

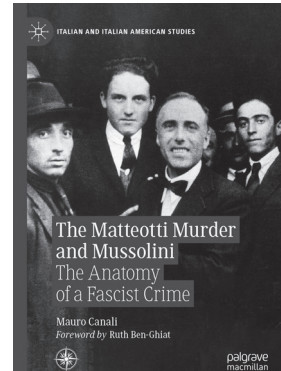
Canali, Mauro. *The Matteotti Murder and Mussolini. The Anatomy of a Fascist Crime* (Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Foreword; Ann. T. Pichey, trans). Palgrave MacMillan, 2024, 272 pp. ISBN 9783031414701

JOSÉ ANTONIO ABREU COLOMBRI*

Mauro Canali's work is the result of a long cycle of sorting out sources on the fascist system and Mussolini's political career. This editorial project took shape in the months leading up to the centenary of the crime against the multi-talented Giacomo Matteotti through the assembly of various academic papers and publications in Italian. From a long list, by thematic specialization, the following works stand out: *La scoperta dell'Italia. Il fascismo raccontato dai corrispondenti americani*, published in Venice (2017), and *Il delitto Matteotti*, revised and republished in Bologna (2024). The different chapters of *The Matteotti Murder and Mussolini. The Anatomy of a Fascist Crime* are grouped into four thematic blocks: "Anatomy of a Political Crime," "Mussolini's Responsibilities," "Mussolini's Defenders" and "After." The analytical models focus on the study of public administration documents and journalistic publications about a crime that acquired a strong international resonance and shocked large sectors of Italian society.

Although many journalists and historians have considered throughout the last century that the attack against Matteotti, for different reasons, was not an action planned by the State, there is a multidisciplinary revisionist work that considers that the exculpatory theories are not so clear. Specifically, Dr. Canali argues that important magistrates of the fascist State monitored, coerced and exercised violence against a multitude of political and union representatives. In the pages of the reviewed work, the author goes further and affirms that Mussolini was involved in the organization and perpetration of the crime. At the same time, the nature of the dictatorship and its glorification of violence (as a form of institutional regeneration and social purification) is explored in depth.

* Doctor en Estudios Norteamericanos. Estancia de investigación posdoctoral en la Universidad del Algarve, Facultad de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales, Porto, Portugal. Correo electrónico: abreucolombri@gmail.com. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8698-6493>



On the occasion of the centenary of the most significant murder of the first period of the fascist dictatorship, a multitude of articles and books are being published that speak of State crime. In particular, Dr. Canali's work focuses on issues that directly involve the political leadership of fascism. Due to the repercussions of the case, the entire propaganda machine had to be put to work at full capacity to exonerate the president of the government and try to clean up the image of Mussolini and the monarchy. However, the case went viral —both in the media and socially— due to the extreme violence used during the kidnapping (June 10, 1924) and the harshness of the scene in which the body was removed (August 16, 1924). This mournful place became a place of pilgrimage for thousands of people, who erected improvised mounds with flowers, candles, prints and inscriptions of all kinds. Many of the foreign correspondents based in Rome spread the news throughout the world.

In a linear fashion, throughout the 13 chapters, the thematic development of the work delves into the personal background of the assassinated political leader and his institutional relationship with the fascist movement, the events surrounding the kidnapping, torture, execution and concealment of the body and, finally, the consequences of this crime (for the State, the circles of the Italian Left and international anti-fascist activism). The personalities who had shown themselves to be against the Italian intervention in the First World War were, from the very beginning, alarmed by the danger represented by the drift of the system of beliefs towards conservative nationalism. The fascist movement, at the beginning of the 1920s, posed a great threat to individual and collective rights as well as to the democratic system itself and encouraged dialectical confrontation in all institutional circles. In this context of uncertainty, lawyer Matteotti's optimistic discourse against all forms of violence emerged. At the same time, his social denunciation and his courageous political criticism made him a target of the fascist squads. The official version, which was widespread in the following decades, was that a group of fascist radicals, acting on their own initiative, decided to attack Matteotti in order to remove obstacles and promote the project of restoring a great Italy. According to this widely held view, Matteotti was a simple opponent until June 1924. The book maintains that the criminal action of this group of blackshirts was neither improvised nor spontaneous as the effectiveness and speed of the attack on the socialist representative prove. Particular attention is also paid to the investigations of the Unitary Socialist Party (PSU) into the business activities and economic interests of Benito Mussolini (and his immediate circle of collabora-

tors, advisors and family members). There was much speculation in this regard over the decades, especially those focused on the illicit profits arising from energy supply contracts. It seems that the oil sold and supplied by various foreign companies left a lot of evidence of corruption (money laundering and embezzlement of assets), and considering the situation, the PSU devised a plan to bring this corruption to light in the plenary session or in a commission of the Italian parliament. This theory of the revelation of the energy business (*Sinclair Oil Corporation*) adds to the classic explanation of the fascist repression in the months of April and May 1924. The electoral process of April 6 had been preceded by a rather bitter campaign, in which the Left and liberal forces in favor of a democratic system had been very divided. Mussolini's victory was very broad after several reforms in the electoral legislation that favored the National Fascist Party. On May 30, Matteotti accused fascism of foul play in the Chamber of Deputies, making a taxonomic classification of all the arbitrary acts and legal abuses that had raised the figure of the Duce to electoral prominence. In this historic speech, Matteotti also denounced the use of systematic violence by fascist squads in the streets of towns and cities in all regions of Italy. On June 10, as already mentioned, the leader of the PSU was kidnapped, beaten and stabbed to death. From different points of view, the work pays much attention to the judicial process carried out during the winter months of 1924-1925. Official information described the event as street violence motivated by the provocations of the murdered man; the existence of a structural "scruadrismo" was always vehemently denied.

The journalistic publications aligned with the anti-fascist theses were dismantled and instrumentalized by the State in the summer of 1924. The Matteotti family always exercised activism against the fascist movement in Italy and assumed the intellectual and democratic legacy of Giacomo. Professor Canali, in a transversal manner in all the thematic developments of the research, tries to define the true nature of the fascist methodology and the individual logic of Benito Mussolini. In each chapter, a documentary reconstruction of the events is made and an analytical synthesis of the main journalistic messages of that time is proposed. In the last thematic block, the author reflects on the historical and philosophical symbolism associated with the figure of Matteotti starting from the second judicial process (1947). Throughout the whole work, two fundamental ideas are defended: the involvement of the political leadership of fascism, and the unexpected repercussion of the crime. The first idea provides new elements, the second idea has a long essayistic journey, but in this case the analysis focuses on

the repercussion of the crime and its consequences. In this sense, the work speaks of how the kidnapping of the general secretary of a secondary political force (which did not even obtain 6% of the votes in the general elections of the Kingdom of Italy) ended up having the repercussion of a first-rate assassination.

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