

# CHAOS AND CHANGE: THE FALL OF MUSSOLINI, THE SIGNING OF THE ARMISTICE BY ITALY IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE POWS INTERNED AT ZONDERWATER

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## **Sommario**

*L'articolo si propone di evidenziare il senso di caos psico-sociologico avvertito tra i prigionieri di guerra italiani internati nel campo di concentramento di Zonderwater (Pretoria) a seguito dell'armistizio dell'8 settembre 1943. Al centro dell'articolo alcuni passi dal manoscritto inedito In marcia, prodotto da prigionieri di guerra della Gabbia Politica (Block 8) istituita nel campo di concentramento di Zonderwater subito dopo la firma dell'armistizio. Particolare attenzione è posta alterna della memoria e del lutto.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past – which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a *citation à l'ordre du jour* – and that day is Judgement Day. (Benjamin, 1969:254)

Although much has been researched and written on the history of the Italian Prisoners of War in South Africa<sup>1</sup>, their contribution to, and influence on, South African life in the years of their detention, very little, if any attention, has been given to the literary production by the prisoners themselves, and the unique vision into the human psyche and war these writings give the modern reader. To paraphrase Benjamin, thus far attention has primarily been given to the chronicle of major or minor ‘acts’ of these individuals, however in order to gain as complete a vision as possible of these events in Italian South African history it becomes necessary to cite events in all their moments and manifestations, independent of their political correctness or incorrectness.

Neitzel and Welzer, in their book, *Soldaten: On Fighting, Killing and Dying*, state that “waging war is neither the only logical result of cost-benefit analysis nor a necessary consequence of objective circumstances. A physical body will always fall according to the laws of gravity and never otherwise, but whatever human beings do they could always have done differently” (2011:8).

This paper will investigate the effects of the fall of Mussolini on 25 July 1943, the signing of the Armistice between the Kingdom of Italy and the Allies (Allied Nations) on 3 September 1943, (made public on 8 September 1943), on the dynamics of the Prisoner of War (PoW) Camp in Zonderwater<sup>2</sup>. A selection of unpublished texts from

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<sup>1</sup> See: Carlo Annese, *I diavoli di Zonderwater, 1941-1947*, Milan, Sperling & Kupfer, 2010; Lorenzo Carlesso, *Centomila prigionieri italiani in Sud Africa, Il campo di Zonderwater*, Ravenna, Longo Editore, 2009; B. Moore & K. Fedorowich, *The British Empire and its Italian Prisoners of War, 1940-1947*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002; Luigi Pignatelli, *Il Secondo Regno*, Longanesi, 1969; Fedora Sasso, *Campo prigionieri di guerra di Zonderwater*, Rai Storia; Stefano Moni, *Captivi italici in Sud Africa (1941-1947)*, 1989, Viva Films Ltd. Flavio; G. Conti, *I prigionieri di guerra italiani, 1940-1945*, Il Mulino, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> The current paper focuses exclusively on the PoWs in South Africa, specifically those interned at Zonderwater, Block 8, it must be highlighted that the dramatic events of 1943 and their effects were felt and commented on also by the Italian ‘political fascist’ PoWs interned in camps in India, East Africa, Egypt, the UK and the USA. Particular attention has been given to the subject of the Italian PoWs interned in the USA by Flavio G. Conti, *I prigionieri italiani negli Stati Uniti*, Il Mulino, 2012; E. Aga Rossi, *Il problema dei prigionieri italiani nei rapporti tra Italia e gli anglo-americani*, in R.H. Rainero (ed), *II prigionieri militari italiani durante la Seconda Guerra Mondiale. Aspetti e problemi storici*, Marzorati, 1985; Francesca Somenzari, *8 settembre 1943: Gli Stati Uniti e I*

the manuscript, *In marcia*, produced by the inmates of Block 8, initially Block 5, a segregated camp constituted after the Armistice to detain the ‘*politici*’ or fascists and non-collaborators, will be examined and commented on from a socio-psychological perspective<sup>3</sup>. The analysis will illustrate how the human spirit is affected by the chaos caused by the dissolution of prior norms, and the manner in which the interned soldiers of *Special Cage*, through their writing and creative expression, sought to bring order to their disintegrating world through memory and the recording of memory<sup>4</sup>. It will also be shown that the manuscript was more than just a repository of memory for these inmates but a means through which the inmates of *Special Cage* dealt with the trauma resulting from the loss of a cause they believed in.

From the writings in the manuscript *In marcia* (On the March), it is evident that the choice made was not only a conscious choice, but also one of faith. In remembering key events and sacrifices, the soldiers of *Special Cage* actively engage in acts of faith renewal, similar to the recitation of the Creed in Apostolic ceremonies. However, although these writings serve as reminders of their pledge, they also serve as an instrument through which they come to grips with the chaos and trauma caused by loss.

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*prigionieri italiani*, Arcane, 2013. The commentaries and reactions of these PoWs echo those of Block 8 at Zonderwater. However a comprehensive comparative study of the above fall outside the scope of the present article and will be dealt with in subsequent research.

<sup>3</sup> It must be stressed that these texts and the manuscript as a whole reflect the sentiments of an isolated group of the camp and do not necessarily echo the feelings and beliefs of the so-called *collaborators* who were in the majority.

<sup>4</sup> Only a select sample of prose writing from the manuscript will be analysed for the purposes of this cursory study. The manuscript as a whole as well as its relevance to the existing body of research on the ‘political problem’ of those military PoWs that after 8 September 1943 refused to embrace ‘collaboration’ is part of a larger research project which will subject not only the writings but also the visual representations contained in the manuscript to analysis and commentary.

## CALM BEFORE THE STORM

### Textualising and Con-textualising the Text

With the fall of Mussolini on 25 July 1943, the scene had been set for a dramatic change in Italian politics. The public announcement on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September of the same year of the signing of the Armistice marked the decisive turn of Italy's participation in the war from being an ally to Germany to that of being a co-belligerent of the USA and Britain. From this date, the status of the PoWs was uncertain: were they still to be considered PoWs or were they now 'free'. One thing was however certain, life in the camp would change and Zonderwater would become a microcosmic reflection of the chaos experienced so many kilometres away in Italy. Lorenzo Carlesso in his book, *Centomila Prigionieri Italiani in Sud Africa: Il campo di Zonderwater*, presents the following analysis of the sentiments of the Italian PoWs towards the events that took place in 1943:

Lontani dalla Patria, i prigionieri italiani in Sud Africa vissero gli avvenimenti politici dell'estate '43 con incredulità e smarrimento. Tra i reticolati la propaganda fascista aveva mantenuto fino a quel momento un ruolo di guida, frutto anche dell'indottrinamento subito in Italia da venti anni di regime.<sup>5</sup> (2009:173)

At first glance, the manuscript is in itself a work of art. It comprises a number of elegant and sophisticated ink sketches, charcoal drawings, lithographs, watercolours and paintings typical of the era and style of the period. The lithographs are evocative of the futurist movement and the script used, in line with Marinettian aesthetics. The individual texts – hand-written in calligraphic swirls and loops, something foreign to a 21<sup>st</sup> century reader, cause the ambiguous reaction of alienation and admiration but are in themselves artistic

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<sup>5</sup> Far from the Fatherland, the Italian Prisoners of War experienced the events of the summer of '43 with disbelief and a sense of loss. Behind the barbed-wire fences Fascist propaganda had, up until that moment, provided guidelines, the fruit of indoctrination sustained in Italy over twenty years of the Regime. (own translation)

creations. However aesthetically pleasing the manuscript may appear, the human and psychological story it tells is far more dramatic. Composed of 244 folios, the manuscript is a glimpse into the psyches of a few PoWs who when faced with a disintegrating reality chose to hold on to the only thing they knew, their moral duty and obligation to their country and *their* leader.

From 1941 to 1943 the PoW camp at Zonderwater had transformed itself, notwithstanding the barbed wire and block divisions, into a true Italian city. Mario Gazzini, an ex-PoW at Zonderwater who prolonged his detention till 1947 in order to complete his book, offers the reader a unique view into life in the camp between 1941 and 1947. His book, *Zonderwater: I prigionieri in Sudafrica (1941-1947)*, is a seminal part of contextualising the manuscript in question in as much as it gives a first-hand account of the history of the camp from its inception to its closure. In this book, Gazzini describes Zonderwater in the following manner:

A uno sguardo d'insieme, Zonderwater appariva come un'estesa città rossa (rossi i mattoni, rossa la terra), ordinata in una geometria regolare che ricordava l'urbanistica ad angolo retto dei Romani, con 30 km di strada, 16 campi di calcio, 22 teatri, 3.000 letti d'ospedale e poi scuole, orti, cappelle, piazze, monumenti...Insomma, una vera, grande città italiana costruita dagli italiani a sud del Tropico del Capricorno. E quando durante la passeggiata serale i cittadini di Zonderwater guardavano il cielo, scoprivano ogni volta che al posto delle stelle dell'Orsa splendeva adesso la Croce del Sud.<sup>6</sup> (1987:44-45)

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<sup>6</sup> Viewed as a whole, Zonderwater looked like a vast red city (red bricks, red ground), organised in a regular geometry reminiscent of the angular urban design of the Romans. It had 30 km of road, 16 football pitches, 22 theatres, 3,000 hospital beds and then schools, gardens, chapels, squares, monuments...All in all a truly large Italian city, built by the Italians south of the Tropic of Capricorn. And when, during their evening stroll, the citizens of Zonderwater looked to the sky they would discover that the stellar constellation of the Bear had been replaced by the Southern Cross. (own translation)

The atmosphere was one of camaraderie, an intense feeling of solidarity and ‘we are all in it together’. However, on 25 July 1943 the dynamics changed and Zonderwater became a microcosm of the macrocosm of World War II, echoing the divided sentiments that were being felt in Italy. Gazzini once again guides us through this change in atmosphere when he writes:

La storia di Zonderwater, come quella degli altri concentramenti di prigionieri italiani nel mondo, ha rispecchiato in molte occasioni la storia che si stava svolgendo in territorio italiano. Questo avveniva soprattutto nei momenti più difficili. Anche Zonderwater ad esempio ha vissuto i drammi e le contraddizioni del 25 luglio 1943. Il fascismo era caduto, Mussolini arrestato. Pietro Badoglio aveva assunto il governo, ma – unica certezza – la guerra continuava. Era cambiato tutto. Cosa sarebbe successo, cosa stava succedendo in Italia? Nessuno era portatore di notizie sicure. C’erano gli strateghi da reticolato, i quali aumentavano la confusione. Gli irriducibili che non cambiavano colore [...] Aumentavano le inquietudini [...] Zonderwater, piccola Italia, era spaccata in due [...] L’8 settembre 1943, l’armistizio badogliano fra Italia e anglo-americani metteva fine, dopo le illusioni, anche alla guerra. Era finita. Proprio finita. Il fulmine della resa ha prima stordito, poi resi increduli, quindi alimentato speranze di una vicina libertà, di un imminente ritorno, ma ha anche acuito la delusione, il dolore degli sconfitti.<sup>7</sup> (1987:46)

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<sup>7</sup> The story of Zonderwater, like that of other concentrations of Italian prisoners in the world, on several occasions, mirrored history as it was developing on Italian soil. This phenomenon was felt all the more in moments of greatest difficulty. Even Zonderwater, for example, lived the drama and contradictions of the 25 July 1943. Fascism had fallen, Mussolini had been arrested. Pietro Badoglio took over the government, however – the only certainty – the war carried on. Everything had changed. What would happen? What was happening in Italy? No one carried any news. There were the barbed-wire strategists who added to the confusion. The irredeemable that refused to change colour [...] Restlessness increased [...] On 8 September 1943, the Badoglio armistice between Italy and the Anglo-Americans ended the war after many illusions. It was over – really over. The lightning bolt

It is this climate of political change, uncertainty and defeat that becomes the catalyst to the production of the manuscript *In Marcia*.

Throughout the manuscript two dates recur in many of the writings, 25 July and 8 September 1943. The incredible events on those two dates, and their effect on the *irredeemable* is succinctly summarized in a single question by Gazzini: “Era proprio vero. Si poteva, di punto in bianco trasformarsi da nemici in amici?”<sup>8</sup> (46). It is clear from this simple question that at that moment in the history of the camp chaos had descended on the tranquil citadel and that daily life and interaction as the PoWs had known it would be undeniably changed. Although the majority of the PoWs accepted the political shift, regarding the surrender as a step closer to liberation, others like the *Camice Nere* (Black Shirts), retreated into denial, acting as if nothing had happened, the trauma too great to accept. They would not waver, declaring that they would only accept judgment on their return to Italy. According to Gazzini (1987), it was a question of prestige and dignity which echoed in the courage to shout for all to hear, “Viva il Duce!”<sup>9</sup>.

The contrasting sentiments of the close to 70,000 PoWs escalated into violent attacks and it soon became necessary to tame the so-called ‘Italian wolves’. A referendum was held in which all the citizens of the ‘suburbs’ of the city of Zonderwater were called upon to vote. It was decided that the *camerati* were to be segregated in a single camp. Initially this was to be Block 5, later they were moved to Block 8, also known as *Special Cage*. Soon after their relocation the *politici*, one of the many names for the inhabitants of *Special Cage*, regained that discipline and order so pivotal to their identity.

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of the surrender first deafened, then rendered incredulous, it fuelled hope of a near liberation, of an imminent return, but it also accentuated disappointment, the pain of the vanquished. (own translation)

<sup>8</sup> It was really true. Could one, point blank, transform oneself from foe to friend? (own translation)

<sup>9</sup> The PoW camp at Zonderwater was no exception to these events and sentiments. Arrigo Petacco in his book, *Quellichedissero no*, published by Mondadori in 2011, addresses instances of other Italian PoW camps in Allied countries and the circumstances surrounding the decision of certain PoWs to remain true to the *causafascista*.

However, although the segregation of the *politici* from the *collaboratori* proved necessary from the perspective of maintaining camp order, it could be argued that psychologically, the separation of the close to 3,000 inmates from the other PoWs may have hampered the process of rehabilitation and the coming to terms with the reality of the irreversible situation. Gazzini comments on this isolation by saying: “Erano due-tremila, isolati dal resto dei PoW. Un isolamento che allentava i sogni e anche inutili illusioni”<sup>10</sup> (47).

According to Kurt Lewin’s theory of group dynamics, more specifically his study on *Quasi-Stationary Equilibria in Group Life and the Problem of Permanent Change*:

Viewing a social stationary process as the result of a quasi-stationary equilibrium, one may expect that any added force will change the level of the process. The idea of “social habit” seems to imply that, in spite of the application of a force, the level of social process will not change because of some type of “inner resistance” to change. To overcome this inner resistance, an additional force seems to be required, a force sufficient to “break the habit”, to “unfreeze” the custom.

Many social habits are anchored in the relation between individuals and certain group standards. An individual P may differ in his personal level of conduct [...] from the level that represents group standards [...] by a certain amount. If the individual should try to diverge “too much” from group standards, he would find himself in increasing difficulties. He would be ridiculed, treated severely, and finally ousted from the group they belong to or wish to belong to. In other words, the group level itself acquires value. It becomes a positive valence corresponding to a central force field with the [...] [forces] keeping the individual in line with the standard of the group. (Lewin, in Burke et al, 2009:75)

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<sup>10</sup> They were two-three thousand, isolated from the rest of the PoWs. An isolation that fed futile dreams and illusions. (own translation)

Therefore, by keeping like-minded individuals together, the group dynamic and ‘force-field’ is thus strengthened. If one were to apply Lewin’s theory of group dynamics and force fields to the situation of the Italian PoWs at Zonderwater, it would conclude that had the *politici* not been segregated, they may have come to grips with the reality of the situation sooner and accepted defeat. This however was not the case, their segregation strengthened their ideas and perpetuated the illusion, causing the trauma to become internalised. In the following section of this paper, it will be shown that the strengthening of the ‘force-field’ through isolation perpetuated the *discorsofascista* creating a false sense of reality, thus stagnating the grieving process of the inmates of *Special Cage*.

## **CALMING THE STORM**

### **Theoretical examination of the Con-text**

Thus far attention has been given to the situation of the PoWs pre announcement of the signing of the Armistice. A glimpse has also been given to the social effects caused by the chaos which erupted in the citadel of Zonderwater post event. However, history happens and historians determine which events are ‘historical’ and what inevitably will be included in the repository of ‘the way things turned out’. The facts are recorded, annotated and analysed through the magnifying-glass of scientific extrapolation. What is left is sanitized, devoid of emotion and the human factor. The reader of history will be able to tell you what happened, when it happened and who the protagonists of the events were. But history is not only about the protagonists, the foot soldiers have a far more interesting story to tell. Their memory of events and experiences give colour to the facts and remind the reader of the human factor of history and that in war there are no victors only victims, be they physical or psychological. Walter Benjamin succinctly illustrates this idea in part V of his *Illuminations* when he posits that:

The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again [...] For every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably. To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise it “the way it really was” (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger [...] The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. (1969:255)

As scholars our charge should be neither to accept nor to reject the happenings of History but rather to observe, comment and glean insight from these happenings and how they relate to our present conditions. Thus said, in order to qualify the examination of the manuscript *In Marcia* and its texts, within the scope of this paper, it is necessary to develop a framework that allows for the context of the manuscript and the human execution of the works to be viewed both from within and without their political landscape. In order to do so, it is necessary to approach the texts not only from a historical perspective, but as was mentioned in the Introduction, from the perspective of the human factor: why was it so important for these men to remember certain events in this particular manner and at this particular time; were they “seiz[ing] hold of a memory as it flash[ed] up at a moment of danger”, and if so, how do we as receivers of these memories react to them.

The manuscript is predominantly populated by texts that recall memorable events such as the March on Rome (22-29 October, 1922). These events, although by the time the manuscript was written, had occurred over twenty years ago, continued to be of great importance to the existence and identity of the members of *Special Cage*. Barbara A. Misztal in her article, *Collective Memory in a global age: learning how to remember and what to remember*, offers the following insight:

When talking about collective memory we tend to stress that, although memory is a faculty of individual minds,

remembering is social in origin and influenced by the dominant discourses. In other words, while it is the individual who remembers, remembering is more than a personal act as even the most personal memories are embedded in social context and shaped by social factors that make social remembering possible, such as language, rituals and commemoration practices. (2010:27)

When the inmates of *Special Cage* were segregated from the other PoWs (collaborators), the dominant discourse remained that of *Fascism* and remaining true to the cause. As was discussed previously, their very division from the rest of the inmates encouraged and aided the 'remembering' and in some way, shaped their reaction to events by perpetuating the *discorsofascista*. However, the act of remembering and memory in the context of this investigation cannot be considered solely as a social act, for if this were the case, the question would be why then are dates like 25 July and 8 September 1943 also remembered in the same manuscript. The social aspect of the memory and the remembering for the inhabitants of *Special Cage* was more than just a group of like-minded combatants reminiscing about the 'old-days'. For them, the remembering was an act of coming to grips with the loss of all that they had sacrificed and fought for. The dates 22-29 October 1922 and 25 July and 8 September 1943 are used in juxtaposing contexts. The latter dates are signifiers of chaos, loss and betrayal, and they become catalysts in the production of the manuscript as indicated by its preface:

In marcia questa è la volontà che nutrice la nostra Fede e non in attesa che è quanto sognano i rinunciatori, i liberati, mercenari, sfruttatori di momento, tepidi, ipocriti: nullità.

In marcia, contro-tutti e contro tutto, costi quel che costi, per l'onore e per la vera libertà, per l'Italia per il Duce<sup>11</sup>.

28 ottobre XXIII<sup>12</sup> (AA.VV., 1943-1947:5)<sup>13</sup>

The former dates are dates of *glory, honour and order*. These are dates that are used in the production of texts of memory, texts that relive the past, justify decisions and allow the inhabitants of *Special Cage* to deal with a loss that can only be rationalised through memory. By remembering the dates of glory, the memory of the past is kept alive and their choice to remain loyal to the *causafascista* is justified. It is also a way for them to deal with the loss caused by the signing of the Armistice.

### **Trauma, Loss and Grieving: Identifying the 'griever' through textual analysis**

It has often been heard in times of loss and grief within a community that people will proclaim that their loss is greater than that of others or that the others cannot understand the loss that they are experiencing. Although this may be partially true at the time, the fact is that loss and grief, albeit communal, is experienced differently by different individuals. Berger in his book, *The Five Ways We Grieve: Finding Your Personal Path to Healing After the Loss of a Loved One* (2009), identifies between five types of grievers: Nomads, Memorialists, Normalisers, Activists and Seekers. Accordingly, each

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<sup>11</sup> On the march, this is the want that nourishes our Faith, not waiting which is what the denouncers, the liberated, mercenaries, opportunists, tepid, hypocrites dream of: nothingness. On the march, against everyone and against everything, no matter the cost – for honour, for true liberty, for Italy, for Il Duce. 28 October XXIII.

<sup>12</sup> When the fascists came into power in Italy they instituted a calendar that ran concurrently with the Gregorian calendar. The Fascist calendar or *Calendario dell'era Fascista* begins on 28 October 1922, the date of the March on Rome. Thus 28 October 1922 marks year I of the Fascist era. The calendar was abandoned directly after the fall of the regime.

<sup>13</sup> The manuscript in question is unpublished, however works contained in the volume date from 1943 through to 1947. It is for this reason that the date of publication cited when referencing the manuscript spans the arch of four years.

type of griever exhibits different actions or behaviours associated with grief. The *Nomad* stands in no-man's-land, not having resolved the question of grief, this individual does not understand the loss that has affected his/her life; the *Memorialist* seeks to preserve the memory of the loved one and is committed to being the repository of past memories; the *Normalizer* seeks to recreate the sense of community and family; the *Activist*, focuses on helping others deal with issues of grief and loss that they have experienced; the *Seeker* will adopt religious, philosophical or spiritual beliefs in order to bring meaning to their lives and experience.

The manuscript presents works that echo all five types of grievers however, this paper will focus mainly on those texts that exemplify traits of the *Memorialist*. Although Berger's model proves useful in the identification of types of grievers, allowing us to identify the majority of the grievers of *Special Cage* as *memorialists*, it does not explain the nature and tone of the writings. In order to find an explanation for this, one needs to refer to yet another aspect of loss, for whereas Berger identifies the state of the individual, loss is an emotion which qualifies that state and therefore, the process of loss needs to be addressed in conjunction with the individual identifier or state. In order for this to occur and to qualify the argument, it is necessary to view Berger's 'types of griever' in conjunction with Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's model of the varying 'stages of grief'.

According to Kübler-Ross (2003), loss or grief and dealing with the issues surrounding these manifests in five distinct behaviours or stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. These stages manifest to a greater or lesser degree in subjects dealing with traumatic events such as the diagnosis of a terminal illness, the loss of a loved-one or a dramatic change in life choices. They are not chronological in order and different subjects move through the stages differently, some even manifesting aspects of multiple stages contemporaneously.

If one looks back at the *Preface*<sup>14</sup> of the manuscript and does an analysis, it is apparent that the tone is one of anger, yet underlying this tone is a sense of denial. The words "In marcia" and "in attesa"

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<sup>14</sup> See footnote 5.

are underlined, thus highlighting and juxtaposing the two psychological and physical states of the divided PoWs: the members of *Special Cage* continuing their march, “in marcia” whilst the *collaborator* remain static, waiting their release, “in attesa”. The anger and feeling of betrayal is clearly evident in the slanderous description of the *collaboratori*, “[...] irinunciatori, iliberati, mercenari, sfruttatori di momento, tepidi, ipocriti” concluding with the ultimate of insults, “nullità”. The Armistice and what it meant for Italy is denied out-right, banishing those who saw it as an end to the war to nothingness. This denial is reinforced by the second paragraph of the preface in which the anger grows and the inmates pledge to continue marching, against everyone and everything at whatever cost, for honour, true liberty, Italy and the Duce. The date at the end of preface, written in accordance to the Fascist calendar further reflects the state of denial and places the manuscript and its authors in the realm of the *memorialist* as both the use of the calendar and the date become significant. The manuscript thus becomes a vehicle through which the inmates of *Special Cage* deal with the chaos caused by the events of history and recreate order through memory.

The stage of anger can again be seen in the text, *Punto Fermo* (The Stand Point), where the ‘us’ and ‘them’ scenario climaxes in provocative language and is aided by stylistic rhythm. The opening paragraph is a clear statement of intention and represents a conscious and determined decision:

Dal 25 luglio 1943 XXI<sup>15</sup> noi ci proclamammo fascisti  
repubblicani. Di fronte alla capitolazione di un governo  
giolittiano, assunto al disonore dal rinunciatarismo con  
un tradimento lurido quanto le loro coscienze, noi  
dichiarammo di continuare per la strada retta per la via  
dell'onore [...]  
[...] dal 25 luglio 1943 XXI [...]

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<sup>15</sup> On 25 July 1943, Benito Mussolini was voted out of power by his own Grand Council. Upon leaving the meeting with the King, Victor Emmanuel II, Mussolini was arrested and taken to the island of Ponza. General Pietro Badoglio became the new Prime Minister. Badoglio was regarded as a sell-out by all who remained true to the cause after the fall of Mussolini.

[...] quando l'avvenire era un ignoto [...]  
[...] quando la fede era un rischio [...]  
[...] quando la volontà era un sacrificio [...] <sup>16</sup> (AA.VV.,  
1943-1947:15)

The repetition of the date, coupled with the use of the fascist calendar year serves to illustrate a need to qualify the 'event' and the reaction to the 'event'. Although 25 July 1943 caused the first tremor that would then capitulate into the earthquake and deafening lightning-bolt alluded to in Gazzini and which plunged the inmates into chaos, the return to the use of the fascist calendar year restores order. In this text the stages and emotions of grief vacillate between anger, bargaining and depression.

The ordered language and description of the decision is sharply contrasted by the angry ramble and figurative and literal regurgitation of insults which follow, symbolic of the chaos caused by the decision of their comrades to 'renounce their faith':

Sulla stabilità insensibile del pietismo imbelle, delle fedeltà – vigliacche, dei vincoli giustificanti; la nostra reazione immateriale interna alle azioni materiali esterne, fu quasi un perturbamento funzionale degli spiriti; ma non fu certo una illazione delle coscienze sul piano delle volontà!<sup>17</sup> (AA.VV., 1943-1947:15)

Throughout the text the reader is confronted by contrasting uses of language. When reminiscing on that fateful day (25 July 1943) and the decisions taken by the *collaborator* the language is disorganised, chaotic, almost infantile, reverting to name calling: "shit-mongers",

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<sup>16</sup> From 25 July 1943 XXI we proclaimed ourselves republican fascists [...] we declared that we would continue on the straight and narrow road, on the road of honour [...] from 25 July 1943 XXI [...] when the future was unknown [...] when faith was risky [...] when will was a sacrifice [...] (own translation).

<sup>17</sup> Regarding the callous stability of unwarlike pietism, of faithfulness – cowardice towards justifying obligations; our internal immaterial reaction to the external material actions was almost a 'functional' perturbation of the spirit, it however certainly was not conjecture of conscience over will. (own translation)

“poo-pooers” yet at the same time it manages to maintain a strong, derogatory and insulting tone reinforcing the state of anger. By contrast the language used to describe their choice to remain republican fascists is strong, orderly and disciplined, yet retains the elements of loss amongst which, anger, bargaining and depression:

Gli avvenimenti che imperversano come una burrasca sul mondo rollante incidono nell'intimo i loro solchi.

[...] l'avvenire è un imperativo categorico; anche se esso fosse un avvenire di umiliazione e di servitù [...]

[...] la fede si trincerà, quasi si nasconde nella profondità dell'intimo e si defila al rischio...la volontà è un peso, un dolore, una noia [...]

Perché?

Avevamo forse sposato una causa certa? No! Avevamo sposato una causa giusta. Se essa è o sarà anche certa ciò sarà più del previsto.<sup>18</sup> (AA.VV., 1943-1947:15)

The concept of time and memory as well as its effect on the movement from chaos to order is clearly depicted in the following extract:

Il tempo modifica, plasma o riplasma; il raziocinio subentra alla istintività retta dello spirito, la materia riprende la sua funzione normale; si ristabilisce tra apparato digerente e cervello un contratto [...]

[...] noi che affrontammo l'ignoto perché esso era bello come una promessa; perché esso era profondo come una fede; perché esso era immenso come una dedizione; noi che donammo a piene mani per avere il

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<sup>18</sup> The events that rage like a storm score furrows on a world that rolls by [...] the future is a categorical imperative; even if it be a future of humiliation and servitude [...] faith will split, almost hiding in the depths of the private that runs from risk [...] will is a burden, painful, a nuisance [...] Why? Did we perchance espouse a cause that was certain?

No! We embraced a cause that was just. If it is or will prove to be certain as well, it is more than was expected. (own translation)

dono del donato; donammo spirito per avere anima<sup>19</sup>.  
(AA.VV., 1943-1947:15)

The pace is slower, the boiling passions of the previous paragraphs are cooled, but rather than being a relief from the tempestuous flood of anger in previous paragraphs the language is sombre, almost dirge like. It is in extracts like these that the stage of depression can be noted.

The majority of the texts in the manuscript show clear signs of denial and anger moving to depression, but perhaps the most striking of the texts in the manuscript, and those that pose the most questions from a psychological perspective are those that veer completely from the general tone such as the essay titled, *L'eterecosmico e le vibrazioni* or *Un problema pratico da carpentiere*. These two pieces were executed by the same PoW, who on investigation was in his early twenties and the youngest of the interned of the *politici*. From the content of the texts one can deduce that their author was probably a university student, which in itself is an anomaly inasmuch as all university students were exempt from military service. As Zonderwater was exclusively a military PoW camp, the chances that the author was a civilian are extremely remote, which would lead one to the conclusion that he was a volunteer.

In relation to the premise of this paper that the manuscript is both a manifestation of memory and faith renewal and by extension a vehicle through which the PoWs of *Special Cage* came to grips with the trauma of the Armistice and the ensuing chaos, these texts speak louder psychologically than those that are clearly open rants of rage.

Although the majority of the inmates of *Special Cage* were from volunteer units, such as the *Camice Nere*, they were all much older and had been part of the movement from its inception, the younger members, such as the author of the abovementioned texts, had espoused an ideal based on the images of glory, sacrifice and national

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<sup>19</sup> Time changes, shapes and reshapes; rationality takes over the instinctive charge of the spirit, the physical regains normal function; a contract between digestive apparatus and mind is re-established [...] we who confronted the unknown because it was as beautiful as a promise; because it was as profound as faith; because it was as immense as dedication; we who gave everything with open hands to receive the gift of the giver; we gave spirit to receive soul. (own translation)

pride. For them the trauma became personal, something too great to deal with in terms of the reality of the situation. Their process of dealing with the trauma becomes subconscious and repressed, identifying them, in terms of Berger's 'types of griever', as *Nomads*. In relation to Kübler-Ross's stages of grief, they are neither in denial or depression as denial would preclude some reference or negation of the present state and depression would manifest in almost total non-interaction. The fact that these two texts neither refer to the past nor show indications of non-interaction (the fact that the author participated in the creation of the manuscript indicates participation in camp activities) is indicative that for these inmates the process of grieving had not yet begun, something that leaves one with a certain feeling of disquiet.

## DEBRIS AFTER THE STORM

On 30 January 1947, the *Georgic*<sup>20</sup> left Durban harbour with the last 2,448 Italian PoWs. It arrived in Naples on 27 February of the same year. The fate of the manuscript *In Marcia* was as uncertain as the fate of those PoWs from *Special Cage* on their return to Italy. However, the military chaplain of the camp managed to smuggle it out, entrusting it to a Pretoria resident. In 1967, the chaplain returned to South Africa where he retrieved a number of his personal items as well as the manuscript. He then entrusted this manuscript to the current chaplain of Zonderwater Block, Father Giuseppe Lama, who donated it to the Zonderwater Museum. The manuscript *Inmarcia* is now preserved in the Zonderwater Archives.

Many of the works composed in *Special Cage* were destroyed after the closure of Zonderwater, the survival of this manuscript, *In Marcia*, gives the modern reader new insight into the reasons behind certain choices made in war. Viewed through the frameworks of

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<sup>20</sup> Although Lorenzo Carlesso in his book, *Centomila prigionieri italiani in Sud Africa: Il Campo di Zonderwater* cites the *Chitral* as being the last ship to leave Durban, on further investigation and consultation on 13/02/2013 with Dr Emilio Coccia, President of the *Associazione Zonderwater* and curator of the Zonderwater Archives, records show that it was in fact the *Georgic*. Of the 2,448 now ex-PoWs, the majority were from *Special Cage*.

Berger and Kübler-Ross one is able to analyse the context of the manuscript and the human execution of the works both from within and without their ‘political’ landscape allowing the work to speak from chaos to how order is restored through the active and conscious creation of the written text. Through this process, the manuscript becomes a vehicle through which the inmates of *Special Cage* seek to deal with the trauma of loss, each contributor displaying their individual manifestation of the grieving process. Although little is known of the fate of these inmates on their return to Italy, an interesting fact that arouse during research is that on closure of the camp in 1947 many of the inmates of *Special Cage* chose to re-qualify their PoW status, choosing to identify themselves on their repatriation cards as *non-collaborators* rather than *politici*. This choice was made, one can only presume, as a practical solution to facilitate their re-integration on repatriation: returning to Italy as an unrepentant *fascista* would not have been a viable option. Although one will never truly know the motivation behind this choice, and any attempt at explaining it remains conjecture, in terms of the psychology of grief and the grieving process, one could argue that they had moved on from the stage of anger to that of an acceptance of reality while still remaining loyal to their beliefs.

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