

Europe on screen, 1932-1943

Projecting a new European Fascist continent in the newsreels of the Luce Institute

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I, Umberto Famulari, hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always stated.

12/07/2017

Abstract

This thesis is the first investigation of the Luce Institute's (LUCE) newsreels, which were filmed throughout Europe during Benito Mussolini's dictatorship. The project focuses on analysing all LUCE's productions in four European countries in specific periods of time (Greece 1939–1940; Spain 1932–1943; Albania 1939–1943; Germany 1933–1942). All of these nations were at the core of Fascist foreign policy in Europe, and were central to LUCE's strategic plans. Dozens of newsreels were filmed and subsequently distributed in Italian cinemas; they showed the rampant Fascist interventionism in 1930s Europe, and the diplomatic relationships of the Duce's regime with Adolf Hitler and Francisco Franco.

The newsreels conveyed to the audience the idea that the Italian Fascist regime was building a network of allies to foster the expansion of Fascism in Europe, in order to defeat the European liberal democracies. The thesis shows that the newsreels were a genre that mixed the realism of news and documentary film with fabricated elements typical of political advertisements and commercials. If on the one hand these productions were partially inspired by the Cine-Pravda of Dziga Vertov, on the other, they widely anticipated techniques that characterized the Nazi newsreels.

Through thousands of these non-fiction films, the Duce's regime portrayed Europe as a continent that was about to be conquered by Fascism and was becoming a utopian and illusory projection of Mussolini's Italy.

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Introduction

Since the rise to power of Benito Mussolini in 1922, cinema and Fascist propaganda were directly related and intertwined. Although it is undoubtedly true that Italian cinema under the Fascist regime reached its creative peak only after the inauguration of the studios of *Cinecittà* in 1936, it is necessary to emphasize that the Duce had already been filmed in 1923 and in 1924 in two documentaries which were entitled *A Noi* and *III Anniversario della marcia su Roma solennemente celebrato a Milano*.¹

Hundreds of propaganda newsreels and documentaries were produced and screened in Italian cinema theatres by the state-funded Luce Institute (LUCE) and, after the mid-1930s, also by Industria Cortometraggi Milano (INCOM), a private company headed by Luigi Freddi with the objective to dismantle LUCE's monopoly in relation to documentary filmmaking and to bring it under the more stringent control of the Ministry of the Popular Culture. There is limited but growing scholarship regarding LUCE's productions. It is worth mentioning that Philip Cannistraro in 1975 and Mino Argentieri in 1979 wrote pioneering studies on the structure of LUCE.² Elaine Mancini was one of the very first scholars to write a chapter in a book about Fascist cinema in relation to LUCE's role as a propaganda machine.³ Ernesto G. Laura's book (only available in Italian) entitled *Le Stagioni dell'Aquila* is an exhaustive description of LUCE's activities and political organization.⁴ More recently, Silvio Carta has studied the representation of Sardinia in the documentaries produced by LUCE. Carta writes that 'these documentary films present Sardinia as a nude territory on which the demiurge-like

¹ Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 15 May 2016.

² Philip Cannistraro, *La Fabbrica del Consenso. Fascismo e Mass Media* (Roma: Laterza, 1975); Mino Argentieri, *L'Occhio del Regime: Informazione e Propaganda nel Cinema del Fascismo* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1979).

³ Elaine Mancini, *Struggles of the Italian Film Industry during Fascism, 1930-1945* (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1985)

⁴ Ernesto G. Laura, *Le Stagioni dell'Aquila. Storia dell'Istituto Luce* (Roma: Immagini dello Spettacolo, 1999).

project of Fascist modernization inscribes its own history'.⁵ Eugenia Paulicelli, in her book about Italian fashion and cinema, describes how the Fascist regime used newsreels to promote the Italian textile and clothing industry, 'capturing the details of cut, fabric, wearability and glamor'.⁶ Giuseppe Fidotta examines a series of LUCE's documentaries entitled *Cronache dell'Impero/Chronicles of the Empire*. As Fidotta notes, these productions 'aimed at attesting the activities that the regime was carrying out in the recently conquered East-Italian African territories'.⁷ Fidotta is also the author of an interesting examination of the use of 'animated maps in relation to ideology and propaganda in Fascist documentaries'.⁸ Although Fidotta looked at the production of LUCE as a propaganda tool that portrayed foreign nations and the colonies on screen, there is no study that focuses on the importance of LUCE's newsreels as a systematic and sprawling source of mediated information in relation to foreign policy.

This thesis aims to be the first attempt to show how the daily bulletin of LUCE's newsreels contributed to the cinematic construction of a utopian European Fascist continent that was a reflection of Fascist Italy. An extensive investigation into the newsreels is necessary to understand how non-fiction films showed Mussolini's view of international relations and the construction of alliances with foreign leaders.

From the beginning of the 1920s to the first half of the 1930s, LUCE concentrated its resources on the production of newsreels that focused on three main pillars: *The battle for grain*, reclamation of the marshes, and overall modernization of the country's infrastructure. This propaganda strategy was necessary in order to maintain robust support in the rural areas of the nation, which were also those with the highest number of inhabitants. Mussolini was

⁵ Silvio Carta, 'Sardinia in Fascist Documentary Films (1922-1945)', *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies*, 2 (2014), 171-187 (p. 172).

⁶ Eugenia Paulicelli, *Italian Style: Fashion & Film from Early Cinema to the Digital Age*, (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), p. 89.

⁷ Giuseppe Fidotta, 'Ruling the Colonies with Sound: Documentary, Technology and Noise in *Cronache dell'Impero*', *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies*, 4 (2016), 111-125 (p. 112).

⁸ Giuseppe Fidotta, 'Animated maps and the power of the trace', *NECSUS. European Journal of Media Studies*, 3 (2014), 267-298 (p. 32).

the undisputed protagonist of most of these films, interpreting and embodying the role of the supreme leader and the new, strong Fascist man. After the first half of the 1930s the Fascist regime reached its highest consensus and the contents of newsreels gradually changed. Mussolini's image remained predominant in many films but foreign policy, aggressive military interventionism and the rise to power of dictators or authoritarian governments in Europe influenced LUCE's editorial choices.

The study shows how LUCE framed Fascist foreign policy in four European countries. I focus my analysis on Greece, the Spanish Republic and the rise to power of Francisco Franco, Albanian colonization, and the relationship with Hitler's Germany. Each of these nations and governments has been critical for the Fascist's geopolitical strategies in Europe. I have chosen to concentrate my examination on the timeframe of 1932-1943 for a variety of reasons. In 1932, LUCE produced the first newsreels with sound, introducing the voice-over and soundtrack. In the same year the regime celebrated the tenth anniversary of the march on Rome and Mussolini's popularity was on the rise. Mussolini's fall in July 1943 marked the end of LUCE's Fascist newsreel. LUCE continued its production during the war and cameramen closer to the regime followed the dictator in Northern Italy, where the new headquarters of LUCE had been established in Venice. However, Mussolini's propaganda machine was effectively dissolved after his forced resignation.

I have watched all of the newsreels screened in Italian cinemas from 1932 to 1943 that are related to the countries included in my study. I have then selected for each chapter a series of productions that I considered to be the most meaningful in relation to propaganda strategies adopted, historical relevance of the footage, and foreign policy. I retrieved the newsreels by typing the name of each nation into the search engine of the website of LUCE's archive (www.archivioluce.com). I omitted from my investigation the productions in which a nation is only mentioned by the voice-over but is not central to the newsreel's narrative. The newsreels

are preserved in the archive of LUCE in Rome and they are available to the public thanks to a digitization project that began in 2005. The archive has digitized approximately 12,000 newsreels and 6,000 documentaries produced during Mussolini's regime.

The thesis has the objective to show the crucial role of the newsreels in showing to Italian people the vast and rampant Fascist interventionism in Europe after 1932 (Greece, Albania) and the point of view of the regime (and, thus, of the Duce) in respect of the rise to power of new European dictators (Hitler and Franco). The films conveyed to the audience the idea that the regime was building a network of allies in order to expand Fascism in Europe, defeating and eliminating the European liberal democracies.

The research is an attempt to identify and interpret the rhetorical power of the newsreels, the cinematic construction of an illusory Fascist reality, and the relationships that connect the images, words and sound of the newsreels. Italian newsreels filmed events that actually happened in Europe and that could be classified as news, but the thesis' goal is to determine that LUCE's films were heavily manipulated by the regime in order to present European leaders and countries on screen as perceived by Fascist propaganda and the Duce.

Chapter 1 is devoted to a broad discussion on realism, documentaries and fictional films, and aesthetics of the newsreels. The chapter shows that the newsreels were a genre that mixed the realism of news, documentary and photographic styles, and fabricated elements typical of political advertisements and commercials. Central to my discussion are the theories and observations of Roland Barthes, Siegfried Kracauer and Germaine Dulac.

Chapter 2 analyzes the newsreels that LUCE produced in Greece. These productions represented a distinctive example of how Fascist propaganda portrayed foreign nations and promoted the political agenda of Mussolini's regime. The non-fiction films that portrayed Greece, its politicians and the colonized Aegean Islands not only are an understudied and valuable historical document, but, as we shall see throughout the chapter, also represented the

prototype of what Fernando Cerchio defined as LUCE's style.⁹ The newsreels that filmed the island of Rhodes, official visits of Greek politicians to Italy, and the Italian military intervention in Greece in 1940 all demonstrate that the Fascist regime aimed both to document events and to educate the audience.

This chapter also highlights the variety of topics covered by the newsreels, and shows LUCE's ability to connect images of war with footage of worldly events such as royal weddings and sophisticated holiday trips. The first section of the chapter specifically aims to show that in LUCE's newsreels the concept of tourism embraced both heritage and leisure so as to achieve the cinematic incorporation of the Greek islands into Italian territory. I dedicate ample space to the analysis of the image and representation of Greek politicians and members of the Greek monarchy during their trips to Italy, and investigate LUCE's attempt to portray the Greek leaders as loyal allies of the Fascist regime.

Eventually, the last segment of the chapter focuses on the role of the Fascist newsreels as a weapon of propaganda to transform the disastrous military intervention in Greece into an illusory and fictitious Fascist victory. After a brief introduction in which I outline the significance of the Air Force under Mussolini's dictatorship, I examine the news films that depict the air bombing of Greece as symbols of Fascism heroism, courage and determination. Throughout this section I consider these productions to be a precursor of the Nazi newsreels.

Chapter 3 is devoted to LUCE's newsreels filmed in Spain from 1932 (the year that coincided with the victory of left-wing parties in the Spanish elections) to 1943. The contents of the newsreels produced by LUCE in Spain were closely linked to the fluctuating diplomatic relations between Mussolini and the Spanish government. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Mussolini had not yet decided whether to intervene in Spain to promote the rise to power of a

⁹ Fernando Cerchio, 'L'Evoluzione del Film Giornale', *Cinema*, 90 (1940), 185-187.

para-Fascist government; consequently, from 1930 to 1934, Fascist propaganda on the Iberian Peninsula was based on moderation and pragmatism.

The first part of the chapter is an in-depth analysis of how LUCE's newsreels projected the leaders of the Spanish Republic. I examine meticulously the news films that focused on the image of Spanish Prime Minister Niceto Alcalà Zamora, and study the cinematic representation of the Spanish government's methods of repression. Well before Francisco Franco became a dictator of Spain, the Fascist regime, through the newsreels, showed a genuine appreciation for the Spanish countryside and its way of life, and in the second part of the chapter I argue that LUCE transformed the Spanish countryside into a bucolic landscape that became an ideal reflection of Fascist Italy. My study of the newsreels filmed on the Iberian Peninsula includes a scrupulous observation of the interactions between voice-over, soundtrack and the representation of nature. I also emphasize the visual similarities that related Spanish and Italian non-urban environments.

The turning point of the activities of LUCE in Spain coincided with the rise to power of Franco and the representation of the image of the new Spanish dictator in the films produced after 1938. In preparation for the second part of the chapter, I watched all of LUCE's newsreels in which Franco appeared, and analyzed the productions that I considered crucial to building the image of the Spanish dictator as a faithful ally of the Fascist regime. LUCE transformed Franco into a dictator who gradually became *El Caudillo*, a politician who was a staunch ally of the Duce but at the same time, a strong leader who forged an alliance with the Nazi-Fascist bloc. By analyzing these newsreels, one can observe the evolution of the image of Franco, as well as the representation of the relationship between the new dictator and the crowds.

Chapter 4 focuses on the representation of the Albanian reconstruction in LUCE's newsreels. It shows the process of transformation of the Balkan country from an independent

nation to an Italian colony, and also examines the construction of the image of Galeazzo Ciano as a possible new Duce and as the chief of the Albanian colony.

The first section of the chapter focuses on the newsreels that LUCE filmed in the marshy Albanian territory during the reclamation projects funded by the Fascist regime, and I study the visual and rhetorical representation of oil drilling and mining discovery in the countryside near Durres (Durazzo). Albania in LUCE's newsreels not only was colonized but also became a new Italian region that was transformed into a symbol of the ostensible Fascist triumphs throughout Europe.

The construction of the figure of Galeazzo Ciano as a possible heir of Mussolini is at the core of this chapter, and visual elements related to the body, attire and gestures of Ciano were used by the cameramen of LUCE to associate the figure of the Italian Foreign Minister with that of the Duce. The study highlights the sophisticated web of newsreels that the Fascist regime produced in order to promote the image of Ciano as a prominent Fascist leader, and emphasizes LUCE's skilful use of the voice-over in relation to both the soundtrack and images.

Chapter 5 shows how the rise to power of Hitler and the gradual construction of the alliance between the Duce and the Führer were represented in Italian cinema theatres. The first section is centred on the evolution of the image of the Führer in LUCE's newsreels, and provides an overview of the productions in which Hitler was shown in at least one sequence. I place particular emphasis on the examination of the voice and rhetoric of the German dictator, and argue that in these films LUCE began to represent Hitler as an ally of Fascist Italy and as an important surrogate of the Duce.

In the second part of the chapter I compare the images of Mussolini and Hitler in the newsreels and I emphasize LUCE's role in promoting the Italian dictator as the dominant figure in the construction of Fascist Europe. The structure, camera shots and narrative

discourse of the newsreels are also analyzed in order to fully comprehend the complex interconnections between the filming of real news and the cameramen's manipulation and mediation.

A large part of the analysis is devoted to the cinematic representation of the Middle Ages, and special attention is given to the representation of Hitler's visit to Florence in 1938. In the newsreels the diplomatic and political significance of the visit of Hitler was overlooked and substituted by a propaganda discourse that created a visual and linguistic link that tied the Middle Ages and Renaissance glory to Fascist Italy.

The thesis is both a historical and a visual analysis of the newsreels of LUCE that were filmed throughout Europe. The European continent publicized on Italian screens was not entirely fictional or fabricated, but surely, as we shall see in later chapters, it was the expression and reflection of the will, desire and strategies of the Fascist regime and, therefore, of Mussolini. It was through thousands of newsreels that the Fascist regime attempted to create a utopian Fascist continent that was a projection of Mussolini's Italy and an illusory new European Fascist space.

Chapter 1

Luce's newsreels in the media landscape

1.1 Newsreels: Between news and documentary

Although newsreels were created shortly after the birth of cinema and the productions were regularly screened in cinema theatres, they cannot be considered simply a film genre. Nicholas Pronay was one of the very first scholars to identify the hybrid nature of the newsreels and their unique characteristic of going beyond their limit of being a short film screened in cinema exhibition space. Pronay notes:

The newsreels are important historical evidence, which deserve study. Not as records of events, but as records of what a very large, socially important and relatively little documented section of the audience saw and heard, regularly from childhood to middle age. They are also primary evidence for the history of those wider developments, which are brought about by the application of modern technology to communications.¹

¹ Nicholas Pronay, 'The Newsreels: The Illusions of Actuality', in *The Historian and Film*, ed. by Paul Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 95-121 (p. 98).

As Richard Howells observes, the newsreel was a reel of film showing ‘a collection of news stories released at regular intervals in the cinema theatres’.² The newsreels were produced and exhibited for much of the twentieth century, and have since enjoyed an afterlife in which their contents are repackaged as forms of historical illustration, or as evidence. Howells underlines that to fully understand the newsreels as a historical source and pioneering means of communication it is crucial to relate them to other mass media, such as newspapers, television and the Internet. Newsreels did not exist in isolation. They were consciously constructed as part of a chain of news provision, serving the needs of a cinema audience already informed about what other media, namely newspapers and radio, had determined the news should be.

The newsreel was an important part of a process of apprehension of the news, of how the news of the moment was visualized and comprehended by a public that was being offered reports and stories through a multiplicity of outlets and in a variety of forms. They were a link in a chain, ‘an interdependent communication network that grew in complexity as illustrated journals, then radio, and, in the post-war period television, added to the rich nexus of news media from which the public selected and determined their understanding of what was news’.³

As Kevin Barnhurst and John Nerone explain, cinemas did not inevitably project newsreels and at the beginning of their screenings there was no positive demand for them as such, but they became popular and contributed to the variety of programmes. ‘They were a part of an evening’s entertainment, which was to give to the audience a steady stream of original news.’⁴ The newsreels created the concept of news in flux, a complex interaction between the visual, the textual and the aural, which is evident in the present digital environment.

² Richard Howells, Robert W. Matson, *Using Visual Evidence* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2009), p. 95.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁴ Kevin Barnhurst, John Nerone, *The Form of News: A History* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), p. 88.

Both in democracies and in dictatorships, one of the key elements that defined the newsreel was the concept of news. News could be genuine or manipulated by propaganda, but remained the fundamental element of these productions. Media historians consider the newsreel to be the ancestor of contemporary news broadcasts, reportages and digital platforms. William David Sloan and Lisa Mullikin Parcell note that during World War II in the United States, newsreels anticipated the advent of journalism on television.⁵ The newsreel could capture people and their everyday actions with an entirely different scope than could a traditional print news story. The productions, for example, showed ‘crying children and anxious parents ducking into ditches to avoid bombs in France; women calmly entering a Parisian bomb shelter; and American soldiers marching smartly and crisply on the training ground’.⁶ For Sloan and Parcell, on the surface the newsreel reflected people as they actually were, but the all-encompassing mirror of the camera lens was under the dictatorship of the editor. The newsreel combined the faithful reflection of reality with the deliberate orchestration of reality in reporting news.

Newsreels are also historically connected with the documentary. Pierre Sorlin declares that the difference between documentaries and newsreels was, and still is, obvious. Cinema and newsreels ‘deal with what has just happened; their style is fast moving and simple; their images are scarce and often come from only one informant, a special correspondent or agency, while documentary filmmakers stand back and have the benefits of insight’.⁷ Although Sorlin’s definition is technically correct, it is not valid for the entire global production of newsreels. As we shall see in the following chapters, the newsreels of LUCE were very often sophisticated examples of propaganda in which the style of filming was neither simple nor fast. Many documentaries were screened just a few weeks after the event

⁵ William David Sloan, Lisa Mullikin Parcell, *American Journalism: History, Principles, Practices* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2002), pp. 10-12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷ Pierre Sorlin, ‘Documentaries: a gold mine historians should begin to exploit’, in *Using Visual Evidence*, ed. by Richard Howells, Robert W. Matson (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2009), pp. 107-123 (p. 115).

was filmed and a substantial number thereof were composed of a series of the most effective newsreels edited by the filmmakers of the regime.

The difficulty of finding a clear definition of “newsreel” is closely connected to the debate surrounding the relationship between non-fiction films (of all genres) and fictional narrative. Alan Rosenthal and John Corner suggest that documentary and non-fiction films tend to trade across the boundary between fact and fiction ‘in order to bring structure to the sometimes intractable indexicality of its imagery, and to make more complex its portrayal of a multi-faceted reality. Problems occur when the material proposed as fact involves more fictional elements than the current generic understanding would allow.’⁸ Once the veracity of the documentary is in doubt, then the factuality or factual material (news included) is in doubt. Jane Chapman observes that the documentary genre ‘positions itself in relation to fiction and that just because we apply a non-fiction label to a film that does not mean we should ignore its fictive elements’.⁹ Chapman emphasizes that it may be true that in an observational documentary the event or subject that happens to be filmed would have taken place anyway. But the presence of the camera ‘is likely to give a different inflection, resulting in a level of performance, which indicates that the camera has an influence, if still within the parameters of real life’.¹⁰

Jeffrey Geiger writes that there is little difference between a documentary and fiction. Although as a cinematic form a documentary is aligned with non-fiction and factuality, therefore not being viewed as “fancy” or “fantasy”, it is easy enough to see that documentaries are ‘constructs containing elements of subjective interpretation, selection, fictional techniques and narrative modes’.¹¹ Documentary film historian Erik Barnouw

⁸ Alan Rosenthal, John Corner, *New Challenges for Documentary: Second Edition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 352.

⁹ Jane Chapman, *Issue in Contemporary Documentary* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), p. 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹¹ Jeffrey Geiger, *American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001).

explicitly declares that non-fiction films have elements of manipulation and fiction because ‘they are always in the service of an idea’.¹² For Barnouw, paradoxically, people today invoke the term “propaganda” only when documentaries do not represent their ideals.

Bill Nichols opens his studies on documentaries and reality with a controversial statement: ‘Every film is a documentary.’ Moreover, he calls a documentary ‘a fiction unlike any other’.¹³ According to Nichols, a documentary, while marking out a space in the popular imagination both alongside and against fiction, occupies no fixed territory and might be seen as a site of ‘contestation and change’.¹⁴ Roger Odin argues that documentary films can share with fictional ones several elements, such as the construction of a diegetic world, the web of conceptual actions that support the narrative, the use of narration and the figure of the narrator, the organization of the film as a discourse, and the adoption of an expository structure.¹⁵

LUCE’s productions appear to fall into the category of non-fiction cinema. The newsreels and documentaries filmed real events; the filmmakers did not use professional actors; the bombings which were filmed during the war were real; the fatigue of the soldiers was authentic; and the new towns that were inaugurated by Mussolini had really just been built. Organization of a plot, voice-over, rhetoric, and film editing were all elements of fiction that arguably created a manipulative effect on the audience. Therefore, fiction and reality were intertwined, undermining the purity of the real, and as we have seen, this is one of the key elements of non-fiction film genres, even among those productions that aspire to be the most credible to the audience.

1.2 Searching for “truth” in the newsreels

¹² Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 344.

¹³ Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁵ Roger Odin, *De la Fiction* (Bruxelles: De Boeck, 2000), p. 135.

The relationship between the reproduction of the image and reality has been the subject of discussion among theorists since the birth of photography. For the French poet Charles Baudelaire, photography is the absolute representation of reality and, for this reason, should not be regarded as an art form.¹⁶ Baudelaire describes photography as the tool of those who need absolute accuracy for scientific reasons, such as naturalists, biologists and astronomers. Elizabeth Eastlake's essay entitled *Photography* accepts the assumption that photography is not art but that it affects the old structures of art. Eastlake underlines that photography is a witness of the passage of time, but it cannot select or order the relative importance of things at any time: 'It does not disentangle what underlies appearances, but records voraciously whatever is in its view.'¹⁷

Roland Barthes conducts an ontological and textual analysis of the reproduction of images. Barthes' study focuses exclusively on photography but it is also adaptable to LUCE's productions, given the photographic component of the newsreels, their characteristic of being news that records seemingly true events, and their limited length. Barthes writes that an image contains three types of messages: denotative, connotative and linguistic. A denotative message is the literal signified of an image. It is 'a message by eviction, constituted by what is left in the image when the signs of connotation are mentally deleted'.¹⁸ The coding of the literal (denoted message) prepares and facilitates connotation, since it establishes certain continuity within the image at once. In newsreels, denotation coincides with the recording of a certain image, and borrowing the words of Barthes, at the denotative level 'the scene is there, captured mechanically, not humanly'.¹⁹

The second type of message, the connotation, is related to the symbolic signifiers of an image. Signifiers can be subject to different interpretations, depending on the knowledge and

¹⁶ Mark Durden, *Fifty Key Writers on Photography* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 2.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Eastlake, 'Photography', *Quarterly Review*, 101 (April 1857), 3-29 (p. 9).

¹⁸ Roland Barthes, *Rhetoric of the Image: Image, Music, Text*, ed. and trans. by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 32-51 (p. 42).

¹⁹ Barthes., p. 44.

cultural background of the viewer. 'Each sign corresponds to a body of attitudes, certain of which may obviously be lacking in this or that individual.'²⁰ Connotations are signs of images and are connected to a wide range of cultural codes of meaning. Barthes considered the third kind of message (the linguistic) to be 'present in every image: as title, caption, accompanying press article, film dialogue, comic strips balloon'. Barthes also underlines that the function of the linguistic message is to produce 'anchorage; and relay'.²¹

Anchorage may be ideological and, indeed, its main purpose is to direct the reader through the signifiers of the image, causing him or her to avoid some and receive others. Relay is particularly important in comic strips and films because in these media the linguistic elements 'advance the action by setting out, in the sequence of messages, meanings that are not to be found in the image itself'.²² As we shall see in later chapters, the three types of messages that Barthes theorizes are present in the newsreels that LUCE produced during the 1930s. In these productions the literal meaning of the image (a generic countryside landscape, a malarious territory, a speech of Ciano from a balcony in Tirana, a military review of Francisco Franco) was influenced and manipulated by Fascist symbols (signs), which were almost universally well known to the average Italian cinema viewer after years of relentless cinematic and photographic propaganda.

Captions and commentary constituted the linguistic element of the newsreels and directed the audience towards an understanding of the images that was shaped by the Fascist regime's ideas and policies. LUCE's newsreels involved both textual and psychological elements. Connotations and a broad stream of perception tried to draw the attention of the audience. A close-up of the face of Ciano or a spectacular long shot of buildings erected by the regime soon after the reclamation of the Albanian Marshes were the images that attracted the viewer's eye. Furthermore, the cameras allowed spectators to travel among the people who

²⁰ Ibid., p. 48.

²¹ Ibid., p. 49.

²² Ibid., p. 41.

attended a rally, or to witness the hard work of farmers. The cameras not only seduced the spectators but also immersed them in a stream of sound, places and feelings. People in cinemas were captured by the images and, consequently, the messages of the regime.

In the newsreels, the frantic search for apparent realism and the manipulation of images were elements that converged and were intertwined. Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov, who created and filmed the series of newsreels entitled *Cine-Pravda*, emphasized the adversarial relationship between realism and non-realism in newsreels.²³ Paul Stoller observes that in the newsreels of the series entitled *Cine-Pravda*, ‘Vertov’s aim was to plunge the cinema into the stimulating depths of real life with a construction of the real prompted by the camera’.²⁴ As Steven Feld points out, Vertov’s approach to the newsreels attacked the theory of realism head-on.²⁵ Vertov distinguished the theory of realism from reality. Opposed to studio fabrication of the real, in *Cine-Pravda*, Vertov demonstrated methods of capturing a cine-reality of life as it lived: ‘For Vertov, film realism was thematic and structural, built up from tiny units of observation of real people doing real things. These units were always organized by the filmmakers to express his version or statement of content.’²⁶

Birgit Beumers writes that for Vertov ‘the camera is more perfect than the human eye, because it lives and moves in space and time’.²⁷ The fast movement of the camera does not copy the human eye. As a mechanical device, the camera is perfect: it is agile and mobile. The cine-eye creates the perfect reality and the perfect man, subjecting both perception and representation to the process of industrialization and mechanization. The cine-eye ‘clarifies

²³ Jeremy Hicks, *Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

²⁴ Paul Stoller, *The Cinematic Griot: The Ethnography of Jean Rouch* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 102.

²⁵ Steven Feld, ‘Themes in the cinema of Jean Rouch’, *Visual Anthropology*, 2 (1989), 223-249.

²⁶ Feld, p. 238.

²⁷ Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), p. 48.

instead of distorting and it is a better way of comprehending the world than the naked eye thanks to the act of recording'.²⁸

The apparent perfect realism achieved by Vertov and the supremacy of the camera in relation to the human eye demonstrates that newsreels, as well as photographs, might realistically represent and simultaneously manipulate images. When the imperfection of the human eye is replaced by the accuracy of the camera, the alleged extreme realism becomes a fabricated reality and a utopian aesthetic exercise.

If, on the one hand, the combination of real and fictional narratives can be considered a crucial element in any documentary, on the other hand, it is complicated to define the degree of reality in a non-fiction film. Fictional elements and the interruption of the real are represented by details such as the choice of specific shots and the voice-over. It is even more complicated to provide a precise definition of the relationship between realism and newsreels, especially when the content of these productions is manipulated by the openly propagandistic efforts of a regime. Sorlin argues that 'we are obliged to treat newsreels as misrepresented images of society and we can't use them as the sole source for writing history because they do not represent the real but only a selection of it'.²⁹ As Sorlin notes, a newsreel are not a completely reliable historical source. However, the study of these mass media should be considered a means to open new perspectives for understanding strategies and mechanisms behind the manipulation of news.

Béla Balázs, a Hungarian screenwriter, director and refugee from Nazi Germany, warns that newsreels 'are the most dangerous form of propaganda because they appear to be objective and authentic photographic records, a sort of pictorial diary of the age'. Federico Caprotti, who devotes a chapter of his study on the reclamation of the Pontine Marches to the productions of LUCE, underlines that Fascist newsreels represent 'a spectacular vision of

²⁸ Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary. A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 5.

²⁹ Pierre Sorlin, 'How to Look at an Historical Film', in *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*, ed. by Marcia Landy (London: The Atholne Press, 2001), pp. 28-45 (p. 32).

reality'.³⁰ The newsreels of the Fascist regime represented a mediated and fabricated reality, which deceived viewers in order to influence their choices. Real events filmed by LUCE's cameramen became a giant spectacle that celebrated and praised Mussolini and the Fascist regime in Italy and abroad.

The manipulation of reality produced by propaganda should not divert attention from the evidence that the newsreels undoubtedly filmed true events. As Gianpiero Brunetta points out, when describing mobile cinemas used throughout Italy to showcase land reclamation in the Pontine Marshes, LUCE's photographic and cinematographic documentation 'constitute the most aesthetically effective testimony of the gigantic project'.³¹ The newsreels were not only the filmed documentation of the authentic and the real, but also the means by which the regime visualized the project and communicated its aims to the Italian population.

1.3 The aesthetic of the *giornale* Luce: between journalism and propaganda

The critical debate and considerations in respect of the aesthetics of newsreels in the 1920s and 1930s were led by the writing of filmmakers who published their studies and observations in Italian journals such as *Bianco e Nero*, *Cinema* and *Lo Schermo* and in the *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, a monthly multilingual cinema journal which ran from 1929 to 1934 (with its headquarters in Spallanzani in Rome at the seat of the International Educational Cinematographic Institute).

The *International Review of Educational Cinematography* was published simultaneously in Italian, English, French, Spanish and German editions, and its main editor

³⁰ Federico Caprotti, *Mussolini's Cities: Internal Colonialism in Italy, 1930-1939* (New York: Cambria Press, 2007), p. 189.

³¹ Gian Piero Brunetta, *The History of Italian Cinema: A Guide to Italian Film from its Origins to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 74.

was Luciano De Feo, who was also the director of LUCE from 1925 to 1929. From the Fascist regime's point of view, the objective of the Institute and its journal, with both created by the League of Nations but fully funded by the Fascist regime, was to 'position Italy as a centre of research on educational film and at least in part to help Mussolini improve Italy's image abroad by presenting itself as a modern state ahead of its neighbours'.³² As Jacqueline Reich writes, the *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, including figures such as Rudolph Arnheim, a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany, and Germaine Dulac, a socialist and feminist filmmaker, demonstrated that within the Institute, 'Italian Fascism accommodated ideological and cultural diversity'.³³ The journal does not provide an extensive and detailed definition of the Italian newsreels, how they were produced, and which criteria were followed to film them, but it reveals that the main function of LUCE's production was to educate the public, propagating ideas through daily or weekly chronicles.

An anonymous article published in 1934 and entitled 'The L.U.C.E. National Institute' indicates that the main objective of the Fascist newsreels was to 'gradually educate the audience without entering in any kind of contrast or competition with ordinary spectacular films'.³⁴ The author writes that the *giornale Luce* formed a rapid news service that gave the audience 'a final edition and the late news just like any other newspaper with the added advantage that the newsreels offer the visual appeal in 1,200 metres of film of news events every week'.³⁵ LUCE's journalism was explicitly biased because it had to follow 'its moral purpose of recognizing the urgent and absolute necessity of carrying on an intensive program of civil education by means of public film projections'.

³² Zoë Druick, 'The International Educational Cinematographic Institute, Reactionary Modernism, and the Formation of Film Studies', *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, 16 (2007), 80-97 (p. 85).

³³ Jacqueline Reich, 'Mussolini at the Movies: Fascism, Film, and Culture', in *Reviewing Fascism: Italian Cinema, 1922-1943*, ed. by Jacqueline Reich and Piero Garofalo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 4-6 (p. 5).

³⁴ Anonymous, 'The L.U.C.E. National Institute', *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 8 (1934), 493-498 (p. 494).

³⁵ Anonymous, 497.

The definition of newsreel as a medium that informed and educated people was also reiterated in an anonymous editorial entitled ‘What a News-Reel Should Be Like’, wherein the author notes that the newsreel ‘should give us the important news as soon as possible, and as an aesthetic document is destined to have a great importance in the mutual understanding of peoples’.³⁶

Germaine Dulac was one of the very few intellectuals who directed newsreels, wrote about their relationship with realism, and analyzed them as a genre that aimed to educate the audience. During the 1920s, Dulac was an avant-garde director who filmed surrealist and impressionist fictional movies, but after 1930, due to the transition from silent to sound cinema and the consequent lack of employment opportunities, she became a director of newsreels and the editor of the series entitled *France- Actualité*. Film historian Tami Williams writes that Dulac was a fervent feminist activist and pacifist, but in her 1935 non-fiction film entitled *Le cinema au service de l’histoire* (which traces the social and political events of the decades leading up to and following World War I), she portrayed ‘the early Socialist turned-Fascist Mussolini as a civilized dictator in relation to Hitler’.³⁷

In ‘The Educational and Social Value of the Newsreel’, Dulac argues that the dramatic fictional film is an application of cinematic art but not the expression of its inner truth, which is better expressed by the scientific film and the newsreel. The newsreel reveals the ‘truth of life which one could not know otherwise than through books, newspapers and manuals’.³⁸

Dulac continues to explain:

³⁶Anonymous, ‘What a News-Reel Should Be Like’, *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 2 (1932), 142-143 (p. 142).

³⁷ Tami Michelle Williams, *Germaine Dulac: A Cinema of Sensations* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014), p. 323.

³⁸ Germaine Dulac, ‘The Meaning of Cinema’, *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 12 (1931), 1089-1110 (p. 1101).

The newsreel is made day by day and cannot therefore be thought of as a premeditated thing. It seizes events of which it becomes a truthful mirror. It illustrates persons and facts. It even goes so far as to seek the intimate reason of their moral sentimental motifs. It is the mirror of any country, its pleasures and efforts, its joys and sorrows, and in this way it can lead to accord or disaccord. It is a fragment of the world's sincerest life, beliefs, struggles, woes and ideals.³⁹

The newsreels filmed real events that actually happened (daily or weekly), and to some extent (and in some cases) they were not premeditated. Indeed, LUCE and the Fascist regime did not control the organization of rallies of Francisco Franco or Hitler filmed in Spain or Germany. Regarding these productions, one can see mediation rather than premeditation. Real news was filtered and transformed after filming through editing and the addition of commentary, captions and soundtracks in order to inform viewers that important foreign leaders were loyal allies of Mussolini.

LUCE's newsreels that were filmed abroad but screened in Italian cinemas were intended to show a European continent on which policies and objectives of the Fascist regime were embraced or forcibly imposed. If we apply the definition of Dulac to the Italian newsreels, we notice that LUCE's productions projected and reflected the Fascist nation and its utopian effort of conquering Europe on screen. Furthermore, they illustrated events and portrayed foreign leaders, giving the illusion that Mussolini's will, policies and decisions were at the core of a European Fascist movement.

In the 1930s, Italian filmmakers and journalists who wrote about non-fiction films under the Fascist regime did not mention directly the analysis of Dulac, but they shared her

³⁹ Germaine Dulac, 'The Educational and Social Value of the Newsreel', *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 8 (1934), 545-550 (p. 546).

idea that the newsreels informed and educated viewers through the faithful reproduction of daily or weekly events. They were the cinematic newspaper of the Fascist dictatorship. Braccio Agnoletti was the first film critic to recognize the newsreels as a genre that had a distinct aesthetic. He proposes dividing the documentary film genre into three groups: ‘documentari fotografici, documentari retorico-letterari, documentari d’interpretazione’.⁴⁰ Agnoletti explains that the newsreels were an example of a photographic documentary because they reproduced real events, capturing an interesting moment and using it to cause a sharp, emotional reaction. The Italian newsreels were only a few minutes in length and, with their brevity, speed and acoustic and visual elements, were able to capture the attention of viewers.

Corrado D’Errico was the very first Italian film director to identify LUCE’s style. D’Errico was supportive of the newsreel as a genre, and in 1934 he directed the series of newsreels entitled *Rivista*, a special news edition that was specialized in theatre, fashion, sport, and variety and was screened alongside traditional newsreels. D’Errico observes that both LUCE’s newsreels and documentaries intended to document events but they had different objectives: ‘Il cinegiornale si ferma all’attualità, riproducendo i fatti nella loro immediatezza cronistica, il documentario li trascende, cercando di interpretarne lo spirito e inquadrandoli nel clima lirico della vita nazionale.’⁴¹

D’Errico observes that, ideally, LUCE should produce four newsreel editions a week so as to guarantee the projection of at least twelve news items and prevent the screening of the same news more than once. He also argues that if, on the one hand, the Italian newsreel preserved the classic structure of actuality films, on the other hand, ‘ha sulla maggioranza dei suoi confratelli di tutto il mondo vantaggiose caratteristiche che si possono riassumere in tre

⁴⁰ Braccio Agnoletti, ‘Documentari pretesto e documentary d’interpretazione’, *Lo Schermo*, 2 (1936), 12-14 (p. 13). During the Fascist regime, Agnoletti was a film critic, journalist and screenwriter. However, twenty years after the fall of Mussolini, he also directed one LUCE’s documentary entitled *Non sono macchine* (1967). Archive of the Luce Institute, consulted on 30 April 2015.

⁴¹ Corrado D’Errico, ‘Lo Stile Luce’, *Lo Schermo*, 7 (1936), 17-22 (p. 18).

principali: la severa selezione dei materiali, la velocità narrativa, l'aderenza immediata ai maggiori problemi politici e sociali'.⁴² According to D'Errico, the newsreel not only informed the audience but also gave Italian people a new form of education that comprised politics, art, sport, industry, and agriculture, following the press and implementing it through the irresistible fascination of the moving image.

The analysis of D'Errico backed (even if not explicitly) LUCE's newsreels' contradictory nature as a means of communication that reproduced true events that the Fascist regime mediated and transformed into a formidable weapon of propaganda. He defines the newsreel's style as 'fotografico e imparziale', but at the same time he writes that these productions were an instrument 'di esaltazione nazionale entro i confini e di profonda penetrazione di spirito italiano nel mondo'.⁴³ Thus, the alleged search for the representation of the truth in the newsreels coincided with the project of advertising and promoting a new Fascist Italy (and Fascist Europe) in Italian cinemas.

Fernando Cerchio was a filmmaker who worked for LUCE and recognized the prominent role of the newsreels in the Fascist propaganda machine. He directed thirteen documentaries under the Fascist regime and five non-fiction films between the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁴ It is worth noting that the documentaries directed by Cerchio shared several elements with LUCE's newsreels. For instance, Cerchio's films reproduced true events: eel fishing in *Comacchio*; bombings on Greece in *Ali Fasciste*; the construction of a boat in *Vele e prore*; climbing the Alps in *Rifugi Alpini*. In *Ali Fasciste*, the director used extracts from newsreels

⁴² D'Errico, p. 17.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 19.

⁴⁴ The documentaries directed by Cerchio during the Fascist regime are: *Vele e prore* (1939), *L'Italia ha sempre ragione* (1940), *Ali Fasciste* (1941), *La fontana di Trevi* (1941), *San Gimignano delle belle Torri* (1941), *Carbonia* (1941), *La scuola del cinema* (1942), *Rifugi Alpini* (1943), *Milizie delle Civiltà* (1941), and *Comacchio* (1940 or 1942). After the fall of the Fascist regime, Cerchio directed two nature documentaries commissioned by LUCE that were entitled: *La Campania. Ricordi Italia* (1958) and *Le Acque costiere* (1976). He directed three newsreels: *Sul set di Nefertide* (Settimana Incom, 1961), *Si gira a Roma Giuditta e Oloferne* (Settimanale Ciac, 1958), and *Manifestazioni per i 25 anni dell'Agis* (Notizie Cinematografiche, 1971). Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 16th August 2017.

filmed on the Greek front, and the voice-over, Guido Notari, was also the narrator of a very large number of newsreels.

Thanks to his extensive production of documentary films, Cerchio should be considered an authoritative voice among LUCE's directors. In 1940 he wrote that the newsreels filmed and projected in cinema theatres real news but that the cameramen should not have been obsessed with the reproduction of the truth, as 'il cinema è qualcosa di differente dalla fotografia e non soltanto un più ricco e perfezionato mezzo di riproduzione, e se la fotografia è indubbiamente alla sua base, tuttavia essa non è che un elemento'.⁴⁵ Cerchio proposes a type of newsreel in which the search for authenticity and what he calls 'il fatto espressivo' are combined. Cerchio defines 'il fatto espressivo' within the newsreel as the capacity of the cameramen to impress and influence viewers through the expression of opinions, judgements and controversy. He agrees that the mechanical eye of the camera is more accurate and better equipped to record an image, but he also thinks that the best newsreels produced by LUCE were the result of the choice, intelligence and journalistic skills of the cameramen.

Cerchio's article was published in March 1940, just three months prior to the Italian declaration of war on France and Great Britain, which explains perhaps why he was particularly concerned about the effectiveness of LUCE's productions. As I shall explain in the chapters that focus on the Italian interventions in Greece and Albania, the outbreak of World War II coincided with the regime's need to convince Italian people that the Fascist troops were well equipped and trained to win the war. The propaganda machine had to reassure the population that the military conflict was not affecting the strength and reputation of Mussolini at home or abroad.

⁴⁵ Fernando Cerchio, 'L'Evolutione del Film Giornale', *Cinema*, 90 (1940), 185-187 (p. 186).

Cerchio believed that the weekly newsreel editions (each edition had four to seven news items) should show viewers a combination of events that were connected, following a narrative in which ‘il giornale Luce potrebbe addirittura diventare un cortometraggio con una sua logica di composizione’.⁴⁶ It is important to underline that since the end of the 1920s, LUCE screened dozens of newsreels that embraced a wide range of topics and followed a daily narrative of events in which politics, art, agriculture, industry, sport, tourism, and entertainment were effectively intermingled. However, it is also evident that following the second half of the 1930s the logic of composition that Cerchio mentions became dominant. New editions of LUCE’s newsreels were characterized and shaped by a perennial political campaign, at the centre of which were utopian ideas of the construction of a new Fascist European continent and the delusive images of military victories on all of the war fronts.

For instance, as we shall see in Chapter 3, a typical monthly screening of newsreels filmed in Albania included images of Galeazzo Ciano in Tirana, reclamation projects funded by the Fascist regime, the vaccination of Albanian children, Italian mine companies extracting oil in the countryside, and the triumphant welcoming of the Italian army. The editors designed a simple but continuous narrative that linked newsreels that portrayed different subjects in order to highlight the prominent role of Fascist Italy not only in colonizing but also in civilizing the Balkan country.

Cerchio outlines the idea of a type of newsreel that ‘racconti, porti in campo dei problemi, che li presenti nei loro termini attuali, che contenga delle idee, dei giudizi. Esempi tipici di questo film-giornale si trovano, nella famosa serie Americana della *March of Time*, giornale tendenzioso di propaganda politica.’⁴⁷ However, it is crucial to specify that the U.S. newsreels entitled *The March of Time* (1931-1945) were generally longer than the Italian counterparts (the North American editions were 20-30 minutes in length; the Italian editions

⁴⁶ Cerchio, p. 186.

⁴⁷ Cerchio, p. 187.

were around 10-15 minutes in length), and that in the U.S. productions the voice-over narrated a larger section of the reel, while in the Italian newsreels the commentary is concise and direct. The Italian and U.S. newsreels had common attributes: they filmed true events (news) that were subsequently filtered by propaganda, and harmoniously intermingled distinct subjects and themes in order to advertise the will and policies of the Fascist regime or, in the case of the U.S. productions, to convey to viewers ‘general good intention, healthy journalistic scepticism, faith in enlightened self-interest, and substantial pride in American progress and potential’.⁴⁸

The logic of composition that linked newsreels that covered different topics and subjects but followed a homogeneous and coherent narrative was a feature that the Fascist newsreels shared with the German productions that were filmed following Hitler’s rise to power. There are no studies that identify the similarities between these two types of newsreels, but an analysis of Siegfried Kracauer’s observations is helpful in deciphering some of the main characteristics of the Nazi newsreels, and subsequently applying them to LUCE’s films. Kracauer writes that the newsreels produced by the Nazi regime after 1933 were specialized in deceiving the audience through the construction of an alternative reality, using ‘commentary, visuals and sound’ and making a ‘direct appeal to the subconscious of the nervous system for the sole purpose of eliciting from the audience certain emotions’.⁴⁹ Describing the Nazi non-fiction war films, Kracauer comments that the Nazis skilfully handled polyphonic techniques and, instead of ever halting the succession of propaganda ideas, merely changed the medium (sound, editing, images) through which these ideas were transmitted. When the commentary is reticent for a few seconds, ‘one can be sure that the visuals or the music take over, and often two or three independent meanings, assigned to

⁴⁸ Editorial, ‘Pictorial journalism’, *The New York Times*, 2 February 1935, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 243.

diverse media, run contrapuntally like themes in a score'.⁵⁰ Similarly to Nazi newsreels, the reality which figured in the Italian productions was heavily manipulated and manufactured by the almighty editor of the newsreels, namely Mussolini's regime, which cleverly used acoustic and visual effects, captions, and commentary so as to promote an ideal Fascist world led by the Duce.

The creation of a composition of news is also a feature of both German and Italian newsreels. Kracauer argues that the average American (with the partial exception of the series entitled *The March of Time*), British and German newsreel (issued before the Nazi electoral victory) consisted of a more or less casual mixture of various bits of news, while the Nazi editors were specialized in connecting different stories in order to form a logical web of news in which:

Pictures of an unsuccessful English raid over occupied Norway imperceptibly run into a lyric glorification of the German spirit of attack against England; Hitler's visit to his soldiers is the middle part of a unit that opens with derisive shots of the English king and ends in the destroyed Maginot Line.⁵¹

The commentary was the third element that Nazi and Fascist newsreels had in common. Kracauer notes that in the Nazi newsreels, pictures prevail over narration and this peculiarity is exhaustively demonstrated when comparing the German productions to the American and British films. In the latter the voice-over covered approximately 80-90 per cent of the shots, while in the former (the comment covered roughly 30 per cent of the reel) 'the

⁵⁰ Kracauer, p. 245.

⁵¹ Siegfried Kracauer, 'The Conquest of Europe on the Screen: The Nazi Newsreel, 1939-1940', *Social Research: An International Quarterly of Political and Social Science*, 10 (1943), 337-357 (p. 338).

commentary inclines towards brevity and, for long intervals, lets the pictures explain themselves'.⁵²

In LUCE's newsreels the voice-over had the dual task of briefly describing the events and emphasizing the propaganda message, implementing it by using hyperbole, metaphors, extracts from speeches of Mussolini, and sentences imbued with Fascist rhetoric. The commentary was a fundamental characteristic in a large section of newsreels but did not overwhelm the other communication channels that shaped the newsreels. It was part of the chain of visual and acoustic components, which, intertwined, became a tremendously effective weapon of propaganda.

The majority of the newsreels produced by LUCE (over 90 per cent) had music in the background, which in some productions simply accompanied the scene, but in others was an integral part of the film narrative. It is worth stating that by comparing the Fascist newsreels to Nazi films, one can notice that the latter were characterized by more widespread and persistent use of music as a tool of propaganda, and that in some productions the sound was better synchronized with images.⁵³ However, as we shall see in the chapters on Greece, Germany and Spain, LUCE also adroitly used soundtracks as a propaganda tool with which to emphasize diplomatic and military successes.

⁵² Kracauer, p. 339.

⁵³ Major studies on Nazi newsreels are: David Welsh, *Propaganda and the German Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2001); David Welsh, *Nazi Propaganda: The Power and the Limitations* (London: Routledge, 2014); Roel Vande Winkel, *Nazi Newsreel Propaganda in the Second World War* (Ghent: Academia Press, 2011).

Conclusion

The chapter attempts to provide a definition of “newsreel” and positions them within the interwar media landscape, identifying the common elements that this genre shared with documentary films. The analysis provides wide space to the studies of documentary film scholars in order to highlight the connections between newsreels and documentaries both in relation to their structure and regarding their attempt to represent the truth. The relationship between journalism and newsreels emerged. News could be genuine or manipulated by the regime, but remained at the core of these productions. Fascist propaganda, through the powerful LUCE, created an impressive daily cycle of visual news that portrayed national and international events.

Throughout the chapter, the theories of Roland Barthes, particularly his definitions of denotative, connotative and linguistic messages, help to decipher LUCE’s strategy that transformed real news into sophisticated political advertisements. It is through the continuous reproduction of images of crowds, reclamation projects, rallies, battlefields, and military exercises that the cameras of LUCE showed to the audience the birth of an illusory Fascist continent and promoted the political platform of the Duce.

Fascist newsreels were effective because they filmed events that seemed to represent incontrovertible truth. They documented and reported real facts and stories that were mediated and repackaged, and similarly to *Cine-Pravda* of Vertov, LUCE’s cameramen were able to create an apparent perfect realism.

As we have seen in the last section of the chapter, the articles published in the journal *International Review of Educational Cinematography* and the contributions of filmmakers such as Corrado D’Errico and Fernando Cerchio recognized the significance of the newsreels

within the Fascist propaganda landscape. D'Errico defines LUCE's newsreels as a genre with its own unique style that simultaneously informed and educated viewers, while Cerchio focused on the development of the *giornale Luce* and theorized a newsreel that followed the pattern of the American series entitled *The March of Time*. The evolution of LUCE's productions is directly related to the observations of Siegfried Kracauer in relation to Nazi newsreels. The logic of composition that linked newsreels that covered different topics and subjects, the homogeneous and coherent narrative, and the use of polyphonic techniques and sounds were elements that both Nazi and Fascist news shared on screen. The mechanisms of the Nazi propaganda film network are well documented but as we shall see throughout the thesis, LUCE's newsreels anticipated strategies and characteristics that scholars usually consider to be originally designed by the Nazi regime.

The next chapter aims to show the cinematic transformation of Greece into a Fascist touristic heaven. The newsreels related to Greece were a pioneering example of how LUCE used images, sound and voice-over in order to promote Europe as a continent that was about to be conquered by Fascism.

Chapter 2

A tale of two countries: Screening Greece before and after the Italian invasion

Introduction

LUCE's newsreels that were filmed in Greece represented a peculiar example of how Fascist propaganda portrayed foreign nations and promoted the political agenda of Mussolini's regime. Although the news on the screen connected to the Hellenic country was significantly outnumbered by footage that LUCE produced in nations such as Albania or Germany, it is important to underline that during the *ventennio* Greece was constantly part of the newsreel cycle. As we shall see in this chapter, in the 1930s Greece was not the most relevant country in the Italian geopolitical chessboard but it was the only foreign state that appeared in Fascist non-fiction productions from the early 1920s up to the fall of Mussolini. The early interest of Fascist propaganda in Greece had one strategic explanation: The twelve islands of the Dodecanese belonged to the Kingdom of Italy.

The newsreels that portrayed Greece, its politicians and the colonized Aegean islands are not only an understudied and valuable historical document but they also represented the prototype of what Cerchio defines as the 'LUCE's style'.¹ The analysis of newsreels that filmed the island of Rhodes, official visits of Greek politicians in Italy, and the Italian military intervention in Greece in 1940 all demonstrate that the Fascist regime

¹ Fernando Cerchio, 'L'Evolutione del Film Giornale', *Cinema*, 90 (1940), 185-187 (p.186).

aimed both to document events and educate the audience. This chapter also highlights the variety of topics covered by the newsreels and it shows LUCE's ability to alternate and connect images of war with footage of worldly events such as royal weddings.

2.1 Touristic gaze and colonial ambitions: Greek Islands in Fascist cinemas

In Fascist Italy tourism was a central element of the propaganda discourse used by the regime both to enhance the concept of Italian greatness (especially when the tourist destinations were in areas where archaeological sites were discovered) and 'to promote the idea of holiday as a working class pastime'.² Cinema was a formidable weapon that enabled the Fascist regime to show the tourist attractions of the Italian peninsula and colonies. An anonymous article in the *International Review of Educational Cinematography* emphasizes that 'the reel is the most adequate means for making known beyond the frontiers the touristic and picturesque aspects of the life of a country and its labor and social economic progress'.³

As Medina Lasansky observes, 'the Fascist regime media campaign nationalized the experience of history for the Italian *popolo*' and, thanks to the Fascist National Party, the act of visiting historic sites was no longer an exclusive rite of the foreign bourgeoisie of the previous century: 'Tourism was now redefined as a pursuit for the Italian people'.⁴ Lasansky argues that tourism under Fascism became 'both a cultural product and a producer of a distinctly Fascist culture that served as a vehicle by which Mussolini's

² Medina Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected. Architecture, Spectacle and Tourism in Fascist Italy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

³ Anonymous, 'The role of the Cinema in Social Life', *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 3 (1930), 347-379 (p. 358).

⁴ Medina Lasansky 'Towers and Tourists. The Cinematic City of San Gimignano' in *Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, ed. by Roger Crum (Ithaca: Cornell University press, 2005), pp. 125-137, (p. 129).

rhetoric could be distributed efficiently'.⁵ As Brian L. McLaren points out, 'heritage tourism coincided with the Duce's project to extol the glorious past of the Italian towns to promote the idea of holiday as a form of patriotic duty'.⁶ In the newsreels filmed in Greece the concept of tourism embraced both heritage and leisure in order to achieve the cinematic incorporation of the Greek Islands in the Italian territory (although contrary to the Aegean islands, Corfù did not officially become an Italian colony).

In the newsreels, Rhodes as a symbol of the projection of Fascist success abroad emerged. In these productions the captions have a denotative function, they are concise and they communicate to the audience a simple but direct message; the Greek Islands belonged to Italy. The voice-over has a twofold function of elucidation and selection. If on the one hand the voice-over describes the sequences, on the other it leads the audience to focus on specific connotative signs of the images in order to create a cinematic illusion in which Greece embodies the condensed essence of what LUCE promotes as symbol of Italianness.

On 28th August 1935 LUCE's newsreel *Una crociera lungo le coste meridionali dell'Adriatico* was screened in Italian cinema theatres. The production films a sightseeing cruise along the southern coast of the Adriatic Sea, which had its point of arrival on the island of Corfù. In the opening scene the voice-over declares that 'una crociera lungo le coste dell'Adriatico meridionale offre sempre uno spettacolo piacevole e suggestivo'. The female voice uses a tone that is kind, polite and elegant, hence perfect for a cruise. In the subsequent scenes the cameramen accompanies the narration, and a soundtrack of trumpets and violins, which gives a sense of harmony and tranquillity, replaces the voice-over. The cameras cut from a medium shot of the cruise ship (which is a large, elegant sailing catamaran) to a series of spectacular longer shots that show the arrival of the ship

⁵Lasansky, 'Towers and Tourists', p. 135.

⁶ Brian L. McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya: An Ambivalent Modernism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), p. 109.

near the coast of Corfù. The last sequences of the newsreel show two middle-aged couples leaving the ship, while the voice-over enthusiastically informs the viewers that they are watching ‘una rapida visione della superba e radiosa Corfù’. The cameramen follow the smartly dressed travellers as they are climbing the stairs of the entrance of a luxurious villa, therefore giving the impression that the holidaymakers are part of the Italian upper-middle class (Fig.1).



Fig. 1: Two couples of Italian tourists arrive at a villa on the coast of Corfù. From: *Una crociera lungo le coste meridionali dell'Adriatico*, 28th August 1935, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 15th November 2015.

In this production it is hard to see tourism as a pastime for working class citizens, indeed only a tiny minority of the Italian population could afford such an opulent holiday. This newsreel and other productions that were set in the Greek islands show places that were considered exotic. The cruise became the unreachable desire that fuelled the cinematic

dimension of a dream in the mind of the average Italian. Accordingly, the newsreel evolved as a form of entertainment, a vehicle to temporarily move the Italian people outside their everyday life.

It is worth noting that during the 1930s dozens of newsreels showing holidays organized by the National After Work Agency (*Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*) and several youth organization holidays were produced. Simultaneously, LUCE unveiled a new attitude towards the representation of vacations. Families with children, girls wearing bathing suits and trendy hairstyles, beautiful and crowded beaches and popular public figures during summer breaks were increasingly filmed and they became a common presence in the newsreel cycle.

The dichotomy that relates tourism and Fascist propaganda was pivotal in the newsreels portraying Rhodes, an Italian colony that was home to about 6,500 Italian citizens.⁷ In 1933, LUCE produced *Rodi. Splendori di civiltà italica nell'isola dei cavalieri. Le terme di Galitea e l'albergo delle Rose*,⁸ a newsreel that focuses on two Italian resorts that were built on the island's shore. This production reminds the audience that Rhodes was an Italian territory, and that the substantial Fascist financial subsidies granted to the Greek colonies were contributing to the Dodecanese's economic renaissance. It is important to observe that in the very first LUCE's newsreel filmed in Rhodes and entitled *I reali Savoia sbarcano a Rodi* (1929), the idea of Fascist colonization (and domination) of the island is already clearly addressed and communicated to the audience through images of King Victor Emmanuel III and his wife Queen Elena of Montenegro greeting thousands of enthusiastic citizens from the balcony

⁷ The Italian occupation of the Dodecanese has been studied by: Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Nicholas Doumanis, 'Italians as "Good" Colonizers: Speaking Subalterns and the Politics of Memory in the Dodecanese', in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (New York: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 212-227 (p. 219).

⁸ This newsreel was divided into two parts both screened in 1933 but the exact release date is unknown. Archive of the Luce Institute, consulted on 15th November 2015.

of the prefecture of the capital Rhodes city (Figs. 2-3). Furthermore, all the newsreels filmed in Greece are always unambiguous in transmitting to the viewers the notion that the Dodecanese is fully incorporated by the Fascist regime.⁹



⁹ The Italian royal couple visited the Greek colonies in June 1929 and the trip is documented by the newsreels: *I reali Savoia visitano l'isola di Castelrosso nel Dodecaneso*; *I reali Savoia in visita nell'isola di Coo*; *I reali Savoia visitano le isole del Mare Egeo*. Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 16th November 2015.



Fig. 2-3: A sequence showing King Victor Emmanuel III and queen Milena of Montenegro on the balcony of the prefecture palace of Rhodes. The subsequent scene shows the crowded square of Rhodes (city) where the people gathered to cheer the Italian king and queen. From: *I Savoia sbarcano a Rodi*, 1929, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 15th November 2015.

The newsreel *Rodi. Splendori di civiltà italiana nell'isola dei cavalieri. Le terme di Galitea e l'albergo delle Rose* shows the island as a new idealized Italian touristic destination. In the reel Rhodes is not only a colony but it represents a dreamlike land where sumptuousness and worldly hotels are within the reach of the Italian people. The film opens with a panoramic sequence of the island, showing the harbour, beaches, one hotel and the typical white buildings (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4: The medium shot of the *Hotel delle Rose* and its beach, from *Rodi. Splendori di civiltà italiana nell'isola dei cavalieri. Le terme di Galitea e l'albergo delle Rose*, 1933, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 19th November 2015.

Subsequently, the cameras cut on the imposing building of *Hotel delle Rose*, a slow soundtrack of violins and trumpets (that sounds like a 1930s swing musical accompaniment) is synchronized to the movement of the cameras, and the voice-over with a calm and gentle tone informs the viewers that: 'questa bianca città che sposa il fascino dell'oriente musulmano alle gloriose opere del medioevo cristiano offre oggi al turista tutte le comodità di un'ideale stazione climatica'. The commentary is followed by images of the seaside in front of the hotel; medium shots of people walking on the beach; close-ups of smiling women while sunbathing; and eventually a series of scenes showing women and men elegantly dressed while chatting and enjoying drinks. (Figs. 5-6). The voice-over remarks that 'l'imponente e modernissimo albergo delle Rose domina una vasta spiaggia gremita di bagnanti tutto l'anno'.



Fig. 5: The close-up of one of the women while lying on the hotel's beach, 1933, from: *Rodi. Splendori di civiltà italiana nell'isola dei cavalieri. Le terme di Galitea e l'albergo delle Rose*, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 19th November 2015.



Fig. 6: Women and men while enjoying food and drinks at the *Hotel delle Rose*, from: *Rodi. Splendori di civiltà italiana nell'isola dei cavalieri. Le terme di Galitea e l'albergo delle Rose*, 1933, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 19th November 2015.

The hotel is described as ‘imponente e modernissimo’ underlying LUCE’s attempt to convey to the viewers the feeling that the island is a perfect example of a Fascist display of innovation and modernization. The swing-like music that accompanies the sequences, images of men wearing white suits, and the women with stylish swimwear symbolizes a worldly and fashionable holiday destination that LUCE promotes as ‘gremita di bagnanti tutto l’anno’, thus pointing out that such a vacation was becoming a consolidated habit.

It would be incorrect to argue that this newsreel does not accurately document and report a genuine journalistic story. The Fascist regime built a series of infrastructures in Rhodes and it is plausible that hotels such as the one shown in the newsreels were popular retreats for the Italian urban upper-middle classes, the wealthiest settlers and Fascist officials who lived on the island. The hotel is still renowned in Rhodes and its website promotes the resort as ‘enchanting and impressive, amazing and glamorous. The Gran Albergo delle Rose began its glorious course through history on the 24th May 1927.’¹⁰ Furthermore the hotel and the rooms maintain a style that ‘mixed Arab, Byzantine and Venetian influences’.¹¹

The Fascist regime also organized trips for the young *avanguardisti* and *balilla* in the Italian colonies. The archive of LUCE preserves ten newsreels that film trips of children and teenagers in various nations and cities along the Mediterranean Sea, and one of these newsreel is set in Rhodes.¹² However, films that focused on holidays of *balilla* or *giovani italiane* were committed to showing the educational and physical training of the Italian youth. The children’s rooms were clean venues but they were not comfortable hotels such as the *Delle Rose*. Rhodes, as also another newsreel (*Rodi. Le salutari terme di Calitea*) indicates, epitomized tourism as a new Fascist cultural product and as a

¹⁰ <http://www.gadr.gr/index.php> [Accessed 20 May 2017]

¹¹ McLaren, p. 182.

¹² *La crociera degli avanguardisti da Napoli a Roma*, 1931. Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 19th November 2015.

cinematic object of desire. For the majority of Italian families a trip to Rhodes was not affordable but LUCE's narrative promoted the island as a dream that was within the reach of all and, as the opening explanatory caption of another newsreel (*Rodi. Le salutari terme di Calitea*) declares, 'gli italiani ricordino che Rodi è una deliziosa villeggiatura d'Italia' (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7: Caption from the newsreel *Rodi. Le salutari terme di Calitea*, 1933, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 19th November 2015.

In the newsreel *Rodi. Splendori di civiltà italica nell'isola dei cavalieri. Le terme di Galitea e l'albergo delle Rose*, the voice-over mentions 'il fascino dell'oriente musulmano'. The relationship between Fascism and Islam is complex and contradictory

and this chapter is not the right place to analyse such a relevant and vast subject.¹³ However, it is important to clarify that LUCE produced a considerable number of newsreels and documentaries in Muslim majority countries (Albania among them) or territories with Muslim minorities. The bulk of these non-fiction films did not openly criticize Islam, but they underlined the alleged benefits of Italian colonization, which was described as a bearer of a new civilization. A few thousand Muslim citizens lived in Rhodes, and the newsreel *I reali Savoia visitano le isole del Mare Egeo* shows dozens of women wearing the Niquāb while cheering the Italian royal couple. The sequence also communicates to the audience that the Muslim minority convincingly supported the Fascist leadership in the Dodecanese islands. Anna Baldinetti points out that the Fascist positive attitude towards Islam was ‘set within the framework of anti-British in the Arab world, which presented the Italian colonial presence as favorable to Muslims’.¹⁴ As Stanley G. Payne observes, the Fascist regime had proclaimed Mussolini a hero of Islam and a defender of Islam in the Italian colonies. The Duce chose to promote himself as a ‘promoter of Arab nationalism above all as a tool for expansion of Italian influence’.¹⁵

If on the one hand, tourism in Rhodes was framed as a glamorous but achievable experience, on the other it also symbolized the Fascist attempt to depict the Greek Islands as a new civilized Italian territory. In June and July 1940, only five months before the Italian military intervention in Greece, LUCE produced three newsreels entitled *Nel sole di Rodi*.¹⁶ In these reels, the ability of LUCE’s propaganda machine to use what Kracauer

¹³ The relationship between Fascism and Islam (and Islam majority countries) is analyzed by: Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism. 1914-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), pp. 328-355; Manuela Williams, *Mussolini’s Propaganda Abroad. Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935-1940* (New York: Routledge, 2006). The production of fiction films and documentaries in the Italian colonies in Africa has been studied by Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Anna Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation. Colonial Legacy, Exile, and the emergence of the new Nation-State* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 27-90.

¹⁴ Baldinetti, p. 50.

¹⁵ Payne, p. 352.

¹⁶ *Nel sole di Rodi. Un rapido viaggio nella capitale dei nostri possedimenti nell’Egeo*, was projected on 7th June 1940, *Nel sole di Rodi. Una visita al castello* was screened on 27th June 1940 and eventually *Nel Sole*

defines as the polyphonic elements of the newsreels, combined with the willingness to give the audience an illusory island that symbolized the success of Fascism abroad clearly emerged. In the series *Nel sole di Rodi* the concepts of tourism as a cultural product and as a heritage and patriotic duty are intertwined. Furthermore, the three newsreels have simple but coherent narrative plots in which different topics and propaganda messages are well synchronized.

The newsreel *Nel sole di Rodi. Un rapido viaggio nella capitale dei nostri possedimenti nell'Egeo* opens with a panoramic view of the beaches and resorts of Rhodes city. A solemn soundtrack of violins accompanies the sequences, and simultaneously the voice-over informs the audience that:

Poche ma eloquenti cifre testimoniano la radicale trasformazione che l'Italia Fascista, apportatrice di civiltà nel segno del littorio ha operato nel piccolo borgo lepantino. Dal 1922 ad oggi la popolazione è aumentata di 10,000 abitanti. Il movimento dei turisti è passato dai 700 nel 1922 ai 60,000 di questi ultimi anni.

A few seconds later the cameramen show the imposing theatre of the city (christened Puccini theatre), the government palace, a medieval building, which, as the commentary reminds us, was renamed 'la casa di Dante', and newly discovered Roman archeological sites. In the second part of the film, a forty seconds long shot gives the viewer the opportunity to travel through the narrow streets of the city centre (Fig. 8). The soundtrack becomes faster as if to mimic a brisk walk, and the voice-over asks the audience: 'non sembra di essere in una città Toscana?' The newsreel ends with sequences showing the

di Rodi. Una visita nella capital delle Isole Egee on 22nd July 1940. Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 20th November 2015.

countryside area of Rhodes where ‘attorno alle linde case rurali, fioriscono i giardini e le messi maturano rigogliose nel dolcissimo clima’. (Fig.9).



Fig. 8: The long shot that accompanies the viewers through the streets of Rhodes, from: *Nel sole di Rodi. Un rapido viaggio nella capitale dei nostri possedimenti nell'Egeo*, 1940, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 21st November 2015



Fig. 9: A panoramic view of the reclaimed land in countryside of Rhodes, from: *Nel sole di Rodi. Un rapido viaggio nella capitale dei nostri possedimenti nell'Egeo*, 1940, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 21st November 2015.

In this newsreel Rhodes becomes the representation of an ideal Fascist colony that also epitomizes (albeit in miniature) a projection of the Fascist regime. By displaying images of modern tourist attractions, idyllic and fertile land, and allusions to the cult of the Italian glorious past and heritage, LUCE not only shows Rhodes as a flourishing and thriving Italian island but also promotes some of the Duce's favorite and recurrent propaganda messages and tropes.

When the cameramen show the streets of the city centre and the medieval building restored by the Fascist regime, the commentary makes a direct comparison between Rhodes and Tuscany. The question 'non sembra di essere in Toscana?' and the shot of the building named 'la casa di Dante' are clear references to the greatness of the Tuscan medieval and Renaissance past.¹⁷ As we shall see in the second section of this chapter and in chapter V, both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were critical in the propaganda strategy of LUCE's newsreels. The statement of the voice-over intends to promote

¹⁷ The relationship between Fascism and medieval and Renaissance past is discussed in Chapter 5, section 5.2, pp. 189-198.

Rhodes as an example of successful Fascist intervention that brought to the island civilization and economic development. However, for LUCE it was also critical to show to the Italian people that Rhodes was well integrated and assimilated into the Italian empire. A few months later, the Italian invasion of continental Greece began and LUCE's cameramen had to demonstrate that the conquest of the entire Hellenic country was worth the sacrifice of a war.

The second and third newsreels of the series are a direct continuation of the first film and to a large extent they reiterate the same propaganda messages. Images of the governmental palace and the theatre are interspersed with sequences showing fifteenth-century buildings of the city centre, churches and the newly restored mosque. However, the last section of the second newsreel (*Nel Sole di Rodi. Una visita nella capitale delle Isole Egee*) offers a combination of acoustic and visual elements that convey to the audience a new and supposedly incontrovertible proof of the Italianness of Rhodes. A sequence of spectacular shots of an Ancient Roman temple is accompanied by the voice-over that declares: 'Rodi, con i templi e le opere rimesse in luce dagli scavi è oggi città Italiana, sentinella avanzata nel Mediterraneo orientale.' (Fig.10). There are a number of studies that investigate the relationship between Fascism and Ancient Rome. Aristotle Kallis looks into the Fascism's relationship to the Roman past and examines the nexus between Fascism, temporality, and modernity.¹⁸ Kallis indicates that Italian Fascism envisioned Rome and the Roman Empire as the sacred locus where its desired status as a national and universal historical force would be enacted and celebrated. Thus 'the regime's heavy investment in the architectural, cultural, and symbolic estate of Rome was related to the Mussolini's willingness to shape the city as an ideal of capital of Italian

¹⁸ Aristotle Kallis, *The Third Rome, 1922-1943: The Making of the Fascist Capital*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, UK, 2014).

Fascism, regenerated, restored and symbol of a universal Fascist political religion.’¹⁹ Paul Baxa writes that ‘in its encounter with Rome the Fascist movement revealed its desire for myth and in doing so became part of a general culture striving for myth after the war’.²⁰ Luisa Passerini notes that ‘the end of World War I saw a resurgence of traditional myths and images that were later appropriated by the regime, especially the cult of the Duce. *Romanità* was another such myth and Fascism’s remaking of the Roman landscape was in part a reflection of these myths’.²¹ Roger Griffin and Matthew Feldman argue that ‘*Romanità* formed the basis for much of the cultural propaganda of the 1930s, and the release of the film *Scipione l’Africano* was the clear indication that Mussolini’s new empire was the recreation of the Roman Empire.’²²

In the newsreel *Nel sole di Rodi* the images of the archaeological sites and the voice-over communicate to the viewers that Rhodes was fully part of the new Italian empire (or of the new Roman empire), that the millenary history of the island was inextricably related to Italy and that the Roman past of the Greek islands justified a further Fascist intervention in Greece.

¹⁹ Kallis., p. 8.

²⁰ Paul Baxa, *Roads and Ruins: The Symbolic Landscape of Fascist Rome* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 18.

²¹ Luisa Passerini, *Mussolini Immaginario. Storia di una Biografia 1915-1939*, (Laterza: Roma-Bari, 1991), p. 38.

²² *Fascism. Critical Concepts in Political Science*, ed. by Roger Griffin and Matthew Feldman (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 190.



Fig. 10: The panoramic shot of the archaeological remains of the Roman Temple, from: *Nel Sole di Rodi. Una visita nella capitale delle Isole Egee*, 1940, Archive of the Luce Institute, consulted on 21st November 2015.

2.2 The cinematic construction of the Italian-Greek alliance

Mussolini wanted to keep a diplomatic profile with Greece and this was reflected in the newsreels until 1940. As Richard Clogg notes, the evidence of Mussolini's strategy was the signing of the treaty of friendship between Italy and Greece in 1928.²³ The non-aggression agreement also stressed the good relationship between the Duce and the Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos, a conservative politician who led a still democratic Greece. The good relations between the two countries continued throughout the brief

²³ Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 107.

interlude of the para-fascist government of Kondylis in 1935, as shown by the newsreels that will be analysed in the current section.

The apparent paradox occurred between 1936 and 1941 when Ioannis Metaxas took power in Greece and established a dictatorship openly inspired by Italian Fascism. Marina Petrakis, in a comprehensive study on the Greek dictator, notes that Metaxas was creating a nation based on the model of the corporatist Fascist state with an extensive propaganda machine, which included the production of newsreels, even though much fewer in number than those produced by LUCE.²⁴

Despite the ideological affinity with Italian Fascism, LUCE showed no interest in Metaxas, preferring to focus on the Greek monarchy. MacGregor Knox observes that Mussolini did not trust the Greek dictator because, if on the one hand Metaxas was implementing fascist policies at the national level, on the other he maintained a strong alliance and economic ties with Great Britain, an archenemy of the Axis forces from the second half of the 1930s. The scarce reliability of Metaxas is the most plausible explanation for the lack of newsreels related to him and his Government. Mussolini decided to ignore the Greek dictator, and the newsreels focused on a variety of other issues related to Greece.

In October 1935 LUCE produced the first newsreel in which the arrival in Italy of a Greek political figure was filmed. The short film follows the visit of the new Prime Minister of Greece Georgios Kondylis at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Rome. As Emilio Gentile writes, the unique sacralisation of politics inaugurated by Fascism finds one of its main expressions in immense collective mourning rituals. Indeed the Fascist cult of the dead is central to the creation of a religion of the nation because ‘it reflects ineradicable cultural and historical passion’ that draws on traditions and reinvents it. The

²⁴ Marina Petrakis, *The Metaxas Myth: Dictatorship and Propaganda in Greece* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), pp. 64-116; see also: Jon Kofas, *Authoritarianism in Greece: The Metaxas Regime* (New York: Columbia University press, 1983), pp. 88-101.

Unknown Soldier Memorial became an inspiration of this reinvention'.²⁵ Historian Patrizia Dogliani notes that under Fascism the Unknown Soldier developed 'special Italian characteristics and the monument in which he was honoured was symbolically identified with the mass of those who had been dispersed'.²⁶

Former General and Minister of War Kondylis became Prime Minister on the 10th October 1935 with a coup that forced the previous chief of Government Tsaldaris to resign.²⁷ The same day Kondylis declared the abolition of the Republic, soon after he endorsed the reinstatement of the monarchy (at that time in exile) and on 9th November 1935 he held a farcical referendum in which 98 per cent of the Greek people voted for the return of the Royal family to the homeland.²⁸ Kondylis had sympathies for Mussolini and the Fascist regime. As the *Time* magazine reports on 17th November 1935: 'Kondylis had turned so far to the right that he now openly sympathies with Fascism. He hopes to echo Benito Mussolini's example in Italy in which Victor Emmanuel III had been reduced to a puppet'.²⁹ The admiration of Kondylis for Mussolini it is the apparent main reason why LUCE produced a newsreel that mentioned a visit of the Greek Prime Minister after eight years had passed without any newsreel about Hellenic politics and politicians.

The newsreel is accompanied by a male voice-over that informs the audience that the Prime Minister of Greece came to Rome and was visiting the capital with the Governor of the city Giuseppe Bottai. The central figure of the newsreel was Kondylis. He is filmed as he climbs the steps to reach the tomb of the Unknown Soldier and he wears a white military uniform (Fig.11). Once he comes close to the monument, he greets

²⁵ Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. by Keith Botsford, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 32.

²⁶ Patrizia Dogliani, 'Constructing Memory and Anti-Memory: The Monumental Representation of Fascism and its Denial in Republican Italy', in *Italian Fascism: History, Memory and Representation*, ed. by R.J.B. Bosworth and Patrizia Dogliani (Houndsmills: Macmillan Press LTD, 1999), pp. 11-31 (p. 14).

²⁷ John S. Kolupoulos, *Modern Greece, A History since 1821* (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2009) p. 103.

²⁸ Karl Derouen, *Civil Wars of the World. Major Conflicts since World War II* (Santa Barbara: Abc Clio, 2007), p. 369.

²⁹ Editorial, 'Greece by the Grace of God', *Time Magazine*, 17 November 1935.

a small group of Fascist officials with the Roman salute. Eventually, in the closing seconds of the newsreel, Kondylis is filmed while repeating the salute on his way to visit the Pantheon.

Kondylis, who in previous years had served as Minister of War and General of the Greek army, felt understandably at ease wearing a military uniform. The Italian people since the 1930s had become familiar with the figure of the Duce as commander of the nation and in this film, the image of the Greek Prime Minister clearly recalled that of the Duce seen in dozens of newsreels. The filming of the Roman salute made by the Greek Prime Minister to the Fascist officials, put Greece ideally at the level of a collaborationist country, an ally of the Italian Fascist regime. It was a clear sign of respect to Mussolini's dictatorship.



Fig. 11: Kondylis as he makes the Roman salute surrounded by the Fascist officials. From: *Visita di Kondylis a Roma*, 10th October 1935, Archive of the Luce Institute, consulted on 21st March 2016.

The attention of LUCE on Kondylis vanished after the first newsreel, presumably because his Government lasted only six weeks due to immediate disagreements with the King of Greece George II. The Greek monarch forced Kondylis to resign and he promptly encouraged the rise to power of his pupil Ioannis Metaxis. For Fascist propaganda the monarchy suddenly became the only Greek institution worthy of a certain attention. From 1935 to 1939 the LUCE filmed four newsreels related to Greece and all of them showed events associated with the Greek royal family. According to Martin Blinkhorn, the Greek monarchy in 1936 was committed to 'dissolve the parliament, ban political parties, abolish the Constitution and create a third Hellenic Civilization',³⁰ therefore LUCE's newsreels (at least for a short period of time) did not openly oppose or criticize King George II and his family.

The first newsreel portraying George II was screened in Italian cinemas on 27th November 1935 and it follows the official visit of the Greek King in Italy. The monarch is filmed while visiting Rome, and then a few days later when he returned to Greece, embarking on a military cruiser that sailed from Brindisi. The newsreel opens with a medium shot of George II who has just reached the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, thus creating a visual analogy to the sequence filmed two months earlier on the occasion of the visit of Kondylis (Fig. 12).

³⁰ Martin Blinkhorn, *Fascism and the Right in Europe. 1919-1945* (New York, Pearson Education Limited, 2000), p. 87.



Fig. 12: The King of Greece George II while climbing the stairs to reach the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. From: *Re Giorgio di Grecia rende omaggio al Milite Ignoto*, 27th November 1935, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 25th November 2015.

The King of Greece approaches the tomb of the Unknown Soldier flanked by Bottai and a few Fascist officials. Both George II and Bottai are dressed in black, elegant civilian clothes. The similarity of the clothing and the absence of zooming make the monarch of Greece hardly recognizable and his image is mingled with that of the Governor of Rome and the other Fascist officials. This visual detail allows the cameras of LUCE to disguise the figure of the King, representing him as a harmless leader who paid homage to Italian Fascism. Additionally, while in the previous newsreel Kondylis made the Roman salute, George II remains stationary in front of the tomb of the Unknown Soldier as an anonymous and detached figure. The lack of exaltation of the figure of George II coincided with the scarce consideration that Mussolini had of the monarchy, an institution that the Duce during the early stage of the Fascist regime had promised to liquidate.³¹

³¹ Richard J. Samuels, *Macchiavelli's Children, Leaders and their Legacies in Italy and Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 166.

In the second half of the newsreel the cameras of LUCE moves to Brindisi, where, as the voice-over reports, King George II embarked on the military cruiser *Helleni*, a ship that belonged to the Greek navy and stationed in Apulia. The body of the King vanishes from the film, and the cameramen focus on the cruiser and the seamen who are waiting to sail. Eventually the cannons of the ship explode two shots before the departures are shown, underlining the military message of the sequence (Fig.13). The grandeur of the warship and the two cannon shots represent the kind of images which the Italians would have had to get used to, given the imminent military intervention in Ethiopia. The sequences also attempt to communicate to the audience feelings of security and safety. The cruiser belonged to the Greek navy but the cameras show an Italian flag waving on the bow of the ship, implicitly reminding the cinema viewers that the Fascist regime had complete control of the Mediterranean Sea.

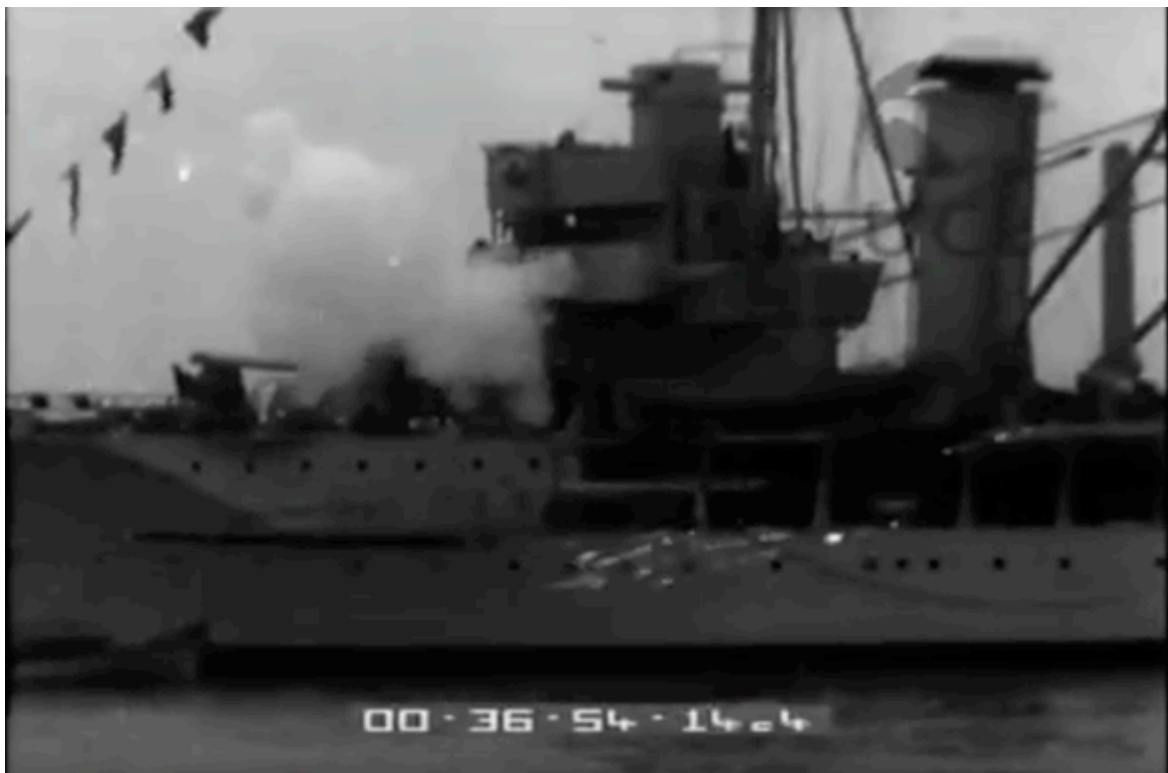


Fig. 13: The medium shot of the warship *Helleni* while firing the cannon shots From: *Re Giorgio di Grecia rende omaggio al Milite Ignoto*, 27th November 1935, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 25th November 2015.

Between 1928 and 1943 LUCE produced hundreds of newsreels in which royal families from all over Europe were filmed and King Victor Emmanuel III and his family appeared in 610 films. The image of the Italian king was central in the newsreels. The cameramen of LUCE followed him during his travels in Italy and abroad and, after the proclamation of the new Italian empire in 1936, he was frequently filmed during his tours in North Africa. Victor Emmanuel III epitomized the figure of a prominent ambassador of the Fascist regime in the world. The Italian monarch alternated elegant civilian clothes with military uniforms and he frequently wore a long cloak that contributed to building his aristocratic image that was diametrically opposed to the anti-conformist way of dressing of the Duce.

Although the figure of the king was often recognizable, the cameramen did not zoom-in on his body and close-ups of his face were very rare. In the newsreels, the short stature of the monarch was never concealed and Victor Emmanuel III often appeared surrounded by Fascist officials who were much taller than him (Fig. 14). The cameramen of LUCE showed no intention of representing the King as a charismatic figure and in the newsreels his voice was never recorded. It appears that the Duce, who behind the scenes was a pragmatic politician, had thought to give the King a delusive main role in the Fascist propaganda, exploiting him as a surrogate and giving the Royal family the illusion that they still preserved a predominant role in Fascist Italy.³²

³² Studies that analyze the relationship between Italian Fascism and monarchy are: Denis Mack Smith, *Italy and its Monarchy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 244-275; Giuseppe Finaldi, *Mussolini and Italian Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 2013); John Pollard, *The Fascist Experience in Italy* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 55-77.



Fig. 14: A medium shot of King Victor Emmanuel III surrounded by Fascist officials during a trip to Milan, from: *La visita campionaria di Milano visitata da Vittorio Emanuele III*, 1931, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 26th November 2015.

The attention of LUCE for the European royal families was constant during the Fascist regime. From 1928 to 1943 the cameramen followed the monarchs all over Europe during weddings, funerals and inaugurations of new public works. LUCE also screened these newsreels as a subtle weapon of domestic propaganda. For instance, before the outbreak of World War II, LUCE produced 50 newsreels that filmed events related to the British royal family. The majority of the productions show the British monarchs while visiting the slums of East London; workers of the manufacturing industry; soldiers of the navy; hospitals and shelters for indigent children; and a coal mine. The newsreels emphasize the crucial role of the working classes in opposition to the European nobility and aristocracy. By showing footage of the British monarchs in the most deprived areas of London the Fascist regime sought to underline that the greatest enemy of Fascism in Europe, the British Empire, was in decline.

After 1939 LUCE's newsreels became much more aggressive and the British Royal family was often opened ridiculed and derided. On the 2nd February 1940, the cameramen of LUCE films the newsreel '*Re Giorgio si è fermato due giorni fra i marinai delle basi navali*'. The images of the visit of the British King are accompanied by the aria that concludes the first act of the opera *The marriage of Figaro*. The citation of the opera is a clear mockery against the monarch, portrayed by Fascist propaganda as a narcissistic aristocrat who is forced by the war to change his nice clothes and forget his noble habits. After the outbreak of World War II the attitude of LUCE towards Great Britain changed and several anti-British newsreels were produced. However, it is important to emphasize that the majority of these films did not target the British Monarchy specifically but they aimed to represent Great Britain as an enemy of the Fascist regime.³³

2.3 How to win a war in the cinema theatres: The Fascist military intervention in Greece

This section investigates the role of the newsreels of LUCE and their importance as a weapon of propaganda to turn the disastrous military intervention in Greece into an illusory and fictitious Fascist victory. MacGregor Knox observes that despite the adverse opinion of the generals of the armed forces, especially Badoglio, Mussolini believed that the war in Greece would have been easily won over a few days. The Duce was convinced that a ruthless and heavy bombing offensive on Greece would have immediately brought

³³Anti-British productions included: *Inghilterra: Leith Docks. Il ritorno in patria dei marinai inglesi già prigionieri a bordo della Graf Spee* (1940); *Bombardieri Tedeschi sull'Inghilterra* (1940); *Lavori d'assedio contro l'Inghilterra* (1940); *Sommersibile Britannico catturato* (1941); *Sommersibili dell'Asse contro i rifornimenti Anglo-Americani* (1941); *Con i piloti Italiani sull'Inghilterra* (1941), Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 20th March 2016.

down the country.³⁴ On the 8th November 1940 the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Galeazzo Ciano was optimistic about the progress of the war, and he wrote in his diary that although the Duce was angry with Badoglio ‘il contrattacco greco si sta indebolendo in tutti settori’.³⁵

In December 1940, the Fascist war in Greece was almost lost. The military expedition, which was meant to ensure victory in a few days, was dramatically extending its duration. The Greek soldiers began a counter-offensive and the Italian army was forced to withdraw, by putting at risk part of the Albanian territory, which was under the Fascist rule.³⁶ LUCE propaganda machine responded to the Fascist military defeats through an aggressive newsreel campaign that aimed to show the heroism and sacrifice of the Italian soldiers and the organization and strength of the Air Force.

Among the three branches of the Italian military (navy, infantry and Air Force), the Air force had a lower budget but it underwent a complete reorganization and renovation. The *Regia Aeronautica* was created by Mussolini in January 1923 and was granted with equal status to infantry and the navy in the following March. The Duce saw the conservative and monarchist Italian army as an imperfect instrument for his ambitions while the new *Regia Aeronautica* had been considered as a Fascist institution from its very inception.³⁷ John Gooch points out that on 6th November 1926, when Italo Balbo replaced the undersecretary of the Air Force Alberto Bonzani, the Italian Air fleet consisted of 800 combat-ready aircraft and 800 reserves that made the *Regia Aeronautica*

³⁴MacGregor Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed. 1939-1941. Politics and strategy in Fascist Italy's war* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 189-209.

³⁵Galeazzo Ciano, *Diario 1937-1943*, ed. by Renzo De Felice (Milano: Rizzoli, 1990), p. 394.

³⁶The Italian military defeat in Greece has been studied by: MacGregor Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed. 1939-1941. Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 231-286; Davide Rodogno, *Fascist European Empire. Italian Occupation during the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); James Burgwyn, *Mussolini Warlord: Failed Dreams of Empire, 1940-1943* (New York: Enigma Books, 2012), pp.31-54.

³⁷David Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control. The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 99.

the second largest Air Force in the world at that time and approximately equal to the British Royal Force, which had 850 front line aircraft.³⁸

However, Balbo ordered tests to evaluate the efficiency of the planes and eventually only 633 aircrafts were able to fly. During the first year with Balbo as the head of the Air Force, the Italian industry produced 420 new aircraft and 900 engines and, between 1926 and 1931, the Air Force expanded in size from 2,340 officers to 3,060.³⁹ Giorgio Rochat notes that under Balbo, who remained Minister of Aviation until 1933, the Italian Air Force soon gained a privileged position and undoubtedly experienced a rapid and successful development.⁴⁰ Despite the progress achieved, Balbo was removed by Mussolini from office in 1933 and ‘a general downturn of the Italian Air Force came in the second part of the 1930s when the worldwide armament expansion began, and when Italy lacking raw materials and foreign currency, was no longer able to keep pace with technological progress’.⁴¹

During the Fascist regime the cult of the Air Force was a prominent element of Fascist propaganda and Mussolini became the promoter and the embodiment of the skilful, brave and fearless pilot who represented both the new Fascist man and the progress of Italy under his leadership. The dictator took part in his first flight as a passenger in 1915 and he began to attend flying lessons with the professional pilot Cesare Redaelli in the summer of 1920, subsequently qualifying as a pilot on the 13th May 1921.⁴² Influential members of the Italian Air Force were friends of Mussolini and close to the Fascist National Party from the beginning of the Duce’s rise to power. For instance

³⁸ John Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals, The Armed Forces and Fascist Foreign policy, 1922-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.99.

³⁹ Claudio Segrè, *Italo Balbo. A Fascist Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 148.

⁴⁰ Giorgio Rochat, *Italo Balbo* (Roma: Utet, 2003), pp. 25-45.

⁴¹ Gerard Shreiber, Bern Stegemann and Detlef Vogel, *Germany and the Second World War. The Mediterranean, South-East Europe, and North Africa 1939-1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 82.

⁴² Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of power in Mussolini’s Italy* (Berkeley: University of California press, 2000), p. 53.

Aldo Finzi, a wartime pilot who took part in D'Annunzio's celebrated raid on Vienna on the 9th August 1918, was alongside the Duce when the dictator received the king's invitation to form a government on the 29th October 1922. Finzi was a Fascist of 'the first hour' who was appointed Under-Secretary of the Interior ministry.⁴³ As Dominick Pisano notes, the propaganda machine promoted the *Regia Aeronautica* as the most important military innovation of the Duce⁴⁴ and according to Gerard Silk:

The picturing of Mussolini in aviator's garb, sometimes at the controls of an airplane, bearing captions such as *Il Primo pilota* or *Il pilota della nuova Italia* referred not only to Mussolini as leader of both the government and the military but also to an individual equipped with the daring and the intelligence to commandeer new technologies such as the airplane, needed as well to lead Italy toward a modern imperial future⁴⁵

Pictures of Mussolini as the 'primo pilota' were widely published in the journal *L'Ala d'Italia*, a magazine that ran from 1922 to 1943. *L'Ala d'Italia* placed the first photo of Mussolini at the controls of an airplane on the cover of the November 1922 issue. Putting Mussolini in the pilot's seat seemed 'to foretell only three months later his move to make the Italian Air Force the most Fascist branch of the military with the Duce assuming the position of commissioner of aviation'.⁴⁶ As Falasca-Zamponi notes, during the 1920s and 1930s airplanes were symbols of a new era, and pilots, like actors, were saluted as stars. In fact most major actors sooner or later played the role of the pilot, most often a war

⁴³ Gooch, p.53.

⁴⁴ Dominick Pisano, *The Airplane in American Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 256.

⁴⁵ Gerard Silk, 'Il Primo Pilota', in *Donatello among the Blackshirts*, ed. by Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 67-82, (p. 73).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

pilot. 'Airplanes embodied qualities such as dynamism, energy and courage, attributes that Fascists worshipped and claimed as its own. Mussolini as aviator automatically represented and promoted these virtues.'⁴⁷

The writer (and mayor of Rimini from 1933 to 1939) Guido Mattioli published the propagandistic essay entitled *Mussolini aviatore e la sua opera per l'aviazione* where he observes that Mussolini envisioned the restructuring and strengthening of Italian air power as 'il ponte ideale tra passato e futuro'.⁴⁸ The Duce considered the airplane as essential to the creation and administration of a modern empire, similarly to the role that roads and sea power had in the Ancient Roman Empire. The heroic Fascist pilots and the *Regia Aeronautica* were also widely advertised by Fascist cinema. In 1938, Vittorio Mussolini, son of the Duce, produced *Luciano Serra Pilota*, a film directed by Goffredo Alessandrini with the collaboration of Roberto Rossellini. The production became one of the most popular films of the decade and it shared the prestigious Mussolini Cup with Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* at the 1938 Venice film festival.⁴⁹ The protagonist of the film was a young pilot, Luciano Serra who, disillusioned at the end of World War I, abandons his family and goes off to South America for nearly fifteen years. In Latin America, Serra becomes an adventurer, but when Italy gets involved in the war with Ethiopia, he returns at the age of forty, to help his country.

Newsreels and documentaries had an even stronger impact in promoting the Italian Air Force and the image of Mussolini as the *Primo Pilota* of the Italian nation. During the period 1927-1943 the LUCE produced over 2,000 newsreels that focused on the Italian Air Force, the Duce as a pilot and civil and military aviation events all over the world.

⁴⁷Falasca-Zamponi, p. 70.

⁴⁸Guido Mattioli, *Mussolini Aviatore e la sua Opera per l'Aviazione* (Roma: L'Aviazione, 1939), p. 31.

⁴⁹For an analysis of the film *Luciano Serra Pilota* see: Stephen Gundle, *Mussolini's Dream factory: Film Stardom in Fascist Italy* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 2013), pp. 184-189); Peter Brunette, *Roberto Rossellini* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 3-11; Steven Ricci, *Fascism and Cinema. Italian Film and Society 1922-1943* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 152.

2.3.1 Real bombing but only cinematic victories

In December 1940 the LUCE began the screening of newsreels that portrayed the Fascist bombing of Greece. These productions were not filmed to represent the Italian expedition in Greece as an effortless or painless mission. Voice-over, spectacular shots and acoustic elements were used to represent the air bombing as a symbol of the (alleged) superior Fascist military preparation and progress. In the newsreels filmed in Greece the voice-over did not provide the description of the sequences but it became a narrator that focuses on few and critical propaganda messages. As Kracauer observes, ‘the commentary inclines towards brevity and, for long intervals, lets the pictures explain themselves’.⁵⁰

On 31st December 1940 LUCE filmed a newsreel that follows a fleet of the Italian Air Force while bombing the Greek infantry (*Grecia. Attività della nostra aviazione*). In the opening scene, the cameramen show three planes of the Italian army as they fly in the Greek sky side by side. Subsequently, thanks to a camera mounted on one of the planes, a spectacular panoramic shot of the Greek territory is shown, effectively representing the domain of the Italian Air Force over Greece.

The voice-over, with an aggressive and militaristic tone, informs the audience that: ‘I nostri aviatori sottopongono tutti i centri vitali del fronte Greco ad un quotidiano martellamento’. At the same time the cameras show the bombs being dropped from the plane, columns of smoke rising from the ground after that targets were hit and the pilots while they are shooting with the plane machine guns. One of the sequences focuses on a pilot inside his cockpit just after the bombing, giving the viewers the opportunity to empathize with the aviator (Fig. 15). This newsreel aims to involve the audience emotionally transmitting the

⁵⁰Siegfried Kracauer, ‘The Conquest of Europe on the Screen: The Nazi Newsreel. 1939-1940’, *Social Research: An International Quarterly of Political and Social Science*, 10 (1943), 337-357 (p. 339).

sense of daring and excitement of live action. The camera, and thus the spectator, is inside the cockpit, very close to what is presented as a dangerous war operation.



Fig. 15: The shot of a pilot in the cockpit of an aircraft of the Italian Air Force while bombing Greek military stations. From: *Fronte Greco. Attività della nostra aviazione*, 31st December 1940, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 3rd December 2015.

The commentary continues to accompany the newsreel with brief, concise and belligerent sentences: ‘I bersagli sono stati centrati!’ and ‘gli aerei sono micidiali ovunque il nemico si annida’. The chronicle of the voice-over is followed by images of dozens of bombs dropped from the planes and a close-up of an optical sight of a machine gun (Fig .16).



Fig. 16: The close-up of the optical sight of the gun machine that was mounted on the warplanes. From: *Fronte Greco. Attività della nostra aviazione*, 31st December 1940, Archive Istituto Luce, Rome, consulted on 3rd December 2015.

The coordination of images, voice-over and the sound of bombing reinforces the idea that the Fascist Air Force was relentless, extremely effective and ready to unleash its power against the enemy. However, although the bombs, warplanes and gun machines are real, the newsreel does not fully cover and document the military operation. There is no mention of casualties or damage, and no Greek soldiers are shown. This production attempts to show the Air Force operation in Greece as a massive and well-organized military effort that swept away an insubstantial Greek army. The sequences showing the bombings epitomize the sublimation of the Italian air fleet, a Fascist symbol that Mussolini desperately tried to preserve despite the imminent catastrophic defeat.

If on the one hand the Greek infantry was never filmed, on the other LUCE showed the struggles and pitfalls that the *Regia Aeronautica* faced. In February 1941 the newsreel entitled *Attività dei nostri bombardieri* filmed the Italian warplanes while struggling to land and take off in the muddy Greek territory and under adverse weather conditions. The opening

sequences of the newsreel document the effort of the pilots to take off and to build improvised makeshift airstrips while heavy wind and rain are battering the war front (Fig. 17).

The images are followed by a solemn soundtrack of violins and a succinct commentary that observes that: ‘malgrado le proibitive condizioni atmosferiche e campi di atterraggio ridotti a pantani dalla pioggia, i nostri piloti continuano ad assolvere le missioni di guerra loro affidate’. LUCE faithfully documents and reports the hazard and peril of the Air Force battles, and the images of pilots and warplanes under the rain, the soundtrack of violins and the comment of the voice-over transmit to the viewers the resilience and heroism of the Italian pilots in Greece.



Fig. 17: The medium shot of a warplane while struggling to take off, from *Attività dei nostri bombardieri*, 1941, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 4th December 2015.

In the second part of the newsreel the documentation of the struggles of the Italian pilots is turned into a celebration of the Air Force and the manipulation of the true journalistic coverage of the air bombing becomes striking. For about one minute the cameras show the bombers while flying over the Greek front, alternating panoramic views of the battleground with medium shots in deep focus of the Italian Air fleet. A slow soundtrack of violins

accompanies the sequences and the voice-over with a severe but calm tone reminds the viewers that: ‘raffiche di bombe sono lanciate su tutti i punti sensibili dell’organizzazione avversaria inesorabilmente battuti dall’ala Fascista’.

In this film, the rhetoric of the commentary, the rumble of the warplane engines and the gun machines are acoustic elements that, intermingled with the images, define the *Regia Aeronautica* as an invincible military force that is capable of overcoming and defeating both the unfavourable weather conditions and the Greek army. During the first weeks of the war in Greece, LUCE continued not to show the Greek infantry, and the enemy was portrayed as an insidious but invisible entity that was destined to lose against the Fascist military might. However, during the spring of 1941 the Greek conflict developed into a war between the Axis and Great Britain. Accordingly, LUCE’s propaganda strategy dramatically changed and the visual and aural rhetoric of the war in Greece evolved.

On the 14th April 1941 the newsreel *Azioni di nostri aerei siluranti sulla baia di Suda nell’isola di Creta* was screened in the Italian cinema theatres. The production shows a huge Italian bomber (model *Savoia Marchetti 82*) while dropping a missile that destroyed a British warship. The newsreel is the very first Italian propaganda film that documents the destruction of British armaments during the Greek war, therefore marking a crucial shift in the representation of the enemy. The film opens with a close-up of the imposing warplane, conveying to the audience the idea of an impressive and seemingly indestructible Italian Air Force. Subsequently the cameramen of LUCE followed a group of Italian soldiers while pushing a massive torpedo that was placed at the bottom of the aircraft (Fig. 18).



Fig. 18: One shot portraying Italian soldiers while pushing the torpedo towards the bomber, from: *Azioni di nostri aerei siluranti sulla baia di Suda nell'isola di Creta*, 1941, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 9th December 2015.

The roar of the propellers of the plane accompanies the sequences, and the voice-over, with an enthusiastic tone, reminds the audience that ‘il siluro, che gli armieri per una comprensibile vanità bellica vogliono lucido e forbito non è una semplice bomba ma una piccola nave subacquea munita di un completo apparato motore’. Images, voice-over and the roar of the propellers aims to communicate the idea of Fascist technological progress and when the commentary explains that the torpedo ‘non é una semplice bomba’ it emphasizes that the Italian Air Force was apparently prepared to compete with the most advanced armies.

As we shall see more extensively in Chapter 4, newsreels filmed in Albania epitomized Italian colonial development through sequences that contained veiled and

implicit sexual references. Similarly, in the film *Azioni di nostri aerei siluranti sulla baia di Suda nell'isola di Creta*, the images of the torpedo positioned under the warplane remarkably suggests a phallic symbol (Figs. 19-20). The torpedo 'lucido e forbito' that satisfied an alleged war vanity is filmed with close-ups and medium shots that underlines its size and brightness while four soldiers, two of them shirtless, are shown as they work frantically to load the missile. In one sequence the torpedo is filmed as an erect phallic symbol that is positioned between the two giant wheels of the planes (that visually suggest two legs) and one of the soldiers seem to hold the missile.





Fig. 19-20: Two series of shots filming the torpedo/phallic symbol from: *Azioni di nostri aerie siluranti sulla baia di Suda nell'isola di Creta*, 1941, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 9th December 2015.

Karen Pinkus observes that ‘the true body of Fascism is the phallic body, existing in a state of preparedness for war’.⁵¹ In this newsreel the preparation for a crucial air raid against British targets is symbolized by the huge torpedo / phallus symbol that becomes a visual representation of both enormous military power and virile masculinity. As Barbara Spackmann notes, virility under Fascism ‘was the property of the male’.⁵² The sequences that filmed bare chested soldiers while pushing the giant rocket are an attempt to show to the audience images of strong, virile Fascist men who are ostensibly ready to experience and win the war. Falasca-Zamponi notes that ‘the themes of fertility, unity and virility

⁵¹Karen Pinkus, *Bodily Regimes: Italian Advertising Under Fascism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 38.

⁵²Barbara Spackmann, *Fascist Virilities. Rhetoric, Ideology and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1996), p. 32.

surreptitiously drove the regime's discourse of expansionism and war'.⁵³ Fascist propaganda in the cinema theatres promoted the military campaign in Greece as a battle to conquest new territories, expand the Italian empire and transform a decadent country into a flourishing and fertile land (following the pattern of the Aegean Islands).

LUCE propaganda machine represented the air bombing on Greece as a victory of the heroic, brave and virile Fascist soldier; a man, as the final part of the newsreel showed, who knew how to utilize the most sophisticated and lethal weapons. A series of eye-catching shots film the Italian bomber while reaching the bay where a British warship is stationed and a few seconds later the dropping of the torpedo is shown (Fig. 21). The missile (whose hissing roar might have resonated in cinemas) enters quickly into the water and reaches the British battleship, which is flipped on its side. Simultaneously the voice-over exclaims 'colpito!' (Fig. 22).

This newsreel was the best example of how LUCE coordinated voice-over, images and acoustic effects to deliver to the audience both an authentic story (the filming of the dropping of the torpedo was real news recorded by the cameramen a few days earlier) and a manipulated and remediated propaganda film that promoted the war on Greece as a victorious mission where the Fascist man triumphed and the British enemy was defeated.

⁵³ Falasca-Zamponi, p.121.



Fig. 21: Shot of the torpedo while in the water before reaching the British warship. *Azioni di nostri aerie siluranti sulla baia di Suda nell'isola di Creta*, 1941, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 9th December 2015.



Fig. 22: The last shot of the newsreel shows the British frigate capsized. *Azioni di nostri aerie siluranti sulla baia di Suda nell'isola di Creta*, 1941, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 9th December 2015.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that LUCE portrayed Greece as a nation that had to be considered under the Fascist sphere of influence. From the 1920s to the outbreak of World War II, the Aegean Islands and Corfù were part of the newsreel cycle and they were promoted as Italian provinces (until the first half of the 1930s) and as territories of the new Italian empire (after 1936). The newsreels of this section documented real news and journalistic stories that embraced a wide variety of topics. However, LUCE manipulated and filtered the news through acoustic, visual elements and voice-overs. As Fernando Cerchio observes, these productions tried to synchronize a faithful and authentic representation of events thus attempting to arouse emotions and reactions among the cinema viewers.

The Aegean Islands and Corfù were portrayed as idyllic holiday destinations that were filmed to advertise the Fascist intervention in Greece and the alleged economic renaissance of the archipelago. Rhodes was deceptively publicized as a glamorous and modern tourist location that offered spa and resorts that all the Italian people could enjoy. If on the one hand tourism was represented as a cultural product, on the other it symbolized the glorification of the Greek ancient past and its Classical heritage. It is in these newsreels that Fascist propaganda tried to create a narrative in which Greece (or at least part of it) was incorporated into Italy.

LUCE showed no interest in the Greek dictator Metaxas while it devoted several newsreels to diplomatic or mundane events related to the Greek monarchy and Prime Minister Kondylis. This strategic decision not only demonstrates that Mussolini did not appreciate Metaxas and his foreign policies but it also highlights a further attempt to depict Greece as a nation that, albeit independent, was under increasing Italian authority.

The images of Kondylis and the members of the Greek Royal family aimed to show the leaders of the Hellenic country as harmless political leaders that cultivated a friendly diplomatic relationship with the Fascist regime.

The intermingling of sequences displaying the frontline and the skilful use of visual symbols, voice-over and music tried to convey to the audience the idea of an invincible and indomitable Fascist Air Force. On the Italian cinema screens the Greek islands were turned into idyllic havens that, according to Fascist propaganda, were a projection and a faithful reproduction of some of the policies that the Fascist regime adopted in the Italian peninsula. As we shall see in the following chapter, Spain also became symbol of the cinematic projection of Fascist Italy throughout Europe but the representation of the Iberian country was mainly focused on its idyllic countryside and the rise to power of the dictator Francisco Franco.

Chapter 3

Defining an ally: The construction of Spain as a satellite of the Fascist regime

Introduction

The contents of the newsreels produced by LUCE in Spain were closely linked to the fluctuating diplomatic relations between Mussolini and the Spanish government. In the late 1920s and early 1930s Mussolini had not yet decided whether to intervene in Spain to promote the rise to power of a para-Fascist government, and, consequently, from 1930 to 1934, Fascist propaganda in the Iberian Peninsula was based on moderation and pragmatism. Although these two terms were apparently distant from the personality and temperament of Mussolini, the newsreels produced before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War suggested that the Fascist regime had a genuine interest in Spanish rural life, and that the Duce appreciated the ruthless methods used by the Spanish Republican government to suppress the opposition.

As we shall see in the first section of this chapter, the propaganda machine behind the newsreels was complex and involved countries and leaders that were not necessarily allies but were potentially interesting strategically, politically, and diplomatically. The productions that filmed Spanish rural life were a sophisticated attempt to connect the Spanish countryside to the Italian one, emphasizing the closeness of culture and tradition between the two Mediterranean nations.

As Aristotle Kallis observes, the first test of the consistency of Fascist cinema propaganda abroad was the Spanish Civil War. The Fascist regime through the creation of the National Union for Film Export (*Unione Nazionale Esportazione Pellicole*, UNEP)¹ facilitated the process of film selection, dubbing or subtitling and distribution.² By 1938 about sixty dubbed productions of LUCE (both newsreels and documentaries) were exported to the Spanish market and were widely shown in nationalist controlled Spain through a series of agreements with local film organizations and distributors. Although Italy and Germany were allies in fighting the Spanish Republicans, the export of Italian non-fiction films in Spain also served to counter the Nazi rule in the Spanish film business.

The German newsreels produced by UFA had been made available to audiences in Nationalist-controlled Spain long before the Italian authorities were alerted to the political and commercial potential of the Spanish market. The Fascist regime, which was concerned about the competition of the Nazi propaganda, began an expansion plan that included an increase in the state subsidy for film productions to be shown in Spain. As a result, in 1939, the head of the General Directorate of Cinematography (DGC) Luigi Freddi, could claim that the Fascist regime had done a 'good job in Spain', especially considering the sluggish inception of the Italian involvement two years earlier.³

The turning point of the activities of LUCE in Spain coincided with the rise to power of Franco and the representation of the image of the new Spanish dictator made by

¹UNEP was created on 29th January 1936. The two founders were the Minister for popular culture (*Ministero per la cultura popolare*, MINCULPOP) and the Fascist National Federation of Entertainment (*Federazione Nazionale Fascista degli industriali dello spettacolo*, FNFIS). The new state-owned company managed the trade of Italian films abroad. The company's initial share capital was 10,000 lire. For a complete description of the birth of UNEP see: Daniela Manetti, *Un'Arma Poderosissima. Industria Cinematografica e Stato durante il Fascismo. 1922-1943* (Milano: Franco Angeli Editore, 2012), pp. 160-161.

² Aristotle Kallis, 'A War within the war: Italy, Propaganda and the Quest for Cultural Hegemony in Europe', in *Cinema and the Swastika. The International Expansion of Third Reich Cinema*, ed. by Roel Vande Winkel and David Welch (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 172- 186 (p.174).

³ Maria A. Paz, 'German film on the Spanish market Before, During and After the Civil War', in *Cinema and the Swastika. The International Expansion of Third Reich Cinema*, ed. by Roel Vande Winkel and David Welch (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 253-264 (p. 257).

the Italian cameraman after 1938. Although there is no doubt that the Italian intervention in the Spanish Civil War was largely filmed by the cameraman of LUCE, the films that followed the Fascist army on the battlefield alongside Spanish Nationalist troops were limited to the representation of the occasional successes of the Italian army, and the flow of productions was often abruptly interrupted after crushing defeats, as it happened after the battle of Guadalajara in March 1936.

As we shall see in the second, third and fourth section of the chapter, the newsreels of LUCE were essential to represent the construction of the figure of Franco as the new leader of Spain but they also showed the Spanish dictator as a loyal ally. The analysis of these productions gives the opportunity to follow chronologically the evolution of the Spanish leader as it was perceived and portrayed by the Fascist regime and thus by Mussolini.

The newsreels that filmed Franco from 1938 to 1942 were important for two reasons. They showed the evolution of the representation of the Spanish leader from his rise to power to the complete consolidation of the Nationalist dictatorship and they emphasized the opportunistic use of the image of a foreign leader by Fascist propaganda.

3.1 Approaching the enemy: Projecting life and leaders under Republican Spain)

From 1932 to 1933 the LUCE produced four newsreels related to Spain that were devoted to the Spanish Republican Government and its president, Niceto Alcalà-Zamora. Mussolini was strongly opposed to the Spanish Republic because the rise to power of Zamora coincided with the end of the military dictatorship of Primo De Rivera and the birth of the Second Spanish Republic. This was the main reason that explains why just a few years before the Civil War LUCE produced only four newsreels in which the Spanish political leaders were protagonists. However, LUCE deliberately neglected to film the foreign political leaders that Mussolini did not consider relevant or who were not reliable allies of the Fascist regime and these productions proved that Mussolini followed the rise to power of Zamora with some interest. If on the one hand it is important to emphasize that Mussolini did not want to build friendly relations with the Spanish president, on the other, he respected the Spanish Government's effective methods of repression. As John Coverdale notes, the Duce was 'impressed' by the violence that Zamora perpetrated against the Anti-Republican conspirators in 1932.⁴

In LUCE's productions both the figure of the leader and the crowds were fundamental elements, often shown as intertwined and interdependent. The over emphatic oratory and gestures of the Duce were extraordinarily powerful when shown in a context where a huge crowd watched and cheered and vice-versa; the image of thousands of Italians gathered in a square was effective when overlapped or flanked by the figure of Mussolini. During the second decade of the Fascist dictatorship, the Italian viewers assimilated both the representation of the figure of the Duce as the absolute leader of Italy and the image of the Italian people as the protagonist of the Fascist revolution; therefore

⁴ John Coverdale, *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 21.

after 1932, the newsreels filmed in Spain marked a further evolution of Fascist propaganda. LUCE's films, with the continuous reproduction of parades in which hundreds of thousands of citizens demonstrated their affection for the regime, conveyed to the viewers the illusion that the people were a collective entity firmly and loyally behind a totalitarian driving force embodied by a dictator or an authoritarian leader.

In these productions the special relationship between the Fascist regime and the crowds was metaphorically represented by the images of Zamora surrounded by his supporters, and later by Francisco Franco and the followers of his regime. The newsreels were offering the viewer a reflection and projection of Fascist Italy, which, reproduced dozens of times in the cinemas, had to convince the Italian people that Spain was following the example of the Duce's regime. It is important to note that Zamora was not represented as a charismatic politician and that the cameramen did not show any interest in portraying his body, gestures, and speeches. The cameras effectively caught the consensus that he seemed to enjoy and the enthusiasm of the crowds towards him.

The first newsreel that filmed Zamora after the birth of the Spanish Republic was shown in Italian cinemas in January 1932 and follows the appointment of the Spanish leader as the new President of the Republic. The first sequence is a long shot that focuses on an enormous crowd that is gathering in one of the main squares in the centre of Madrid. The enthusiasm of the people that attend the ceremony of the appointment of Zamora is overwhelming and the mounted police attempts to contain the supporters at a safe distance from the presidential palace. Although the Duce wanted to overthrow the Spanish Republic, this scene shows that the Fascist regime appreciated the popular support enjoyed by Zamora and it communicates to the Italian viewers that the Duce was right to think that the key element for the success of a political movement was vast popular support.



Fig. 23: A shot of the crowd in front of the presidential palace, from: *Madrid: Il Signor Alcalà Zamora è proclamato primo presidente della Repubblica Spagnola*, January 1933, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 29th October 2015.

Before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Mussolini admitted that the Republicans ‘had a broad popular support and their capacity to attract supporters was similar to the ability of Italian Fascism to mobilize people at the grassroots level’.⁵

A sudden cut transports the viewer to the next scene, in which the president and a group of Spanish political authorities are filmed on the balcony of the presidential palace (Fig. 24). The crowd in the square of Madrid physically disappears from the screen but the audience in the cinema heard the thunderous applause of Zamora’s supporters. For thirty seconds the cameras of LUCE filmed the balcony of the presidential palace,

⁵ Coverdale, p. 62.

Zamora is at the centre of the screen but he is hardly recognizable and there is neither voice-over nor caption to support the viewers. The applause of the Republican followers represents the importance of the popular enthusiasm behind the rise to power of a political movement, while the sequence that shows the balcony confirmed that LUCE did not want to focus on the image of the Spanish President. Mussolini knew that Zamora was a political actor with whom he had to maintain (at least temporarily) a pragmatic relationship, but the Spanish leader remained an enemy of the Fascist regime and an obstacle to the expansion of Fascism in Spain.



Fig. 24: Zamora and other Spanish politicians on the balcony of the presidential palace in Madrid, from: *Madrid: Il Signor Alcalà Zamora è proclamato primo presidente della Repubblica Spagnola*, January 1932, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 29th October 2015.

The representation of the popular support for the Spanish president was reiterated in another short newsreel entitled *Murcia. Festeggiamenti in occasione della visita del presidente Zamora*, which was screened in Italian cinemas in April 1932. In the first half

of the newsreel the cameramen of LUCE film the Spanish leader surrounded by Republican officials on a balcony of a building in Murcia. In this newsreel the camera lens zoom in on the Spanish politicians, but similarly to the previous production, the face of Zamora does not emerge as clearly distinguishable from that of other party officials. The Fascist regime does not depict Zamora as the irrefutable star of the rise to power of the Republicans and the Spanish leader is represented only as a part of the mechanism of the Republican success, which was led by the people.

This concept is reinforced in the next scene, when the cameramen follow thousands of citizens gathered under the balcony from which the president briefly appears. This scene is pivotal to understand the newsreel coverage of the Republican Spain. The viewers in Italian cinemas heard the cheers of the crowd, but more importantly saw the close-up view of a huge Spanish flag (Fig. 25). The sequence reveals how the propaganda of the LUCE was astute and skilful in using visual signs that were familiar to the public who attended the screenings of the newsreels. The cameramen show the Italian viewers the Spanish flag as a symbol of the success of a political movement that had fought to seize power. The flag epitomized the victory of the new Republican Spain and similarly, the Italian flag represented the affirmation of new Fascist Italy in dozens of newsreels of LUCE. The scene was not a tribute to the victory of Zamora but a message for the Italian viewers who were encouraged to consider the national flag as a symbol of the Fascist revolution.



Fig. 25: A close-up of a Spanish flag, from: *Murcia. Festeggiamenti in occasione della visita del presidente Zamora*, April 1932, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 30th October 2015.

In the following weeks LUCE produced a newsreel that follows a military parade of the Republican army in the centre of Madrid (*Madrid. Il presidente Alcalà Zamora assiste alla parata militare in ricorrenza del primo anniversario della Repubblica*). As in the previous production, Zamora is filmed on a balcony as he observes the parade surrounded by other politicians and, for the third time in a few weeks, the cameramen portray the Spanish President as a static leader (Fig. 26). He appears to be a man with little charisma, unaccustomed to posing for the cameras, and LUCE seems to consider his image as a negligible detail. The structure of the newsreel confirms this approach. Indeed, the shot that shows the Spanish politicians lasts about twenty seconds, while the remaining minute of the film is dedicated to the military parade.



Fig. 26: Zamora and other Republican leaders attend the military parade, from: *Madrid. Il presidente Alcalá Zamora assiste alla parata militare in ricorrenza del primo anniversario della Repubblica*, April 1932, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 1st November 2015.

LUCE produced the last newsreel representing the activities of the Spanish Republican government more than a year after the filming of the parades of Madrid. The reason for the interruption was linked to the attempted coup d'état that was organized by Spanish monarchist groups to overthrow the Republican President in August 1932. Mussolini supported the coup because he feared that a coalition headed by Socialist and Communist parties would soon replace the liberal-conservative Spanish government.⁶

As Coverdale explains the Fascist regime 'agreed to provide a limited amount of ammunition and weapons to the insurgents but the coup failed before the supplies reached the rebels'⁷ and after the defeat, the Duce began to have doubts about the possibility of a quick collapse of the Republican government. Julian Casanova observes that 'a group of

⁶ There are several studies that analyse the attempted coup to overthrow the Spanish government in 1932. For a full account of the events see: Coverdale, pp. 37-42; Julian Casanova, *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 72-82; Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War. 1936-1939* (Penguin Group: New York: 2006), pp. 22-30.

⁷ Coverdale, p. 63.

Spanish anti-Republican activists and conspirators had met in Rome the then Italian air minister Italo Balbo, who promised them weapons'. However the abrupt failure of the coup 'forced Mussolini to moderate his policy towards Spain'.⁸

The newsreel *Il Vandalismo sovversivo e la repressione esercitata dalle truppe governative* (1933) follows the raids of the Spanish police against anti-republican subversive groups. The title of the production (which was also the only caption of the film) expresses the ambiguous relationship between Fascist propaganda and Republican Spain and clearly shows that if on the one hand Mussolini was involved in supporting anti-republican insurgencies, on the other, the regime praised the repressive and violent attitude of the Spanish police. The caption defines the pro-monarchy rebels as vandals and subversive elements, whilst the cameras show the images of a damaged church and a derailed train. LUCE portrays the activities of the rebels as terrorist acts which were intended to destabilize the Spanish government. The destruction caused by the Spanish rebels is effectively represented by the sequence in which the cameramen provide a close-up of a train derailed with one train carriage shattered and a medium shot of the entrance to a church whose door had been blown up by explosives⁹ (Figs. 27-28).

⁸ Casanova, p. 86.

⁹ The Archive of the Luce Institute does not provide clear indications about the location of the insurgent attacks.



Fig. 27: The train derailed after the attack of the rebels, from: *Spagna. Il vandalismo sovversivo e la repressione esercitata dalle truppe governative*, December 1933, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 5th November 2015.



Fig. 28: The image of the damaged Church from: *Spagna. Il vandalismo sovversivo e la repressione esercitata dalle truppe governative*, December 1933, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 5th November 2015.

After showing the damage caused by the rebels, the cameras film the Spanish police raids, arrests and police officers patrolling the streets. The sequences show the audience the restored order in the streets of the Spanish cities thanks to the timely intervention of the police, thus corroborating the Duce's recognition of the repressive methods used by the Spanish government.

The production was part of a strategy, which aimed to intimidate or at least to warn the Italian viewer. The shot that follows the policemen, who were armed with rifles, and the scene that shows the inspection and arrest of pro-monarchy rebel suspects were ominous signals that the Fascist regime transmitted to the Italian population. LUCE informed the audience that any attempt to damage the regime would have been readily suppressed, that the violent reaction of the Republican government was an example to follow, and that Mussolini would react to any plot against him with the same violence used by Zamora.

3.1.2 The cinematic idyllic Spanish countryside

The Fascist regime did not produce other newsreels with Spanish politicians until 1936 and from 1934 LUCE focused predominantly on the Spanish countryside, thus following the life and rituals of the Iberian peasants. The change of the Spanish political landscape and the new moderate approach of Mussolini convinced LUCE to gradually modify the contents of newsreels related to Spain, producing films that did not openly criticize the Republican Government or its leader Alcalà Zamora, adopting instead a sophisticated propaganda tactic that linked the cult of rural life (which was one of the cornerstones of Fascism) to the hard work of the peasants in the Spanish countryside

In the archive of LUCE there are twenty-five newsreels that follow the everyday life in Spain during the Republican period (1932-1934) and in these productions the Spanish political leaders do not appear. These newsreels showed the Italian people a model of apparent harmonious and healthy rural life that partially corresponded to the vision that Mussolini had of Fascist Italy, particularly outside urban centres.

Agriculture was at the core of LUCE's newsreels production during the 1930s, and non-fiction cinema became the essential tool for educating peasants and teaching them the most innovative agriculture techniques. Newsreels that filmed the work in the countryside were distributed in cinema theatres, and, from 1926, they were also shown through the cinemobili.¹⁰ The cinemobili were small trucks with a film projector and a removable screen that reached the most remote areas of the Italian peninsula. Produced by Fiat, the cinemobili were equipped with a 35 mm film projector, portable screen and batteries that could provide energy to project movies for more than one day, and each

¹⁰ Debora Toschi, *Il Paesaggio Rurale. Cinema e Cultura Contadina nell'Italia Fascista* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2009), p. 120.

vehicle was assigned to a member of the *milizia volontaria (voluntary Milizia)*.¹¹ Thousands of Italian people watched their first propaganda film thanks to the *cinemobili*, a vehicle that became increasingly popular during the 1930s and allowed the population in the countryside to assiduously follow policies, advice, and rallies related to agriculture and farming.

In 1936 the film critic Alberto Conti notes that the newsreels were an influential source of information through which the peasants learned new and more efficient methods of pruning, fertilizing and seeding. Conti observes that ‘il contadino osserva, fa paragoni, trae deduzioni, quando e’ nella pace del suo casolare torna con la mente a quello che ha veduto e si desta in lui il desiderio di renderlo realtà nel suo potere’.¹² The film screenings were an important form of training aimed at increasing the productivity of the Italian peasants. Vittorio Cardinali (a film critic active during the Fascist regime) points out that the goal of the *cinemobile* is to project newsreels that embraced topics such as poultry farming, healthcare, childcare, and hygiene. The *cinemobile* ‘devono essere portati nei centri in cui si svolgono i corsi professionali per i contadini per proiettare film istruttivi, riguardanti gli argomenti dei corsi stessi’.¹³

Apparently, the reception of the newsreels in the countryside was enthusiastic and in the journal *Lo Schermo*, a few letters written by the majors (*podestà*) of towns in the south and centre of the Italian peninsula were published. Everything that comes from publications and newspapers funded or somehow controlled by the Fascist regime must be taken with the benefit of the doubt, however these comments were the signal of a growing interest in agricultural education and newsreels under Fascism and evidence that their role as propaganda weapons were becoming increasingly important. For instance, the major of Ruvo di Calabria defines the agriculture film that had just been screened in

¹¹ Toschi, p. 123.

¹² Alberto Conti, ‘L’Istituto Nazionale Luce e L’Agricoltura’, *Lo Schermo*, 7 (1936), 35-37 (p.36).

¹³ Vittorio Cardinali, ‘Il cinema dei Rurali’, *Cinema*, 26, (1937), 47-48, (p.47).

his town as ‘un professore ambulante di agraria pratica. La località dove è avvenuta la proiezione era stipata all’inverosimile di pubblico’; the major of Gagliano del Capo (Puglia) underlines that ‘autorità, sindacati e pubblico fanno voti a che queste proiezioni, altamente istruttive, vengano istituite con più intense frequenza’; and the Fascist secretary of San Gregorio D’Ippona (Calabria) observes that ‘tali proiezioni si ritengono della massima efficacia per la istruzione di questi rurali oltremodo attaccati alla terra’.¹⁴

Fascist propaganda identified the Spanish countryside as an ideal landscape to project the idyllic agricultural world that Mussolini aimed to promote across Europe. In 1933 the LUCE produced the newsreel entitled *Spagna. Canti e danze festeggiano il raccolto delle arance*. The cameramen of LUCE focus on a ceremony that celebrated the annual harvest of oranges in the countryside near Valencia. The film is two minutes long, it consists of only six sequences, and during the first fifteen seconds the cameramen make a panoramic shot of the orange trees. The scene is immediately followed by a gradual movement of the camera that captures a group of peasants who wear traditional clothing and perform a local dance as a tribute for the successful harvest (Fig. 29).

This film has several points in common with the Fascist newsreels related to *The battle for grain* or Italian agriculture more generally, indeed the orange trees as well as grain and other products that relied on the agricultural work were the symbols of the labour and perseverance of peasants. The sequence is both a representation of the success of the Spanish countrymen and a message directed to the Italian farmers. The harvest of the oranges in the Spanish countryside is shown as a rewarding model that the Italian families who worked in the agricultural sector could follow and embrace.

¹⁴ Conti, p. 36.



Fig. 29: Traditional dances of the peasants after the harvest, from: *Spagna. Canti e danze festeggiano il raccolto delle arance*, 1933, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 19th November 2015.

The scene of the traditional dance shows a moment of serenity after hard work and constitutes a type of scene that is seen in many productions of LUCE even before the birth of the Fascist newsreels. In the documentary produced by LUCE in 1925 and entitled *La Battaglia del Grano* the cameramen show the daily and tireless work of Italian farmers during the wheat harvest and the last part of the production focuses on the depiction of the family dinner that eventually involved the whole farming community, in a ritual that the caption called *La festa del desinare* (Fig. 30).¹⁵ The cameramen film the peasants while reaching a farmhouse to dine with their wives and children. The scene shows a huge table surrounded by people enjoying food, talking and joking with each other. The sequence is a reassuring representation of healthy countryside life, family

¹⁵ The film *La Battaglia del Grano* is one of the very first films produced by LUCE. It was printed in 120 copies, and screened simultaneously in 100 cities for an audience of almost six million viewers. Elaine Mancini, p. 124.

union and camaraderie among the peasants who lived, worked and ate together. The image also symbolically epitomizes the ideals of the new rural Italy designed and built by Mussolini.



Fig. 30: An Italian family during the dinner after a day in the fields, from *La Battaglia del Grano*, 1925, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 19th November 2015.

The representation of the Spanish countryside as an ideal model of healthy living is confirmed in the newsreel entitled *San José Suggestive visioni di vecchi mulini mentre si affaccia la primavera* (1934). In the first scene the cameramen show a close-up of a few ears of corn with a mill in the background and the sequence is accompanied by an extract from *Bolero*, a one-movement orchestral piece written by Maurice Ravel in 1928 (Fig. 31). The scene is very powerful and meaningful for the Italian audience because the grain, which was the symbol of one of the most important economic and political battles

of the Fascist regime and the primary source of food for millions of Italian people, is shown as one of the main products of Spanish agriculture. The close-up of the ears of grain, which almost covers the camera lens, underlines the importance of wheat as an essential product of the land. The mill in the background was another familiar image for the Italian people living in the countryside. It was the essential tool for grinding grain and for the production of flour in many Italian farms and the archive of LUCE preserves several newsreels filming the mills in Italy and abroad.¹⁶



Fig. 31: The close-up of the grain with the windmill in the background, from: *San Josè Suggestive visioni di vecchi mulini mentre si affaccia la primavera*, 1934, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 20th November 2015.

¹⁶The importance of the practical and symbolic role of the mills in agriculture is emphasized in a considerable number of newsreels: *Mulini Idraulici in Cina* (1931); *Austria. L'inizio della primavera sulle Alpi Tirolesi* (1937); *Cressa. Il nuovo mulino Industriale* (1937); *Vipiteno. Corteo denominato Mulino delle Vecchie* (1938). The documentary *Galla e Sidamo* (1937) shows several sequences that focus on grinding grain in a mill in East Africa. The documentary *Oro Bianco* (1939) celebrates water as the main source for a sustainable agricultural life and as a crucial tool for the functioning of the water mills. Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 24th November 2015.

The background music is a natural reference to the culture and history of Spain. *Bolero* was originally a dance created in Spain in the late eighteenth century and the namesake ballet, written by Ravel in 1928, became extremely popular all over the world after the exhibition in New York led by conductor Arturo Toscanini in 1929.¹⁷ The slow and steady pace of *Bolero* is perfectly suited to the rhythm of the sequence, and it follows the sluggish but constant motion of the blades of the mill. There is a symbiosis between images and music that reaches its peak in the subsequent sequence, which shows the strain of donkeys in powering the mill. The images symbolize the gradual, steady and hard work of the Italian and Spanish farmers. For many viewers in Italian cinemas, the mill, the donkeys and the patient waiting for the good season to complete the harvest, were common and familiar images (Fig. 32).



Fig. 32: The shot that portrays the effort of the donkeys while pushing the windmill, from: *San Josè Suggestive visioni di vecchi mulini mentre si affaccia la primavera*, 1934, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 21st November 2015.

¹⁷ Arbie Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 99.

Fascist propaganda considered agricultural work and country life as critical elements for the new Fascist citizen but more widely, the countryside was represented as the emblematic place of rebirth. The last seconds of the newsreel show a close-up of a tree in bloom and subsequently the cameras shift the lens to a child who is playing with some newly hatched chicks. The child, the tree and the chicks are a metaphor of the arrival of the spring and they epitomize the success of the country life model that had to be transmitted from generation to generation (Fig. 32-33). The whirling blades of the mill, the circular motion of the donkeys giving power to the blades, and the harmonious rhythm of the soundtrack are perfectly interconnected elements in the editing of the newsreel and they transmit to the viewers the idea of a functional and perennial cycle which implies hard work and culminates with the birth of new lives.



Fig. 32: *San Josè Suggestive visioni di vecchi mulini mentre si affaccia la primavera*, 1934, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 21st November. 2015.



Fig. 32: The shot of the child and the chicks, from: *San Josè Suggestive visioni di vecchi mulini mentre si affaccia la primavera*, 1934, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 21st November 2015.

3.2 Dominating the crowds on screen: The gradual evolution of the representation of Francisco Franco

From 1934 to 1936 the Fascist regime did not produce newsreels in Spain and LUCE filmed the first footage related to the Spanish Civil War in August 1936, while the first film that focused on Francisco Franco was released in Italian cinemas in January 1938. The future Spanish dictator was initially overlooked by LUCE and this choice was connected to the doubts that Mussolini had about the ability of Franco to lead the rebels against the efficient Republican army. James Burgwin argues that Mussolini decided to support the Spanish nationalists to ‘forge a tie with and eventually a patronage over a kindred Spanish authoritarian movement.’¹⁸ As Robert Mallet emphasizes, Mussolini ‘at first remained reticent about backing Franco’s uprising’.¹⁹ Following the arrival in Rome of two Spanish emissaries, whose object was procuring aircrafts and military supplies for the Nationalist forces, ‘Mussolini confirmed that he was less than enthusiastic at offering any Italian support’.²⁰ David Kertzer points out that Mussolini’s involvement in the Spanish Civil war ‘was driven by a desire to limit the international influence of the leftist government in France’.²¹ Furthermore, Mussolini ‘did not have particular affection for Franco’.²² For the first year and a half of the Spanish Civil War LUCE did not describe Franco as the official leader of the rebels. The coverage of the Spanish General in the newsreels changed only after the first months of 1938 when the rebels were close to overpowering the Republican army.

¹⁸Burgwin, p. 18.

¹⁹ Robert Mallet, *Mussolini and the Origins of the Second World War, 1933-1940* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 101.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

²¹ David I. Kertzer, *The Pope and Mussolini: The Secret History of Pius XI and the Rise of Fascism in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 135.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 143.

In the period 1938-1942 the Fascist regime released the majority of newsreels linked to the figure of Franco and the films gradually built the image of a leader who was staunchly anti-communist and loyal to Fascism. For the preparation of this section I watched 77 newsreels in which Franco was filmed from 1938 to 1942. I analyzed in detail only the productions that contributed to building the image of the Spanish dictator as the faithful ally who led the new Spanish dictatorship and who helped the Duce to control the Mediterranean Sea.

The newsreels gave a substantial amount of information on events related to Franco and the audience received a continuous flow of optimistic news that focused on the progress of the new Spanish dictatorship. By analyzing these newsreels one can observe the evolution of the image of Franco and the representation of the relationship between the new dictator and the crowds. The Spanish citizens were shown as the protagonists of the rise to power of the *Generalissimo*, and the newsreels promoted and advertised the idea that the people were the architects of a perpetual revolution that was later completed and controlled by the establishment of a dictatorship.

Kracauer identifies the crowds and the army as two visual elements that Nazi cameramen filmed frequently and he observes that one of the propaganda strategies that characterized the Nazi newsreels is ‘an important, though simple, use of the camera to feature moving troops that symbolized the enormous Nazi war machine’.²³ As this section shall demonstrate, the Nazi newsreels were not the only propaganda production that filmed soldiers during military marches. Indeed, during the 1930s LUCE widely shot moving troops in Italy and abroad and Francisco Franco was often portrayed while reviewing and supervising the military during parades and celebrations.

²³ Sigfried Kracauer, ‘The Conquest of Europe on the Screen: The Nazi Newsreel. 1939-1940’, *Social Research: An International Quarterly of Political and Social Science*, 10: 3 (September 1943), 337-357, (p. 340).

Kracauer notes that images of marching columns of soldiers, 'made the audience itself participate in a spectacle that symbolizes irresistible advance'. In the Nazi newsreels, the cameramen placed their cameras near some highway or city street to capture the whole scenery in order to film armed columns advancing towards the foreground and 'as the formation moves on steadily growing in size, the camera pans to keep it within the field of the vision'.²⁴ Similarly LUCE's cameras alternated panoramic or long shots portraying the whole army and close shots that singled out several individual soldiers or even mere fragments of them; their heads, their torsos, their marching legs. By interspersing panoramic and medium shots the cameramen depicted the movement of the soldiers from all conceivable angles, showing the audience the powerful march and conveying to the viewers the impression that the military was a continuous and unstoppable flow that symbolized the victories of Fascism, and in Spain the triumph of Franco. Both Nazi and Fascist newsreels used panoramic shots and bird's eye views to show 'the compactness of the crowds'.²⁵ However, the crowds were not entirely autonomous but they were controlled and mastered by a dictator who was usually filmed from a balcony or a podium, thus emerging as the only individual on the screen.

²⁴ Kracauer., p. 342.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 345.

3.2.1 Promoting a new ally: The *Generalissimo* Franco in the newsreels

The cameramen of LUCE filmed Franco for the first time on 5th January 1938. The newsreel was shot in Pamplona and Miranda (a town one hour and a half from Pamplona), which were both strongholds of the Spanish Nationalists. The production entitled *Miranda. Celebrazione dell'annuale della marcia su Roma alla presenza del Generalissimo Franco* is a short film that shows a joint military parade of Italian and Spanish soldiers and ends with the image of Franco while giving a medal for military valour to an Italian soldier who fought in the Spanish Civil War (Fig. 34). The images are accompanied by the voice-over that informs the viewer that:

Le divisioni Fiamme Nere e 23 Marzo consacrano i propri eroi nell'annuale della marcia su Roma. Il Generalissimo Franco consegna le ricompense al valor militare sul campo ai legionari Italiani.

The Fascist regime associated the memory of the march on Rome and the rise to power of Fascism to the Italian soldiers who fought in Spain to support Franco's victory. The voice-over reminds the Italian audience that the war in Spain is crucially important for Fascism and that Italian volunteers should be celebrated as the Fascist militants who marched on Rome in 1922.

During the first sequences the cameramen focuses on Franco while giving a medal to a young Italian volunteer who is injured and has a bandaged arm. Interestingly, the face of Franco is not visible, while the audience has the chance to clearly see the Italian soldier, therefore transmitting to the viewers the idea that Franco is grateful for the Italian commitment in Spain and metaphorically showing the Spanish leader as an ally who is

subject to the leadership of the Fascist army. The proud glance of the Italian soldier is the symbol of a Fascist regime that was headed towards a future of success and his bandaged arm epitomizes heroism on the battlefield and sacrifice for Fascism. The Italian volunteer is also taller than Franco and the dictator seems to step up to put the medal on the chest of the soldier, thus visually reinforcing the notion that the Spanish conflict was above all a Fascist war, in which young Italian men died and were wounded to give Mussolini a resounding military victory in Europe.



Fig. 34: Franco while giving the medal for military valour to the Italian volunteer, from: *Miranda. Celebrazione dell'annuale della marcia su Roma alla presenza del Generalissimo Franco*, 5th January 1938, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 28th November 2015.

In this sequence the image of Franco is of marginal importance. The Spanish dictator is represented only as a mere detail in the celebration of the triumph of the Fascist war machine. Franco appears again in the next scene of the newsreel when the cameramen

film him, the Italian soldiers, and Nationalist officials as they make the Roman salute. This sequence is the first shot that portrays the Spanish leader while making the Roman salute in front of the cameras of LUCE, conveying to the audience in the Italian cinemas a reassuring message in which Franco is shown as a loyal ally of Fascism and a credible supporter of the Mussolini's regime.

The second newsreel filmed in Spain was screened in Italy on 5th January 1938 and follows a parade of citizens and soldiers who were loyal to Franco. As Paul Preston notes, although the civil war was not over, in 1938 the Spanish rebels already ruled large portions of Northern Spain.²⁶ The film opens with a long panoramic shot of the crowd in the town square, creating a visual effect that fills the screen (Fig. 35). The sequence communicates the idea that an oceanic crowd supported the rebels led by Franco, proving that popular support for the Nationalists was wide and real.



²⁶ Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War, Revolution and Revenge* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), pp. 266-301 (p.281).

Fig. 35: The crowd in the main square of Pamplona, from: *Rito Patriottico alla presenza del Generalissimo Franco*, 5th January 1938, from: Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 29th November 2015.

The image helped the audience in Italian cinemas to identify the Spanish people as the true protagonists of the revolution who led the rebels to seize power. This concept is supported by the voice-over which accompanies the sequence and that defines the event as:

Un rito patriottico presenziato dal Generalissimo Franco davanti a tutto il generoso popolo della Navarra, questa antica e famosa provincia che il capo del Governo nazionale ha voluto decorare con la croce di San Fernando. Un rito che celebra le doti guerriere di questa gente fierissima.

It is worth noting that although Franco is mentioned as the leader of the new national government, he only appears for five seconds in the last scene of the newsreel. The *Generalissimo* is filmed with a medium shot as he observes the parade, therefore showing that the construction of the image of Franco as the supreme leader of Spain had not yet become a priority of the propaganda of the Fascist regime.

The LUCE focuses primarily on the population of Pamplona whose citizens are likened to warriors who after the battle were rewarded with the highest Spanish military honour. As Antony Beevor explains, ‘the cross of San Fernando is the highest military honour in Spain and it was awarded for the first time in 1811: During his dictatorship Francisco Franco widely used the award as a symbol of the military force of Nationalist

Spain'.²⁷ For Fascist propaganda Nationalists were winning the war thanks to the tenacity, strength, and courage of the Spanish people. Franco is defined as their chief, but his figure is negligible and marginalized by the centrality of the powerful citizens-warriors.

As well as with the newsreels showing the Spanish peasants, this production offers to the Italian audience an example to admire and praise. Once again, viewers in Italian cinemas were encouraged to empathize with the Spanish population, stimulating the process of identification between two peoples that the Fascist regime considered as united by a new belligerent spirit. The idea of a new Italy forged by citizens-warriors was one of the pillars of the propaganda of LUCE and the newsreels depicted Italian citizens as always ready to fight for their country (in real battlefields or in political conflicts such as *The battle for grain* and the struggle to reclaim the marshes). LUCE represented the population of Nationalist Spain led by Franco as a new invincible army that followed in the footprints of Fascist Italy.

In the production entitled *L'adunata dei giovani Falangisti* (1937), which follows a military parade to honour the *Generalissimo*, one can see how the role of the crowds and the army in representing Franco's movement became predominant. The newsreel opens with a medium shot of a group of young Falangists while marching and making the Roman salute. Simultaneously the voice-over informs the audience that the parade is attended by '35,000 giovani falangisti convenuti da ogni angolo del territorio nazionale fin dalle Baleari, dal Marocco e dalle Canarie'. The commentary communicates a concise and direct message that aims at informing the audience that Franco's army was a powerful military machine capable of recruiting young troops coming from all territories that the Nationalist had vanquished.

²⁷Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain. The Spanish Civil War* (London: Penguins Books, 2006), p. 198.

This is the only intervention of the commentary in the newsreel but it is well synchronized with the images and does not overwhelm the visual elements of the film. The voice-over has the limited but fundamental role of introducing the event, highlighting the sprawling presence of the army led by Franco in Spain and its colonies. Comparably to the Nazi newsreels, the Fascist productions relied on the voice-over as a communication channel that implemented the signified of the images but without being exceedingly descriptive because the commentary inclines towards brevity. In *L'adunata dei giovani Falangisti* the voice-over is followed by a series of twenty-three brief scenes that film the marching of young Falangists (the first shots focus on men, and subsequently the women's wing of the Nationalist army is also filmed), children making the Roman Salute, Moroccan soldiers, and three medium shots of Franco, in an attempt to show to the Italian audience the broad and diverse support that Franco enjoyed during the Spanish Civil War (Fig. 36-76).



Fig. 36: The woman's wing of the army while doing the Roman salute, from: *L'adunata dei giovani Falangisti*, 1937, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 29th November 2015.



Fig. 37: The march of the nationalist army, from: *L'adunata dei giovani Falangisti*, 1937, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 29th November 2015.

The cameramen alternate images of young Falangists while marching and medium shots of individual soldiers (focusing on their busts and faces) giving the audience the impression that the cameras were following the Nationalist army from all the possible visual perspectives. Franco's army is portrayed as a relentless force that is indomitable, unbeatable and has a welcoming attitude towards young men, women, and North African soldiers. The medium shots of one soldier is immediately followed by the image of the marching army, therefore proving that the individuals do not emerge as independent entities but that they are part of the collective and uniform body of the Nationalist army.

3.2.2 Projecting a foreign dictator in the Italian cinemas: *El Caudillo*

The end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939 and the ascent to power of Franco coincided with a change of the representation of the Spanish leader in the newsreels of LUCE. Subsequently the cameramen of the Fascist regime began to show Franco as the dictator of the new Nationalist Spain. Franco was defined by the voice-over as *El Caudillo*, a nickname that linked the Spanish General to the authoritarian and populist tradition of the South American dictatorships of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For LUCE Franco was no longer only the *Generalissimo* but he became the official chief of Spain who developed a stronger and fruitful relationship with Mussolini. As Coverdale points out, the Duce was enthusiastic about the possibilities of future Italo-Spanish collaborations. Mussolini suggested that Franco should renovate the Spanish navy urging him to build four 35,000-ton battleships.²⁸ The aim of the Italian dictator was to strengthen Spain, allowing Franco to be actively involved in the alliance with Nazi Germany. According to the Duce's geo-political plans, Morocco should go to Spain and Tunisia and Algeria to Italy, while an agreement with Spain would guarantee Italy's permanent access to the Atlantic through the Gibraltar Channel.²⁹

The newsreels produced by LUCE in 1941-1942 focused on the figure of Franco as the junior and trustable partner of the Duce. Nationalist Spain was represented as a new ally in the Mediterranean that Mussolini considered essential both to support the axis with Nazi Germany against Great Britain and to rival the dominance of Hitler in Europe. The first newsreel of the new series of films devoted to Spain is entitled *Convegno di Bordighera. L'incontro del Duce col Caudillo* and was screened in Italian cinemas on 18th February 1941. The meeting was organized by Mussolini to discuss the participation

²⁸ Coverdale, p. 385.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 391.

of Spain in World War II alongside the axis forces. The production is the very first newsreel that follows an official meeting between Mussolini and Franco. Stanley Payne suggests that ‘the meeting was organized by the Duce but it was a Hitler’s idea’.³⁰

In the first sequence the cameras focuses on a large terrace where a group of citizens had gathered to welcome the arrival of Franco with applause and cheers. The scene is relevant because for the first time LUCE shows Franco as admired by the Italian population. This production, which redefined the representation of the Spanish leader, was screened in Italian cinemas in February 1941 whilst the Italian army was suffering disastrous defeats on the Greek battlefields. For the Fascist regime, it became critical not only to display Franco as a weak leader of a satellite state but as a stable and powerful ally who supported the victory of Fascism in the World War II.

In the second and last scene of the newsreel Franco is filmed along with Mussolini shortly before entering *villa Margherita*. The voice-over introduces the sequence informing the viewer that: ‘Il Caudillo è in Italia per incontrarsi con il Duce a Bordighera’. The definition of Franco as the Caudillo shows the gradual transformation of the Spanish leader into a military and authoritarian dictator. The military aspect is also emphasized by the presence of a group of Italian soldiers who are greeted by Franco with the Roman salute. The scene also shows for the first time Franco and Mussolini side-by-side and wearing similar clothing, proving that Franco adopted the same style of Mussolini, leading the viewers to believe that the image of the Caudillo was inspired by the Italian dictator, and suggesting that the Spanish leader intended to become the Duce of Spain.

In the following seconds the cameramen continues to follow the Spanish dictator who is filmed with a close-up while reviewing the soldiers (Fig. 38). Mussolini remains

³⁰ Stanley Payne, *Fascism in Spain. 1923-1977* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), p. 337.

in the background, a few feet away, as if he had left the centre of the scene and the leading role to the Spanish leader, thus helping the Italian viewers to familiarize themselves with the image of the *Caudillo*. From this newsreel, the figure of the Spanish dictator is no longer a minor detail but a means to show the Italian population the transformation and evolution of a leader, whose body became the visual element that drew the attention of the audience thanks to close-ups of his smile, military uniforms, and a more aggressive and charismatic attitude towards the audience.



Fig. 38: Franco while reviewing the Italian soldiers, from: *Convegno di Bordighera. L'incontro del Duce col Caudillo*, February 1941, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome consulted on 11th December 2015.

The transformation of Franco to a commander in chief at the helm of a military strong nation is reinforced in another newsreel entitled *Il generalissimo Franco passa in rassegna le truppe nel secondo annuale della vittoria*, which was screened in Italian cinemas on 14th April 1941. The newsreel shows Franco on a podium while watching a massive military parade. Medium shots of the Spanish dictator are interspersed with very

short sequences that follow the march of several divisions of the Nationalist troops. The *Generalissimo* has the same military uniform he wore during the meeting in Bordighera, and with a smiling face he makes the Roman salute looking towards the cameras (Fig. 39). The sequences convey to the Italian audience the idea of a military leader who recognizes the friendship with Fascist Italy. The newsreel tried to convince the Italian population that Spain under Franco's leadership was a rising military power that was moulded following the Italian example and that it was ready to support the Fascist regime on the battlefield.



Fig. 39: Franco while greeting the soldiers and the crowds, from, *Il generalissimo Franco passa in rassegna le truppe nel secondo annuale della vittoria*, 14th April 1941, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 18th December 2015.

The fast film editing shows tanks, infantry, and the division of the Falanx while marching under the podium where Franco and the representatives of the Nationalist Government

are standing. Images of the tanks, which fill the screen, transmit to the audience the idea of an impressive military potential, while the continuous flow of the marching soldiers gives the viewer's eye the illusion of an endless army (Figs. 40). These sequences seem to have the objective to reassure the Italian population, underlining that the militarization of Spain and the rise to power of Franco were tangible signs of the success of the Fascist regime in Europe. Spain led by the Generalissimo and reflecting Mussolini's Italy, appeared to be a nation organized and protected by a new generation of men who were forged by militarism and the harshness of the war.



Fig. 40: The military parade in Madrid, from: *Il generalissimo Franco passa in rassegna le truppe nel secondo annuale della vittoria*, 14th April 1941, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 18th December 2015.

In February 1941 LUCE produced a newsreel that follows Franco during the military exercises of the Spanish Navy and implement the definition of Spain as a military power

led by *El Caudillo*. In the opening scene of the film entitled *Bilbao. Il Generalissimo Franco passa in rassegna la squadra navale* (1941) Franco boards a military ship and he observes the huge crowd at the port of Bilbao. The camera is positioned above the bows from which Franco appears, creating a spectacular visual effect and giving the audience in the cinemas the impression of watching an outstanding popular demonstration in support of the Spanish dictator. Franco wears a dark military uniform and on this occasion he also has a white navy hat. This stylistic detail shows that LUCE aimed to prove that Franco followed Mussolini as a model to imitate. Mussolini is portrayed as a supreme chief of the navy in several newsreels of LUCE and therefore this visual representation was well known and assimilated by the Italian audience.³¹

The Spanish dictator was much less charismatic than Mussolini but Franco is represented as a leader who is regarded as a valuable ally of the Duce at the head of an ally nation. Several newsreels produced from 1941 to 1943 depicted Franco as a surrogate and a reflection of Mussolini. In the film *Inaugurazione di un gruppo di case economiche nel giorno commemorativo dei Re di Spagna* (1943) Franco becomes the generous father of the Nation who inaugurates new houses for the Spanish working class; in *Inaugurazione a Siviglia della Mostra Zootechnica alla presenza del Caudillo* (1943) the Spanish dictator is the leader who considers agriculture as a key sector for the development of the Nationalist regime. In the co-production LUCE-UFA entitled *Franco presente all'inaugurazione di un orfanotrofio a Madrid* (1942) he is represented as the charitable leader who cares about the future of the Spanish children who lost their parents.³² Furthermore, in *Bilbao. Il Generalissimo Franco passa in rassegna la squadra navale*, the cameramen film Franco from the back. The scene conveys to the audience the idea that the Generalissimo is both embracing and dominating the crowd (Fig. 41).

³¹ 263 newsreels of LUCE follow the Italian navy and in a considerable number of these productions Mussolini appeared.

³² Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 18th September 2016.



Fig. 41: Franco while addressing the crowd, from: *Bilbao. Il Generalissimo Franco passa in rassegna la squadra navale*, 4th August 1941, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, Rome, consulted on 18th December 2015.

In the last seconds of the film the cameramen take a panoramic shot of imposing Spanish warships, which symbolize both Franco's military power and the safety of the Mediterranean Sea. At a time when the archenemy of the Axis became Great Britain with its historically effective and formidable Navy, it was essential to show the Italian people that the Fascist regime and its allies were trained and equipped to defeat the enemy and that the fleets of the Italian and Spanish Navy were patrolling the sea against the attacks of hostile countries. The subsequent scene, the image of Franco smiling, is a sign that the Spanish dictator was more at ease in front of cameras and it communicates optimism and

reassurance for the future (Fig.42). The Italian army was in the quagmire in Greece, North Africa and Russia and the propaganda of LUCE was desperately trying to raise the morale of the Italian population.



Fig. 42: The close-up of Franco, from: Bilbao. *Il Generalissimo Franco passa in rassegna la squadra navale*, 4th August 1941, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 18th December 2015.

Conclusion

In the early 1930s, the attitude of the Fascist regime towards foreign policy in Spain was deliberately ambiguous and this choice was reflected in the newsreels of LUCE. From 1930 to 1934 the Spanish countryside was represented as an idyllic place, which was both an ideal world and a metaphorical projection of Fascist Italy. These newsreels did not support the Spanish government but they praised the lifestyle of the Spanish population. The cult of the outdoors life, hard work of peasants and fishermen, and camaraderie were elements that the Fascist regime considered universally effective for the affirmation of an efficient nation. The fact that these values were shared in other countries was the alleged recognition of the achievements of Fascism around the world, a success that the newsreels had to constantly advertise in Italian cinemas.

The newsreels produced during the period 1933-1934 showed how the propaganda of LUCE and Italian foreign policy were connected and in many cases overlapped. These newsreels were not just a mere exercise of propaganda used by Mussolini to launch his bombastic message to the Italian people in the cinemas. The content of the newsreels related to Spain before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War was characterized by a cautious attitude and pragmatism. The newsreels showed Republican Spain as militarily prepared and internally well organized to prevent coups. Although Mussolini dreamed of overthrowing the Spanish democracy, these productions conveyed to the Italian people the idea of a Duce at least temporarily prudent in pursuing its policies and goals in the Mediterranean. The newsreels also confirmed the genuine respect of the Italian dictator for the violent methods used by the Republican government to repress political opponents.

In the early newsreels Franco was shown as a new loyal ally of the Fascist regime. However, the Spanish dictator was not the prototype of the Fascist man and the films underlined his lack of charisma. After 1939, Nazi Germany became increasingly powerful on the world stage while Mussolini was struggling to maintain the role of supreme leader of Fascism in Europe. Consequently the representation of Franco changed radically. The cameramen began to portray Franco as a leader who was a friend of Italy and a dictator who was building a new militarily powerful Spain, and therefore in order to support Italy and Germany on the battlefields of World War II. The newsreels showed a militarized Spain, while Franco became El Caudillo, a strong leader who emulated at a visual level the Duce.

The Italian cameramen represented Nationalist Spain both as a satellite state and as a precious ally. The newsreels were trying to convince the Italian population that, thanks to the support of the Italian Government, Spain had become a country that embraced the expansion of Fascism in Europe. These productions did not show real admiration for Franco and the Spanish dictator was never portrayed as a strong Fascist man. However, Mussolini needed Franco and the Duce wanted to take advantage of the rise to power of the Spanish General to show the Italian people that the intervention in the Spanish Civil War had strengthened Italy.

Representing Franco as a credible ally and Spain as an emerging power that could help Italy was a strategy that aimed to reassure the Italian people after Mussolini's decision to participate in the World War II. The new Spanish dictatorship was depicted as a close ally of Fascist Italy and as a direct consequence of the Mussolini's influence and inspiration. If on the one hand the newsreels widely insinuated the idea that Spain emulated Fascist Italy, on the other, Spain was represented as an independent and autonomous nation. As we shall see in the next chapter, LUCE chose a different approach

concerning Albania, as the Balkan country was described as a nation that had to be colonized and civilized.

Chapter 4

Albania on Italian screens: A utopian Italian Empire in Europe

Introduction

The chapter is an analysis of the newsreels that LUCE filmed in Albania, which sheds light on the role of Fascist propaganda in building the figure of Galeazzo Ciano as a possible heir of Mussolini and investigates the process of transformation of the Balkan country from an independent nation to an Italian colony.

The first section scrutinizes how the visual elements related to the body — attire and gestures — of Ciano were used by the cameramen of LUCE to associate the figure of the Italian Foreign Minister with that of the Duce. In 1939 the Fascist regime decided to invade Albania so as to create the first Italian colony in Europe; consequently, Fascist leaders were filmed during their travels in the newly conquered nation. Ciano was filmed in several newsreels during official visits to Tirana, and the invasion of the Balkan country was a crucial turning point for the ambitions of the young foreign minister. As many historians note, ‘the Albanian war was Ciano’s war’.¹ He persuaded Mussolini that Italy would benefit from the apparent (but not fully verified) mineral resources of Albania. The minister argued that Albania, which was sparsely populated, ‘could welcome two million Italians following the establishment of new towns’.²

¹ The reconstruction of the role of Mussolini during the Italian invasion of Albania is described by: Bernd J. Fischer, *Albania at War* (London: Hurst & Company, 1999), 5-60 (p. 41).

² Alessandro Roselli, *Italy and Albania. Financial Relations in the Fascist Period* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 97-107 (p. 103).

The second part of the chapter shows the representation of the Albanian reconstruction in LUCE's newsreels. Reclamation projects, the battle against malaria and the discovery of mineral resources (particularly oil) were both the symbol of a utopian Albanian rebirth and the emblem of a new and allegedly powerful Italian Empire. LUCE produced a series of newsreels to promote the reclamation of the Albanian territory, and throughout the chapter I argue that the recreation of a new European Italian colony was advertised in theatres through the skilful use of denotative, connotative and linguistic levels.

Between 1927 and 1943 LUCE produced ninety-two newsreels in Albania, eighty-seven of which were filmed after 1932. The number of newsreels produced was impressive, considering that Albania is a relatively small country and its economy was underdeveloped. Italy had strategic interests in Albania since the outbreak of World War I and although still not officially belligerent, 'the Italian army occupied the Albanian ports of Slaza and Vlora in October 1914'.³ In exchange for a military contribution against Austria, Italy was pledged extensive territories in Albania, and during the course of the war the Italian troops succeeded in occupying half of the country. In 1920 the enactment of the Treaty of London forced Italy to remove its soldiers from Albania but this measure did not stop Mussolini's interests in the Balkan country following the Fascist rise to power in 1922.

After the 1920s Mussolini developed close relations with Albanian monarch King Zog and from 1927 to 1932 LUCE released five newsreels that were filmed in Albania. These newsreels follow the Albanian king during ceremonies and military parades in which he was applauded and cheered by the local population. Examples of such productions are: *Viaggio di S.E. Zogu in Albania* (1927); *Festeggiamenti per Re Zogu*

³ Bernd J. Fischer, 'Italian policy in Albania 1894-1943', *Balkan Studies*, 26 (1985), 101-112 (p. 107).

D'Albania (1927); *L'onorevole Grandi si reca a visitare il re Zogu* (1929).⁴ It is also interesting to note that two newsreels filmed in Albania are among the first fifty newsreels produced in the history of LUCE. In 1932 the Fascist regime screened nine newsreels which mainly focused on the traditions and religious ceremonies of the Albanian people, but it was from 1936 that the number of newsreels related to Albania dramatically surged.

The increased production of non-fiction films coincided with the signing of a new treaty between Mussolini and Zog in 1936.⁵ The treaty stated that in return for the bailout of Albania, Italy would obtain the granting of the strategic port of Durres for 15 years. The resulting flow of money coming from Italy forced Albania to become economically dependent on the Fascist regime. Consequently, the films produced by LUCE after 1935 showed the apparent rebirth of the Balkan country, thanks to the support of Italian funding.

The exponential increase in the production of newsreels related to Albania after 1932 is also connected to the Fascist regime's change in priorities. After a decade of intense film production focused on national policies such as *The Battle for grain* and the reclamation of the Pontine Marshes, the regime needed new objectives and places in order to continue to advertise and promote the perennial Fascist revolution.

⁴ Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 25 June 2016.

⁵ Fischer, p. 109.

4.1 The cinematic construction of Galeazzo Ciano's leadership in Tirana

The propaganda strategy that transformed Albania into an Italian territory was a gradual process that began at the end of the 1920s and culminated in the fast rise to power of Galeazzo Ciano as the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs. The non-fiction films that followed Ciano in the Balkan country were very short productions marked by a series of visual details that were repeatedly shown to spectators in Italian cinemas.

In May 1937, the Italian foreign minister undertook his first trip to Albania, the cameras of LUCE followed the journey of Ciano and his arrival in Tirana, and on 5 May 1937 a newsreel entitled *Ciano a Tirana incontra Re Zog* was screened in Italian cinemas. In this newsreel the Italian foreign minister appears in three sequences. In the first scene Ciano is filmed as he leaves a twin-engine plane and greets the Albanian authorities that are welcoming him. The minister is smartly dressed in a black jacket and white shirt and the cameras focus for 20 seconds on his face, producing a medium shot of his prominent jaw (Fig. 43). The cameramen of LUCE seemed intent on representing Ciano as a younger Duce and in the sequence in which the cameramen film the face, head and jaw of Ciano the similarity between the foreign minister and the Duce is glaring.

The general context of the sequence coincides with the arrival of the minister in Albania, the reception of the authorities, and the subsequent military review. These images contain a number of coded elements, which would have been familiar to the Italian public in cinemas and which induced the viewers to connect the arrival of Ciano to the project of the conquest of Albania. The connotative element of the scene is the medium shot of the face of Ciano and, in particular, of his head. The profile of Ciano was also filmed in other newsreels produced in Albania, and it was the visual detail that attracted the attention of the eyes of the spectator. Camera angles, framing, close-ups and

voice-over gave the viewers in the cinemas the opportunity to associate the face of the minister with that of the Duce, whose proverbial jaw was filmed by the cameramen of LUCE dozens of times.⁶ The medium shot of Ciano was LUCE's first attempt to transform the minister into a leader physically resembling Mussolini.



Fig. 43: The arrival of Ciano in Tirana, from *Ciano a Tirana incontra Re Zogu*, 5th May 1937, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 25th March 2014.

The voice-over that accompanies the scene reinforces the image of Ciano as an increasingly powerful and relevant Fascist leader. The narrator reminds the audience that ‘all’uscita dell’aeroporto vibranti manifestazioni del popolo Albanese accolgono il

⁶ LUCE's cameramen focus on Ciano's profile also in other newsreels, such as: *Albania. La visita di Galeazzo Ciano* (1938); *Albania. La visita di Galeazzo Ciano* (1939); *Ciano in Albania visita cantieri edili*, April 1939. Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 27th June 2016.

rappresentante dell' Italia Fascista e lo accompagnano lungo tutto il percorso'. Ciano is defined as 'the representative of Fascist Italy' in most of the newsreels produced in Albania. The young Fascist leader is not a mere emissary of the regime travelling in a foreign country, but rather embodies the projects of the Fascist regime in Albania.

The last 30 seconds of the newsreels are dedicated to the arrival of the Italian foreign minister in the Albanian capital. Ciano meets King Zog (the meeting is shown in the last short sequence of the newsreel), and he appears on the balcony of the headquarters of the Italian Foreign Ministry in Albania (Fig. 44). The cameras alternate between panoramic shots of the citizens of Tirana who applaud Ciano and medium shots of the minister, who greets the crowd from the balcony while making the Roman salute. The details of the scene that capture the imagination of the spectators, and, using the words of Barthes, that 'pierce' them, comprise the image of the balcony. It is the visual sign that directly links the figure of the Duce as the leader of Italy to that of Ciano as his possible young successor.



Fig. 44: The appearance of Ciano on the balcony of the Italian Foreign Ministry in Tirana, from *Ciano a Tirana incontra Re Zogu*, 5th May 1937, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 25th March 2014.

The appearances of Mussolini on the balcony of *Palazzo Venezia* in Rome and on the balconies of Fascist institutions in Italy and abroad were among the most popular images of the Duce in newsreels, photographs and postcards during the Fascist regime. Mussolini was filmed for the first time on a balcony during a rally in Grosseto in 1930.⁷ For the Duce the balcony became the ideal place from which to address the nation (both in public squares and in cinemas) and to communicate emphatically to the Italian people the most critical steps for the future of the regime. The image of Ciano on the balcony of Tirana

⁷ In May 1930 the Duce spoke to the crowd of Grosseto from the balcony of the local prefecture. Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 1 February 2016.

was symbolically powerful because, for the Italian people, the balcony was automatically associated with the Duce. Ciano appears again on a balcony while holding a rally in the following years and he was filmed in the newsreels entitled *La seduta dell'assemblea costituente* (1939) and *L'avanzata delle nostre truppe in territorio Greco* (1940).⁸

On 19 April 1939, a newsreel entitled *La visita di Ciano* was screened in theatres. The newsreel is relevant because it represents another step in the construction of the figure of Ciano as a future Fascist leader and coincides with the annexation of Albania to the Kingdom of Italy. The Italian foreign minister reached Albania so as to celebrate the beginning of the Italian occupation of the Balkan country, counting on the fact that the Albanian government was devoid of an organized army and that the opposition of the Albanian population to the arrival of the Italian army was bland and limited to a few *guerrilla* groups. As Owen Pearson notes, 'the first phase of the war between Italy and Albania ended with a rapid Italian victory', and at least initially the Albanian population did not react violently to the Italian invasion.⁹

The cameras follow Ciano as he leaves the plane, meets a group of Italian and Albanian politicians, and reaches Tirana in his convertible car. The soundtrack of the newsreel is that of a musical motif with a syncopated rhythm that begins with a solemn and slow tone, which increases in intensity when Ciano leaves the plane and reaches its peak when the minister is filmed in his car. LUCE used this type of soundtrack to accompany films that portrayed remarkable achievements of the Fascist regime or events of extraordinary importance for the nation.

In the archive of LUCE there are no newsreels showing military conflict in Albania during the Italian occupation; the rise to power of the Fascists in Tirana is represented as a harmonious process that ended with the annexation of a nation that

⁸ Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 29 July 2016.

⁹ Owen Pearson, *Albania in the Twentieth Century. A History: Vol II: Albania in Occupation and War. From Fascism to Communism. 1940-1945* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 1-31,(p. 14).

voluntarily chose to be aligned with Fascism. Therefore, the soundtrack of *La visita di Ciano*, with its crescendo of intensity and its direct connection to the image of the arrival of Ciano and the enthusiasm of the Albanian citizens, is one of the few symbolic elements that epitomize the Italian victory in Albania in the Fascist non-fiction films.

Ciano appears after the first 30 seconds in front of his personal plane, making the Roman salute to the Albanian citizens (Fig. 45). The short-medium shot is significant because the minister is wearing a military uniform that is almost identical to those worn by the Duce in many newsreels, especially during meetings related to military conflicts in which Italy was involved. In this newsreel Ciano appears not only as a future Fascist leader but also as a military chief. He is presented to the audience as the key man for the conquest of the new European colony.

The structure of the newsreel has three seamlessly intertwined elements: the soundtrack, the figure of Ciano, and the voice-over. The commentary is a brief but quintessential element of the newsreel and it reminds the audience that:

Sua Eccellenza Galeazzo Ciano tornava a Tirana per una storica seduta dell'Assemblea costituente che deciderà i destini del Regno. Autorità Italiane e Albanesi converranno all'aeroporto, dove tra breve il grande trimotore pilotato personalmente da Ciano compirà un perfetto atterraggio.

Ciano's trip to Albania is defined as a historical and crucial event for the future of the kingdom, and the commentary communicates to the Italian viewers that the conquest of Albania is an important step in the consolidation of Italian power in the Balkans. When the voice-over remarks that the minister has arrived in Tirana while personally piloting

his plane and making a perfect landing, the soundtrack becomes increasingly intense and Ciano is portrayed as the leader who represents a new *Primo Pilota*, a character that, as we have seen in the previous chapter, was played by Mussolini in dozens of newsreels.



Fig. 45: The image of Ciano as he leaves his plane and makes the Roman salute to the Albanian authorities, from *Albania. Tirana. La visita di Ciano*, 19th April 1939, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 6th April 2014.

In the archive of LUCE there is a series of newsreels that advertise Ciano as a pilot of proven ability, and the figure of the Count as an adventurer and indomitable pilot is reiterated in several newsreels and documentaries in 1935 during the Italo-Ethiopian War.¹⁰ The first of these productions is entitled *Ciano consegue il brevetto di pilota*

¹⁰ The productions preserved in the archive of Istituto Luce are: *L'Avanzata delle truppe Italiane* (1936); *Da Adua ad Axum* (1936); *Le tappe dell'avanzata Italiana*; *Riconsegna della fiamma della 'Disperata' al Fascismo fiorentino da parte del comandante Galeazzo Ciano* (1936); *Il Cammino degli eroi* (1936); *Roma-Napoli. I volontari in partenza per l'Africa Orientale* (1935); *I figli di Mussolini e Galeazzo Ciano arrivano ad Asmara e*

aviatore and was filmed in October 1934. The short film follows the young Fascist leader during the qualifying examination to become a pilot. From the point of view of Fascist propaganda, the first sequence is significant. Ciano is filmed in his plane as he speaks with another airman before departure, and the voice-over which accompanies the scene reminds the audience that ‘Sua Eccellenza Galeazzo Ciano consegue il brevetto di pilota aviatore con un brillante esame effettuato in condizioni atmosferiche avverse’.

The voice-over mentions the adverse weather conditions so as to highlight the courage and resourcefulness of Ciano, beginning the construction of the image of the future foreign minister (he was appointed in 1936) as a prototype of a Fascist strongman. As Guido Bonsaver notes, when Ciano planned to join the Ethiopian War as a bomber pilot, he looked for an able journalist who could follow him and celebrate his military adventures.¹¹ Ciano’s desire to be followed by journalists, cameramen and photographers was proof that the Italian Foreign Minister was embracing a propaganda strategy that portrayed him as an important Fascist leader and possibly a future Duce.

It is critical to emphasize that in the newsreel filmed in Ethiopia, Ciano is depicted as a brave pilot who embodies the new Fascist man, but not yet as an important political leader who is explicitly indicated as being among the eligible candidates to succeed Mussolini. However, in the newsreels produced in Albania, for the first time, Ciano metaphorically represents a leader who is ready to become the pilot (and, therefore, the commander) of the nation and of the new Empire.

visitano il campo di aviazione italiano. Ciano prende possesso del nuovo Ufficio Stampa e Propaganda dell’Africa Orientale (1935); *Africa Orientale, Consegna delle medaglie al valor militare alla squadriglia ‘Disperata’* (1935). Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 1 February 2016.

¹¹ Guido Bonsaver, *Censorship and Literature in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 191.

4.2 The transformation of Ciano into a new Duce

LUCE's newsreels were effective because they manipulated the truth, creating an alternative reality by means of a web of signifiers which framed and affected interpretation. The Fascist regime did not intend to give the audience the opportunity to interpret what was behind the mechanisms of propaganda, but rather aimed to convince the spectators that what they saw in theatres was the only irrefutable truth. The objective of LUCE was to persuade the audience that the real Albania was the country loyal to Fascism which was visible in the newsreels.

Referring to the concept of reality in photography, Barthes writes, 'I call the photographic referent not the optionally real thing to which an image or sign refers but the necessarily real thing that has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photographs'.¹² Barthes points out that a photograph gives the viewers the chance to reveal the 'has been' of a thing. The newsreels of LUCE showed in cinemas what the Fascist regime defined as news and a variety of real events that actually happened. The newsreels were a sophisticated example of audience persuasion because they hid the propaganda message within a frame of reality given by the camera lens that filmed the 'has been' of a certain event.

During his visit to Albania in August 1939 the cameramen of LUCE followed Ciano in the areas surrounding the Albanian capital in which the Fascist regime was completing the reconstruction of the aqueduct of the city. The inauguration of the aqueduct is filmed in a newsreel entitled *Galeazzo Ciano a Tirana inaugura l'acquedotto*. The Fascist regime regarded the construction of new aqueducts as critical to the improvement of urban centres and as powerful symbols of purification and rebirth. These

¹² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 61.

infrastructures became fundamental to the passage of clean water following the massive works of reclamation in Italy and Albania. The opening of aqueducts following the reclamation of the marshes is filmed in sixteen newsreels and one documentary. The first film was screened in Italian cinemas in February 1929 and is entitled *La cerimonia dell'inaugurazione della più grande centrale elettrica d'Europa a Tivoli*.¹³

Ciano's visit to Tirana and the inauguration of the new aqueduct was a real event that represented an unequivocal truth and the Barthesian 'has been' of the newsreel. The aqueduct was among the infrastructure completed by the Fascist regime in the Albanian capital, and the Italian press also reported the news. The newspaper *La Stampa* devoted a detailed article to the inauguration and journalist Vittorio Varale wrote that the event 'è un segno indelebile della presenza Italiana in terra d'Albania'.¹⁴ In this film the propaganda of LUCE exploits symbols and images that aspire to transform the inauguration into a triumphant ceremony that celebrates Mussolini and his hypothetical heir. The element of truth of the newsreel is overwhelmed by coded details which LUCE cleverly used to develop the construction of the image of Ciano as a future leader of Fascism.

In the first part of the newsreel a series of long shots follow the Italian foreign minister during the journey from the airport to the centre of Tirana. Ciano is filmed standing on the front seat of his convertible car and greeting the crowd. Meanwhile, the citizens of Tirana applaud the minister and chant 'Duce! Duce!', creating a metaphorical but explicit association between Mussolini and the Count. The medium shot of the

¹³ The other titles are: *Ravenna il nuovo acquedotto* (1929); *Lecce. Il Re inaugura il grande serbatoio dell'acquedotto Pugliese* (1931); *Grosseto. Il Re inaugura il palazzo delle Poste e il nuovo acquedotto* (1932); *Il compimento del primo grandioso acquedotto Istriano* (1933); *Come appare il nuovo acquedotto Alessandrino dopo i restauri* (1934); *Paestum. Inaugurazione del nuovo acquedotto* (1934); *Roma. L'acquedotto dell'acqua vergine* (1935); *Montescuro. Le opera dell'acquedotto di Montescuro* (1935); *Teramo. Lavori per l'acquedotto* (1935); *Istria. Inaugurazione acquedotto Istriano* (1936); *Terra assetata* (1937); *Scanzano. Il cippo terminale dell'acquedotto di Avellino* (1937); *Lacquedotto dell'Alto Calore* (1938); *Bari. Starace ammira la fontana dell'acquedotto Pugliese* (1939); *Il Duce inaugura il primo tronco dell'acquedotto Imperiale* (1940). Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 21 September 2015.

¹⁴ Vittorio Varale, 'Entusiasmo di folle attorno alle opera di civiltà', *La Stampa*, 20 August 1939, p. 1.

smiling Ciano conveys to the audience the idea of a confident and strong politician perfectly at ease in the role of leader (Fig. 46).



Fig. 46: The image of Ciano dominates the screen during the first 30 seconds of the newsreel, from *Galeazzo Ciano a Tirana inaugura l'acquedotto*, 20 August 1939, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 7th April 2015.

The link between Ciano and Mussolini is also reinforced in the second part of the film, in which the minister takes the stage to begin the rally that precedes the opening of the aqueduct. The cameramen conduct a spectacular panoramic shot of the square of Tirana, filming hundreds of people who have attended the inauguration. Subsequently, they zoom in on the majestic stage from which Ciano presses the button to switch on the mechanism that allows the water to flow from the aqueduct to the square, creating an impressive gush of water that fills the cinema screen.

The scene is visually impressive and communicates the idea of the rebirth of the Albanian territory and the success of the Fascist regime and Ciano in Tirana. The image of the clean water that flows from the aqueduct and invades the square is a symbol of purity and new life, which epitomizes the Albanian rebirth. From the point of view of the construction of the sequences, this newsreel follows a narrative already seen in previous productions that film the inauguration of new infrastructure on the Italian peninsula and abroad (Figs. 47-48).

The Duce is filmed in many newsreels during the opening of new aqueducts. For instance, the film produced in 1932 and entitled *Velletri. S.E. il capo del governo inaugura l'acquedotto del Simbrivio, che darà acqua a 22 comuni del Lazio* resembles the newsreel entitled *Galeazzo Ciano a Tirana inaugura l'acquedotto*. Mussolini is shown holding a rally on an imposing stage in the centre of the square of Velletri. The gushing water of the aqueduct floods the square and, eventually, the crowd applauds and cheers the dictator enthusiastically.

LUCE used a standardized model of filming this type of production, which became very familiar to audiences and was reiterated over the years in Italian cinemas. The screening of inaugurations of new infrastructure in front of thousands of people, majestic stages, and eye-catching performances, such as the fountain of water, are images that viewers automatically associate with Mussolini, who, in these films, embodies the role of a leader who modernized Italy and, later, the Empire. The figure of Ciano on the stage in Tirana evolves into a new form of representation that the audience can immediately link to Mussolini. In this film Ciano becomes the man who symbolized the new Albania, physically replacing Mussolini on cinema screens.



Fig. 47: The gushing water coming from the aqueduct inaugurated by Ciano, from *Galeazzo Ciano a Tirana inaugura l'aquedotto*, 20th August 1939, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 7th April 2015.



Fig. 48: The gushing water coming from the aqueduct inaugurated by Mussolini, from *Velletri. S.E. il capo del governo inaugura l'aquedotto del Simbrivio che darà acqua a 22 comuni del Lazio*, November 1932, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 9th April 2015.

The sequences that follow the arrival of Ciano on the stage of Tirana are accompanied by a voice-over. The commentary reminds the audience that ‘il popolo Albanese disciplinatamente inquadrato applaudiva al *Duce salvatore* e al suo Ministro’. The voice-over uses a language inspired by Catholicism, which gives the newsreel a religious and mystical atmosphere. The Duce is defined as the new saviour, a divine and omnipotent figure, while Ciano is his minister; therefore, his disciple and chief representative focused on executing the Duce’s will.¹⁵

Although in this film the Duce is absent physically, and between the late 1930s and early 1940s his appearance in the newsreels declined, Mussolini is still portrayed by LUCE as the supreme chief of Fascism, and the spiritual leader of the nation through the use of symbolism. As early as the 1920s researchers focused their attention towards Fascism’s rituals and symbols, claiming that they were examples of a secular religion, which they viewed as one of the more original aspects of the movement, as well as being one of the factors behind its success. In 1929 H.W. Schneider and S.B. Clough wrote that Fascism ‘has a rudiment of a new religion, but whether or not these will grow remains to be seen. Certainly there can be no doubt that already this new cult has taken some hold of the Italian heart and imagination.’¹⁶ As Emilio Gentile notes, Fascism did not restrict itself to venerating God in traditional terms, but rather intervened directly within the religious sphere.¹⁷ Fascism’s interest in religion was ‘exclusively political and not theological, just as its privileged recognition of the Catholic Church was due to its pragmatic use of religion as an *instrumentum regni*’.¹⁸

However, as Herman Finer observes, ‘the very fact of claiming that the state had its own morality meant that Fascism evoked the existence of its own divinity, which was

¹⁵ According to the dictionary *Treccani* in the Catholic tradition the Ministers of the Savior are also the angels, as executors of the will of God.

¹⁶ H.W. Schneider, S.B. Clough, *Making Fascists* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1929), p. 73.

¹⁷ Emilio Gentile, ‘Fascism as Political Religion’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 25 (1990), pp. 229-251.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

the inspiration of Fascist morality, and effectively put itself forward as a new religion'.¹⁹ Fascism, due to its totalitarian concept of politics, 'took upon itself the prerogative of defining the meaning and ultimate aim as regards the lives of millions of men and women. Consequently, Fascism constructed its own system of beliefs, myths and rituals, centered on the socialization of the state.'²⁰ Gentile notes that Fascists considered themselves to be 'the prophets, apostles and soldiers of a new patriotic religion, which had arisen in the purifying violence of the war, and which had been consecrated with the blood of the heroes and martyrs who had sacrificed themselves finally to achieve the Italian revolution'.²¹

In *Galeazzo Ciano a Tirana inaugura l'acquedotto* the Italian foreign minister is represented as the possible heir of the Duce, but for Fascist propaganda the father of the new Italy is Mussolini, who could be replaced physically but remains eternally the saviour of the country. The gigantic letter M that is positioned on the front of the stage from which Ciano holds the rally emphasizes the constant symbolic presence of Mussolini (Fig. 49). The M is filmed with a medium shot with a high angle, creating a visual contrast between the enormous letter, Ciano, and the other authorities on the stage, who appear to be much smaller and, therefore, symbolically subject to the authority of Mussolini. The letter M is the visual detail that attracted the viewer's eyes in the cinema. The M of Mussolini was a recurring visual element repeatedly shown in newsreels, photographs and posters. Mussolini's charismatic power was increased by the institutionalization of Fascism as a religion. Mussolini's meetings with citizens during rallies were 'the highest point of Fascist worship in which, with appropriate orchestration,

¹⁹ Herman Finer, *Mussolini's Italy* (Henry Holt and Company: New York, 1935), p. 186.

²⁰ Gentile, p. 230.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

one witnessed the emotional fusion of the leader with the crowds as a symbolic mystical dramatization of the nation's unity, achieved through its supreme actor'.²²



Fig. 49: The capital letter M on the stage in Tirana, from *Galeazzo Ciano a Tirana inaugura l'acquedotto*, 20th August 1939, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 7th April 2014.

As Falasca-Zamponi notes, 'the signature of Mussolini often replaced his iconographic representation and conveyed his essence, as in the collected works of Mussolini's speeches and writings'.²³ The capital letter M appeared very frequently on monuments and buildings, in gymnastics choreography during celebratory games, in groves and gardens, and also featured on the badges and uniforms of Fascist organizations, transforming it into visual shorthand for the Duce and underscoring his ubiquitous presence. In several newsreels the arrival of Mussolini in Italian cities is anticipated by

²² Gentile, p. 236.

²³ Falasca-Zamponi, p. 80.

images of installations that show a huge M. Twenty-two Italian battalions during World War II were named M and are featured in eight films of LUCE.²⁴ Filming of the capital letter M in the newsreel entitled *Galeazzo Ciano a Tirana inaugura l'acquedotto* allows the viewer to connect the inauguration of the aqueduct to the Italian dictator immediately. The sequence thus epitomizes the signature of the Duce in the modernization of Albania and his ubiquitous and perennial aura in the non-fiction film propaganda of the *ventennio*.

²⁴ The series of newsreels was screened in 1941 and is entitled *Battaglioni M*. Archive of the Luce Institute, consulted on 23 September 2015.

4.3 Promoting reclamation and reconstruction: the case of Albania under Fascism

Following the end of the 1920s the Fascist regime intervened in Albania with substantial funding for the construction of infrastructure and buildings, and the Albanian economy ‘gradually became dependent on Fascist Italy’.²⁵ Although Albania officially became an Italian territory in 1939, and the occupation of the Balkan country was relatively brief, from the early 1930s the propaganda of LUCE was constant and relentless.

The newsreels aimed to portray the reclamation, reconstruction and rebirth of the Albanian territory, whilst also presenting to the Italian people the regime’s ability to reconstruct an economically underdeveloped and inhospitable territory following the example of the reclamation of the Pontine Marshes. The willingness of the Duce to create an Italian empire prompted the cameramen of LUCE to represent Albania as an Italian region that depended exclusively on Italian funding and complied with the directives of the Fascist regime.

After the second half of the 1930s the Fascist regime intensified propaganda activity in Albania, and LUCE explicitly represented the Albanian people as enthusiastic Fascist supporters. The newsreels wanted to prove to audiences that the Fascist regime physically rebuilt Albania and gained the trust of the local population. As Fischer points out, by 1939 the Fascist regime had restored most of the city's main streets.²⁶ Other high-profile projects included land reclamation, ‘for which the Italian government set aside 1,200 million lire to be spread over eight years’.²⁷ More than thirteen thousand hectares in the Durres (Durazzo) area were to be reclaimed by the end of 1941.

It is important to emphasize that at least for a limited period of time the Italian funding for the construction of infrastructure had had a positive impact on the Albanian

²⁵ Roselli, p. 89.

²⁶ Bernd J. Fischer, *Albania at War* (London: Hurst & Company, 1999), p. 68.

²⁷ Roselli, p. 91.

economy and was warmly received by the local population. Indeed, the new public works designed by the Fascist regime lowered the unemployment rate and, in 1939, ‘twenty-five thousand Albanian people, under the direction of ten Italian supervisors were enlarging the runways of many Albanian airports from one to two kilometres’.²⁸ In the newsreels of LUCE the Fascist regime overestimated the amount of infrastructure that was completed thanks to Italian funding, but as a matter of fact new bridges and roads were built and new public edifices were erected.

The 2-minute-long newsreel screened by LUCE in November 1937 and entitled *La Vita della Popolazione* follows the work of the peasants who lived in the countryside just outside the city of Durrës. In the first 30 seconds the cameras conduct three medium shots that focus on a group of Albanian peasants who are collecting huge amounts of grain and an enormous field of wheat (Fig. 50).

The scenes convey to the viewer the idea of healthy living and hard but rewarding work in the countryside. The audiences in cinemas had the opportunity to relate the images of the Albanian countryside to dozens of newsreels that showed agricultural activities in Italy. The Fascist regime linked unequivocally the rebirth of the Albanian territory to a series of ideal images of the Fascist countryside, which began to circulate as early as 1927. LUCE’s first newsreel showing agricultural activities is entitled *Carpegna, Romagna. Il Duce della Battaglia del Grano dà l’esempio* (1927).²⁹ Images of Albanian peasants and fishermen were exploited by LUCE so as to advertise the countryside renaissance as a project designed by the Fascist regime and, thus, by the Duce in Italy and abroad.

²⁸ Fischer, p. 68.

²⁹ The first newsreel that was filmed in the Italian countryside and showed agricultural activities is entitled *Carpegna, Romagna. Il Duce della Battaglia del Grano dà l’esempio*, 1927. Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 24 August 2015.



Fig. 50: Albanian peasants collecting grain, from *La vita della popolazione*, 18th November 1937, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 13th May 2014.

In *La Vita della popolazione* the voice-over has a prominent role and accompanies the scene which promotes explicitly the idea that the renaissance of the Albanian countryside is led by innovative Fascist regime policies. As Barthes points out, the linguistic level of an advertisement (slogan, caption) ‘helps me to choose the correct level of perception and permits me to focus not simply my gaze but also my understanding’.³⁰ Barthes defines the linguistic level of an advertisement as a means through which to reinforce the connotations perceived by the audience. In this film the voice-over completes and consolidates the propaganda message of the Fascist regime. The commentary is perfectly integrated with the images, and supports the level of understanding of the newsreel through concise sentences that are intended to capture the attention of the viewers. The

³⁰ Barthes, p. 64.

narrative intervenes in three distinct moments, and in the first part of the film it reminds the audience that:

Le piane costiere erano ormai trasformate in acquitrini e ne urgeva la bonifica. È sorta così frutto della fiorente collaborazione Italo-Albanese la bonifica di Sciglia dove si è rinnovato il miracolo dell'Agro-pontino.

When the voice-over remarks that, thanks to the flourishing collaboration between Italy and Albania the miracle of the Agro-Pontine reclamation is renewed, the cameramen perform a sequence of medium shots of an Albanian farm that show the reclamation projects sponsored by the Fascist regime and a herd of buffalos running on the newly cleaned land (Fig. 51).



Fig. 51: A medium shot of the Albanian buffalo, from *La vita della popolazione*, 18th November 1937, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 13th May 2014.

The long shot of a herd of Albanian buffalos was particularly effective because it introduced to the public in cinemas a common feature found in several newsreels. The domesticated buffalos of Central Italy appear in twenty-five films and became a symbol of the reclamation of the marshes.³¹

A fascinating newsreel shot in 1936 near Salerno and entitled *Una mandria di bufali* defines the animal as the ‘antico abitatore delle paludi che pareva destinato a scomparire’. According to the film the buffalo was saved thanks to the Fascist ‘bonifica integrale che premise ai suoi allevatori di vegliare su questa bestia utile laboriosa e intelligente’. The cameramen perform an impressive medium shot of one herd of buffalos

³¹ Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 15th May 2015.

running towards the fence while the voice-over emphasizes that ‘queste bestie sono disciplinate’ (Fig. 52). Both in Albania and in Italy, the buffalo represents the success of Mussolini’s dictatorship in reclaiming the territories of the new empire; at the same time, it also epitomizes the attempt of LUCE to promote the Fascist regime as being capable of conquering and taming nature. Furthermore, under Fascism the massive and powerful buffalo becomes a disciplined and docile creature that symbolizes the reclamation of marshy lands throughout the new Italian Empire.



Fig. 52: A herd of buffalos in the Italian countryside, from *Una mandria di bufali*, 10th June 1936, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 14th October 2014.

In the second part of *La vita della popolazione* the exploitation of nature and the subsequent extraction of mineral resources so as to enrich the Fascist empire are promoted through the images of oil installations on the outskirts of Durrës. LUCE

produced several newsreels on the exploitation of Albanian mineral resources and the films (produced in Europe and the Middle East) emphasize the importance of oil as a resource in worldwide technological development.³² In the newsreels filmed in Albania, oil became one of the symbols of the modernization of Fascist Italy. It was a resource extracted from a foreign territory which had recently been conquered (even if not officially occupied until 1939) and its representation in cinemas had to give the audience the idea of a nation at the forefront of technological progress.

The images of public works and the discovery of oilfields in the countryside surrounding Durres are denotative elements of the newsreels. The choice of the cameramen to focus on medium shots, close-ups and panoramic visual details such as bridges and oil installations provides an extra connotative element to the film, fostering a further process of decoding of the images in theatres. The voice-over provides a linguistic element that is not limited to the description of the scenes but rather lures the audience to identify with the Italian colonization of Albania.

During the 1930s the Fascist regime widely advertised gasoline, gas pumps and oil producers (Esso, Agip and Shell) in magazines such as *Le vie d'Italia* and *Automobile Italia*. Moreover, as Karen Pinkus notes, if on the one hand these advertisements represent the idea of modernity and speed (in relation to cars and motorcycles), on the other, the posters that portray petrol pumps and drivers in rural areas or small towns

³² Oil was the main object of numerous Fascist newsreels: the archive of the Luce Institute preserves the following films: *Pozzo petrolifero a Los Angeles* (1929); *I pozzi di petrolio di Fontevivo presso Parma* (1931); *Paraguay. Il petrolio del Gran Chaco* (1932); *Hannover. Un pozzo di petrolio della profondità di mille metri* (1934); *Filadelfia. Un fratello della Littorina. Treno azionato a petrolio* (1934); *Veleia. I lavori di estrazione dal sottosuolo* (1935); *Texas. La scoperta di un giacimento petrolifero* (1936); *Oklahoma City. La scoperta del petrolio* (1936); *Austria. Il funzionamento dei pozzi di petrolio* (1936); *Napoli. La costruzione del nuovo impianto di raffineria* (1936); *Livorno. Benni inaugura i nuovi impianti per la distillazione della benzina dai residui del petrolio* (1938); *Genova. Il funzionamento dell'oleodotto* (1938); *Dall'Irak. Alcuni aspetti del giovane stato Arabo* (1941); *Il Duce ispeziona un cantiere per l'estrazione del petrolio nella provincia di Frosinone* (1942). Two documentaries are dedicated to the extraction of oil and its strategic importance: *Cantiere petrolifero dell'Agip a Fontevivo* (1931) and *Tecnica* (1940). Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 25 May 2015.

reaffirm the concept that driving was not to be considered a bourgeois activity, but rather an element of modernity perfectly blended with the ideal Fascist countryside.³³

In *La vita della popolazione* the cameramen partially follow the visual patterns of the posters that advertise gasoline in Italy. After an abrupt cut the cameras conduct a panoramic shot of a rural and barren landscape in the Albanian countryside. The voice-over explains that ‘la natura stessa dei luoghi suggerisce l’idea di possibili ricchezze minerarie’. The discovery of oil in Albania is associated with images and scenes in which linguistic levels and connotative levels convey to the viewer the idea of modernity but within the context of a countryside environment that is familiar to Italian cinemagoers. The voice-over continues its commentary, underlining that the cameramen are filming ‘a Kuçovë centro minerario di concessione Italiana dotata delle più perfezionate tecniche di estrazione e trivellazione per estrarre la preziosa essenza’.

The intervention of the voice-over is accompanied by images showing enormous drills penetrating the terrain from which the petroleum emerges (Fig. 53). From a denotative point of view, the continuous rotary movement of the augers that pierce the ground can be seen as a simple action of oil extraction, but these images were constantly repeated in the newsreels that filmed the discovery of mineral resources, thus transmitting to the audience the idea of perpetual Fascist progress. An impressive medium shot films the drills that are smashing the soil, allowing crude oil to flow to the surface. The destruction of the ground embodies the strength and power of the Fascist regime and its relentless conquest of Albanian land.

³³Karen Pinkus, ‘Selling Gasoline in Autarchic Italy’, in *Figura umana. Normkonzepte der Menschendarstellung in der italienischen Kunst und Bildkultur von 1919 bis 1939*, ed. by Edgar Leuschner (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2012), pp. 151-160 (p. 158).



Fig. 53: The impressive force of the auger while drilling the ground, from *La vita della popolazione*, 18th November 1937, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 13th May 2014.

The oil extracted in Albania is labelled as the precious essence, and this definition (which is visually associated with the image of oil emerging from the ground) is a prime example of LUCE's skilful use of linguistic elements in support of the connotative signifiers of the images. *Essenza* can be translated from Italian as being linked to an aromatic and oily substance that is extracted and used not only in perfumery, pharmacy and chemistry but also as something fundamental and substantial. Combining the words precious and essence (in its literal meaning of being essential) and simultaneously filming the gush of oil, LUCE shows petroleum to be a mineral resource that is crucial in the economic development of the new Italian empire.

A further sudden cut precedes a short series of sequences (30 seconds long) showing the bridges and roads under construction on the outskirts of Durrës. The cameramen film a group of Albanian builders who are working on the completion of a new road and, subsequently, a bridge with an imposing arch (Fig. 54). The latter scene is

introduced by the voice-over, which explains that ‘il problema delle telecomunicazioni viene risolto attraverso un continuo lavoro con una notevole rete di vie rotabili ricche di opere d’arte’.



Fig. 54: A medium shot of the imposing bridge built by the Fascist regime near Durrës, from *La vita della popolazione*, 18th November 1937, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 13th May 2014.

In *La Vita della popolazione* LUCE presents the new Albanian infrastructure as an example of Fascist excellence. The shot of the bridge with its impressive arch is accompanied by commentary which states that the Albanian communication networks are ‘ricche di opere d’arte’. The image of the solid bridge is visually persuasive in

communicating the idea of Italian greatness in the new colony. The linguistic level effectively supports the images, trying to capture the attention of the viewers. Bridges and roads are not only exposed to the audience but also promoted, superimposing the visual and linguistic elements, thus defining the new infrastructure as Fascist masterpieces.

Advertising oil extraction is the main objective of the newsreel entitled *L'azienda Italiana dei petroli in Albania nella vallata del Devoli*, which was produced in May 1937 and filmed in the Devoll valley, a rural area in the centre of Albania. The newsreel is introduced by a panoramic shot of the valley and by a voice-over that reminds the audience that: 'l'azienda Italiana dei petroli dopo le lunghe e assidue ricerche incoraggiate dall'allora Ministro delle telecomunicazioni Costanzo Ciano ha creato 150 posti di estrazione'.

The scenery recorded by the cameras is similar to many other rural landscapes filmed in the newsreels of LUCE: viewers have the chance to glimpse into only a sparsely populated area, and the film does not provide any specific geographical information. From a denotative point of view, the images portray a generic countryside area. The linguistic message, however, presents the discovery of oilfields in Albania as a sensational Italian mission; the commentary highlights the prominent role of former Minister of Telecommunications Costanzo Ciano, who was the architect of the Italian expedition in Albania that aimed to find oilfields. During the *ventennio* Costanzo Ciano (a veteran of World War I and one of the few trusted friends of Mussolini) was considered a hero. Furthermore, during the very early stages of Fascism, Mussolini, who feared being killed, chose Ciano as his possible successor.³⁴

He appeared in many newsreels during the 1920s and 1930s, and when he died suddenly in 1939, his life was celebrated by a documentary entitled *L'eroe di*

³⁴ Martin Clark, *Mussolini* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 113.

Cortellazzo.³⁵ Costanzo Ciano was the ideal incarnation of the successful, heroic and fearless new Fascist man projected by Mussolini. Following the 1920s he was a popular and well-known man; therefore, his name was ideal in publicizing the new Italian oil platforms. The opening of new oilfields was not only presented to audiences as a mayor technological advancement, but reference to Ciano transformed the discovery of petroleum in Albania into a new heroic victory for Fascism.

After the introduction of the voice-over and the aerial filming of the valley of Devoll, the cameramen perform a series of medium shots of oil installations that fill the screen with their monumental metal towers, therefore creating a spectacular visual effect. In these sequences the cameras show dozens of oil platforms, giving the impression that the expanse of oilrigs reaches the horizon (Fig. 55).

The oil platforms are filmed in three distinct scenes in which they are framed within a countryside landscape.³⁶ Karen Pinkus notes that many posters designed in Italy by artist Dario Bernazzoli for oil company Esso are drawings that represent gasoline pumps or drivers near petrol pumps usually located in isolated outdoor landscapes.³⁷ In one of the advertisements one can see in the foreground a street sign indicating Esso, as well as a series of parallel lines (representing the streets), in the background further street signs with the brand Esso, and between the lines Bernazzoli has inserted the word 'ovunque'. In this advertisement, Esso pumps are ubiquitous, and 'at each point in space the driver can expect to encounter the same attendant and same product'³⁸ (Fig. 56).

³⁵ *L'Eroe di Cortellazzo*, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 15 May 2014. Ciano also appears in 104 newsreels preserved in the Archive of the Luce Institute.

³⁶ A group of Fascist authorities led by Galeazzo Ciano walked down the oilfields, but they were only mentioned by the voice-over and appeared to be of little importance in this newsreel.

³⁷ Karen Pinkus, 'Selling Gasoline in Autarchic Italy', in *Figura umana. Normkonzepte der Menschendarstellung in der italienischen Kunst und Bildkultur von 1919 bis 1939*, ed. by Edgar Leuschner (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2012), pp. 151-160 (p. 153).

³⁸ *Ibi.*, p. 157.

The image of the expanse of space on which the seemingly endless chain of oil rigs stands is the representation of the successful extraction plan of the Fascist regime in Albania but it is also a persuasive connotation that transmits and advertises the idea that oil is a resource abundantly available in the new Italian empire. The public had to be convinced and reassured that oil and its derivative products such as gasoline were distributed anywhere and anytime thanks to an efficient web of platforms built in the colonies.



Fig. 55: A shot of the Italian oil platforms in Albania, from: *L'azienda Italiana dei petroli in Albania nella vallata del Devoli*, May 1937, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 15th May 2014.



Fig. 56: The poster of Dario Bernazzoli (1938). (Archivi della Triennale of Milan)

Oil was promoted as a resource that would ensure to the Italian population a future of modernity, victories (oil was one of the fundamental resources for the military intervention after the outbreak of world War II) and prosperity, and as the voice-over that accompanies the last scene points out ‘gli Italiani sono riusciti a creare nel cuore della vecchia Albania un centro fervido di operosità e di ricchezza’. During the intervention of the commentary the cameras make a close-up of a high fountain of gushing oil emerging from the subsoil, explicitly linking the image of the jet of oil with the stream of water coming from the new aqueducts filmed in the newsreels after the land reclamations (Fig 57).



Fig. 57 The gushing fountain of oil from: *L'azienda Italiana dei petroli in Albania nella vallata del Devoli*, May 1937, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 15th May 2014.

Images of powerful jets of oil and water epitomize the rebirth of the territories of the empire and the triumph of Fascism against a hostile land. The visual and symbolic connotation that bound water and oil is an apparent contradiction since oil is a key economic resource but highly polluting substance, while water is an essential element for human life. However, in the newsreels of LUCE, both water and petroleum represent a territory that becomes clean, wholesome and pure thanks to the reclamation projects of the Fascist regime. The extraction of oil is not shown to be potentially harmful to the environment but it is portrayed as the emblem of the resurrected land.

4.4 Public hygiene on Italian screens: The battle against malaria in Albania

After the occupation of Albania (April 1939), LUCE produced a limited series of newsreels that showed to the Italian viewers the latest reclamation of land near Durres and the eradication of malaria. After the reclamation of the marshes along the Italian peninsula had in fact successfully combated the disease in many agricultural districts, the elimination of malaria from the Albanian wetlands became one of the main targets of the Fascist regime.³⁹ The Fascist regime ‘spent only 1,5 million lire for the reclamation of the Albanian land and the eradication of malaria against an initial budget which amounted to 15 million lire’.⁴⁰ However, by 1939, ‘5,000 hectares of land were reclaimed and therefore at least in those territories malaria was eradicated’.⁴¹ LUCE showed the Fascist regime as the bearer of a new wave of civilization of Albania, and the Italian occupation was shown to include the promotion of fundamental new sanitary and health rules, thus emphasizing further the fundamental civilizing impetus of Fascism.

Hygiene was one of the cornerstones of Fascist propaganda and the concept of cleaning, as a representation of new purity and eradication of a ‘dirty’ past, was at the basis of the Fascist idea of sanitation. Articles in the *International Review of Educational Cinematography* were devoted to demonstrate the effectiveness of non-fiction cinema as a tool to educate the viewers to achieve better hygiene conditions, and as a fundamental weapon to teach local city administrators how to defeat the threat of malaria in the Italian countryside districts and in the colonies. Anna Fraentzel Celli, who was a German hygienist and philanthropist that dedicated her life (with her husband Angelo Celli) to

³⁹ Roselli, p. 121.

⁴⁰ Steen Bo Frandsen ‘The War that we Prefer. The Reclamation of the Pontine Marshes and Fascist Expansion’ in *International Fascism. 1919-1945*, ed. by Robert Mallett and Gert Sorensen (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 69-83 (p. 75).

⁴¹ Federico Caprotti, *Mussolini’s cities: Internal Colonialism in Italy. 1930-1939* (Youngstown: Cambria Press, 2007), p. 107.

eradicate malaria from the marshes surrounding Rome, writes that the Fascist newsreels have become ‘the most efficacious and rapid of all the means of anti-malaria campaign’.⁴² Celli underlines that on holidays and in the evenings, the educational cinema of LUCE gave numbers of shows that explained ‘persuasively the dangers of fever, the means of avoiding it and of treating it’.⁴³

An anonymous appendix that followed Celli’s article, points out that LUCE ‘have been carrying on the anti-malaria campaign by means of its travelling cinemas, in addition to the permanent cinemas that exist in the various little towns of the *Campagna*’.⁴⁴ The commitment of LUCE to defeat malaria was impressive and in 1930 educational newsreels and documentaries were shown ‘in more than 4,700 rural centers’.⁴⁵ As Diop-Lombardi explains, in Italy in the early 1930s, in pamphlets, medical literature and visual and written campaigns against contagious diseases such as tuberculosis and syphilis a correlation was established ‘between sanitary conditions of the domestic environment, which was the domain of women, and the need to protect the Italian race against contamination and degeneration’.⁴⁶

Gigliola Gori observes that the Fascist regime organized holidays that were designed to teach young people personal hygiene and care of the body.⁴⁷ The children who attended the health resorts received a homogenous and standardized treatment that included ‘climate cure, well-balanced if simple nourishment and person and

⁴² Anna Celli, ‘The Cinema in the Campaign against Malaria’, *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 5, (1930), 619-623 (p.618).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 618.

⁴⁴ Anonymous, ‘The Cinema in the Campaign against Malaria,’ *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 5, (1930), 624-627 (p. 625).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 626.

⁴⁶ Cristina Lombardi-Diop, ‘Spotless Italy: Hygiene, Domesticity, and the Ubiquity of Whiteness in Fascist and Postwar Consumer Culture’, *California Italian Studies Journal*, 2 (2009), 3-24 (p. 20).

⁴⁷ Gigliola Gori, *Italian Fascism and the Female Body: Submissive Women and Strong Mothers* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 122.

environmental hygiene, all of them being largely unknown to most children from large poverty stricken families.’⁴⁸

As Pollard writes, the extension of health and welfare provision during Fascism was spectacular and ‘spending for hygiene and welfare rose from 7 per cent to 20 per cent of the Italian national budget from 1930 to 1940’.⁴⁹ Hygiene and health issues were heavily publicized by the Fascist regime, and ads that portrayed the curative bath in clean water had a very important place in the culture of Italy during Fascism.⁵⁰ During the 1930s the idea of bathing ‘was always sold as a synonym of hygienic, cleanliness, curative and free of diseases’.⁵¹

LUCE was engaged in a propaganda campaign to promote the extirpation of deadly diseases in Italy and in the new colonies, and in the newsreels personal hygiene and public health were often associated with the Fascist fight against malaria and the reclamation and purification of marshy waters. Before the conquest of Albania the Italian cameramen shot six non-fiction films in Italy that were devoted to the eradication of malaria; a recurring theme of these productions was the contrast between images of the putrid and unhealthy water before the reclamation, and the decontaminated water after the intervention of the Fascist regime.⁵²

In February 1940, LUCE produced a pivotal newsreel entitled *I lavori di bonifica della piana di Durazzo*. The cameramen show for thirty seconds the swamps on the outskirts of Durres, while in the second part the voice-over extolls the successes of the Fascist regime in vanquishing malaria in the Balkan county. In the opening scene the

⁴⁸Gori, p. 123.

⁴⁹John Pollard, *The Fascist Experience in Italy*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 83.

⁵⁰Pinkus, *Bodily Regimes: Italian Advertising Under Fascism*, p. 64.

⁵¹Pollard, p. 65.

⁵²The films are: *Malaria* (1929); *La vita della zanzara* (1940); *Verso la terra* (1931); *Squilli di vittoria* (1937); *Come l'Italia Fascista educa le nuove generazioni* (1931); *Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane. Igiene Ferroviaria* (1931); *Ungheria. La lotta contro la malaria* (1938). Archive of the Luce Institute, consulted on 27th October 2014.

cameramen make a long shot showing a panoramic view of the marshes before the Fascist intervention, and whilst the eye of the camera moves slowly over the muddy waters, the voice-over explained that:

Nella piana di Durazzo, importantissima regione dell'Albania, sia per le sue possibilità agricole sia per la sua privilegiata posizione, fervono alacramente i lavori di bonifica intesi a restituire all'aratro e alla vanga le grandi superfici di terreno finora sommerse dalla mortifera palude

The use of the adjective mortiferous is essential to interpret the sequence. From the point of view of Fascist propaganda, pre-Fascist Albania was a moribund country both because its territory was infected with the germ of malaria, and its government had not yet fully embraced Fascism. Although, as we have seen earlier, the marshy lands in certain areas of Albania were a real issue and the successive Fascist reclamation funding was substantial, it is also relevant to highlight that LUCE's newsreels produced in the early 1930s (thus before the Italian direct influence in Durres and Tirana) not only showed the disastrous effect of the malarious swamps but they relentlessly represented Albania as an underdeveloped, barren, and dying country that would benefit from the salvific intervention of Fascism. The structure of these productions is based on the contrast (visual or simply delineated by the voice-over) between Albania before and after the influence of the Fascist regime.⁵³

The commentary makes it clear that the deadly marshes need a fervent work of restoration and the reference to the plough and the spade is particularly effective. In the

⁵³ The newsreels, which are preserved in the archive of the Luce Institute are: *Tipi e costumi Albanesi* (1931); *Albania. Panorami Pittoreschi* (1932); *Albania. Moschee* (1932); *Kruja. Le attrattive della cittadina* (1936). The archive preserves other non-fiction films that follow the same patterns but are labeled as documentaries: *Albania* (1937); *Scutari d Albania* (1931); *Fiumi e Laghi d'Albania* (1931); *Albania che risorge* (1931). Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 9th November 2014.

first part of the newsreel there are no images of peasants plowing the land, therefore the viewer's attention is aroused by the opening long shot of the marshes and by the linguistic element of the film (Fig. 58).



Fig. 58: The panoramic view of the marshes near Durres, from: *La bonifica della piana di Durazzo*, February 1940, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 26th May 2014.

For thirty seconds the cameras focus on the malarious and desolated land. Subsequently, the cameramen create a stark visual effect with a series of medium shots that film a group of Albanian workers while digging and shovelling the marshland. Spade and plough were two words constantly used in the productions of LUCE and they become one of the cinematic symbols of the Fascist countryside, associated to the successes of *The battle for grain* and the reclamation projects. In Albania spade and plough are mentioned as the

tools that rescue the besieged marshes of Durres, and when in the latter part of the newsreel the countrymen working to reclaim the marshes are filmed, spade and plough become the unmistakable symbols that conflate the idea of peasant toil and fertility of the land (Fig. 58).



Fig. 58: A group of Albanian men during the reclamations work: *La bonifica della piana di Durazzo*, February 1940, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 26th May 2014.

In the last part of the newsreel the cameras film an enormous excavator that represents efficaciously the reclamation of land near Durres. The cameramen shot the mechanical arm of the backhoe, which slowly stretches and reaches the swampland. The images show the bucket that smashes the ground violently causing an impressive noise that might have boomed in the cinemas (Fig. 59).



Fig. 59: The shot of the bucket that penetrates the marshy ground in the Agro-Pontine, from *Dall'Acquitrino alle giornate di Littoria*, 1933, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 18th November 2014.

The destructive action of the excavator marks the beginning of the rebirth of the Albanian territory, and the bucket of the bulldozer, with its striking strength and capacity to remove and destroy the ground represents the immense power of the Fascist regime.

The excavator is a recurring element in the newsreels that symbolizes the reclamation of the Italian territory and the new empire. Images of reclamation of the marshy quagmire not only denote the intensive work of the Fascist regime but they become signs whose signified is tied to the concept of rebirth of territory. In the production without sound entitled *Bonifica di Piscinara* (1931) excavators are filmed

during the removal of the marshland. The sequences are introduced by a caption that reminded the audience that: ‘cinque anni di lavoro, cinque mila operai impiegati, cinque mila nuove case, trenta mila coloni’. The short film centers almost exclusively on a series of sequences that film the backhoes digging vigorously the ground (Fig. 60), and only at the end of the film, for twenty seconds, the cameras show the audience a sequence in which the Duce appears while visiting the reclaimed land.



Fig. 60: The shot of the excavator while digging the marshland from: *Bonifica di Piscinara*, 1931, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 26th May 2014.

In the first part of the long newsreel (13 minutes in length) *Dall'acquitrino alle giornate di Littoria* the cameramen show the battle for survival of the peasants living in the malarial land of the Agro-Pontine. Scenes of farmers riding horses in the contaminated

waters follow images of struggling buffalos walking in the marshland. In the second section of the film, the reclamation work is shown; massive excavators fill the screen, imposing buckets penetrate the ground, and a powerful soundtrack of violins and trumpets with solemn pace accompanies the sequences representing the immeasurable Fascist strength and defining an atmosphere of triumph over the malarial lands.

In *La Bonifica della piana di Durazzo* the linguistic, visual, and acoustic elements are intertwined in order to mark the Fascist success in saving the deadly Albanian territory. When the bucket of the excavator lifting the ground is filmed, the soundtrack of violins that accompanies the scene has a frenetic pace. At the same time the voice-over comments: ‘così nel nome di Roma si combatte in terra d’Albania la battaglia già coronata in patria da fulgide vittorie’. The reclamation of the Albanian territory is christened as a battle in which the enemy, albeit not mentioned directly, is the germ of malaria and the Fascist weapon is the powerful excavator. The blade of the bucket that pierces the muddy ground is the representation of both destruction and restoration. Indeed for the audience in the Italian cinemas the images of the excavator digging in the marshland established a connotation related to the concept of resurrection after eradication both in the territories of the Pontine Marshes and in Albania.

The expression ‘nel nome di Roma’ conveys the idea that the reclamation of the Albanian marshes was linked to the will of the central government and thus of the Duce but it is also an unequivocal reference to the Fascist attempt to build a new Roman Empire in which Albania was a province. The Fascist regime tried to find a connection between Albania and the history of ancient Rome through newsreels in which archaeological excavations undertaken in the country of the Balkans were filmed.

For instance, in the newsreel entitled *Albania. Butrinto* the cameras of LUCE show an expedition led by the Italian Minister of Economy Paolo Emilio Thaon di Revel

at Butrint, an archaeological site where artifacts and an amphitheatre from the Roman period were unearthed. The voice-over defines the archaeological discoveries as: ‘interessantissime vestigie lasciate dall’impero di Roma nel paese dei progenitori degli attuali Albanesi’ suggesting that the Albanian people were directly related to the Roman Empire, and therefore finding a further justification for the massive Fascist intervention in Albania.⁵⁴ If on the one hand for LUCE it was essential to advertise Albania as a nation whose conquest gave the Fascist regime a new land rich in resources, on the other, it was critical to convince the viewers that the roots of the Albanian people were historically Italian.

Conclusion

LUCE portrayed Albania as a colony that acquired a growing strategic relevance for the Fascist regime. If on the one hand the Balkan nation became the ideal stage to promote the figure of Ciano as a possible successor of Mussolini, on the other it symbolized the utopian Fascist attempt to colonize Europe. Although in the newsreels of LUCE Mussolini was often emulated and idolized, Ciano was not shown as a clumsy imitator of the Duce. The Count was a young and dynamic leader whose figure was gradually associated to that of the dictator. In this productions, symbols and visual and acoustic elements were intertwined creating newsreels that incorporated characteristics of political ads, commercials and non-fiction films.

⁵⁴There are other LUCE’s productions filmed in Albania that follow a similar pattern: *Scavi dell’Acropoli di Feniki* (unknown date); *Scavi della missione archeologica Italiana a Butrinto* (unknown date); *Albania. Paesaggi e Costumi* (1932).). Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 14th January 2015.

The newsreels produced in Albania were among the most effective propaganda news-films of the Fascist *ventennio* and the reconstruction of a new European Italian colony was advertised in the cinema theatres through the skilful use of denotative, connotative and linguistic levels. By visually associating the Italian and Albanian countryside and showing the reclamation projects of the Balkan nation, the cameramen of LUCE fabricate an illusory Albanian rebirth. The malarious and barren Albanian land was transformed into a fertile and idyllic place where the Fascist colonization of Albania was promoted as a European geo-political mission. The perpetual visual dichotomy that connected the Italian and Albanian territory (especially the Agro-Pontine and the province of Durres) communicated to the Italian audience that the policies of Mussolini were exported in the colonies and were successfully implemented in the new Italian empire. The Albanian state was represented as a nation that fully embraced Fascism and became the laboratory for Italian national policies. As we shall see in the next chapter Nazi Germany represented the completion of the illusory cinematic Duce's European Fascist project.

Chapter 5

Screening the construction of the Nazi–Fascist alliance

Introduction

In 1932, on the eve of early elections in Germany, the representation of Hitler and the Nazi movement was at the core of the productions of LUCE in Germany. The aim of this chapter is to show how the rise to power of Hitler and the gradual construction of the alliance between the Duce and the Führer were represented in Italian theatres. In the first part of the chapter I analyse all of the newsreels that were produced by LUCE in which Hitler appeared. It is important to emphasize that in my analysis I have not included newsreels that were produced by the German UFA (*Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft*) and distributed in Italian cinemas after dubbing. For instance, the series of German newsreels entitled *La Settimana Europea* was produced for the Italian market.

The newsreels included in the first section of this chapter do not have subtitles, voice-over or captions and only the original voice of Hitler is heard. I have decided to translate and analyse the speeches of the Führer because I assume that they were screened in Italian cinemas with commentary. Concerning these productions, the lack of dubbing or voice-over is not easily explainable, as LUCE added a voice-over or comments when a political leader made a speech. The German dictator was the only leader other than Mussolini whose voice was audible in theatres; therefore, these films occupy a consequential space within LUCE's vast archive. Renato May, one of the editors of LUCE, explains that newsreels filmed in foreign countries were later re-edited and the

voice-over was added in recording studios.¹ The practice of dubbing was so common that the newsreel editions that were exchanged abroad were directly dubbed in recording studios in Rome. For instance, May observes that LUCE produced a weekly newsreel that was projected in Spain in which ‘le notizie e gli avvenimenti sono tratti dai giornali nazionali e doppiati in lingua Spagnola’.² Furthermore, the archive of LUCE preserves ninety-four newsreels and fourteen documentaries produced by UFA and screened in Italian cinemas in the 1930s and 1940s that are accompanied by a voice-over and captions, and fifty newsreels produced in Germany and screened in Italy during World War II (*La Settimana Europea*) that are translated and dubbed in Italian.³

It is worth noting that the newsreel series entitled *Die Deutsche Wochenschau/ The German Newsreel* (which was a German news film series exported abroad, thirty-two of which were screened in Italy) is preserved in the archive of LUCE without translations or comments.⁴ The presence of LUCE’s films in their original foreign language should lead us to think that a small group of newsreels among those that had an international circulation and that were screened in Italy were dubbed in recording studios. The translated versions are presumably missing or not yet catalogued and only the original versions are preserved. By analysing the datasheet of the newsreels in which Hitler appeared in 1932 and 1933 one can notice that these films were LUCE’s productions but were distributed by American Fox Movietone.⁵ The distribution of newsreels through Fox Movietone ensured that they were screened in dozens of countries around the world (and in all US theatres). It is plausible to assert that LUCE preserves in its archives the original

¹ Renato May, ‘Il Montaggio dei Film Giornali e delle Attualità’, *Bianco e Nero*, 6 (1940), 61-75.

² May, p. 70.

³ The newsreels of UFA were projected in Italy in 1942 and 1943, while the documentaries were produced from the 1930s to 1943. The German series entitled *La Settimana Europea* was shown in Italian cinemas once a week in 1943. Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 13 July 2015.

⁴ Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 13 July 2015.

⁵ Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 13 July 2015.

versions of the first Italian newsreels that filmed Hitler, recording his live voice, while the dubbed versions (including the Italian one) have been lost.

5.1 The evolution of the image of the Führer on Italian screens

In the late 1990s and early 2000s the relations between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany were extensively analysed and the policies of the two dictatorships were scrutinized and compared.⁶ However, there is only one study examining the direct links between Fascist and Nazi propaganda cinema and there is no English-language publication that analyses the representation of the Nazi regime in the non-fiction productions of LUCE.⁷ In 1928, the Fascist regime reached an agreement with UFA, forging the first Italo-German cinema collaboration, which an anonymous article on *Cinematografo* described as ‘un accordo in cui non ci appoggiamo alla Germania più di quanto la Germania non si appoggi a noi e non riceviamo dalla Germania più di quanto la Germania non riceva da noi’.⁸ Between 1928 and 1944 UFA produced 179 newsreels and documentaries that were screened in Italian cinemas. After the agreement, in June 1928, LUCE began screening in Italian cinemas the newsreels filmed in Germany whose content not only ranged from entertainment to science but also included explicit political propaganda.⁹

⁶ Richard Bessel, *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: Comparisons and Contrasts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Alexander De Grand, *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: The Fascist Style of Rule* (New York: Routledge, 2004). A comparison of the aggressive expansionist policies of the Italian and German dictatorships is seen in: Aristotle A. Kallis, *Territory and Expansionism in Italy and Germany, 1922-1945* (London: Routledge, 2000). For a detailed analysis of the foreign policy of the two regimes see: Macgregor Knox, *Common Destiny: Dictatorship, Foreign Policy and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁷ Aristotle A. Kallis, ‘A War within the War: Italy, Propaganda and the Quest for Cultural Hegemony in Europe’, in *Cinema and the Swastika. The International Expansion of Third Reich Cinema*, ed. by Roes Vande Winkel and David Welch (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 172-186.

⁸ Anonymous, ‘Italia-Germania 1-1’, *Cinematografo*, 13 (1928), p. 5.

⁹ Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 12 January 2015.

In the federal elections in 1930, the Nazis achieved second place and won ninety-seven parliamentary seats. LUCE chose to devote two productions to the German federal elections (14 September 1930), as well as the first day of work of the newly elected members of the National Socialist Party, marking the first tangible cinematic interest of Mussolini's regime in the Nazi movement. For example, in the newsreel without sound entitled *La riapertura del Reichstag a Berlino*, a caption introduces the film, informing the audience that cameramen are filming the 'Camicie brune di Hitler'.

Until the end of the 1920s Mussolini showed no interest in the Nazi Party and in 1927 when Hitler requested an autographed picture of the Duce, the dictator's office replied that 'the Duce regrets being unable to fulfill his request but thanks him for the expressions of support'.¹⁰ Only in 1928, following the first electoral success of the Nazi Party, did Mussolini ask journalist Nino D'Arma to provide detailed biographical information about the man 'that the international press was calling the head of the Fascists in Germany'.¹¹ LUCE's first newsreel filming Hitler was screened in Italian cinemas in 1931. It is entitled *L'Ultima adunata dei Nazionalisti di Hitler passati in rivista dal capo* and Hitler appears only for a few seconds as he greets the militants of his party.

In 1932 and 1933, the cameramen of LUCE followed Hitler prior to the 1932 general elections (*Aspetti delle elezioni presidenziali in Germania; Elezioni presidenziali. Hitler parla a 150,000 Camice Brune*) and following the arson attack that damaged the German parliament in 1933 (*Hitler assiste ad una delle grandi adunate delle camicie Brune*).¹² These productions followed a common pattern characterized by images of oceanic crowds of Nazi sympathizers and medium shots of Hitler on a podium or stage while addressing the German people. However, it is important to emphasize that symbols,

¹⁰ Santi Corvaja, *Hitler and Mussolini. The Secret Meetings* (New York: Enigma Books, 2008), p. 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹² Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 12 January 2015.

body language, and linguistic and acoustic elements were features that transformed these newsreels into a vehicle with which to advertise Hitler as a new ally of the Fascist regime and as a dictator who triumphantly conquered power, following in the footsteps of the Duce.

In February 1933 the LUCE screened in Italian cinemas the newsreel entitled *Il cancelliere Hitler apre la campagna elettorale per il rinnovamento del Reichstag*. The structure of the early newsreels portraying the rallies of the Führer is characterized by the filming of parades of Nazi sympathizers, which are followed by the appearance of the Führer, who addresses the crowds from a podium (Fig. 61). Although these sequences were not stylistically sophisticated and the German dictator was always filmed with a series of medium shots that did not convey to the audience the idea of a man who was physically strong and virile, the newsreels recorded and documented the speeches of Hitler in order to provide the audience with real news, therefore reinforcing the propaganda message through apparently irrefutable and reliable authentic reportages that the cameramen of LUCE filmed in Germany.

The objective of LUCE was to promote the Führer as a new, strong ally of the Fascist regime. The newsreels produced in 1932 and 1933 were the propaganda channel that allowed the Italian people to gradually get to know Hitler through his rallies and speeches. Thanks to the newsreels, the performances of the German dictator in cinemas became events that the viewer could ‘see, live and not only fancy’ and that remained better impressed upon the mind than those read in any newspaper.¹³

¹³ Dulac, ‘The Educational and Social Role of the Newsreel’, p. 546.



Fig. 61: A shot of Hitler from the newsreel entitled *Il Cancelliere apre la campagna elettorale per il rinnovo del Reichstag*, 1933, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 10th April 2015.

Hitler appears in six newsreels while addressing his supporters in arenas and in the German Parliament. The cameramen filming the dictator, showed the audience a true event, a fact, news that apparently seemed to be ‘senza preconcetti di false ideologie, imparziale’¹⁴ and with the style that Braccio Agnoletti describes as ‘fotografico e fedele alla realtà’.¹⁵ However, in the Fascist newsreels the Barthesian ‘has been’ was accompanied by the need of the regime to manipulate reality in order to promote

¹⁴ Corrado D’Errico, ‘Lo Stile Luce’, p. 18.

¹⁵ Braccio Agnoletti, ‘Documentari pretesto e documentari d’interpretazione’, p. 13.

Mussolini's policies, and the early films representing the rallies of Hitler became the ideal platform on which truth and propaganda were interwoven.

There are two possible explanations as to why LUCE recorded the voice of the Führer and subsequently decided to broadcast it in cinemas. The most simplistic one is that Hitler deserved to be listened to, as he was the first strong ally of the Duce and the chief of a movement that, though substantially different, was inspired by Mussolini's Fascist revolution. Hitler's voice also boosted the apparent truthfulness of the newsreels, as viewers did not listen to the usual summaries of the voice-over but rather lived the direct experience of attending a rally of the Führer. Moreover, LUCE gave the audience the chance to see a rising political star whom they would not have the chance to meet outside of a theatre; therefore, borrowing the words of Ambrose Diehl, viewers 'met' the Führer and 'heard him speak'.¹⁶

In the newsreels the stiffness of the body of Hitler was counterbalanced by his powerful and hoarse voice. If, on the one hand, in the Italian productions one cannot see significant similarities between the Duce and the Führer—the representation of their bodies and gestures in fact underlined stark differences—on the other hand, it is the voice that connected the two dictators. As we will see in the next section, after 1933 the remarkable oratory of Mussolini was extolled by LUCE so as to overshadow Hitler, but one year earlier the voice of the German dictator was an acoustic element that could cause among viewers what Agnoletti called 'una brusca reazione emotiva'.¹⁷

Laura Dreyfus-Barney, who during the 1930s was the president of the Cinema and Radio Commission of the Women International Council, notes that newsreels that showed on the screen 'politicians from different nations gathered together to discuss important subjects, and words of wisdom and hope which accompany such films, produce

¹⁶ Ambrose Diehl, 'Women and the Cinema', *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 6 (1934), 398-402 (p. 400).

¹⁷ Agnoletti, p. 14.

a profound impression on the masses and favor the idea of understanding between peoples'.¹⁸ The voice of Hitler in the productions screened in Italian cinemas in 1932 and 1933 was one of the weapons that Fascist propaganda used to impress audiences in cinemas. LUCE's aim was to show that the Führer was promoting in Germany the same policies and ideas that the Duce fostered and advertised in the Italian peninsula.

In the film entitled *Il Cancelliere apre la campagna elettorale per il rinnovo del Reichstag* (1933) the German dictator addresses a group of supporters, emphasizing that they have to be ready for a long, ideological war in order to fight and defeat Marxism. The Führer declared that 'Der Kampf gegen den Marxismus wurde damals zum ersten mal zu einem Kampfziel erhoben' ('The fight against Marxism was raised for the first time to be an aim to fight for'). Subsequently, he reassured the audience by declaring that he was firmly determined to lead this war. He stated, 'Damals gelobte ich mir zum ersten mal, als unbekannter Einzelner, diesen krieg zu beginnen und nicht zu ruhen, bis endlich diese Erscheinung aus dem deutschen Leben beseitigt sein würd' ('I vowed for the first time, as an unknown single man, to begin this war and not to rest until at last this occurrence is removed from German life').¹⁹ LUCE presented this speech as a strong indication that Nazi Germany was a precious ally of the Fascist regime and that Hitler was a new anti-Marxist champion.

It is worth noting that in another newsreel screened in Italy and entitled *Hitler parla a 150,000 camicie brune* (1932) the German dictator also attacks the Socialists (the strongest rivals of the Nazis at the polls), highlighting the willingness of LUCE to show viewers that both the Socialists and the Communists were dangerous enemies of European Fascism. In this film the Führer reminds supporters that he is firmly against the

¹⁸ Laura Dreyfus-Barney, 'The Cinema and Peace', *International Review of Educational Cinematography*, 4 (1934), 252-256 (p. 256).

¹⁹ All of the translations from German into English were made by Shuna Blankenahus and Melanie Gray, final-year undergraduate students in German Studies at the School of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures at Royal Holloway, University of London.

war reparations payment that Germany agreed to honour after being defeated in World War I. During the rally the Führer declares that:

Die Sozialdemokratie und das Zentrum — sie erkennen jetzt plötzlich selbst, was sie tun hätten müssen! Sie reden heute gegen Reparationen... drei Milliarden, sind ihrer Auffassung, vom deutschen Volk nicht zu zahlen.

(Social democracy and the centre — now realise themselves, what they should have done! They speak today against reparations... three billion should, in their opinion, not be paid by the German people.)



Fig. 62: Hitler's speech in Berlin, from *Hitler parla a 150,000 camicie brune*, 1933, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 10th April 2015.

In a production screened in 1933 the cameramen of LUCE filmed the funeral of two Nazi Brown Shirts, showing the arrival of Hitler, the oceanic crowd that attended the ceremony and, eventually, the coffins wrapped in Nazi flags. The newsreel has only six shots and opens with a caption — ‘Hitler partecipa ai funerali di due suoi gregari assassinati dai Comunisti’ (Fig. 76) — that aims both to inform the audience, providing news of the assassination, and to warn them about the apparent Communist militant threat. The film does not have commentary but the slow pace of the powerful and loud sound of the church bells conveys to the audience a solemn atmosphere, thus giving them the opportunity to participate emotionally in the funeral of the young Nazis. Using the element of truth of the news (the murders actually happened) and the simplicity of its

filming (which communicates further realism), LUCE was able to frame the Communists as dangerous enemies.



Fig. 63: The caption that opens the newsreel, from *Hitler partecipa ai funerali di due suoi gregari assassinate dai comunisti*, 1933, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 14th April 2015.

The last newsreel in which the cameramen filmed a rally of Hitler and wherein his voice was recorded symbolized the full endorsement of the Fascist regime for the new Nazi chancellor. The title of the reel, *La Germania si è svegliata* (April 1933), recalls the beginning of the speech of the Führer, who, during the film, addresses thousands of Nazi militants and reminds them, ‘Die große Zeit ist jetzt angebrochen. Deutschland ist nun erwacht. Die Macht haben wir uns in Deutschland gewonnen. Nun gilt es dass deutsche

Volk zu gewinnen.’ (‘The time has begun. Germany has now awoken. We have won the power in Germany. Now we must win over the German people.’) From the point of view of the Fascist regime, Germany’s awakening is presented as a result of its embracing a totalitarian regime, following in the footsteps of Fascist Italy. The newsreel, reporting a true event through moving images and the voice of Hitler, accompanies the viewers at the heart of a Nazi rally, allowing them to become witnesses of the unfolding German transition from a democracy to a dictatorship (Fig. 64).

In the last part of the speech Hitler moves his arms with a syncopated pace and when he orders the supporters — ‘Ihr dürft nicht handeln. Ihr müsst gehorchen. Ihr müsst euch fügen. Ihr müsst euch diesem urhaften Zwang beugen’ (‘You must not act. You must obey. You must comply. You must succumb to this primeval urge’) — his tone of voice becomes harsher. The concise message of the Führer was a warning also directed towards the Italian spectators, who had to continue to ‘act’, ‘obey’, and ‘comply’ with their Duce, but apart from the propaganda value of the speech, the voice of Hitler coincided with the element that captured the attention of the viewer, and his mesmerizing oratory became increasingly similar to that of Mussolini.



Fig. 64: Hitler addressing the crowd, from *La Germania si e' svegliata*, 1933, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 10th April 2015.

The Fascist regime was extremely interested in the economic and political development of Nazi Germany and LUCE's cameramen filmed Hitler until the spring of 1944. However, after 1933 the representation of the Führer in Italian newsreels underwent a significant change: the editors eliminated the voice of the German dictator in all of the newsreels screened in Italian theatres. A partial exception was the newsreel entitled *Germania. Berlino. Il discorso di Hitler in risposta dei nuovi patti Americani con nazioni Europee* (11 May 1939). During the film the voice of Hitler is partially audible but it is accompanied by commentary in Italian.²⁰ In the productions of LUCE Hitler embodied the renaissance of a glorious German nation. However, the absence of his voice and its replacement with commentary irretrievably diminished the charisma of the Führer on

²⁰ Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 27 April 2015.

screen. For instance, in the newsreels that show Hitler's trip to Italy the German dictator is voiceless. His physique did not represent effectively the ideal of the strong Fascist man; therefore, he was overshadowed by the image and presence of Mussolini.

The first meeting between Mussolini and Hitler took place in Venice and was released in Italian cinemas in June 1934. Historians have pointed out that the journey was the first mission of Hitler abroad and that during the meeting the Führer sought to convince Mussolini that Nazi Germany would not undermine Austrian independence.²¹ The newsreel focuses on the joint rally of Mussolini and Hitler in Piazza San Marco in Venice. Mussolini is wearing a military uniform and during the newsreel maintains a position that emphasizes his proverbial jaw and chest, while Hitler, who wears an elegant and bourgeois suit, is filmed as he observes the Duce. The role of the cameras in this newsreel is crucial in conveying to the audience the representation of a strong Mussolini, who was the incarnation of a military commander, and the portrayal of Hitler as a leader with much less charisma than the Italian dictator (Figs. 65-66).

²¹ A complete account of the events is described by: Peter Neville, *Mussolini* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 135; John W. Barker, *Wagner and Venice* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2008).



Fig. 65: Mussolini giving the speech on the balcony in San Marco square, from *L'incontro Mussolini Hitler a Venezia*, 1934, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 2nd February 2015.



Fig. 66: A shot of Hitler while he listens to Mussolini's speech, from *L'incontro Mussolini Hitler a Venezia*, 1934, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 2nd February 2015.

The stark discrepancy in the depiction of the Duce and the Führer is emphasized by the brief speech of Mussolini. After a brief medium shot of Hitler, who was surrounded by Nazi and Fascist officials, the camera lenses focus on the Italian dictator, who declares to the crowd: ‘Undici anni sono passati da quando io riposi la mia parola in questa stessa piazza. Erano passati almeno cinque anni dalla fine della Guerra. Venezia e il Veneto portavano ancora il segno delle loro gloriose ferite.’ Mussolini delivers his words with a syncopated rhythm; the tone of his voice is hoarse and potent. Meanwhile, Hitler is filmed leaning out of the window motionless as if he were hypnotized by the presence of the Duce.

Mussolini’s speech aspired to subtly warn the Führer, while at the same time reassuring the Italian people. Mussolini recalled his first visit to Veneto in 1923 and the glorious Venetian wounds following the bloody battles of the Great War both to remind Hitler that he wanted to maintain peace in Austria, protecting his ally, Chancellor Dollfuss, and to emphasize the importance of the Venetian sacrifice during the Great War and its symbolic value in the Fascist movement. As Philip Morgan points out, politically the meeting between Hitler and Mussolini ‘was a failure’.²² Only two weeks later the pro-Fascist Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss was killed by a group of Nazi followers supported by the German government. As Peter Neville notes, after Dollfuss’ murder, ‘Mussolini was furious with Hitler’ because the Duce considered the Austrian right-wing politician a precious ally in countering the rise to power of the Nazis in a country that shared its borders with Italy.²³

²² Philip Morgan, *Fascism in Europe. 1919-1945* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 84. LUCE devoted a series of newsreels to the Austrian chancellor before and after his death. The films are: *L’Europa interroga Roma* (1933); *Com’è fallito il tentativo bolscevico in Austria* (1934); *Le giornate romane del Cancelliere Austriaco* (1934); *Messa in suffragio del Cancelliere Dollfuss alla quale ha partecipato Mussolini*; *Le solenne onoranze funebri del Cancelliere Dollfuss* (1934); *I figli del Cancelliere Dollfuss in vacanza a Riccione* (1934); *La colonia marina intitolata al Cancelliere Dollfuss* (1935). Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 6 February 2015.

²³ Neville, p. 225.

As Barbara Spackman notes, Fascism became ‘a realm of word, and a study of Mussolini’s rhetoric, imposed as official linguistic model during the regime, may contribute to our understanding not only of the verbal revolution of the regime but of its political revolution as well’.²⁴ LUCE skilfully used Mussolini’s references to World War I to extol the role of war in shaping Fascist Italy and to transform the Duce into the supreme military leader of a nation forged by the tragic experience of the trenches. As Odin observes, non-fiction films can share with fictional ones ‘a web of conceptual actions that support the narrative’.²⁵ Newsreels such as *L’incontro Mussolini Hitler a Venezia* filmed true events that were turned into propaganda vehicles, thanks to a simple narrative that captured the attention of the public through the intertwining of the image of the Duce and his rhetoric linked to World War I.

Following the first half of the 1930s the productions that filmed the meetings between Mussolini and Hitler show audiences in cinemas that the chief of Fascism was a respected and appreciated leader in Germany, too. Consequently, the cameramen focused on the body of the Duce, gradually overshadowing the figure of Hitler. In the newsreel entitled *Viaggio di Mussolini a Monaco* (screened on 25 June 1940, 2 weeks after the declaration of war on France) the cameramen followed the journey by train of Mussolini to Germany and his meeting with Hitler. This production is a prime example of how the trips of Mussolini in the non-fiction films of LUCE followed a precise narrative that was acoustically guided by voice-over and visually focused on the exaltation of the Duce’s presence.

In this newsreel the creation of a narrative did not affect the element of truth, which was the news that the Duce had reached Monaco by train, but it influenced the perception of the audience through elements widely used in non-fiction cinema, such as

²⁴ Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities. Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 87.

²⁵ Roger Odin, *De la Fiction* (Brussels: De Boeck, 2000), p. 135.

‘narration and the presence of a narrator, the organization of the film as a discourse, and the adoption of an expository structure’.²⁶

In Innsbruck the Duce is welcomed by a group of young Nazi sympathizers who are filmed as they try frantically to reach the train on which the Duce is travelling. The crowd is apparently unstoppable and the military has to intervene so as to escort the convoy (Fig. 82). Mussolini appears to be visibly pleased and responds with a warm greeting from the train window (Fig. 83). The scene is accompanied by a voice-over explaining that ‘lungo tutto il percorso si rinnoveranno le manifestazioni all’indirizzo del Duce’. In the town of Rosenau (Austria), where the Duce stopped for a short break, the welcoming of the local population was even warmer. The police are shown to be unable to manage the excitement of the crowd, which appeared anxious to have the chance to see the Italian dictator.

The increasingly enthusiastic voice-over informs the audience that ‘il servizio d’ordine è quasi impotente a frenare l’entusiastico impeto della folla’. In Munich, Hitler received Mussolini and the cameramen performed a series of medium shots of the Duce and Hitler. Both leaders wear military uniforms, but in this film the undoubted star is Mussolini, whose arrival was labelled a triumph (Fig. 85). The commentary remarks that after the appearance of the Italian dictator, ‘tutta Monaco è nelle vie, le accoglienze sono deliranti, la folla sa di essere testimone di uno dei più grandi avvenimenti della storia’.

The hyperbole used by the voice-over and the images of the almost unmanageable crowds were the acoustic and visual elements that created a narrative that transformed a true event (Mussolini’s trip to Monaco) into a political advertisement that aimed to convey to audiences in cinemas the idea not only that the Duce was respected in Germany but also that he was loved by the German people.

²⁶ Odin, p. 136.



Fig. 67: The crowd welcoming the Duce at Innsbruck train station, from *Mussolini e Hitler si incontrano a Monaco*, 1940, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 12th February 2015.



Fig. 68: Mussolini greeting the crowd when the train left Innsbruck, from *Mussolini e Hitler si incontrano a Monaco*, 1940, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 12th February 2015.



Fig. 69: A medium shot of Mussolini and Hitler immediately after the arrival of the Duce, from *Mussolini e Hitler si incontrano a Monaco*, 1940, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 12th February 2015.

In this type of production the line that separates fiction and truth is narrow, but although it is undeniable that the voice-over and images followed a pattern that aspired to emphasize the figure of the Duce, it is important to note that the film entitled *Mussolini e Hitler si incontrano a Monaco* delivered to audiences in cinemas news that documented a trip that actually happened.

The cameramen of LUCE filmed several newsreels in which the concept of a celebratory journey (particularly by train) of Mussolini and Hitler was the central theme; for instance, in 1938, cameras followed the trip of Hitler from Brennero to Berlin (*La visita del Führer. La conclusione del viaggio*, 1938) (Fig. 85). The structure of this production is similar to that of the newsreel entitled *Mussolini e Hitler si incontrano a Monaco* and the voice-over that accompanies the film describes the journey from

Brennero to Berlino as ‘un viaggio svolto in un’atmosfera di incessanti acclamazioni’. However, it is important to underline that the cameramen show the people welcoming the German dictator only when the train reaches Monaco. Italian citizens were not filmed cheering the Führer, therefore demonstrating that in this newsreel the cine-eye documents and records an actual event, focusing on a narrative that is intended to praise Hitler but without obscuring the perennial aura and supremacy of the Duce.

5.2 Projecting and re-enacting the Middle Ages during Hitler’s visit to Florence

Hitler organized a trip to Italy in 1938, reaching Florence, Naples and Rome. As Roger Crum explains, during his stay in Florence the Nazi leader remained in the city for eight hours; he arrived by train and was driven by motorcade through the city.²⁷ This procession was followed by various receptions, historical games in the Boboli Gardens, and tours through the Uffizi, the *Palazzo Vecchio*, the *Palazzo Pitti*, and the Vasari Corridor. For Hitler’s visit, the face of the city was transformed with ephemeral decorations, with the display resembling a cross between a Renaissance regal *entrata* and the Nazi presentation of Nuremberg in Leni Riefenstahl’s 1934 film entitled *Triumph of Will*. A large map of Florence that was made before Hitler’s arrival traced several possible motorcade routes in different colours. The routes ‘predictably followed the historic thoroughfares of the city and passed the city’s principal monuments’.²⁸

²⁷ Roger J. Crum, ‘Shaping the Fascist Man’, in *Donatello among the Blackshirts*, ed. by Claudia Lazzaro, Roger J. Crum (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 128-141 (p. 136).

²⁸ Luciano Artusi, Vincenzo Giannetti, *Quando Firenze era il salotto di Mussolini* (Firenze: Lito Terrazzi, 1999), p. 280.

In one of the points marked on the map the planners of the propaganda events installed a copy of Donatello's St. George. Once Donatello's statue was detached by the Renaissance contest, the work became a generic martial armature on which diverse interpretations could be hung. St. George was a knight and, therefore, a military figure of sorts, and Italy under Fascism was a militaristic state. St. George could represent heroism, militarism, courage, honour, and strength, which were features that the Fascist regime considered crucial in the creation of the new Fascist man.

Historian Thomas Shatz points out that the appeal of the newsreels was not only in the news but also in the images, as American audiences 'attended to the newsreels for the motion picture imprint of news already heard and digested on the radio and the press'.²⁹ Betty Houncin Winfield, who investigates the use of the newsreels during the Franklin Delano Roosevelt presidency, notes that by 'encompassing the visual patterns of photos and the sound dimensions of radio, the newsreels gave the audience what appeared to be pictorial fact complete with image and interpretation'.³⁰ The newsreels covering the visit of Hitler to Italy were produced not only to communicate to audiences the reasons behind the diplomatic meeting between the Duce and the Führer (the news), and the commentary did not mention why Hitler's trip was historically relevant. These films were the visual representation of the celebration of the friendship that united Italy and Germany.

During Hitler's journey the Fascist regime adopted a strategy in which the news about the arrival of the Führer and the diplomatic meetings, albeit manipulated and filtered by propaganda, were meticulously reported and described in Italian newspapers. The function of the newsreels was to show the images of the imposing Fascist

²⁹ Thomas Shatz, *Boom and Bust, American Cinema in the 1940s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 401.

³⁰ Betty Houncin Winfield, *FDR and the News Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 116.

organizational machine before and after the arrival of the German dictator in Italian cities.

The Italian national press highlight the alleged success of the meeting between Hitler and the Duce. *Il Popolo D'Italia* defined the event as 'l'intesa d'onore tra due grandi popoli che si sono incontrati nel travaglio della Rivoluzione e nello sforzo della ripresa, che si sono conosciuti nella volontà maschia e risoluta di una nuova vita'.³¹ *Corriere della Sera* remarked the success of the diplomatic pact between the two regimes, labelling it 'fondamentale nella realtà internazionale interna. La sua sola esistenza è bastevole per imprimere alla politica degli altri paesi un indirizzo moderato che giova a essi e alla pace generale.'³² On 10 May 1938 the newspaper *La Stampa* described the visit of Hitler in Florence as 'dieci ore per lui indimenticabili, recando negli occhi una visione di bellezza suprema. Un fuoco solo di colori al vento, un popolo stretto in un'anima sola.'³³

As Lasansky notes, Hitler's visit to Italy in 1938 was designed as an opportunity for Mussolini to 'display Italy's military strength, resources and preparedness for battle as well as cultural superiority'.³⁴ The celebration of the past in Florence represented Italy as a nation with a strong cultural past, present and future and LUCE's newsreels that filmed the trip of the Führer tried to translate the apparent Italian superiority for theatres audiences. *Viaggio di Hitler a Firenze* opens with a long take that films the black convertible car of the two dictators entering the crowded historic centre of Florence. The leaders are welcomed by thousands of people cheering and waving Italian and Nazi flags (Fig. 70). The soundtrack (the German national anthem) accompanies the first sequences, while the commentary describes all of the stages of the tour of the city, creating a link

³¹ Editorial, 'Intesa di grandi popoli', *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 8 May 1938, p. 1.

³² Editorial, 'L'Incontro di Hitler col Re e il Duce', *Corriere della Sera*, 4 May 1938, p. 1.

³³ Editorial, 'La giornata Fiorentina', *La Stampa*, 10 May 1938, p. 1.

³⁴ Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected*, p. 83.

between the works of art of the historic centre, Florence's glorious past, and Italian genius and creativity.



Fig. 70: Mussolini and Hitler begin their sightseeing trip of Florence, from *Viaggio di Hitler a Firenze*, 1938, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 18th February 2015.

When the dictators reach Palazzo Pitti a medium shot of one room of the palace is followed by a voice-over reminding the audience that ‘Palazzo Pitti accoglieva il capo del Reich con la sua maestosa architettura e la superba ricchezza delle sue sale’; at the Church of Santa Croce the cameramen perform a series of spectacular shots of the façade of the church. Subsequently, the Duce and the Führer are filmed ‘nella cripta del tempio mentre rendevano omaggio ai grandi Italiani morti per la causa Fascista’; during the stop at *Piazzale Michelangelo* Mussolini and Hitler are filmed enjoying a ‘meraviglioso panorama della città sullo sfondo incomparabile dei colli fiesolani dove l’Italia offre tutta la sua grazia agli occhi del Führer’ (Fig. 71). Finally, at *Giardino di Boboli* the dictators are saluted by dozens of people who have staged a parade in order to honour the

Medieval legacy of Tuscany, and when the cameramen film two men dressed as Medieval knights the voice-over explains that ‘gli uomini in armi con i loro antichi costumi accoglievano l’ospite’. Eventually, the leaders visit the Uffizi Gallery and the commentary with triumphant tones declares that Hitler ‘visita gli Uffizi, una delle più famose d’opere d’arte del mondo ammirandone i più insigni capolavori’.



Fig. 71: A panoramic shot of the skyline of Florence after the arrival of Mussolini and Hitler, from *Viaggio di Hitler a Firenze*, 1938, Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted, on 18th February 2015.

As Ruth Ben-Ghiat remarks, the non-fiction films produced by LUCE were an important element of ‘the Fascist aesthetic of realism that was extended to literature, art and architecture as well, conceived to appeal to the populace. In this context, the films provided an ‘anti-elitist approach to culture both in terms of subject matter and

medium'.³⁵ Lasansky emphasizes that LUCE's non-fiction films representing the Middle Ages and the Renaissance made history visible and visitable and 'mediated the public perception of history filming on-site and in real time, thus appearing as neutral documents of cultural facts that, with their aesthetic of realism, seduced the audiences who forgot that these presentations were fictionalized'.³⁶

The aesthetic of realism in LUCE's productions was effective in capturing the attention of the viewers because, as Vertov indicates, in a non-fiction film the camera shows what the human eye can see but cannot record. Bruzzi confirms that Vertov's cine-eye 'clarifies instead than distort, creating a better way of comprehending the world than the naked eye thanks to the act of recording'.³⁷ The Middle Ages and Renaissance that figured in the films of LUCE were fictionalized, manipulated and staged representations of historical periods that aimed to communicate to viewers the illusion of the advent of a new glorious era.

The rhetoric of antiquity served to legitimized the regime's agenda of empire building and 'the medieval/Renaissance past provided Mussolini with distinct material and a set of myths that allowed him to reinforce the idea of native Italic traditions and a share concept of Italian self'.³⁸ As Roger Crum explains, Mussolini believed that both the Nazi and Fascist revolution were inspired and united by a return to the virtues of selfless medieval and Renaissance sainthood and to the chivalry of knighthood'.³⁹ Furthermore, as Lasansky writes, for Hitler, who was inspired by the rhetoric of art historian Jacob Burckhardt, 'a visit to Florence would have represented a cultural pilgrimage'.⁴⁰ The German dictator believed that the Renaissance was the foundation of Western civilization

³⁵ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, 'Fascism, Writing, and Memory: The Realist Aesthetic', *The Journal of Modern History* (1995), pp. 627-665 (p. 631).

³⁶ Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected*, p. 103.

³⁷ Bruzzi, p. 6.

³⁸ Lasansky, p. 107.

³⁹ Crum, p. 138.

⁴⁰ Lasansky, 'Towers and Tourists', p. 135.

and that Florence political-cultural history not only belonged to all Europe but it was at the core of the Nazi-Fascist set of common values.

It is important to specify that the newsreel that filmed Hitler's trip to Florence was part of a LUCE's series of productions that focus on the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in the 1930s. LUCE's cameramen filmed panoramic views and skylines of Medieval and Renaissance towns in order to embrace the city landscapes, therefore giving the audience the opportunity not only to observe but also to dominate and possess the urban space. The newsreels fostered the identification and the sense of belonging of the viewers in relation to the cities and the history that they represented.

For instance, in 1941 the non-fiction film entitled *San Gimignano delle belle torri*⁴¹ was produced 'as part of the media campaign designed to represent the medieval Tuscan countryside as the repository of the genius of the Italian people'.⁴² LUCE's cameramen focused on the towers and buildings of the Tuscan town of San Gimignano. Panoramic shots and long takes highlight the impressive skyline of the city's historic centre, while the voice-over explains that 'San Gimignano ci viene incontro con un aspetto che ci riporta indietro nei secoli. Le quindici torri di pietra viva che ancora svettano dalla cinta delle mura duecentesche dicono i tempi delle fazioni dei Guelfi e dei Ghibellini' (Fig. 90).

In this film the images of the imposing towers become the embodiment of the Italian Middle Ages, and when the voice-over underlines that the towers 'svettano ancora dalla cinta delle mure duecentesche' it conveys to audiences the feeling that the buildings of *San Gimignano* were indestructible symbols of the powerful cities that controlled the Italian peninsula during the Middle Ages.

⁴¹ Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 25 February 2015.

⁴² Lasansky, 'Towers and Tourists', p. 136. The film is preserved in the Archive of the Luce Institute, Rome, consulted on 25 February 2015.

In the film produced in 1943 and entitled *Viaggio per torri e campanili*, long takes and panoramic shots allow audiences to admire the Medieval and Renaissance architecture of castles and palaces from the Aosta Valley to Rome. The voice-over accompanies the images with a syncopated tone that is perfectly synchronized with the soundtrack of violins. In the opening sequences of the film the commentary declares that ‘nessun castello in Italia meglio di quelli della Val d’Aosta evoca l’atmosfera del medioevo e le torri ne sono l’espressione più significativa. Dalle feritoie si avvistava il nemico ed era più valida la difesa.’⁴³ The filming of Medieval castles not only offers audiences the possibility to identify with the glorious Italian past but also establishes a direct connection between the Middle Ages, the concept of war, and the Second World War, in which Italy was involved. The solid castles (which offered protection) and slits of the towers from which it was possible to identify the enemy became a metaphor for the Fascist regime as a firm defender of the Italian people, especially in 1943, a year that coincided with Italian catastrophic defeats on several war fronts.

In the newsreel celebrating the four hundredth anniversary of the death of Ludovico Ariosto LUCE recreated the spirit of the Renaissance in Ferrara, filming the poet’s house and its interior, the castle *Estense*, the cathedral of the city, an original copy of *Orlando Furioso*, and the arrival of the Princess of Piedmont Maria Josè (wife of Prince Umberto II of Savoy), who greeted the crowds from a balcony of *Palazzo del Paradiso* (which was not a Renaissance construction but rather a Medieval palace erected in 1391). The association between the images of the Renaissance and Medieval buildings, the house of Ariosto, and the arrival of the princess was not only an attempt to reproduce a specific historical period.

⁴³ *Viaggio per torri e campanili*, Archive of the Luce Institute, consulted on 25 February 2015.

The cine-eye of LUCE's cameramen recorded the images of the real palace, the church and the Princess of Piedmont, therefore giving audiences the illusion that a resurgence of the Italian Renaissance eminence was actually happening in cities such as Ferrara. The film does not have commentary; a powerful but monotonous soundtrack of violins and trumpets accompanies the scenes; and there is only one but consequential caption that explains that 'con le celebrazioni ferraresi di Ludovico Ariosto l'Italia rivendica con rinnovato titolo le glorie spirituali del Rinascimento che diedero luce e lezione al mondo'. The caption emphatically and effectively promotes the Renaissance as an example of Italian excellence, which became recognizable all over the world. The expression 'diedero luce e lezione al mondo' was a reference to Italian prestige abroad, which inherently contains the desire of the Fascist regime to restore fame and admiration for the Italian peninsula. The caption frames and synthesizes the objective of the Duce to position Italy as a world superpower through the rise of a global Fascist movement.

In *Viaggio di Hitler a Firenze* the diplomatic and political significance of the visit of Hitler was overlooked and substituted by a propaganda discourse that created a visual and linguistic link that tied the Middle Ages and Renaissance glory to Fascist Italy. The vocabulary used by the commentary included expressions such as 'maestosa architettura', 'superba ricchezza', 'grandi Italiani', 'meravigliosi panorami' and 'insigni capolavori', which were associated with moving images of sculptures, works of art, and some of the most important churches of Florence and communicated to contemporary audiences the idea of a reclaimed Italian greatness.

The eye-catching panoramic shot of Florence from *Piazzale Michelangelo* embraced the historic centre of the Tuscan city, offering audiences the same spectacular view that the two dictators admired when they reached the square. As Lasansky observes, the arrival of Mussolini and Hitler in the *piazzale* marked 'an important moment in the

Fascist repossession of Florence'.⁴⁴ Visiting Piazzale Michelangelo was the ultimate tourist experience, not only for the two leaders but also for the audience that in turn observe them through the various mass media that chronicled the event.

Conclusion

This chapter aims to be the first step towards understanding the Fascist newsreel productions related to Hitler and Nazi Germany, and shows that LUCE began to advertise the new German dictator as an ally of Fascist Italy and of the Duce. The first newsreels depicting Hitler were not sophisticated, and were characterized by medium shots of the Führer on a podium or stage while addressing the crowds. The structure of these productions boosted the apparent realism of the events that were shown, transforming the speeches of Hitler into breaking news that was screened in Italian theatres. As I mentioned previously in this chapter, the speeches, trips and events that involved the German Chancellor were meticulously commented upon and reported in the Italian press a few days prior to the screening of the newsreels. However, the newsreels of LUCE served to implement the news through visual elements (the image of the Führer on a stage while addressing the crowd, the syncopated movement of his arms, Nazi flags, etc.) and sound elements (the concise and direct messages of Hitler, his booming voice, etc.), thus capturing the attention of the viewers through communication channels that the press did not have.

I have analysed productions that filmed the trips of Mussolini to Germany and the journey of Hitler throughout Italy. The newsreel that showed the train journey of

⁴⁴ Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected*, p. 83.

Mussolini towards Germany was an attempt to promote the chief of Fascism as a leader of international stature that the German people respected and loved. Although the production provided the audience with real and incontrovertible news of Mussolini's trip, both the triumphalist tone of the voice-over and the images of unmanageable crowds were elements that LUCE used as propaganda weapons so as to show audiences the fervent and passionate enthusiasm surrounding Mussolini's arrival.

This production is a striking example of how LUCE used the crowds as visual elements in order to symbolize not only the seemingly active role of the people in the Fascist and Nazi rise to power but also their subjugation to the absolute authority of the dictators, thus confirming that LUCE assimilated and partially anticipated the theories that Kracauer put forward regarding the role of the masses in the Nazi newsreels.

The analysis of the newsreel that follows the trip of Hitler to Florence demonstrates that the German dictator was not considered a junior ally of the Duce; rather, he was depicted as a loyal supporter of the perpetual Fascist battle for the conquest of Europe and the establishment of a global Fascist movement. In *Viaggio di Hitler a Firenze*, the German dictator's visit became a collective experience that promoted and projected the ancient beauty of Florence and its inherent historic value to thousands of people in Italian cinemas. The two dictators' tour among the monuments, squares and a number of iconic buildings of the Tuscan city was transformed into a celebration and re-enactment of the glorious Italian Middle Ages and Renaissance past.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has shown that in the second decade of Italy's Fascist regime, LUCE's newsreels represented Europe as a utopian continent that was becoming a reflection and projection of Fascist Italy. From 1932 to 1943, the newsreels were used as a very effective and powerful propaganda tool to promote Italy as a nation at the core of a new European Fascist movement that ostensibly followed in the footsteps of the Duce's regime. In LUCE's non-fiction films, sound, image and text were intertwined in order to create an apparently irrefutable truth and to fabricate an illusory reality in which Fascist Italy was a dominant player on the international geopolitical chessboard.

LUCE's productions lacked the artistic sophistication and avant-garde flavour that characterized those of the Soviet Union; but as we have seen, Vertov's search for an apparent absolute truth inspired the cameramen and editors of LUCE in their pursuit of an illusory reality that would depict a triumphant Fascism. It is also important to point out that at least in terms of non-fiction films, LUCE did not achieve the systematic efficiency of Germany's sprawling Nazi propaganda machine, designed by Joseph Goebbels.

However, as the first chapter has comprehensively shown, the Italian newsreels were more than a mere exercise in bombastic propaganda messages. In the journals *Cinema* and *Lo Schermo*, the interventions of prominent non-fiction film directors such as Corrado D'Errico and Fernando Cerchio provided a theoretical framework that defined the aesthetic and style of the newsreels. The role of LUCE (later also supported by INCOM) was to produce non-fiction films 'that reflected the elevated significance of

propaganda both as domestic mechanism for consensus-building and as a medium of foreign political cultural influence'.¹

There is a substantial body of research related to Nazi cinema propaganda, its representation of foreign nations and its worldwide networks.² As Benjamin George Martin emphasizes, 'beginning in the mid-1930s and accelerating during the Second World War, Nazi Germany sought to create a German-dominated European film bloc oriented in opposition to the United States'.³ However, historians and film scholars have rarely considered the Italian Fascist newsreels as productions that were relevant internationally, and their prominent role in portraying foreign nations and leaders has been neglected. Therefore, the present thesis has attempted to fill this gap. Through the meticulous analysis of hundreds of newsreels, this dissertation has emphasized LUCE's capacity to film productions throughout Europe, thus manufacturing the representation of nations, politicians and policies. The research also highlighted that the structure and aesthetic of the newsreels changed and evolved over the years; it has also indicated that LUCE's directors were seeking to transform the newsreels into a propaganda tool that would compete with Russian, North American and German productions.

This thesis aimed to be the very first research to consider the Fascist newsreel not only as an important historical document, but also as a medium with its own unique style and language within the broad media landscape. Furthermore, this dissertation is the first study to examine the Italian newsreels by comparing their representation of multiple nations, and emphasizing their capacity to promote Fascist foreign policy to the Italian audience. Ruth Ben-Ghiat, in her study of feature and documentary films produced by the

¹ Aristotle Kallis, 'A War within the War: Italy, Film, Propaganda, and the Quest for Cultural Hegemony in Europe (1933–1943)', in *Cinema and the Swastika. The International Expansion of Third Reich Cinema*, ed. by Roel Vande Winkel and David Welch (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 172–187 (p. 174).

² David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema, 1933–1945* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

³ Benjamin George Martin, 'European Cinema for Europe! The International Film Chamber, 1935–42', in *Cinema and the Swastika. The International Expansion of Third Reich Cinema*, ed. by Roel Vande Winkel and David Welch (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 25–42 (p. 28).

Fascist regime in the African colonies, highlights that these productions represented the ‘Fascist expansion’ on screen. Imperial films were ‘metaphors of mobility where colonies can become ideal homelands’.⁴ This research has shown that the daily screening of newsreels epitomized the Fascist regime’s attempt to project the apparently relentless Fascist expansion beyond the national borders throughout Europe. Nations and their leaders were portrayed as inspired by Mussolini’s ideas and greatness, and policies such as the reclamation projects were described as models for a European agricultural rebirth.

As Gian Piero Brunetta writes, newsreels preserved in the archive of LUCE form an extraordinary and irreplaceable documentation of Italy: ‘Filmmakers behind these newsreels and documentaries wanted to show Italy’s march toward modernization without forgetting its traditional roots’.⁵ This study tried to consider LUCE’s newsreels as connected to Brunetta’s definition, but it also added a different and more nuanced perspective. It examined these productions as an attempt to represent Europe through the lens of the Fascist regime, recognizing the continuous dichotomy between the illusion of factuality and the objective to manipulate and manufacture truth. One of the common threads throughout the chapters is the emphasis on the importance of LUCE’s newsreels as an organized and sprawling source of mediated information in relation to foreign policy.

It is crucial to underline that this dissertation is not a semiotic analysis of the newsreels; nevertheless, the application of Roland Barthes’ definition of connotation, denotation and linguistic message to non-fiction films opens new pathways in the investigation of the sounds, visual patterns and photographic elements of these productions. LUCE’s newsreels were not only a simple and tedious sequence of propaganda news; they also gave the viewer a variety of content and offered a broad stream of perceptions. Although

⁴ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), p. 18.

⁵ Gian Piero Brunetta, *The History of Italian Cinema: A Guide to Italian Film from its Origins to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 75.

some newsreels were monotonous and standardized, they were also acoustically and visually compelling, particularly those made in the second half of the 1930s.

The theoretical framework of the thesis devoted a section to the essays and articles published in the *International Review of Educational Cinematography*. Luciano De Feo's journal is an under-studied historical source that offered opinions and observations in relation to educational cinema and non-fiction films. The journal published Germaine Dulac's writings, which focused on the newsreels as films that showed the 'truth of life'. Dulac's interpretation has been used throughout the thesis to define and clarify LUCE's attempt to construct a cinematic illusory realism.

The newsreels' connection with photography and documentary is also a fundamental theoretical element that returns throughout the chapters. The construction of a convincing and plausible theoretical frame linked to LUCE's productions was one of the most challenging aspects of the thesis. The theoretical chapter specifically, and the thesis more generally, aimed to provide a first exploratory application of theories concerning documentary film and photography to the Fascist newsreels; its objective was to position LUCE's non-fiction films in the media landscape alongside the Nazi and Soviet productions.

A number of newsreels produced were clearly repetitive. However, the analysis of these productions revealed that LUCE's non-fiction films developed a complex but logical thematic composition where topics linked to foreign policies were interconnected and intertwined with the project of implementing a European Fascist continent led by Mussolini and his regime. Remarkably, the logic of composition used in LUCE's films anticipated techniques and visual elements that were adopted by the Nazi propaganda machine a few years later.

LUCE's productions in Greece show the evolution of the newsreels from the 1930s to the 1940s; specifically the chapter that focuses on the Hellenic country emphasizes that

Siegfried Kracauer's observations about the Nazi newsreels were applicable to LUCE's films. As historians point out, the Italian military expedition in Greece was 'ineffective',⁶ and the invasion was 'a disaster logistically'.⁷ The chapter analysed all the newsreels that were produced in Greece during the Italian invasion; it made an original contribution to understanding how LUCE narrated the war and manipulated events related to foreign affairs at the beginning of World War II.

The regime's desperate effort to turn the disastrous defeat into a miraculous military victory showed how LUCE became skilfully persuasive and creative in trying to delude and mislead the audience. Images of hotels and holiday destinations in the newly colonized island of Rhodes, and the spectacular panoramic view of the Italian Air Force expeditions, highlight sophisticated and nuanced coercion strategies.

After the Italian invasion, Greece was portrayed as a nation that belonged within the Fascist sphere of influence. From the 1920s to the outbreak of World War II, the Aegean Islands and Corfù were part of the newsreel cycle: they were promoted first as Italian provinces (until 1935) and then as territories of the new Italian Empire (from 1936). These newsreels documented real news and journalistic stories that embraced a wide range of topics; however, LUCE manipulated and filtered the news through acoustic and visual elements, as well as the voice-over. The Aegean Islands were represented as idyllic holiday destinations that were filmed to promote the Fascist intervention in Greece and the alleged economic renaissance of the archipelago. For instance, Rhodes was deceptively publicized as a glamorous and modern tourist location that offered spas and resorts that all Italian people could enjoy.

⁶ MacGregor Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed. 1939–1941. Politics and strategy in Fascist Italy's war* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 27.

⁷ Bosworth, R.J.B., *Mussolini's Italy: Life Under the Fascist Dictatorship, 1915–1945* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Books Ltd, 2005), p. 464.

The thesis analysed for the first time a substantial number of non-fiction films that LUCE filmed in the Iberian Peninsula before, during and after the Spanish Civil War, stressing their role in promoting an alleged ideological Fascist colonization of Spain. During the Spanish Civil War, the Fascist regime understood that Italy needed to finance a network of international headquarters in order to produce newsreels and documentaries to be screened in Italy and in foreign markets. As Kallis notes, LUCE's production of non-fiction films in Spain 'served to counter the Nazi rule in the Spanish film business'.⁸ Furthermore, newsreels that were filmed and produced directly by LUCE faithfully represented the point of view of the Fascist regime.

In the Italian cinemas, Spain was represented both as a satellite state and as a valuable ally. The newsreels tried to convince viewers that, thanks to the support of the Italian Government, Spain had become a country that embraced the expansion of Fascism in Europe. These productions did not show real admiration for Franco, and the Spanish dictator was never portrayed as a strong Fascist leader. However, Mussolini needed Franco, and the Duce wanted to take advantage of the Spanish general's rise to power in order to show the Italian people that the intervention in the Spanish Civil War had strengthened Italy.

LUCE portrayed the Spanish countryside (both before and after Franco's rise to power) as a bucolic place that represented both an ideal world and a metaphorical projection of Fascist Italy. The cult of the outdoors life, the hard work of peasants and fishermen, and camaraderie were elements that the Fascist regime considered universally effective in promoting the affirmation of an efficient nation. The fact that these values were apparently shared in other countries was the recognition of the success of Fascism in the world, a success that the newsreels had to constantly advertise in Italian cinemas.

⁸ Aristotle Kallis, 'A War within the war: Italy, Propaganda and the Quest for Cultural Hegemony in Europe', in *Cinema and the Swastika. The International Expansion of Third Reich Cinema*, ed. by Roel Vande Winkel and David Welch (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 172–186 (p.179).

The newsreels produced in Spain have a particular historical relevance. In fact, the Fascist intervention in the Spanish Civil War (and in Spanish political affairs) coincided with Mussolini's aggressive new approach to foreign policy. The newsreels show how LUCE's views about Spain changed gradually. Pragmatism is not a word that historians usually relate to Fascist Italy, but these newsreels demonstrate that at least until the beginning of the war, the attitude of Mussolini's regime towards Spain was cautious, circumspect and prudent. Moreover, the descriptions of the Spanish Government in the newsreels before the rise of Franco avoided overly anti-republican tones.

The intervention in Spain, Franco's consequent rise to power and the colonization of Ethiopia convinced Mussolini that Italy had to increase its geopolitical weight in Europe. The Fascist regime considered Albania as the ideal starting point for a European military campaign. The Balkan nation was not only geographically very close to Italy, but the two countries also had a long history of diplomatic and economic relations. Hence, this thesis analysed non-fiction films that LUCE produced in Albania, which showed the Fascist colonization through the construction of infrastructure, the promotion of an educational programme and the frequent visits made by Galeazzo Ciano.

The representation of Albania in the newsreels epitomized the Duce's utopian hope of creating a colonial empire that included at least part of the Balkans. It was also the cinematic location of the illusory political triumphs of Galeazzo Ciano. If on the one hand, the theory that Ciano would be the designated leader of Italy after the death of Mussolini is debatable, on the other, these films showed that the young and charismatic leader was building an international and ambitious profile.

As LUCE's productions document, Albania became the stage that launched Ciano's international career. The Count was shown as a young and self-confident leader whose gestures, physique and attire resembled those of the Duce. After the proclamation of Victor

Emmanuel III of Italy as King of Albania, and Italy's subsequent full control of the Albanian economy, LUCE portrayed Albania as an Italian region that fully embraced Fascist ideals and policies.

The newsreels displayed the regime's attempt to rebuild Albania, and also projected Mussolini's desire to construct an empire that would include part of Europe. One particular cinematic narrative related the Fascist restoration of towns and countryside to the visual representation of the reclamation of the Pontine Marshes, and the public works in Albania. LUCE aimed to convey to Italian viewers that the regime was committed to exporting to its colonies the policies and measures that were considered successful and effective nationally, and Albania was represented as a resurrected land that had been civilized by the salvific intervention of the Fascist regime. The arrival of Ciano in Tirana and Durres was displayed as a mystical and redemptive event, and his appearances on balconies and stages were described as solemn ceremonies that celebrated the inauguration and completion of infrastructures and reclamations.

After the successful invasion of Albania and the consequent preparation for a war in Greece, Italy strengthened its connections with Germany. The relationship between Mussolini and Hitler was complex and ambivalent, but the two dictatorships forged an ideological and military alliance. As Bosworth writes, despite their national differences, 'Nazism and Italian Fascism did retain some commonality, being more like each other as societies than was their totalitarian rival, Stalinist Communism, or their half-embarrassed progenitor, conservative Liberalism'.⁹ Significantly, Mussolini and his regime 'acted as a role model for Adolf Hitler during the 1920s, when the Führer was still a peripheral and unsuccessful figure in Germany'.

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⁹ Bosworth, p. 4.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 8.

LUCE's productions were a diplomatic weapon that introduced Hitler to the Italian audience. The newsreels did not openly endorse or show the German dictator until 1932; the films depicting Hitler were usually characterized by medium shots of the Führer on a podium or stage while addressing the crowds. Hitler's speeches were framed as breaking news that informed the Italian audience about the latest events related to the Nazi regime. In the newsreels, Hitler was represented as a respectable and reliable ally of Fascist Italy. However, when the two dictators were filmed together, there was an evident visual contraposition between the figure of the Duce as a dynamic leader and that of Hitler, who appeared subdued and somehow reserved. Overall, these films reiterated that the Nazi party had saved Germany from the communist threat, and they stressed the similarities between the two regimes.

The thesis also highlighted that the newsreels produced during the 1930s had a simple but logical plot, and used acoustic and visual elements similarly to the American short non-fiction film series *The March of Time*. The increased sophistication of LUCE's productions was evident when Mussolini was filmed during his trips to Germany, promoting the Italian chief of Fascism as a leader of international stature whom the German people respected and loved. These newsreels gave the audience real and incontrovertible news connected to Mussolini's trips; however, the triumphalist tone of the voice-over and the images of unmanageable crowds were both used as propaganda tactics to portray fervent, passionate and uncontrollable enthusiasm at Mussolini's arrival.

The newsreels filmed in Germany are visually and acoustically captivating, and LUCE's efforts to show Mussolini as the true chief of a European Fascist movement were regularly reiterated. This is an interesting element that we can observe in all the productions related to Germany. LUCE acknowledged Hitler's rise to power and Germany's economic achievements, but the accomplishments of the Nazi regime were often linked to its capacity to emulate Fascist Italy and Mussolini's ideas.

As a symbol of the new Fascist Italy, the glorious Italian past was also one of the themes regularly covered by the newsreels. Hitler's trip to Florence in 1938 became the perfect occasion to show the cinema audience the ideal continuity between the Italian Renaissance, the Middle Ages and Mussolini's regime. Florence was transformed into a metaphor of this rediscovered Italian greatness, and the meeting between Mussolini and Hitler was alleged to be the moment when Italy reclaimed its place at the forefront of the world stage, and at the head of the transnational Fascist movement.

As historian Rosetta Giuliani Caponetto writes, 'the newsreels were aimed at fostering consensus and support for the regime and at drawing attention to events, values and people, and they closely followed the national and international progress of Mussolini's government'.¹¹ This thesis, in its attempt to provide a systematic analysis of hundreds of non-fiction films, has stressed the relevance of the newsreels as a propaganda machine that profoundly affected the Italian cinematic experience during the *ventennio*, impacting how the regime narrated and communicated the idea of a transnational Italian Fascism. In relation to foreign policy, LUCE's newsreels 'constituted a basic component of the cinema experience during the Fascist period'.¹²

As seen by the Italian people through the newsreels, Europe was a continent that metaphorically represented the political and strategic objectives of Mussolini. These films showed a reconstructed and illusory reality that was projected in hundreds of Italian cinemas. The European continent publicized on the Italian screens was not entirely fictional or manufactured; but undoubtedly, as we have seen throughout the chapters, it was the expression and reflection of the will, desires and strategies of LUCE, and thus of Mussolini.

¹¹ Rosetta Giuliani Caponetto, *Fascist Hybrities. Representation of Racial Mixing and Diaspora Cultures under Mussolini*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 163.

¹² Ricci, p. 60.

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