

and the early-years-to-adulthood groups of the Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB) that politicised children's 'free time'. In addition, readers are treated to a detailed account of the ways in which selected key episodes in Italian history – most notably those of ancient Rome and, more recently, the wars of Risorgimentalist and unified Italy – and contemporary events such as the League of Nations' sanctions and Ethiopian war were imagined and instrumentalised in relation to race. All of these aspects mean that the book is likely to become a principal and regular reference point for both students and scholars of Fascism, particularly for those working in English.

Certainly, *Mussolini's Children* is very much a top-down history of the presence of ideas about race in Italian elementary education. As a historian who approaches the history of the Fascist dictatorship from the 'bottom up', and from the perspective of how its policies and values were received, experienced, lived and practised, I would have liked the picture of Fascist racism in its education system to be completed with discussion of how these ideas emanating from on high, and imparted via textbooks and other media, were interpreted and received not only by Italian children but also, just as crucially, by the people who mediated between textbook and child: Italian teachers. Of course, all readers read in and out of books the things that most interest and concern them: we historians are no different. It is impossible to meet and satisfy the concerns, curiosities and expectations of every reader. Still, the glimpses of 'reception' that we are afforded – the *quaderno* entry that opens chapter 4, the school diary entry and schoolchild's letter to General Graziani in chapter 5 and the mention at the opening of chapter 8 of 'Miss D'Astore's' speech about 'autarky and race' to her class in Soletto, near Lecce, in October 1938 – suggest not only that such source material exists, though sparse and with its own interpretative challenges, but also how richly its use enhances the analysis. How much, and how, Italian children absorbed, appropriated, accepted, modified or even subverted and rejected the tenets of Fascist racism that were thrown at them in their schooling and other formative experiences strikes this reader as an important corollary and development of the argument presented here. How Italian teachers themselves understood and mediated the messages on race contained in regime pedagogical rhetoric and in textbooks, how they actually taught race, would also be a vital piece of the jigsaw. We know, for example from Scotto di Luzio's work on children's literature and libraries, among others, that Italian readers, to paraphrase, 'imperfectly appropriated' the ideas about Fascism that they encountered in the books they read; it would be fascinating to know how imperfectly Italian teachers and their pupils appropriated the myriad notions of race, racial difference and superiority that McLean so ably demonstrates they were bombarded with, in increasingly pointed and consequential ways over the 20 years of Fascist rule.

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Una Chiesa in guerra. Sacrificio e mobilitazione nella diocesi di Firenze 1911–1928, by MATTEO CAPONI, Rome, Viella, 2018, 332 pp., €13.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-88-6728-980-6

Matteo Caponi's *Una Chiesa in guerra* is a micro-historical work on the role of the Florentine diocese during the years surrounding the First World War. Specifically, it demonstrates, with reference to this locality, the intersectional processes of religion, nationalism, and wartime

mobilisation from a strongly culturalist perspective. The book is divided into five chapters, each containing five to eight sections, as well as an introductory and concluding section. It is highly readable and well organised, offering a detailed portrayal of the complex networks of the Florentine diocese and their extensive impact in both local and national arenas. Furthermore, this book well justifies its challenging stance in the context of the surrounding historiographical literature, dealing, in particular, with the treatment of the Church's relationship with right-wing movements.

Caponi looks in detail at the continuing fashions in historiography concerning Italian faith and the First World War. Questioning the common historiographical position of 'the religion of war', Caponi elects to focus on the Florentine diocese in order to more accurately depict the concrete mechanisms by which ecclesiastical institutions and faith contributed to the rhetorical construction of patriotic sacrifice. Utilising micro-historical methodology, Caponi aims to demonstrate manifestations of this process in the Florentine context, both in connection and in parallel with that on the macro-national level. Caponi chooses Florence on which to base this study, due to its highly unique municipal features, including its discernible intellectual fertility, even within the framework of the Catholic Church.

Among the highlights of Caponi's achievement is his presentation of the aggrandisement of the role of ecclesiasts in the war effort, from their initial function in offering pastoral support to their eventual participation as soldiers and policy-makers. Caponi also examines the role and delineation of 'consensus' in the context of national belligerency, utilising sources varying from private letters to popular religious literature and war memorials. He also highlights the role and treatment of women in this historical process, a subject often overshadowed in the traditional literature. Caponi's method ensures the preservation of a broad-based perspective within a highly focused approach, consistently offering comparative perspectives between cases in Florence and other Italian municipalities.

Despite its exceptionally strong attention to detail, the book could be criticised for its lack of justification of its focus upon, specifically, the *Catholic* Church, as during this time in Florence, there were sizable minority communities of Jews and Anglicans who also participated in Florence's Great War efforts, as featured in the work of Christina Loong. Supplementary comments on their involvement in connection to that of Florence's Catholic diocese would further strengthen Caponi's innovative stance of raising questions central to the religious history of the First World War in tandem with seeking to discover its 'transnational moment'.

Nevertheless, the greatest contribution of this piece is its excavation of the nuances of the Florentine diocese's role in the political, cultural, and social reaction of the Great War as well as their trans-scalar impacts. Dispensing with the traditionally portrayed 'totalisation' of the First World War, Caponi expertly draws on a full gamut of ecclesiastical perspectives, uncovering the multiple facets of this subject, too often flatly portrayed. In addition, he fully illustrates the significance of this research in a far broader temporal plane. Turning to the present day, Caponi states that in the context of the centenary of the First World War, the modern Catholic Church has often suppressed narratives of its nationalistic belligerent tendencies, in favour of a strongly globalised pacifism; over the century the church has moved from a position of 'We [Italians] are with God' to a position of '[A peace-loving] God is with us [i.e. with all Catholics]', spotlighting the need to explore the historical process of the Church's 'evangelicalisation of its age'.

Whilst this book is strongly directed towards scholars of early twentieth-century Italian Church history, it also contains much material that would be of interest to cultural historians of early twentieth-century Italy, particularly those who examine political spiritualism. In addition, this work nicely parallels research on Fascism, particularly that focused on a scalar analysis of the

utilisation of the Church to legitimise and integrate the Fascist state. For historians outside these fields, Caponi's work is a well-crafted model of thorough micro-history.

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'Misfits' in Fin-de-Siècle France and Italy: Anatomies of Difference, by SUSAN A. ASHLEY, London/New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, 312 pp., £90.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781350013391

In the second half of the nineteenth century, as part of the debate on evolutionism, a broad discussion developed on the presence in contemporary society of groups and human types showing serious limits of adaptation. Evolutionism, considered as a linear and progressive mechanism of development, could offer a key to understanding this reality. Although Darwin, indeed, had not presented his thinking in these terms, social theory had interpreted deviance as a delay in reaching higher stages of development or as the persistence in the present of earlier stages in the overall cultural and psychological dynamic. Moreover, deviance was attributed not only to a deceleration in the progressive rhythm of transformations, but also to degenerative processes of retreat. The idea of mental health had to deal with this complex perspective, which accompanied the importance given to biological determinism in the justification of aberrant behaviour. Such an approach took it as obvious that the signs of cognitive and moral deficiencies could be read in a person's outward appearance.

Starting from these considerations, the historian Susan A. Ashley sets about analysing the ways in which experts (criminologists, sociologists, psychiatrists, neurologists) in France and Italy, at the end of the nineteenth century, tried to explain the existence of a variety of deviant figures, and to comprehend their specific features, with a view to a sort of classification. Her research is focused on six categories of deviants: geniuses, lunatics, neurotics, vagabonds, criminals and sexual deviants; the first three regarded as mental 'misfits', the others as social 'misfits'. Each of these categories is treated in a single chapter, each of which opens with the presentation of the problem, and follows with an analysis of the scientific debate and its psychological and social implications.

An introductory chapter illustrates the key elements of the research, supported by a wealth of historical documents and literature. On an interpretative level, inevitably, the works of Michel Foucault emerge, linking the dominant idea of health and normality to the structures of power. The punitive attitude usually adopted by institutions, in the name of the defence of society, required the imprisonment of misfits, perpetrators of crimes and the insane at detention centres.

France and Italy provide the terrain for Ashley's study (although there is no lack of comparative incursions beyond their borders), where, although industrial development was slower than in some other European countries, the social tensions generated by the changes taking place were strongly felt.

A general question concerns the identification of the boundary between normal and abnormal behaviours; although this could be relatively easy with murderers (Henry Landrou, Giuseppe Musolin and Jack the Ripper became stars of the judicial chronicles and newspapers), it was less so for other figures. Commentators of the time, for example, were quite convinced that there was a relationship between genius and recklessness. Both geniuses and people with inferior intelligence showed eccentric behaviours, characterised by an absence of measure. The sociologist