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The “Touring Club Italiano” and the Pride for the Army from 1908 to 1914

Bizzocchi, M.*
University of Bologna (Italy)

ABSTRACT

Announced on December 1907 and completed in January of the following year, the Touring Club Italiano update aesthetic and substance of its official propaganda organ: “*Rivista mensile del Touring Club Italiano*”. In a detailed analysis of the review we want demonstrate that with this aesthetic update there is a tacit, but clear, change of direction of the whole association that opens to a nationalistic thought.

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*e-mail address: marco.bizzocchi.ther@gmail.com

Since its foundation, the Touring Club Italiano has always given great pedagogical objective of "making Italians", helping in the creation of a citizens aware of their history and territory it occupies, and at the same time, trying to heal the great historical social and cultural cleavages that divided the country. The project of the Touring planned to facilitate the fraternization of individuals to each others, through the knowledge of the territory and journeys. For this reason in the Touring's review, called *Rivista mensile del Touring Club italiano*, the official organ for propaganda of the association, there was space not only for articles about geography, history and culture of individual regions or the entire peninsula, but were organized journeys and cultural excursions, on foot or by bicycle. Above all it was encouraged personal initiative with maps' distribution, regional and national, or tourist guides with itinerary and routes suggested by the expert of the Touring: «Il progetto, per non dire la filosofia, di un'associazione che tende irresistibilmente al movimento, è la conoscenza del paese[...] superando la frammentazione geografica e i particolarismi culturali di classe» (Rumi, 2004, p.11).

Another great instrument used by Touring to create a national conscience was pride for the advanced state reached by the Italian industry of those years. And what is the symbol par excellence of these new Italian triumphs if not the car? Evocative, in this sense, is the journey, by car, made by Federico Johnson to Sardinia «per dimostrare, col fatto, la praticità dell'automobile (especially for the postal service)» (*Rivista mensile del Touring Club Italiano*, Giugno 1904 p.192). He argued that the car was so comfortable on the island, where the distances between villages were so huge, that he has been back on the continent with this dilemma: «non si saprebbe se l'automobile fu inventata per la Sardegna, o se la Sardegna fu inventata per l'automobile»(ibidem).

The objective was not only to demonstrate the functionality of the new mean of transport, but rather to impress people through the new wonders that Italy, finally modern, was able to produce. In this sense is so appropriate the metaphor «cattedra ambulante della modernità» that Stefano Pivato used to define these itinerant journeys that the Touring makes to the "Modern": «Certo, nell'Italia d'inizio secolo l'automobile è un "utensile di lusso" e il suo possesso è limitato a poche migliaia di esemplari. Tuttavia il "mezzo meccanico" non rappresenta solo uno strumento da diporto. È anche, se non soprattutto il risultato di una scienza da esibire, il prodotto di una modernità di cui andare fieri. In definitiva il Touring agisce come una sorta di esposizione universale itinerante, come una cattedra ambulante della modernità che familiarizza gli italiani alla scienza e al progresso»(Pivato, 2006 p.67).

The main objective was astonish, and therefore, make people proud of the modern character of their nation, and to be citizens of a State which can boast of being at the first places in the great world race toward the indefinite progress.

Already announced on December of the previous year, in 1908 the T.C.I. decides to renew the review adding several sections and making improvements

to some of the existing ones. Although not explicitly reported in official form, we believe that the "Reform" not concerns only the famous organ of propaganda's aesthetics, but it is also related to a change of the whole association direction, no longer aimed only at a cultural patriotism matrix Risorgimento, but rather aimed at the "philosophy" tending on nationalist. Above all the theme of modernity is more emphasized, linking both to the automotive world, both to aviation and to technological advances to the armed forces. Latter point appears surprising for an association as the Touring Club Italiano who had never hidden his personal *pacifist philosophy*: «è indubbio che anche il Touring facilitando i viaggi fra nazione e nazione, favoriscono notevolmente col fatto codesto "affratellamento"; e di questa verità non è certo necessario il dare dimostrazione, tanto che è chiara e lampante. Più si gira e più ci si conosce; più ci si conosce e più ci si ama...e meno si fanno guerre. Dunque Touring vuol dire pace, e pace vuol dire Touring» (Rivista mensile del Touring Club Italiano, Gennaio, 1902, p. 3)

At first "incipit" of this singular interest for the armed forces was found on March 1908, when from the corresponding number of the review, we learn that a new life member is registered in ranks of the association: an ironclad. Indeed the battleship *Regina Margherita* is reported as life member in the section *Elenco dei candidati* (list of candidates) and is dedicated to it a small article with an illustration that show the protagonist. (Rivista mensile del Touring Club Italiano, Marzo, 1908, p. 126) «È la prima volta», says the text's author, «che un Ente di tale categoria viene ad accrescere forza e autorità al Sodalizio[...]aggiungendosi a noi ha completato il carattere d'universalità ed il patriottismo che è proprio della multipla anima del Touring» (Ibidem).

From the text it can be highlighted at least two points of interest: the first is about the fact that the author sets in parallel patriotism and the ironclad, followed by a second, where the author defines the Touring like a «multipla anima» (multiple soul), and that its universal character is «completato»(completed) after the entry in the Sodality of the new life member. There is certainly a gap between the philosophical tradition of Touring that glorified the way of tourism as peace tool and this *new way*, which includes, among its ranks, a battleship. This apparent contradiction can be explained through the analysis of the second point. We, in fact, suppose that in these terms, «multipla anima» are included all the traditional activities that are part of the experiential baggage of the association: cycling excursion and on foot, tourism incentive and to geographic knowledge etc... With the registration of this new and singular member, the Touring seals the new interest (*the new soul?*) for technological advances and new discoveries in military field from Italian industry. As with the car¹, the army's weapons become instruments to impress and make people proud of the new power obtained by the armed forces when, in Europe, many States converged more and more like a power politics.

¹ Indeed, ever since 1908, also the first flight experiments civilian and military.

For this reason the «carattere di universalità[of Touring] viene completato»: arms and the potency of the Italian armed forces were a form of national pride not yet considered from T.C.I.: «Più che un nuovo membro aggiunto all'immensa compagine del grande organismo turistico nazionale, era un simbolo tangibile di patriottismo che veniva a coronare la fisionomia morale del Touring»(Rivista mensile del Touring Club Italiano, Settembre, 1908, p. 420).

To seal the importance of this new member «ed anche indicare ad altre istituzioni analoghe, la necessità di seguire l'esempio» (Ibidem), the Touring gave the ship, a bronze plaque «raffigurante la propria impresa» (Ibidem) and the consul of Naples, Baron Gaetano De Angelis, had set it «opportunamente in rilievo il rapporto tra l'alta missione della Armata nazionale e gli intenti patriottici del Touring» (Ibidem), organizing and managing the ceremony for the plaque delivery. All of this not only decrees the partnership between two institutions, the T.C.I. and the Italian Army, but also indicate a turning point in the philosophy of the association of Milan, no longer limited to a cultural patriotism, but open to a real nationalism.

Since September appear, in the review, articles about military life and progress in armaments army. We can find a first example of it, on November 1908 where there is a small article dedicated to the first airship designed by the Italian air force. The text, in addition to provide technical data and dimension of the airship, it offers a comparison with other foreign experience: «Il nuovo veicolo manovrava con rapida agilità e guizzava in tutte le direzioni senza neppure l'ombra di quelle oscillazioni che costituiscono il vizio comune di tutti i dirigibili esteri finora comparsi.[...]Il primo dirigibile italiano ha provato di possedere doti superiori a' suoi congeneri delle altre nazioni, doti di sicurezza, d'equilibrio, di dirigibilità e di fusione fra le sua parti ed organi diversi. Nella costruzione di esso si fece tesoro degli insegnamenti che venivano porti dagli insuccessi e dalle catastrofi determinatisi in questi ultimi tempi nel campo internazionale dell'aeronautica» (Rivista mensile del Touring Club Italiano, Novembre, 1908, p.498).

The reference to recent catastrophes and failures is about disaster of *Zeppelin IV*, the gigantic German airship that on August 6th crashed to the ground in flames. The T.C.I. not miss the opportunity to write about it, an highly polemic article against the German air force, highlighting that the main problem of these air giants is located just in their immense sizes, hard to manoeuvre in high wind condition (Cianetti, 1908). The Touring Club Italiano contributes to the national power politics through these articles, putting evidence on Italian successes and foreign failures. Moreover, to dwell on, above the exaggerated sizes of the *Zeppelin IV* (136 meters) when, a few months later, Italy will show its first airship of only 39 meters, highlights the fines strategies of the T.C.I. to make Italian people proud. The intention to compare the results of the Italian aeronautical industry to those of other nations becomes even more apparent in the article

that Arturo Mercanti dedicates to the new airship *1 bis*. Since to beginning it's presented as a product all original.. «che è tanto diversa dalle altre, che è del tutto italiana, che delle altre è tanto migliore, e che è creazione superbamente nazionale se è fatta per la patria dai figli che alla difesa della patria sono prima degli altri votati.» (Mercanti, 1910 p.16)

If in the previous article about the first Italian airship we find a general comparison with foreign realities, it never get down in detail as in Mercanti's case who, having itself tasted the new Italian product, he claims to be able to highlight the great qualities of *1 bis* in comparison to foreign products: [Rising on the white nacelle]«Nulla più qui delle necessità che nei dirigibili come *Colonel Renard*[French], *España, Zodiac*[French], riducono i passeggeri [a] strumenti di equilibrio. [...] Delle manovra di partenza chi se n'accorge?[...] un sorriso ai pochi amici, un breve giro di manovella, una fumata d'olio a poppa, un vellutato ronzar di eliche, che non è lo strepito delle *Zeppelin*[German], non il clangore delle *Wright*[United States]» (Ibidem).

Although these texts are always furnished with some pictures, often completed with captions and explanatory schemes, their reading often results not immediate or fluent in raison of their technical terminology. In these articles the *1 bis* is completely disassembled and piecemeal described using highly technical terminologies that render, the total comprehension of the text, accessible only for a limited scale of "insiders". But there is a question: is really so important, for T.C.I., to make the text comprehensible for all? For those who succeed to understand the various minutiae that the text has to offer, will be gratified by a superior knowledge of the new vehicle. For those who are devoid of a good technical preparation, maybe remain the wonder and curiosity that an enigmatic (only in part) text can exhale and instil. We had said "only in part" because not all Arturo Mercanti's article is difficult and, indeed, the only thought that, really, has importance, is written in simple and incisive language: the *1 bis* is an Italian product and it is superior than European competitors. If this excellence derives from micro or macro technical abilities of vehicle is a secondary importance thought. In all probability what for the greater number of T.C.I. members care, is as he indirectly says in a successive article about the *1 bis*, «L'Italia insegna» (Rivista mensile del Touring Club Italiano, Maggio, 1910, p.265).

These years are so sparkling for the industry of the military aeronautic and the Touring devotes an increasing number of articles about it: we can say that since 1908 until 1914, it has been published at least twenty-three articles with military matters, most of them dedicated to Aviation. Naturally the years close and contemporary of the Libyan war has seen a clean increment of the article numbers that arrive to be eight for year. Despite a higher concentration of the aviation theme, subjects are several and often completely disconnected from the tourism world. Like the case of the article dedicated to *cannons against airship* (Rivista mensile del Touring Club Italiano, Gennaio, 1910, pp.48-49), or to

the *amphibious machine for military use* (Ivi p.49), or the Giorgio Molli's text (1916), dedicated to the ironclads and cruisers of the Italian fleet, or even more evident in the case of the long article who the Captain Ettore Bravetta (1912), dedicate to the history of the artillery and the various bullets, grenades and cannonballs employed from it. These reported texts, which are just a few examples of those we can find in the review, reveal the attention that the Touring has towards topics completely unrelated with tourism, and is in the way to present the technological innovations products by Italian military industry, in evident competition with the foreign countries, that the Touring shows that it has accepted the nationalist power politics; if not, why to put in a tourism review, articles of this kind?

The diffusion of military culture, encouraged by Touring, does not even know time limits, it is able to dedicate articles to the "armed forces" of the past. Main reference is, naturally, the ancient Rome, which most of these articles are dedicated, also about not purely military subjects: for our interests we can see the a Attilio De Marchi's article (1910), above the figure of the roman soldier in march, or Giacomo Boni's text (1916), about the roman fleet. Since 1908 until 1913, are worthy of mention at least fourteen articles about roman civilization, in Italy and in Africa. In latter case the interventions on the review generally fall in the Libyan campaign period where, having such illustrious predecessors was important to establish a link between modernity and the ancient times.

Although, the T.C.I., has never officially expressed a clear political position and, as the direction publicly declared, he preferred to be inspired by the universal sentiment of "italianity" (Bardelli, 2004), we cannot notice a determined approach, of the T.C.I., to the nationalist current to the approach of the Libyan conflict. It seems difficult to not notice the political influence, even if unofficial, of the most articles here presented and commented. The same interest in the progress of the firearms and to the armed forces, it must be seen as the opening, of the T.C.I., to a typical nationalist thought where is priority, for the political survival of the nation, the Italy's descent in the international arena of the political power. Is always from this point of view that should be read the support «senza tentennamenti» (Ivi, p.304) of Touring to the Libyan war. A support that Touring confirms already before the flare-up of the war through Attilio Rossi's article about an Italian archaeological mission in Cyrenaica, limited to the region between Bengasi and Cyrene. The Touring use this mission «per giustificare i diritti italiani sulla Libia divulgandone le ragioni storiche assieme alle cognizioni geografiche che costituivano la premessa indispensabile per la penetrazione italiana» (Ivi, pp.280-288).

In war years, sure enough, soldiers figure becomes a classic icon often represent the hero and the martyr for national cause. The blood of those young lives is spent to regenerate the pride and the prosperity of the nation so their loss, «olocausto irreparabile», would have always had the gratitude of the country. Also the soldier weapons have had a radical metamorphosis: a machine

gun, for example, from formidable tool of death to a «*wise and severe exhibition of pacifism*». (Bertarelli, 1912 pp1-2) In the Libyan war² the pride for the armed forces was not only played in prospective of a statement political power, but also to dissipate fogs which, before Dogali and in particular Adua, were condensed on the reputation of Italy and in its colonial abilities; in this regard, we show an opening speech held by the association president in the general assembly of members, held in 1912 March 31st : «quest'anno mi pare di non poter esimermi dal fare un confronto fra le circostanze nelle quali tenevamo, diciassette anni sono – la nostra prima assemblea, nell'aprile del 1895 – e quelle nelle quali ora ci riuniamo. Allora l'Italia nostra trovavasi in mezzo alle incertezze ed alle inquietudini di una impresa africana che pesò per tanti anni sul nostro sentimento nazionale; ed ora l'Italia con uno slancio, una concordia, con vigore fattivo che è di gloriosa meraviglia a noi stessi, scrive col sangue dei suoi prodi una pagina di storia degna delle sue più splendide tradizioni, dei suoi più sacri diritti, delle sue più alte idealità. Vada dunque[...] vada il pensiero, vada il saluto nostro, il saluto dei centomila soci del Touring, sulle rive vittoriose del rivendicato mare nostro, vada ai gloriosi eroi caduti, ai valorosi combattenti, che il sentimento del dovere e l'amore della Patria hanno servito e servono con tanto animosa energia d'intelletto e di cuore, esplicando essi con le armi quei principi stessi di civiltà, di progresso, di umana conquista rigeneratrice, che sono nel programma eminentemente italiano della nostra grande Istituzione» (Rivista mensile del Touring Club Italiano, Maggio, 1912, p.277).

The general T.C.I. interest for the armed forces must be read under this further light : try to wash humiliation for a double defeat of Dogali and Adua. The T.C.I., describing the Italian army as one of the largest in Europe, including technologically best-equipped and as the one who carry the banner of civilization and progress, encourages the pride of the citizens for own nation and, at the same time, trying to erase the memory of the military disaster of Adua.

The same objectives are the basis of the *Prima escursione nazionale in Tripolitania*, that represent the main initiative of Touring, after the war, to present, for the first time, the colony at the members. Intention of the organizers is to highlight the potential economics, demographics and agricultural of the colony, but also, through a selected and planned visit at certain war theatres, to give worthy farewell to «martiri ad eroi[...] e riaffermare oltre il mare tutta l'energia e tutta la virtù del "latin sangue gentile"» (Rivista mensile del Touring Club Italiano, Febbraio, 1914, p.75).

Was visited, to Henni, the small cemetery that collected the soldiers killed in the battle of Henni and Shara Shatt, to Homs, the cemetery and the fort Italia, still chaired by the armed forces; were also made many events such as the main one was the *Cerimonia della consegna dei Gonfaloni*, in which were donated, to the city of Tripoli, many banners representatives of over 60 Italian city, to be placed into

² In the Tourings articles of course.

the military necropolis in project. In this way the Touring contributed to create a new mythology around the Italian soldier giving typical features of the highest nationalist ideals.

Conclusions

The Touring Club Italiano, since its foundation, has always used tourism, and everything that revolves around it, to publicize and teach Italy to Italians. In 1908 it is openly declared the aesthetic and substantial update of the review that not only change dimensions, many section that did not exist before were added, and most of these which were already in, are cancelled or extended. This update coincides with a tacit and unofficial change of route of all association that open itself more to themes of nationalist mould. Tourism always remain the centre of the pedagogical program of the association, but, are added to it different nature themes as the army, military aviation or the roman history that only marginally have common thematic related with tourism. We note as the technological progress of military industry, that is the main object of articles, is constantly pitched in comparison \ competition against the corresponding foreign in a way that may be called a small "cold war", fought with shots of technological advances and articles about the incredible possibilities of the national industry and discredit to give to those "enemies". The objective seems to be the conquest of public opinion to convince it to accept the picture of a country strong, civilized and, soon, colonial.

We say colonial because the other great confirmation of the nationalistic turning of Touring is the acceptance without hesitation of the declaration of war against Turkey and the total support to the Libyan campaign that, takes often the form of direct aids to the official in front or in the rain of articles, rises from naught on October 1911, dedicated to Africa and Libya in the present and in the past.

In conclusion, trying to give a better definition about this nationalistic feature, we argue that the Touring, from 1908 to 1914, is the mouthpiece of a nationalism that Gentile (2006) could call «umanitaristico», and that it has such theoretical basis: «l'esigenza di rigenerazione del carattere per formare la coscienza nazionale dell'italiano moderno; la valorizzazione della civiltà nazionale nella visione del progresso della civiltà moderna; l'accettazione del colonialismo come tutela degli interessi nazionali nella competizione internazionale e come strumento di civilizzazione; la concezione morale della guerra come evento possibile e talora inevitabile per la vita e lo sviluppo della nazione.» (Gentile, 2006 p.124).

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