

# BIRTHS AND FERTILITY IN INTERWAR ITALY

## Trends, Images, Policies and Perceptions

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### INTRODUCTION

Italy has witnessed a decline in fertility over the last four decades. Since then, the opportunity to implement measures that support fertility has been a subject of debates (Dalla Zanna, 2004; Sori, 2002; Treves, 2001). Italian scholars have begun studying pronatalist policies<sup>3</sup> that the Italian fascist regime carried out during interwar time. This paper reviews the relevant literature on this topic, and is structured in four parts: First we analyse the demographic trends, statistics on fertility, and the population projections produced in Italy in 1920s and 1930s, which stimulated the implementation of pronatalist policies. Secondly, we examine the population theories of the main Italian demographers who lived during interwar time. We explore the ways in which these demographers considered fertility decline and the policies that supported fertility. We also examine how low fertility was interpreted by Italian fascism, and the objectives it expected to achieve through the implementation of pronatalist policies. Following this review, we then analyse the pronatalist policies which were implemented. We identify two phases of fascist pronatalism: the first period (October 1922-March 1929) was characterised by the crafting and implementing of the main fascist policies with a pronatalist aim; during the second period (March 1929-July 1943) these policies were reformed, their pronatalist scope enhanced, and new pronatalist policies introduced. We also consider the propaganda that the fascist regime devoted to pronatalism. Finally, we provide an account of the attitudes towards family formation of Italian women who lived during this period, and we discuss on how Italian women did not conform to the fascist model of prolific mothers.

#### *1. Demographic trends and population projections*

The demographics which encouraged the implementation of pronatalist policies in fascist Italy were produced by the *Italian National Institute of Statistics* (ISTAT). After its creation in 1926, the number of years between subsequent censuses was shortened from 10 to 5 years, the reliability of census and registry office figures increased and, for the first time, Italian women's age-specific fertility rates were calculated (Ipsen, 1996; Leti, 1996; Treves 2001).

According to census figures, the Italian population totalled 41,177 million people in 1931. The average annual population growth rate between 1921 and 1931 was 0.87% (Livi Bacci, 1980). This population increase was attributed to decreases in mortality and net migration rates rather than an increase in fertility rates. The first study on marital fertility was carried out by ISTAT in the framework of the 1931 census (Ipsen, 1996; Treves, 2001) and revealed that the average number of children per married (or widowed) woman (4.11 per woman) was still above replacement level fertility. However there had been a decline in completed cohort fertility: the average number of children was equal to 6 for women above 60 years of age, to 4 children for those aged between 50 and 59 years, and to 3 children for those aged 40-49 years (Ipsen, 1996; Treves, 2001).

The decline in fertility revealed by the 1931 study was taken into account by Gini and De Finetti (1931) in their Italian population projections. Commissioned by the government,

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<sup>3</sup> We refer to 'pronatalist policies' as any measure with the aim of increasing fertility.

these projections for the first time employed a method based on age-specific fertility and mortality rates. Starting with the 1921 census and continuing until 1961, these projections did not consider hypotheses of fertility increase for the following years. Three hypotheses were used: 1) fertility and mortality remain constant at 1921 levels; 2) fertility decreases, mortality remains constant; and 3) a decline in both fertility and mortality rates. Gini and De Finetti (1931) considered the third hypothesis to be the most plausible. The Italian population was likely to continue following the development pattern begun in the last decade: it was going to experience further decreases in age-specific fertility and mortality rates as well as in net migration rates. The Italian population was not projected to start declining until 1961. However, to avoid total population decline after 1961, authors felt that growth needed to be encouraged through pronatalist policies (Gini and De Finetti, 1931).

Gini and De Finetti (1931) also compared the Italian population projections to those made for the French, German and British populations. They observed that “our situation is better than that of other countries; as these projections demonstrate, Italy, compared to other countries, might still ameliorate her demographics; we need actively to defend ourselves from hypotheses of population decline and from the possibility to shrink as much as the other populations have done so far” (Gini and De Finetti, 1931, p. 121). These projections served “to demonstrate the statistical prowess of the (fascist) Italians and to compare Italy’s demographic vitality to that of other white-race nations” (Ipsen, 2002, p. 103).

Gini and De Finetti’s 1931 projections had been influenced by the European demographic scenarios that had been calculated by Kuczynski using a method based on gross reproductive rate, or the Kuczynski index (Treves, 2001). This index is the sum of age-specific fertility rates in a given year, considering only female births and women of reproductive age (ages from 15 to 49) and measures the strength of women’s generation replacement in a given year. Applying this index, Kuczynski (1928) projected that the European population was going to decline in future years, starting with north-western European countries.

A decrease in Italian population growth rate was shown in the 1936 census: the average annual population growth rate between 1931 and 1936 (equal to 0.83%; Livi Bacci, 1980) had been lower than that observed before 1931. The total Italian population in 1936 was 42,918,726 (Livi Bacci, 1980).

## 2. *Opinions on low fertility and pronatalism*

### 2.1. *The views of Italian demographers*

The observation of fertility decline encouraged demographers’ interest in studying low fertility. There were two main schools of thought during fascist Italy, each founded by the two leading demographic researchers: Corrado Gini and Livio Livi (De Sandre, 2002; Ipsen, 1996; Treves, 2001). These two demographers agreed that decreasing fertility should have been contrasted through specific policies. However they had different opinions regarding the reasons of fertility decline as well as the impact of different policies on individuals’ reproductive behaviours.

On one hand, according to Gini’s *cyclical theory of population growth* (Gini, 1912; Gini, 1930), decreasing fertility started in the upper classes of the society; it would then have spread to the middle and lower social classes, and finally brought about population extinction. Fertility decline was mainly a biological phenomenon due to the weakening of population reproductive capacities. Gini and his scholars were in favour of policies that enhanced human health conditions, discouraged urbanisation, and forbade contraception and abortion. In their opinion, financial incentives to reproduce were ineffective.

On the other hand, according to Livi’s theory based on the concept of *optimum population* and *minimum population* (Livi, 1940; Livi, 1941), it was necessary to maintain

constant positive fertility rates, so as to preserve the minimum population (i.e., a sufficient number of inhabitants to conserve the socio-demographic equilibrium of a population). Fertility decline was mainly a socio-economic, as well as moral phenomenon, due to the spread of contraceptive methods<sup>4</sup>. In his eyes, financial incentives for childbearing were the most effective measures to counteract the fertility decline. Livi's approach to fertility decline and on policies to encourage fertility became more popular among Italian demographers compared with Gini's ideas (De Sandre, 2002; Ipsen, 1996; Treves, 2001).

Gini's and Livi's schools also developed an interest in eugenics (Pogliano, 1984). In 1926 Gini was appointed president of the *Italian Society of Genetics and Eugenetics* (SIGE). Regardless of their opinions on the main causes of low fertility, the majority of Italian demographers supported the theory of positive eugenics (Pogliano, 1984). According to this theory, fertility decline interferes with the biological improvement of human species, because it reduces the number of people participating in the process of natural selection. As a consequence, policies that encourage birth rate increases should be implemented. In contrast with positive eugenics, negative eugenics, which was widespread among Anglo-Saxon scholars during interwar time, favours the transmission of the best genetic traits while at the same time impeding the reproduction of individuals with undesirable characteristics (Pogliano, 1984).

Despite supporting positive eugenics, the majority of Italian demographers neither officially disagreed with German policies of negative eugenics, nor with the fascist 1938 racist measures (Treves, 2001). Since a law passed in 1925 would strip those who contested the fascist regime of their offices (De Sandre, 2002; Goglia, 1988; Turi, 1989), also the majority of Italian scholars across other fields did not openly oppose the regime (Turi, 1989).

## 2.2. *The views of Italian fascism*

Italy's fertility decline not only constituted demographers' central interest of research, but it also brought about Italian fascism's political concerns. Benito Mussolini, the National Fascist Party's leader and the Italian Prime Minister (October 1922-July 1943), first expressed his intentions to implement pronatalist policies in his Ascension Day Speech before the Italian Parliament, on 26 May 1927. This speech, together with Mussolini's 1928 article *Numero come forza* (Strength in Numbers), constitutes the basis for understanding fascism's pronatalism (Ipsen, 1996; Treves, 2001).

In the Ascension Day Speech, that was drafted in collaboration with demographer Corrado Gini (Treves, 2001), Mussolini (1927) considers the number of inhabitants as the main factor that determines countries' military strength, as well as their economic and civic developments: "national demographic strength provides a subsidiary but fundamental evidence of nations' political as well as economic and civic strength" (p. 364). In Mussolini's view, the liberal states' indifference to citizens' reproductive behaviours was suicidal:

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<sup>4</sup> Contraceptive methods were first used in Italy during the last two decades of 1800 (Livi Bacci, 1980). The knowledge of contraceptive methods was mainly spread by the *Italian Neo-malthusian League*, created in 1913 by Luigi Berta, a revolutionary trade unionist, and Secondo Giorni, a blue-collar worker who had learned about contraceptive methods during a period of emigration in France. The League published a magazine entitled *Educazione sessuale* (Sexual Education) with the aim of popularising information about contraceptive methods and the neo-malthusian theory. Also another magazine entitled *Educazione sessuale* (Sexual Education), published in Milan, and the Institute *Il Pensiero* (The Thought) took part in the popularisation of contraceptive methods in Italy (Wanrooij, 1990). *Coitus interruptus* was the most common method during interwar time in Italy; abortion was also widespread (De Grazia, 1993; Ipsen, 1996). It was illegal and most of the time resulted in permanent health problems or even death, even when it was carried out by a medical doctor. Women resorted to abortion after failure of post-sexual intercourse methods (e.g., showers). The most common abortion methods consist of emetic substances, irrigations with herbal infusion and irritating chemical elements, hairpins, knitting needles, probes, and curettage (De Grazia, 1993).

governments should actively encourage childbearing and support high birth rates. He underlined that the link between demographic and political strength applies to any context and at any time. With reference to the Italian context, Mussolini held that pronatalist measures were necessary and urgent, because Italian fertility decline should be stopped (Mussolini, 1927). He highlighted the necessity of avoiding low fertility rates which had already been reached by other European countries. He announced that the most important policies to carry out were anti-urbanisation measures and the prohibition of contraception. In his article *Numero come forza* (Strength in Numbers), Mussolini (1928) upheld the need for these pronatalist policies.

Mussolini and the Italian fascism considered urbanisation as the main cause of Italian fertility decline. In their opinion, the individualist and secular cultures which characterises urban contexts had brought about women's emancipation. This in turn had spread the use of contraceptive methods and reduced individuals' number of children (De Grazia, 1993; Zunino, 1985). Mussolini (1928) regarded pronatalist policies as a "goad to public morals" (p. 216), and so pronatalist policies were necessary not only to build Italy's political strength, but also to improve the moral standards of the Italians. While aiming at increasing Italian fertility, these policies should also encourage the creation of a new deeply-fascist civilization, "based on the rural traditional values of the family and hard agricultural work, as well as on the total commitment to the state and fascism" (Ipsen, 1996, p. 18). The fascist civilization should replace the decadent middle-class liberal society, by restoring the traditions of male virility and female high fertility which had characterised Italians before female emancipation (Quine, 1996; Treves, 2001).

Mussolini (1928) also expresses concerns for African and Asiatic demographic vitality. In his view, the implementation of pronatalist policies would avoid the disappearance of western societies. Furthermore these policies can improve population genetic qualities (Mussolini, 1928). Italian fascism included positive eugenics: all the Italians should reproduce, because each one of them was suitable for transmitting "the spiritual determinants of Rome, the Church, and the Renaissance" (Zunino, 1985, p. 272). Italian fascism also embraced negative eugenics since the 1938 implementation of racist policies. These policies served to strengthen the alliance with Germany (Di Nolfo, 2000). Their purpose was to model a fascist civilization based on the Italian superiority (Zunino, 1985).

Fascist pronatalist policies were necessary to fulfil Mussolini's foreign as well as domestic policies. On one hand, increasing birth rates were to supply a strong army, which had to defend Italy against military threats that were being made by European democracies. A strong army was also required to accomplish Italy's colonial ambitions in Libya and Ethiopia (Zunino, 1985). Mussolini often justified fascist colonialism by presenting it as a consequence of Italy's increasing population growth rates (Carocci, 1967; Nobile, 1974; Treves, 2001). High fertility rates were also to supply a strong labour force which, in Mussolini's eyes, was necessary to develop a self-sufficient economic system, and to support Italian military goals (De Grazia, 1993; Quine, 1996). On the other hand, pronatalist policies were carried out to consolidate fascism's power, and to build a totalitarian state. During the 1920s, pronatalist policies served the purpose of gaining Catholics' and peasants' support for fascism and strengthen its power. They supported peasants' model of large families, as well as Catholics' and moralists' fight against sexual emancipation (Dau Novelli, 1996; De Grazia, 1993; Ipsen, 1996; Quine, 1996; Saraceno, 1991; Treves, 2001). In the 1930s, these policies were suitable for the creation of a fascist civilization, where all people believed in fascism and had fascist attitudes in all spheres of life including reproduction (Dau Novelli, 1996; De Grazia, 1993; Ipsen, 1996, Quine, 1996; Treves, 2001). Eventually, Mussolini presented the 1938 racist regulations as a consequence of Italian fascism's pronatalist approach (Treves, 2001).

### 3. Pronatalist policies

Mussolini carried out measures not only aimed at increasing fertility, but also at opposing emigration, and implementing positive eugenics. Italian fascism's pronatalism shaped its entire demographic policy<sup>5</sup> (Ipsen, 1996; Treves, 2001). This policy aimed at increasing Italian population and improving its genetic qualities. Mussolini also implemented measures with the purpose of improving Italy's demographic statistics<sup>6</sup> (Ipsen, 1996; Ipsen, 2002; Treves, 2001). Furthermore, he supported new institutions for demographic research, whose creation was initiated by demographers Corrado Gini and Livio Livi<sup>7</sup> (Levi, 1996).

We limit our analysis to the pronatalist policies which were implemented by the Italian fascist regime. In the following sections, drawing on distinctions of two phases in the development of fascist demographic policies by Ipsen (1996) and Treves (2001)<sup>8</sup>, we identify two periods in the development of these policies. The first period starts with the so-called 'March on Rome' (October, 1922), which started the Italian fascist regime, to the plebiscite (March, 1929), where people gave their approval to the fascist government; the second period starts with the 1929 plebiscite up to the end of the Italian fascist regime (July, 1943). Fascism's main objective consisted of gradually building a totalitarian state (De Felice, 1998). The achievement of this objective influenced the entire development of fascist demographic policy (Ipsen, 1997; Treves, 2001). We also examine fascist propaganda that accompanied pronatalist policies after the 1929 plebiscite

#### 3.1. First period of fascist pronatalism

In the 1920s, Italian fascist government linked its pronatalist policy to measures aimed at improving population quality, protecting motherhood and reducing infant mortality (De Grazia, 1993; Ipsen, 1996; Quine, 1996). After it came to power, the fascist regime

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<sup>5</sup> We refer to 'demographic policies' as any measure (e.g., regulations, laws, decrees, etc.) which have the explicit purpose of influencing population demographic characteristics and structure (De Sandre, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> He promoted the creation of ISTAT (see section no.1) with the tasks of organising and coordinating the statistics produced by national as well as local administrations. He personally took care of the budget and the finances of this Institute, and wanted its new headquarters in Cesare Balbo street, in Rome, which was inaugurated in 1931 (Leti, 1996). When, after the October 1943 armistice, Mussolini re-established the fascist government in the north of Italy, with the so-called *Salò Republic*, he wanted the entire Institute to be moved as well. Moreover, with the aim of fighting people's unwillingness to fill out census forms, Mussolini promoted an information campaign about the importance of statistics, and the publication of *Notiziario demografico* (Demographic News Bulletin), a magazine meant to increase individuals' knowledge about demography as well as to promote their interests in demographic statistics (Leti, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> In the mid-1920s, Gini founded the *Scuole di statistica* (Statistical Schools). He created the *Comitato italiano per lo studio dei problemi della popolazione* (CISP; Italian Committee for the Study of Population Problems), in 1928, the faculty of *Scienze statistiche, demografiche e attuariali* (Statistical, Demographic and Actuarial Sciences) at University of Rome, in 1936, and the *Società italiana di statistica* (SIS; Italian Society for Statistics), in 1939. Thanks to Livi, the *Comitato di consulenza per gli studi sulla popolazione* (CCSP; Advisory Committee on Population Studies) was founded in 1937. In 1938, this committee became the *Società italiana di demografia e statistica* (Italian Society for Demography and Statistics), that today is named *Società italiana di economia demografica e statistica* (Italian Society for Economic Demography and Statistics) (De Sandre, 2002; Ipsen, 1996; Treves, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Ipsen (1996) and Treves (2001) review all the demographic measures that the regime implemented. Ipsen (1997) names the first phase of fascist demographic policies "the organization of totalitarian demography" (p. 50), which goes from Mussolini's January 1925 speech before Italian Parliament, until the Lateran Treaty (February, 1929). He labels the second phase "the realisation of totalitarian demography" (p. 90), which goes from the Lateran treaty until the end of the Italian fascist regime (July, 1943). Treves (2001) distinguishes between the starting of the fascist demographic policy with Mussolini's Ascension Day Speech (May, 1927), and its reorganisation settled by the *Gran Consiglio del Fascismo* (GCF; Fascist Grand Council) (March, 1937) (Treves, 2001). In both distinctions, the first phase was characterised by the launching of the fascist demographic policy; during the second phase existing policies were strengthened, and demographers became involved in the crafting of new policies.

implemented policies for eradicating widespread diseases (e.g., tuberculosis, malaria and alcoholism) as well as opposing infant abandonment. The *Opera nazionale per la protezione della maternità e dell'infanzia* (ONMI, National Organization for the Protection of Motherhood and Infancy, Law, no. 2277, December 10, 1925) was created for the purpose of reducing infant mortality.

Policies explicitly aimed at increasing fertility were implemented after the mid-1920s (De Grazia, 1993; Ipsen, 1997; ISTAT, 1934; Quine, 1996). The earliest measures were aimed at penalising non-reproductive behaviours. A Consolidated Act of the provisions concerning public security, passed on November 6, 1926, prohibited abortion and the distribution of contraceptive devices and expertise<sup>9</sup>. A Royal Legislative Decree (RLD), passed on December 19, 1926 imposed a bachelor tax to all unmarried men aged 25-65 years, except for clergymen, soldiers and disabled persons. This tax, calculated as the sum between a rate of taxation determined by age (equal to 35 liras for men aged 25-35 years, 50 liras for those aged 35-50, and 25 liras for those aged 50-65), and a variable by income, was intended to finance the ONMI.

Along with the implementation of pronatalist policies, the fascist government also implemented anti-urbanisation measures as well as policies that encouraged internal migration while simultaneously discouraging emigration abroad<sup>10</sup>; it launched new colonisations in Africa and drainage of Italian marshlands (Nobile, 1974; Ipsen, 1996; ISTAT, 1934).

In the 1927 Ascension Day speech, Mussolini officially committed himself to implement pronatalist policies (see section no. 2.2.; De Grazia, 1993; Ipsen, 1996; Quine, 1996). After this speech, all the physicians and ONMI personnel were given the task of reporting violations of the prohibition of contraception and abortion (Law passed on June 23, 1927). The government initiated measures aimed at supporting reproductive behaviours, with the introduction of income-tax exemptions for large families (Law, June 14, 1928): tax exemptions were granted to soldiers and civil servants with at least 7 living dependent children and to non-state employees with at least 10 living dependent children. Since there were few families with 7 or 10 children, the application of this law remained limited (Ipsen, 1996). The bachelor tax was doubled (RDL, September, 24, 1928).

### 3.2. *Second period of fascist pronatalism*

After the 1929 plebiscite, fascist government strengthened the connection between pronatalist policies and measures intending to ameliorate population quality, and to protect motherhood and childhood (De Grazia, 1993; Ipsen, 1996; Quine, 1996). It reorganised the ONMI and increased its budget (Law, April 13, 1930). The ONMI was given the task of arranging the *Giornata della madre e del fanciullo* (Day of the Mother and Child) every year starting on December 24, 1933. On this day, Mussolini himself awarded monetary prizes to the largest families of each Italian province. A minimum of 12 children was required; and children who had died in battle also counted. In 1933, the prize was equal to 3,000 liras; in 1935, it was

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<sup>9</sup> The articles no. 112, 113, 115 forbade the distribution of contraceptive knowledge and devices, because this was considered offensive to public morality and decency. The condom was allowed for prophylaxis purposes. It was associated with prostitution, extra-marital sex, and venereal diseases. The main firm producing condoms was named *Hatu*. Its main client was the army (De Grazia, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> The Italian fascist regime upheld nationalists' proposal to oppose emigration abroad, while at the same time enlarging Italian territories and encouraging internal migration as a measure against unemployment (Nobile, 1974; Ipsen, 1996). The *Comitato permanente per le migrazioni interne* (CPMI, Permanent Committee for Internal Migration) was created in March, 1926, with the task of planning and fostering internal migration. In June, 1927, la *Direzione generale degli italiani all'estero* (DGIE, General Office of Italians Abroad) passed a series of measures that progressively forbade permanent emigration. In June, 1928, the price of passport was increased from 2 to 80 liras.

equal to 5,000 liras. These prizes were quite generous, given that the average monthly salary for a blue-collar worker was equal to 300 liras<sup>11</sup> (De Grazia, 1993).

Measures that penalised non-reproductive behaviours were tightened (De Grazia, 1993; Ipsen, 1996; ISTAT, 1943; Quine, 1996). The new Penal Code (so-called Rocco Code, October, 19, 1930) defined abortion and contraception as “crimes against the race” (art.545-555) and increased sentences for offenders. The bachelor tax was doubled for the second time in 1934 (RLD, April 14, 1934), and increased again in 1936 (RLD, February 6, 1936). A new measure gave preference to hiring and promotion of married men with children (Law, June, 6, 1929).

Policies that supported reproductive behaviours were intensified (De Grazia, 1993; Ipsen, 1996; ISTAT, 1943; Quine, 1996). Tax exemptions for civil servants who had large families were generalized with a measure which provided for calculating income taxes in proportion with family size (RLD, July 29, 1933). Family subsidies were introduced in the 1934 collective work agreement for industrial workers with children below the age of 14 years<sup>12</sup>. Another policy encouraged local administrations to provide housing for large families (Law, June, 13, 1935). Paid maternity leave, which had been introduced for female industrial workers before fascism came to power<sup>13</sup>, was first extended to women working in commercial firms (RDL, May, 13, 1929<sup>14</sup>), and then to all women working for an employer (RDL, March, 22, 1934). Some categories of workers, including agricultural workers<sup>15</sup>, domestics, and civil servants<sup>16</sup> were still excluded. The duration of obligatory leave was prolonged to a month before and six weeks after childbirth; mothers could apply for an optional three months leave plus one month for illness. The maternity fund payment was increased<sup>17</sup>. Women had their job guaranteed and the right to breaks during work for breast-feeding. In 1936 agricultural workers were also provided with a maternity insurance (RDL, August, 7, 1936); these payments were lower than for other categories of workers (Ipsen, 1996).

These measures were implemented along with policies that discouraged working mothers, and encouraged mothers to be housewives (De Grand, 1976; De Grazia, 1993; Ipsen, 1996; Saraceno, 1991). Since 1923, women were excluded from high-school teaching and public-service competition. In 1938, non-state offices were not permitted to hire more than 10% of women (De Grand, 1976; De Grazia, 1993; Ipsen, 1996; Saraceno, 1991). At the same time, the fascist government strengthened anti-urbanisation measures, added disincentives against emigration, encouragement for repatriations, for colonisation in Africa, and the drainage of Italian marshy territories<sup>18</sup> (Ipsen, 1996; Nobile, 1974; Sori, 1975).

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<sup>11</sup> To have the real value of lira during fascist time, Ipsen (1996) provides a table for lira conversions to 1990 US dollars (pp. XIV-XV).

<sup>12</sup> The government had decided to alleviate unemployment by limiting the work week to 40 hours. Wages were reduced proportionally. Family subsidies were introduced with the purpose of compensating reduced family wages (Ipsen, 1996). A National Fund for Family Subsidies was created and administered by the *Istituto nazionale fascista per la previdenza sociale* (INFPS, National Fascist Social Security Institute). All industrial workers and employers contributed 1% of their wages to the fund.

<sup>13</sup> The fascist regime had gathered all the existing policies concerning maternity leave and fund, in a Consolidated Act, in September, 24, 1923.

<sup>14</sup> The 1929 RDL, which constitutes the first fascist innovation regarding maternity leave and fund (Ipsen, 1996), also extended the duration of obligatory leave to one month before and after childbirth, and it provided for three months optional leave for birth-related illnesses.

<sup>15</sup> Agricultural workers had the right to a two-months unpaid maternity leave, since the 1907 (Ipsen, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> Female civil servants had already been given a maternity fund payment with the 1923 Consolidated Act (see note no. 13), and a months maternity leave in 1924 (RD, December, 31, 1924).

<sup>17</sup> Already increased by the 1923 Consolidated Act (see note no. 13), in 1934 the payment was fixed to 150 for live births and to 100 for stillbirths or miscarriage. The National Fund for Maternity was administrated by INFPS (see note no. 12). Only female workers and their employers contributed to it (De Grazia, 1993; Ipsen, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Measures to punish illegal emigration were introduced in July, 1930. Due to rapid increase in unemployment after 1929 worldwide economic crisis (the so-called Great Depression), fascist government passed extraordinary

After the 1936 proclamation of the Italian Empire in Africa, Mussolini strengthened political efforts to build up a totalitarian state (De Felice, 1998). To this end, he carried out a large reform of fascist demographic policy. Many of the new provisions were based on those which had already been implemented in Germany. Since the mid-1930s Mussolini had begun denouncing the failure of Italian demographic policies, while at the same time proclaiming the success of German ones. The reform was introduced by the *Gran Consiglio del Fascismo* (GCF; Fascist Grand Council) with a resolution passed on March 3, 1937<sup>19</sup> (De Grazia, 1993; Ipsen, 1996; Quine, 1996; Treves, 2001).

This resolution called for the creation of two new institutions the *Ufficio centrale demografico* (UCD, Central Demographic Office; RD, June 7, 1937) and the *Unione fascista per le famiglie numerose* (UFFN, Fascist Union for Large Families; RDL, June 3, 1937). The UCD was given the following tasks: a) to propose and study demographic policies; b) to carry out demographic surveys and analyse demographic data; c) to analyse the impact of demographic policies; d) to take over the Minister of Council's task of awarding the fertility prizes. A year later, the CCSP (see note no. 7) took on the task of carrying out demographic researches. Through the collaboration between CCSP and UCD, demographers became policy expert consultants (De Sandre, 2002; Treves, 2001). The UFFM was present in each Italian region; it had the task of representing the interests of families with at least 7 children, and of informing them about all the benefits they were entitled to.

The GCF's resolution also called for the reform of some pronatalist policies and the introduction of new measures (De Grazia, 1993; Ipsen, 1996; ISTAT, 1943; Quine, 1996; Treves, 2001). Family subsidies were expanded to contract workers in all sectors, except for civil servants who already benefitted from similar arrangements (RDL, June, 17, 1937). A fifteen-day marriage leave was introduced both for state and non-state white-collar workers (RD, June, 24 1937). Marriage loans were introduced (RDL, August, 21, 1937) which, already in use in Germany, went from a minimum of 1,000 liras, up to 3,000, and could be granted only if both the spouses were less than 26 years old with an annual income lower than 12,000 liras. These loans, distributed by each provinces and coordinated by the INFPS (see note no. 12), were repaid in instalments. Subsequent pregnancies resulted in postponement and reduction of the debt amount: 10% discount for the first child, 20 % for the second one, 30% for the third one, and 40% for the fourth one. The debt would be cancelled, if the couple had 4 children within 6 and half years after the wedding. The RDL providing the marriage loans also doubled the income-tax reductions, extended the bachelor tax to some military categories, and expanded the 1934 legislation on paid maternity leave to female civil servants. Some regulations conceded hiring and promotion priorities to large families' breadwinners (RDL, September, 21, 1938, and reforms: RDL, February, 25 1939, and RDL, March, 27, 1939). Some others extended maternity insurance to domestics, made it increase with

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regulations that increased the number of passports issued. In February, 1931, these regulations were removed, and the price of Italian passport increased again. The CPMI was replaced by the *Commissariato per le migrazioni e la colonizzazione* (CMC, Commission for Migrations and Colonization), which coordinated the settlements of Italians in new reclaimed lands, such as Golfo di Oristano in Sardinia and Agro Pontino in Latium, as well as in African colonies, i.e., Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in Libya, and *Africa Orientale Italiana* (Italian East Africa, consisting of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia). In January, 1939, fascist government created the *Commissione permanente per il rimpatrio degli italiani all'estero* (CORI, Permanent Commission for repatriation of Italians Abroad), with the task of managing reintegration of Italian workers who had emigrated abroad, back to Italy or to her colonies. Anti-urbanization measures were also strengthened (Ipsen, 1996; Nobile, 1974; Sori, 1975).

<sup>19</sup> The regime realised all the (seven) directives included in the resolution. It failed only in redrawing the provincial and municipal borders which, scheduled in conjunction with the 1941 census, should have eliminated those local administrations that were aging demographically. This directive was not realised because, due to the outbreak of the Second World War, the 1941 census was cancelled (Ipsen, 1996).

successive births, and introduced nuptial prizes and fertility prizes<sup>20</sup> (RDL, April, 14, 1939). Finally, to commemorate the GCF's meeting, the annual *Giornata demografica* (Demographic Holiday) was established on the 3rd of March (Law, May 22, 1939). On this day, the UFFN delivered medals of honour to the mothers and fathers with the highest number of children. Fascist pronatalist policies were in force even during the Second World War<sup>21</sup>.

In conjunction with demographic policy reforms, Italian fascist regime had implemented racist regulations since April 1937 (Goglia, 1988; Ipsen, 1996). These regulations prevented marriage and reproduction between Italian natives and African natives of Italian colonies. After November 1938, marriage and reproduction between Italians and individuals of non-Aryan race was also prohibited. In September 1938, the UCD was transformed into the *Direzione generale della demografia e della razza* (General Direction for Demography and Race; also called *Demorazza*) with the task of studying not only demographic issues, but also racial ones (De Sandre, 2002; Ipsen, 1996; Treves, 2001). University faculties that specialised in Demography changed their names to indicate that races were also subjects of research. Therefore, from an institutional viewpoint, demographic and racist laws were inextricably linked. This brought about a conceptual association between demographic and racist policies, which is at the basis of the silence around births and fertility in Italian public discourse since the Second World War up to mid-1970s (Dalla Zuanna, 2004; Treves, 2001).

### 3.3. Fascist pronatalist propaganda

In the 1930s, along with strengthening of pronatalist policies, the government also carried out pronatalist propaganda. In the 1920s Italian fascism sustained the model of Catholic family, so as to gain moralists' and Catholics' support. After the 1929 plebiscite registered approval of the fascist state, Italian fascism promoted the model of fascist large family (Dau Novelli, 1996; De Grand, 1976; De Grazia 1993a; Saraceno, 1991). Mussolini used the family to promote high fertility, and to establish a totalitarian state moulding a new civilization characterised by deeply fascist attitudes in all areas of life. He considered the family suitable for training young people to desire children, and to respect the authorities and the fascist cult of homeland (Dau Novelli, 1996; De Grand, 1976; De Grazia, 1993; De Grazia 1993a; Ipsen, 1996, Quine, 1996; Treves, 2001)

The fascist large family had a patriarchal structure based on the values of motherhood and fatherhood: the fascist woman was a stay-at-home mother-wife faithful to the fascist cult of homeland (Dau Novelli; 1996; De Grand, 1976; De Grazia, 1992; De Grazia 1993a); the fascist man was a worker-soldier and virile father-husband who served the nation both in peace and at war (De Grazia, 1993). Despite the fact that Italian fascism was characterised by a misogynist attitude (De Grazia, 1992; De Grazia, 1993a), the role of disseminating the model of fascist large family was mostly assigned to women. They became the main targets of fascist pronatalist propaganda (Dau Novelli; 1996; De Grand, 1976; De Grazia, 1992; De Grazia 1993a). This was based on two images of woman: on one hand, the skinny, cosmopolitan, hysterical, decadent and infertile crisis-woman; on the other hand, the flourishing, robust, happy, calm, patriotic, and fertile mother-woman who was embodied by countrywomen. The major Italian magazines (e.g., *La Domenica del Corriere* e

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<sup>20</sup> At this time all workers contributed to a fund which financed maternity insurance, nuptial prizes and fertility prizes. The maternity insurance payments were the following: 300 liras for the first child, 350 liras for the second and the third one, 400 for the fourth one and any subsequent child. Agricultural workers were given 150 liras for the first child, 175 for the second and the third one, and 200 for the fourth and any subsequent child. Nuptial prizes were between 1,500 and 5,000 liras; they varied according to the man's job. Fertility prizes were between 400 and 3,000 liras; 1,000-9,000 for twin births (Ipsen, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> Only hiring and promotion preferences for married men were suspended for some categories of public workers (Ipsen, 1996).

*L'illustrazione italiana*) no longer showed pictures of long-limbed sophisticated American smoker-women wearing short hair and trousers (Dau Novelli, 1996). During the 1930s, these magazines illustrated only Italian women with large hips, wearing long hair and long skirts (Dau Novelli, 1996). To develop an Italian fashion industry, in 1935 the fascist government established the *Ente nazionale della Moda* (National Fashion Corporation) with the task of producing clothes for the larged-hipped fascist mother-women (De Grand, 1976). The above mentioned Day of the Mother and Child (see section no. 3.2.) was devoted to celebrate the fascist mother-women<sup>22</sup> (De Grazia, 1993). The role model for fascist mother-women was spread through the Italian radio and cinema<sup>23</sup> (Dau Novelli, 1996). But the main fascist pronatalist propaganda tools became the female organizations of the *Partito nazionale fascista* (PNF, Fascist National Party)<sup>24</sup>. They were in charge of socialising individuals by means of role models for fascist women (Dau Novelli, 1996; De Grand, 1976; De Grazia, 1992; De Grazia 1993a). Upper middle-class women volunteered in these organisations and managed their activities. They taught lower-class women to take care of their houses following rational home-management rules, to raise their children to become fascist men, to serve their husbands diligently and comfort them from the pressure and anxiety of modern life (Dau Novelli, 1996; De Grand, 1976; De Grazia, 1992; De Grazia 1993a). At the same time, fascist male party organisations<sup>25</sup> taught men military and physical education (Dau Novelli, 1996). To become virile, young men were told to eat male sex food (e.g., male animals' meat and milk of mothers who gave birth to male living creatures; Tallarico, 1942), and to practice sex even with prostitutes (De Grazia, 1993).

#### 4. Italian women's attitudes towards family formation

Italian fertility decreased during the fascist period of power: in 1930 the average number of children per woman was equal to about 3.4; in 1937 it reached the level of about 3 children per woman on average. It increased slightly in 1938 and 1939, when it was equal to 3.08 and 3.1 children on average per woman respectively (Teitelbaum and Winter, 1985). But it started decreasing again as soon as Italy entered the Second World War (i.e., June 10, 1940) (Teitelbaum and Winter, 1985). Also the completed cohort fertility declined: it had started in 1913 (Coale and Treadway, 1986), and it was smaller for women who lived during fascist time than it had been for women who ended their reproductive age before fascist pronatalist policies were implemented. It was equal to 4.5 children for the generation of women who were born in 1875, to 3.14 for the 1900 generation, and to 2.27 for the 1925 generation (Livi Bacci, 2002). Italian fascist pronatalism failed in achieving its primary objective of increasing Italian fertility<sup>26</sup> (De Grazia, 1993; Ipsen, 1996; Quine, 1996; Treves, 2001; Saraceno, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> Mussolini chose to celebrate this day on every December 24<sup>th</sup> (Christmas Eve) so as to give some degree of religious legitimacy to it (De Grazia, 1993; Ipsen, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> The Italian fascist government created in 1928 the *Ente italiano audizioni radiofoniche* (EIAR, Italian Radio Corporation). In 1938, it nationalised the *Istituto Luce*, which produced Italian movies (Dau Novelli, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> The women's section of the Italian Fascist Party were the *Fasci Femminili*, which gathered middle-class women, and controlled the *Massaie rurali* (Country Housewives) and the *Sezione operaie e lavoratrici a domicilio* (SOLD, Home-based Female Workers' Sections). There were also specific organisations for young girls: the *Giovani fasciste* (Young Fascists, between 18 and 22 years of age), the *Piccole italiane* (Little Italians, 20-24 years old), and the *Gruppi universitari fascisti* (GUF, Fascist University Groups) (Dau Novelli, 1996; De Grand, 1976; De Grazia, 1992; De Grazia 1993a).

<sup>25</sup> The main male fascist party organisations were: *Figli della lupa* (Sons of the Wolf), *Balilla* (bear of the Fascist party youth group), and *Avanguardisti* (Avant-garde men) (Dau Novelli, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Both Ipsen (1997) and Quine (1996) also consider ineffective Italian fascist policies aimed at improving population quality, protecting motherhood and reducing infant mortality. Despite declining during fascist time, Italian infant mortality rates, stillborn rates and maternal death rates, remained too high compared to other European countries. The agencies of ONMI were unequally distributed. They were more numerous and efficient in the cities and in the Northern regions, than in the country side and Southern regions (Ipsen, 1996; Quine,

Country families were the largest, with 7.3 children on average per woman, despite the fact that they were not the main targets of fascist pronatalism<sup>27</sup> (De Grazia, 1993).

Due to its authoritarian nature, Italian fascist regime prevented opinion surveys on pronatalist policies (Treves, 2001). The *Istituto di orientamento professionale* (Professional School) for women of Rome carried out two surveys on students' aspirations in life. One survey was conducted in 1937 among a sample of (1000) girls aged 14-18 years (De Grazia, 1993); the other one took place in 1939 among a sample (1000) girls aged 16-18 years (Dau Novelli, 1996). Both the surveys showed that the majority of interviewed girls desired no more than two children, and that they disliked the company of children as well as typically feminine activities, such as housecleaning, sewing and knitting. They would prefer going to the cinema to doing sports, and dancing to singing, painting or playing music. These surveys only reveal the aspirations of professional school students who belonged to the Roman middle class. These students' would not desire to become a fascist stay-at-home mother who devoted her life only to her children and husbands (Dau Novelli, 1996; De Grazia, 1993).

Other studies reveal that, due to financial problems, middle and working classes married women in the northern as well as southern Italian regions have applied birth control methods during fascist time (see note no. 4; De Grazia, 1992; De Grazia, 1993; Treves, 2001). Given the prohibition of contraception, the majority relied on *coitus interruptus* and illegal abortion (De Grazia, 1993). In middle class women's eyes, having many children represented a violation of simple rules of home economics. They had been taught these rules by upper class women during courses organised by the fascist Party female organisations (see section no. 3.3.; De Grazia, 1993a). In a letter addressed to Mussolini, a factory worker's wife of Milan explained that she could have only one child and that she had to work outside home because of her husband's low salary (De Grazia, 1993a). Italian fascism implemented policies against female labour force participation (see section 3.2.), but it also kept men's salaries low. As a consequence, women had to find paid labour outside home. They mostly had part-time occupations or worked in the shadow economy (De Grazia, 1992; Saraceno, 1991). It is estimated that, during fascist time, the percentage of married women with a paid job increased (from 12% in 1931, to 20.7% in 1936); women accounted for 27% of the Italian labour force in 1936, when about 25% of women of working age were employed (De Grazia, 1992). It decreased female illiteracy, and it increased the number of woman nurses, teachers, journalists, architects and writers (De Grand, 1976; Saraceno, 1991). Women were 4% of university students in 1911-1912, they accounted for 18% in 1935-1936 (Dau Novelli, 1996; De Grand, 1976).

The regime succeeded in spreading the male breadwinner family. It laid down a model of gender relations that were to last far longer than fascism itself (Saraceno, 1991). But it failed to stop female emancipation and the modernisation process (Dau Novelli, 1996; De Grazia, 1993a; De Grand, 1976; Saraceno, 1991). Fascist policies did not prevent the expansion of mass media (mostly radio, movies, telephone), cars, foreign consumer goods, other leisure facilities (e.g. after-work bars, sport and recreation places) and holidays. These measures brought about changes in individuals' opportunity structures: people began finding their own life-dreams and selfish desires more attractive, than the idea of having many children (Dau Novelli, 1996; De Grazia, 1993a; De Grand, 1976). Furthermore, the fascist

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1996). Furthermore, Italian fascist migration policies failed their objectives: Italian citizen's emigration towards the cities continued (Nobile, 1974; Sori, 1975; Ipsen, 1996); emigration abroad decreased, but repatriations did not increase (Nobile, 1974).

<sup>27</sup> It was in these families' own interest to have several children. During fascist time, sharecropping agreements and redemption lease contracts were signed which, providing for the division of agricultural products between property owners and occupants, encouraged having numerous children in order to benefit from their free agricultural labour (De Grazia, 1993).

regime based its propaganda on the role model played by the large-hipped countrywoman with long hair and long skirts. But it failed to arrest the circulation of images of beautiful and attractive women, such as the Italian actresses photographed by Arturo Ghergo and Elio Luxardo in the 1930s (Amendola and Iaccio, 1999). Finally, pronatalist policies strengthened individuals' perception of the family as an entity independent of the State, which carried interests different from those of the national community (Dau Novelli, 1996). The regime set up a complicated bureaucratic system to access its welfare services. This system induced an aversion towards the state within the population, and led to the use of family and friendship networks in order to access state services. In fascist Italy, Italians began to believe that "the family exists independently of the society, as a shelter against state interference, rather than a pillar for the nation state" (De Grazia, 1993a, p. 163).

### SUMMARY

This paper set out to provide an overview of literature on Italian fascist pronatalism. It is organised in four parts. First, we analysed the demographics which led to implement pronatalist policies. Second, we examined fertility decline and pronatalist policies in the light of Italian demographers' population theories and fascist demographic ideology. Third, we explored the main pronatalist provisions carried out by the regime. Finally, we looked at Italian women's life aspirations and dispositions towards reproduction and family formation.

The Italian fascist regime promoted the creation of ISTAT in 1926. The institute made possible progresses in the demographic surveys (Ipsen, 1996; Leti, 1996; Treves 2001). The 1931 study on marital fertility revealed a decline in Italian women's completed cohort fertility (Ipsen, 1996; Treves, 2001). The observation of fertility decline led Gini and De Finetti to exclude hypotheses of increases in fertility in their 1931 population projections. They projected that by the 1960s, the Italian population would have started shrinking. These projections fostered fears of population decline (Treves, 2001; Ipsen, 2002; Overbeek, 1974), which were confirmed by the 1936 census figures.

Despite having different viewpoints regarding the origins of fertility decline and the effectiveness of pronatalist policies, Corrado Gini and Livio Livi, the main Italian demographers during interwar time (De Sandre, 2002; Ipsen, 1996; Treves, 2001), agreed that natalist policies were necessary, because low fertility prevented human biological and genetic evolution. Most Italian demographers shared Livi's opinion according to which financial incentives to reproduction were the most effective measures to counteract fertility decline (De Sandre, 2002; Ipsen, 1996; Treves, 2001). Although their eugenics theory was contrary to racist measures, the majority did not officially disagree with fascist 1938 racist policies (Treves, 2001). Demographers' concerns about Italian population decline were shared by the Italian fascism. Mussolini implemented pronatalist policy with the purpose of increasing the number of Italian inhabitants (Mussolini, 1927; Mussolini, 1928). However pronatalist policy also served a function in Italian fascism's foreign and domestic policies. On the one hand, it served for justifying fascist colonialist ambitions (Carocci, 1967; De Grazia 1993; Nobile, 1974; Quine, 1996; Treves, 2001; Zunino, 1985). On the other hand, it represented a strategy to gain Catholics', moralists' and peasants' support, and to build a totalitarian state (Dau Novelli, 1996; De Grazia, 1993; Ipsen, 1996, Quine, 1996; Treves, 2001; Saraceno, 1991). It also served as an argument to justify the racist laws implemented after 1937 (Treves, 2001).

Italian fascism's pronatalism influenced the regime's entire demographic policy. Anti-emigration and anti-urbanisation provisions, and positive eugenics were carried out, along with measures for increasing fertility. We distinguish two periods in the development of fascist pronatalism. In the first period (from the 1922 March on Rome, to the 1929 plebiscite), the Italian fascist regime prohibited contraception and abortion, it introduced a bachelor tax, which financed activities for the protection of motherhood and infancy, and tax exemption for

large families. Mussolini considered these policies suitable for gaining Italians' approval to the regime. After the 1929 plebiscite showed the support of the people for fascism, pronatalist policies became useful to mould the fascist civilization and to establish the totalitarian state. During the second period of fascist pronatalism (from the 1929 plebiscite, to the 1943 fall of the regime) the fascist government strengthened the link between pronatalism and improvement of motherhood and childhood: ONMI, the institution that protected motherhood and childhood, was put in charge of managing financial prizes for large families. Policies that penalised non-reproductive behaviours as well as those that financially supported reproductive behaviours were tightened up; the duration of maternity leave was increased. Pronatalist propaganda started, with the purpose of establishing a new fascist civilization based on the role models of fascist stay-at-home mother-wife, and worker-soldier virile father-husband. After the 1936 proclamation of the Italian Empire in Africa, the Italian fascist regime strengthened its efforts to build a totalitarian state, on the example of Nazi Germany (De Felice, 1998). It implemented a large reform of its demographic policy. It introduced measures already used in Germany. For the first time Italian demographers were involved in the crafting of demographic policies (De Sandre, 2002; Treves, 2001). In 1938, the Italian fascist regime linked the racist laws to the demographic policies from an institutional point of view (De Sandre, 2002; Ipsen, 1996; Treves, 2001).

Despite an increase in total fertility rate in 1938 and 1939, the completed cohort fertility of Italian women who lived during fascist time is smaller than that of women who passed through their reproductive years before the implementation of fascist pronatalist policies. Fascist pronatalist policies failed (De Grazia, 1993; Ipsen, 1996; Quine, 1996; Treves, 2001; Saraceno, 1991). The Italian fascism regime did not transform into a totalitarian state (De Felice, 1998). It did not achieve its objective of moulding a new civilization devoted to reproduction and fascism. It promoted the male breadwinner family, but it did not stop female emancipation and modernisation processes (Dau Novelli, 1996; De Grazia, 1993a; De Grand, 1976; Saraceno, 1991). This encouraged life-aspirations incompatible with the reproductive behaviours promoted by fascist pronatalist propaganda. The regime activated a complicated bureaucratic system to benefit from state services, which encouraged an aversion for the state, and the perception that the family should act independently of the state (De Grazia, 1993a).

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