

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Fascism in Italy Project

Personal Experience

O. H. 412

FILIPPO MONTEVIDEO

Interviewed

by

Elisa Calabrese

on

June 11, 1986

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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Fascism in Italy Project

INTERVIEWEE: FILIPPO MONTEVIDEO

INTERVIEWER: Elisa Calabrese

SUBJECT: Education, Cultural aspects of Italian life

DATE: June 11, 1986

C: This is an interview with Filippo Montevideo for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program; topic of discussion is Fascism in Italy, on June 11, 1986.

Thank you very much Mr. Montevideo for consenting to this interview. I would like to know a little bit about yourself, when you were born, where you were born, and about your family.

M: I was born in Italy in 1925.

C: Where?

M: South in Calabria. It was very hot and dry there. It was by the ocean.

C: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

M: I have two brothers and a sister.

C: What I really want to know about are the war years.

M: During the war it was very tough. First of all, the railroads were in bad shape. The Americans and English bombed all of the time. We didn't have any transportation, food, soap, or clothing. To get something to eat you had to walk fifty miles. There was no food. Even if you had the money you could not buy anything because there was nothing available. There was trouble all of the time with the Germans. They destroyed bridges, roads. You were almost isolated from everybody.

C: When you went to school did you learn about Mussolini?

M: Yes.

C: Can you tell me how you addressed yourself to the teacher when you went to school in the morning? What were your daily habits?

M: We went to the fifth grade. We dressed like we were in uniform. In five years, believe it or not, you learned what you learn in twelve years over here. You finished your schooling by eleven years. If you wanted to continue your education from that point on you had to pay for your own schooling. In those five years though, you would learn a lot, much more than you learn here. This was after Mussolini. You had to go to school. Before Mussolini people didn't have to go to school if they didn't want to.

C: He really pushed for education?

M: Mussolini pushed for everything. A lot of people didn't like it, but he was good.

C: Tell me more about Mussolini.

M: Mussolini did something which nobody else did. He built cities. He built water lines. He built bridges, railroads, hospitals, and something like social security. He was good for the working man. Unfortunately, he made the mistake of going with Hitler. For Italy he was very great; he did a lot of things for the people.

C: I've been reading about a contradiction in his policy with the Jews in Italy. Did you ever hear anything about mistreatment of the Jews?

M: While I was over there, no. We didn't have Jews where I was living, but we never heard anything in the newspapers.

C: Give me a typical day of school. What time did you go to school? What did you learn, the subjects?

M: That's hard for me to remember because you're talking about fifty years ago. We used to go five days a week to school. We went up to the fifth grade. Every single day, except for Monday, we studied until about 3:00. One day we studied history with math. The other day you would have geography with Italian. Every day was a different subject. On Saturday we used to call it "fascist" Saturday, because everything was closed, but you had exercises.

C: I heard that in the morning you would get up and salute Mussolini?

M: No.

C: You never did that?

M: No. You used to salute the head of the fascist party from the city. If you were in uniform and another guy was in uniform, you saluted him.

C: What about different youth movements that Mussolini had when you were a certain age?

M: They started just like the Boy Scouts here. Over there it was called piccolo belillo, which was little boy. Later on they called it fascist. Every Saturday you had to go.

C: How was it during the war, the bombing? You said you didn't have food or clothing. Tell me more about that. Did you have a farm? Where would you go to trade?

M: I used to live in a small town. The small towns lived better than the big towns because there was more agriculture, more farming. We used to live on what was growing. For example, we used to grow our own potatoes and beans. We didn't have much meat. There was no trading over there though. The farmer was better off over there. They didn't have meat, but they had something to eat: pears, beans, whatever. There was something to put on the table.

We used to have a train nearby. If I would take olive oil with me I could sell it like gold. They didn't have anything. It was like a black market. It was like they sell dope now. You could get anything over there. For a loaf of bread that was worth twenty lira, they would give one thousand lira. You cannot use the money. Italy was all black market then.

You used to buy food with food stamps too. They used to give so many to each person. Once they were consumed, forget it. Unless you had extra money to buy stamps, you did not get anymore until they were issued again. A lot of times they didn't even want money on the black market. We had a lot of silverware, and they would take silverware or bed sheets or tablecloths instead of money.

C: Did any of your brothers have to fight?

M: No. My oldest brother was on the last ship to this country; he was the last one to come in. Then he went to the service in this country and they shipped him over. Actually, he fought against the Italians.

C: And his family was over there?

M: Yes. He didn't have a choice.

C: Did you ever have to serve in the military in Italy?

M: No. To be truthful, I paid my way out.

C: Tell me about right after the war. How were the towns, were they desolate? Was everything destroyed?

M: No. My hometown never got hit. The most destruction was from the Germans. When they retreated they destroyed bridges and railroads and everything. Six miles away from my hometown there was damage to the railroads.

C: Do you remember when Mussolini went back and Hitler made him head of the puppet government in Northern Italy in 1943?

M: It didn't last too long.

C: As a person growing up in those times how would you view Mussolini and his government?

M: The idea was brilliant, but there was too much power in his hands. They were overdoing everything, and it was bad. That is what ruined him.

C: Was there any conflict? Did people say that it wasn't good for Mussolini to go with Hitler?

M: There was a lot of conflict over there. Myself, I say it was no good. On the other hand, some people said he didn't have any choice. He said, "You will be with me or against me." If he would have gone against him he probably would have destroyed all of Italy. I think he was forced to go with Hitler.

C: Did you feel there was any difference between Fascism and Nazism?

M: Yes, absolutely. Nazism was bad. Those people don't give a damn about anything. They would kill for anything, and they did. They did close to my hometown. They would come to your house and destroy everything. Any food that would be there they would take. They didn't have any heart; I think Fascism was a little bit different. Maybe it was the people themselves who were different. I don't know.

C: That could be, the general character of a German and the general character of an Italian might be different.

M: I think that is what it was.

- C: After the war were the cities being built back up by the Americans?
- M: The war ended in 1945. In my hometown nobody started to build anything. In the big cities they started. Who did it I don't know.
- C: How was the economy then and the way of life right after the war for the people in Italy?
- M: It was tough. A lot of people didn't have houses. People would live in tunnels under bridges. The Americans didn't care where they threw the bombs. They would trample anywhere; they didn't care who died. They would come from the ocean and start to bomb like a carpet.
- C: Did American troops come through your town?
- M: Yes.
- C: Did they act like the Germans? You said they robbed and stole.
- M: No. There was no fight at all. The Italians just gave up. They didn't have any chance to survive so they gave up.
- C: When did you come to this country?
- M: 1950.
- C: What made you decide to come to the United States?
- M: First of all, my father was here, my brother was here. We were supposed to come before, but on account of the war we got delayed.
- C: How was the culture? What did you do for fun when you were a young man in Italy?
- M: There is a big difference between where I come from and the big cities. I worked all day long learning a trade. I am a tailor. You started at 8:00 and quit at 10:00. In the summer time you worked from 8:00 until 1:00 and went home and everybody slept. Then you went back to work at about 4:00 and worked a little bit longer. On Sunday you would go to a movie. In the afternoon you would play soccer. People would get together and play cards, go hunting. They had fun without spending money. One other thing, there was no dope.

C: How would you describe Italy in those days in comparison to the United States?

M: We were premature. It is two different things when you talk about Italy and where I come from. I think the big cities were much better than this country. They had everything we have over here. In a small community like I came from we didn't have work or anything. We used to cook by the fireplace.

C: Did you have electricity?

M: We had electricity, but only a few people had this. This was in small cities; in big cities they were modern.

C: I've been interviewing people from all over Italy. Is there a little rivalry between the north and south?

M: No. In fact, during the summer time the people from the south used to go to Northern Italy to work in the factories. We didn't have any factories where I came from. Even in Central Italy there was not much.

C: Would you like to add anything else?

M: One thing we didn't have was salt. We used to go down to the ocean and get a big pot of water. It would boil and the residue would be salt.

Also, there were no matches to cook with. We made fires just like the Boy Scouts. We would transfer the fire from one house to another.

END OF INTERVIEW