From the emotional dimension, fascism strove to encourage in its young readers empathy for the characters involved in enthralling, harrowing stories.

The children's literature and school textbooks provide abundant examples: characters in circumstances where their parents go into combat or, in the worst case, support the republican side, a cause for disgrace and humiliation in the family. Numerous are the characters and children who are forced to flee from the chaos of the war brought about by the republicans and who may even have to sacrifice their lives, always from a perspective of faith in the Catholic church.

One way of evoking these situations was with descriptions of scenes where battles had been fought, and of how the Italian soldiers fighting for Franco's cause were warmly embraced by the locals. This element appears frequently in the textbooks. In *Le feste natalizie* [Christmas holidays] and *Il suono della tromba* [The sound of the trumpet], by Piero Bargellini, we learn about how affectionately the Italian fighters were taken in by Castilian townspeople when they had a respite between battles; in this case, the break in the fighting coincided with Christmas. The story tells of the presents the fighters received from their families and of the emotion they felt at being so far from home at such a time:

The Christmas holiday is approaching. It's always raining in this sad town. It even rains inside the church. Kneeling on the floor is like kneeling in the street.

The legionnaires have tried to make do, when they're lucky, by making little stoves and spreading straw on tables for mattresses. While they are resting someone sings, accompanied by an accordion, traditional songs from their land.

And then the packages from their homes arrive.

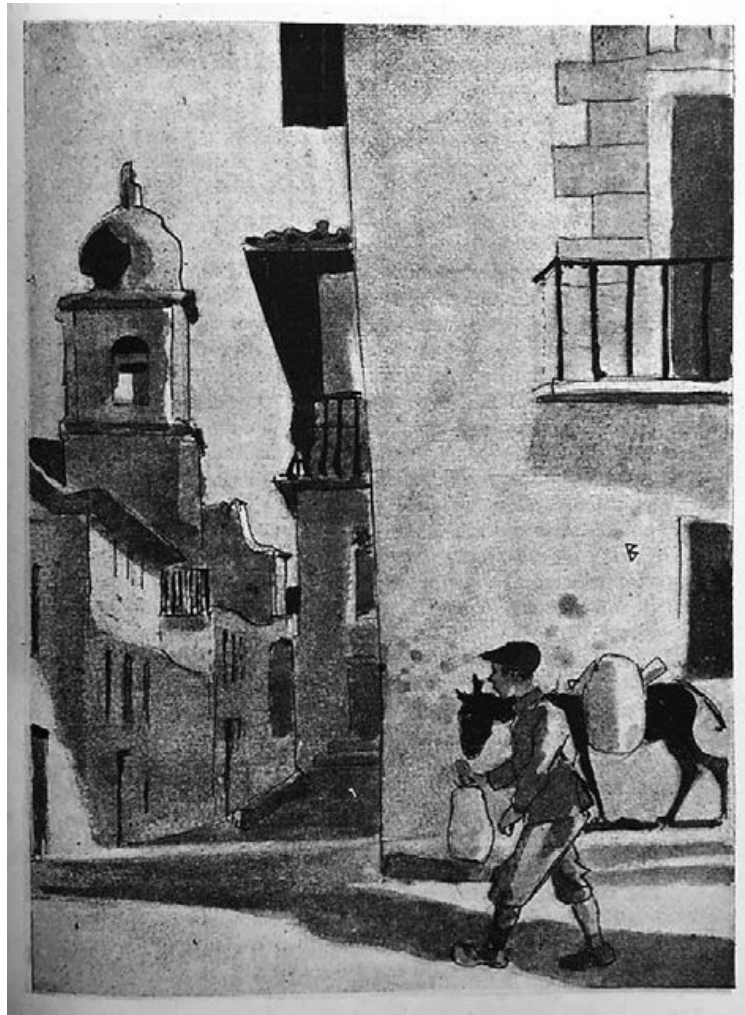
The legionnaires celebrate when a package arrives. Sometimes they will give it a kiss before opening it. Or they touch it against their cheek, so as to feel the warmth of their family.

Then, they call their mates [...] and they start opening the packages on the straw mattresses. They remember how, as children, on Christmas morning they used to empty their Christmas stocking on their bed, rejoicing with each present<sup>66</sup>.

This text offers a summarized version of the consequences of the civil war. It gives a context to the situation, describing a sad, cold town that is in ruins, where it even rains inside the church due to the damage from the battles (Pic. 10). It fuses this context with the mood of the soldiers celebrating the arrival of gifts from their families and evoking childhood memories, all of which helps to create a situation that the readers can easily relate to. And all of this in a tragic, hostile surrounding, the result of a civil conflict.

In this story, Bargellini provides a clue to one the unifying, recurring themes of fascist school literature: the anti-clericalism of the republicans and the burning of churches. The church represented not only a patrimonial treasure

<sup>66</sup> Bargellini, *Le feste natalizie*, in Id. (ed.), *Lecture per la quinta classe elementare dei centri urbani*, cit., p. 120.



Pic. 10. Drawing of Logroño in the tale *Le feste natalizie*<sup>67</sup>

but a space of spirituality and faith. In the text *Logroño* we read that «the sons of blasphemy ransacked the beautiful churches built by thier own fathers. They tore down the palaces of the nobility, not realizing that they were erasing the achievements of Spanish civilization and art in Spain»<sup>68</sup>.

Finally, the texts go on to envision a future of sacrifice as Spain sets out to recover from the war. In the section dedicated to Spain within the subject of Geography, Carmelo Cottone reflects on the country's situation and on how the civil war has left numerous ruins and victims in its wake:

Spain will have to overcome enormous challenges for its redemption: the ruins left by the war are enormous and rebuilding them is going to require a gargantuan effort. The reconstruction of Spain is going to call for deliberate willpower and boundless energy. We should have faith in the resurrection of Spain. A people who, after centuries of decadence

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>68</sup> Bargellini, *Logroño*, cit., p. 118.

and abandon, during five years wrecked the country's vital centers but was able, nonetheless, to find the strength to rise up in arms, anxiously volunteering to fight under Franco's flag and, although requiring the help of foreign nations, to lead a bloody and victorious war for three years<sup>69</sup>.

Once again we see here an emphasis on the patrimonial, social and even the economic aspects of the civil war. Cottone refers specifically to the duration of the conflict, as if it were a spiritual purging process that the country needed to go through.

In short, virtually all of the school materials analyzed make reference to the consequences of the war, either through the chronicling of specific events or stages of the war or by giving a global analysis of it. The damage caused is treated as a natural, inevitable effect, one that is necessary for the country's *salvation*.

### *Conclusions*

The Spanish Civil War was given immediate and ample representation in school textbooks, notebooks, press and literature in Italy. The perspective given to the conflict is essentially one of identity. Italian children studying in elementary schools under fascism were taught, with the example of the Spanish Civil War, that they must be loyal – to their country and to their family –, brave, Catholic and, in union with this last trait, willing to make sacrifices. They should, if the situation arose, be ready to give their lives for the fascist cause and that of its allies.

The school materials that we have analyzed also show the way in which the civil war served as showcase for the potential of Italian armament. Illustrations portray the crucial role played by Italy's military engineering in battles – especially in air combat – and the importance of the provisional military air base established in the Balearic Islands.

The sources also show the war as an emotional event. The consequences of the war become engrained in the minds of the younger generations of Italians by means of moving stories about characters who undergo harrowing emotional experiences, losing loved ones and even losing their own lives. At the same time, the descriptions of the devastation of the cities and towns highlight the patrimonial, cultural and even the economic losses caused by the war.

Furthermore, what is evidenced across all of the categories analyzed is fascism's determination to revive the spirit of the Roman Catholic Empire

<sup>69</sup> Cottone, *Spagna*, in *Il libro della quinta classe elementare. Aritmetica, Geografia, Scienze*, cit., p. 162.

through the victory of the insurgent army, which it supported unflinchingly. Another aspect of the materials has to do with the characters and protagonists of the texts and illustrations, who are invariably male, thus reinforcing the military ideal associated with the figure of the man. In this sense, it is curious to find women authors narrating scenes of warfare; while they are undoubtedly showing their sympathy for the fascist cause, the few feminine characters portrayed in the stories are always in a secondary role.

In short, the Spanish Civil War is an example of how a concrete, transnational, historical event can be used as a curricular tool for the legitimization of a national identity, a political and ideological system and its international projection. In this sense, and with possible future lines of research in mind, we believe that similar sources could be used to study Nazi Germany, or to examine the representation of alterity in the case of Italy, contrasting them with the Francoist discourse of the time.