



EUI Working Papers

MWP 2009/08

MAX WEBER PROGRAMME

BORDERLINES IN THE BORDERLANDS:
DEFINING DIFFERENCE THROUGH HISTORY, "RACE", AND
CITIZENSHIP IN FASCIST ITALY

Roberta Pergher

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE
MAX WEBER PROGRAMME

***Borderlines in the Borderlands:
Defining difference through history, “race”, and citizenship in Fascist Italy***

ROBERTA PERGHER

This text may be downloaded for personal research purposes only. Any additional reproduction for other purposes, whether in hard copy or electronically, requires the consent of the author(s), editor(s). If cited or quoted, reference should be made to the full name of the author(s), editor(s), the title, the working paper or other series, the year, and the publisher.

The author(s)/editor(s) should inform the Max Weber Programme of the EUI if the paper is to be published elsewhere, and should also assume responsibility for any consequent obligation(s).

ISSN 1830-7728

© 2009 Roberta Pergher

Printed in Italy
European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy
www.eui.eu
cadmus.eui.eu

Abstract

The paper discusses the colony in Libya and the province of South Tyrol under Fascism. It focuses on their status as “borderlands” and what that meant in terms of defining the difference between the native populations on the one hand and the immigrant Italian population on the other. In particular, the paper analyzes the place afforded to the Libyan and the South Tyrolean populations in Italian ideology and legislation. It discusses the relevance of the myth of Rome for Italy’s expansion and analyzes various taxonomies of difference employed in the categorization of the “other,” in particular racial and religious markers of difference. After analyzing the limitations of citizenship in a fascist dictatorship and within the colonial environment in particular, the paper concludes with a short discussion of assimilative and segregationist approaches to “otherness.”

Keywords

Fascism, Colonialism, Borderlands, Myth of Rome, Citizenship, Race, Libya, South Tyrol

Introduction

In 1911, Italy invaded Libya, turning this former Ottoman territory into an Italian colony. Seven years later, during the last days of World War I, Italy occupied the northern region of South Tyrol, which until then had belonged to Austria-Hungary. Though conquered and annexed under Italy liberal regimes, the integration of both Libya and South Tyrol into the Italian polity occurred primarily under Fascism. Juxtaposing the cases of Libya, a colony, and South Tyrol, a national province, illustrates that the distinction between national and colonial possessions became increasingly blurred in the interwar period under Fascism. On the one hand, both territories were re-imagined as integrated regions of the Italian nation. As such, they were to be rendered “truly” Italian. On the other hand, the policies aimed at forging their Italianization took on markedly colonial connotations.

Italy was to span the Mediterranean, reaching across it from the Alpine ridge to the African desert. How was this national transformation to be accomplished? On a fundamental level, nationalist and colonialist circles imagined both South Tyrol and Libya as genuinely and rightfully Italian. A crucial referent in this respect was the ancient Roman Empire. The myth of Rome called for the return of these lands to Italy after millennia of “foreign” domination. A strong narrative of “redemption” was employed with respect to both South Tyrol and Libya. For instance, the regime saw fit to brand the two territories with monuments that established a direct link between ancient and fascist Rome. Though the assertion of spiritual and cultural distinctions continued to underwrite this imagined Italy and its “others,” discourses of difference were increasingly defined in racial terms. Such taxonomies of difference impinged also upon definitions of citizenship. The national incorporation of Libya, for instance, called for new-fangled parameters for citizenship. In fact, the management of “differences” within the borders of the nation, as opposed to colonial or external divergences, rendered the position of the “other” in question more complicated. The Fascist response to this challenge was to prioritize a politics of segregation over a politics of assimilation.

More than Symbols

The restoration of the Arch of Marcus Aurelius in Tripoli represents a striking example of how the Italian occupiers monumentalized the Roman past and put it to political use.¹ The arch was built in 164 B.C. When the Italians invaded Libya in 1911, it rested on the northwestern edge of the Arab medina, adjacent to the Mediterranean shore. The lower part of the arch was buried several feet below street level and the top part functioned as a store.² The urban intervention of the Italians in the medina was minimal, with only the most urgent redevelopments being undertaken. The store-converted arch, however, was reestablished as a monument. Following the invasion, the arch was painstakingly excavated and buildings in its proximity were demolished to create an open space around it, thereby disrupting its earlier integration into the fabric of daily life in the medina.

It should be noted that the recovery of the arch and its establishment as a monument was not a Fascist project. It was conceived and realized by the Italian liberal governments that preceded Mussolini’s rise to power. As such, it followed the trajectory of Roman invocation pursued by nationalist and colonialist advocates in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. As one writer surmised in 1912, by invading Libya, Italy had finally laid claim to “the ancient rights which come to

¹ For a detailed and shrewd analysis of the restoration of the arch of Marcus Aurelius see Krystyna von Henneberg, “The Construction of Fascist Libya: Modern Colonial Architecture and Urban Planning in Italian North Africa (1922-1943)” (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1996): 242-251. On the restoration of the arch see also the contemporary account of R. Micacchi, “L’arco di Marco Aurelio in Tripoli e la sistemazione della zona adiacente,” *Rivista delle Colonie Italiane*, VIII, no. 10 (October 1934): 824-839; Michele Marelli “Relazione al progetto di sistemazione dell’arco di Marco Aurelio in Tripoli,” *Africa Italiana*, Anno V, no. 3-4 (1933): 162-171.

² Sources disagree over the use of the arch at the time of the Italian invasion. One source records that the arch was used as a cinema, others say it served as a wine or coal store. See von Henneberg, *The Construction of Fascist Libya*, 242.

the heirs of the Roman conquest.”³ His reasoning was widely shared at the time, and its logical consequence was the recuperation of everything Roman.⁴

Figure 1 *Arch of Marcus Aurelius, Tripoli*



It should be noted that the recovery of the arch and its establishment as a monument was not a Fascist project. It was conceived and realized by the Italian liberal governments that preceded Mussolini's rise to power. As such, it followed the trajectory of Roman invocation pursued by nationalist and colonialist advocates in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. As one writer surmised in 1912, by invading Libya, Italy had finally laid claim to “the ancient rights which come to the heirs of the Roman conquest.”⁵ His reasoning was widely shared at the time, and its logical consequence was the recuperation of everything Roman.⁶

With its strong, heroic forms and formidable scale, the arch as a monument was meant to testify to the power and superiority of Roman civilization in the past, and by extension to the power and superiority of Italian civilization in the present. While invoking Rome's authority, the occupiers overlooked the complexity of relations that had accompanied Rome's presence in the port cities of Sabratha, Oea (modern-day Tripoli), and Leptis Magna.⁷ In forging the link between Ancient Rome

³ Paolo De Vecchi, *Italy's Civilizing Mission in Africa* (New York: Brentano's, 1912), 8.

⁴ On Italy's efforts in the restoration of ancient ruins and the significance of archeological work for Italy's geopolitical interests in the Mediterranean see Massimiliano Munzi, *L'epica del ritorno. Archeologia e politica nella Tripolitania italiana* (Roma: “L'Erma” di Bretschneider, 2001). See also Stefan Altekamp, *Rückkehr nach Afrika: italienische Kolonialarchäologie in Libyen, 1911-1943* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2000) and Marta Petricoli, *Archeologia e Mare Nostrum. Le missioni archeologiche nella politica mediterranea dell'Italia 1898/1943* (Rome: Valerio Levi, 1990). While archeological finds could be interpreted as providing a narrative sequence between ancient and modern times, arguing for Italy's “return,” not all archeological excavations were supported by the Italian government.

⁵ Paolo De Vecchi, *Italy's Civilizing Mission in Africa* (New York: Brentano's, 1912), 8.

⁶ On Italy's efforts in the restoration of ancient ruins and the significance of archeological work for Italy's geopolitical interests in the Mediterranean see Massimiliano Munzi, *L'epica del ritorno. Archeologia e politica nella Tripolitania italiana* (Roma: “L'Erma” di Bretschneider, 2001). See also Stefan Altekamp, *Rückkehr nach Afrika: italienische Kolonialarchäologie in Libyen, 1911-1943* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2000) and Marta Petricoli, *Archeologia e Mare Nostrum. Le missioni archeologiche nella politica mediterranea dell'Italia 1898/1943* (Rome: Valerio Levi, 1990). While archeological finds could be interpreted as providing a narrative sequence between ancient and modern times, arguing for Italy's “return,” not all archeological excavations were supported by the Italian government.

⁷ In his analysis of the interrelations between archeology and politics in Tripolitania, Massimiliano Munzi asserts that Rome incorporated the cities on the Tripolitanian shoreline gradually, allowing the cities to retain the autonomy they had enjoyed

and modern Italy, the colonizers also chose to ignore the many other influences that had preceded Roman rule in Libya and those that had followed it: Berber, Phoenician, Punic, Greek, Vandal, Byzantine, Arab, and Ottoman.⁸ Rather, the monument was intended to establish Italy's rightful presence in Libya: it had endured the centuries, leaving not only a powerful mark but creating a bridge between the past and the present.

The Fascists, under the governorship of Italo Balbo, undertook a second restoration of the arch, expanding the open space around it, thus further increasing the distance between the monument and the Arab medina that had previously encompassed it. This spatial separation effectively annihilated all that had developed in the arch's surroundings between the Roman and the Italian periods of rule. Furthermore, Italian architects interpreted the imposing structure of the arch as a symbol of strength, authority, indeed virility, and contrasted it to the nearby dwellings and stores and to the Gurgi Mosque in the background, which were coded as diminutive, feeble, and feminine.⁹

The effected distance and contrast between the Roman arch and its Arab surroundings foreshadowed the urban transformation of Tripoli under Fascism.¹⁰ In the 1930s, the Fascist colonial government constructed a new Italian town next to the old city of Tripoli. While the new city was meant for the Italian bureaucrats, clerks, traders, and teachers, the Arab medina was left to the Libyans but was restructured so as to render it more accessible and "picturesque" for Western tourists.¹¹ This plan of urban segregation emanated from racial conceptions of insurmountable differences and the perceived need for separate spaces – a separation that in daily life was neither achieved nor even desired by most Italians residing in the colony.¹² Nevertheless, the monumentalization of the arch and the urban transformation of Tripoli exemplified contemporary approaches to colonial urban planning.¹³ The new town was construed as a rational, modern, open, healthy, clean, and separate space in contrast to the Arab environment, which was portrayed as crowded, dirty, loud, backward, dilapidated, and bewildering. In this sense, the segregationist development of Tripoli echoed the restoration of the arch, which had been deemed worthy of separation from its Arab surroundings.

The arch created a link to the past, but it also symbolized the attitude of the colonizers and set their agenda for Libya's future. As Krystyna von Henneberg noted in reference to the now well-established historiography on the invention of traditions, "had the arch not existed, it would have to be invented."¹⁴ Coincidentally, this is precisely what took place in South Tyrol.

(Contd.)

under Numidian rule for a long time. For over a century, until Caesar's victory over Numidia in 46 B.C., Rome had a weak presence in Tripolitania and was in conversation with other cultures. Moreover, Munzi maintains that there never was a Roman colonization with veteran soldiers turned agriculturalist in Tripolitania. See Munzi, *L'epica del ritorno*.

⁸ von Henneberg, *Construction of Fascist Libya*, 245.

⁹ Ibid., 244.

¹⁰ For an analysis of colonial urbanism in Libya see von Henneberg, *The Construction of Fascist Libya*; von Henneberg, "Imperial Uncertainties: Architectural Syncretism and Improvisation in Fascist Colonial Libya," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 31:2, Special Issue: The Aesthetics of Fascism, (April 1996): 373-95; von Henneberg, "Public Space and Public Face: Italian Fascist Urban Planning at Tripoli's Colonial Trade Fair" and Mia Fuller, "Preservation and Self-absorption: Italian Colonization and the Walled City of Tripoli, Libya," in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. by Ben-Ghiat and Fuller. See also Mia Fuller, *Moderns Abroad: Architecture, Cities and Italian Imperialism* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Fuller, *Colonial Constructions: Architecture, Cities, and Italian imperialism in the Mediterranean and East Africa* (London: Spon, 2003) and Fuller, "Building Power: Italy's Colonial Architecture and Urbanism, 1923-1940," *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 4 (November 1988): 455-487.

¹¹ On the creation of "hybrid" spaces, see von Henneberg, chapter 7 "Tripoli Reconstituted: Staging Diversity" in *The Construction of Fascist Libya* and von Henneberg, "Public Space and Public Face."

¹² For a complication of this picture, and the way in which plans for segregation did not translate into segregationist practices see Mia Fuller, "Oases of ambiguity: on how Italians did not practice planned urban segregation in Tripoli," in *La Libia tra Mediterraneo e mondo islamico. Atti del convegno di Catania*, edited by Federico Cresti (Milan: Giuffrè, 2006).

¹³ On colonial architecture and urban planning see Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Nezar AlSayyad, ed. *Forms of Dominance: On the Architecture and Urbanism of the Colonial Enterprise*, (Brookfield, Vt.: Avebury, 1992); Felix Driver and David Gilbert, eds, *Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display, and Identity* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999); Anthony King, "Writing Colonial Space. A Review Article" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37, 3, (July 1995): 541-554; Robert J. Ross and Gerard J. Telkamp, eds., *Colonial Cities: Essays on Urbanism in a Colonial Context* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Nijhoff, 1985).

¹⁴ Von Henneberg, *Construction of Fascist Libya*, 251. The reference is to Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

In 1926 the King of Italy, Victor Emanuel III, traveled to the capital city of South Tyrol, called Bozen in German and Bolzano in Italian, for the inauguration of an imposing monument. It was the *Monumento alla Vittoria*, the Monument to Victory dedicated to the Italian soldiers who died in World War I.¹⁵ The 60-foot high triumphal arch was designed by Marcello Piacentini, who is often referred to as the “architect of the regime” thanks to his many plans and constructions on behalf of the Fascist government.¹⁶ The arch was fashioned in the neoclassical style, erected in white marble, and covered with Fascist insignia. A powerful symbol delineating the boundaries and parameters of Italianization, the Monument to Victory inspired me to explore the Fascist efforts in South Tyrol from a colonial perspective, to think of South Tyrol as a “fourth shore” of sorts, and to envision South Tyrol in the interwar period as a bulwark of Italianness in the making.

Figure 2 *Monument to Victory, Bolzano 1926*



The arch could not have been more different from its architectural surroundings in 1926. Its monumental style stood in stark contrast to the quaint, bourgeois town of Bozen. Though the arch was erected on the western edge of town, its construction still required the clearing of land. Property was confiscated, buildings were torn down. Specifically, the arch was built on the foundations of a monument that was to have been erected in honor of the fallen soldiers of an Austrian regiment stationed in Bozen during WWI. For the local population, the new Fascist arch thus obliterated their own sacrifice during the war.¹⁷

¹⁵ On the Monument to Victory in Bolzano see Thomas Pardatscher, *Das Siegesdenkmal in Bozen: Entstehung, Symbolik, Rezeption* (Bozen: Athesia, 2002) and Ugo Soragni e Enrico Guidoni, *Il Monumento alla Vittoria di Bolzano: architettura e scultura per la città italiana, 1926-1938* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1993).

¹⁶ On Marcello Piacentini see Mario Pisani and Marcello Piacentini, *Architetture di Marcello Piacentini: le opere maestre* (Roma: CLEAR, 2004) and Sandro Scarrocchia, *Albert Speer e Marcello Piacentini: l'architettura del totalitarismo negli anni trenta* (Milano: Skira, 1999). Piacentini has published numerous articles and books. See, for example, Marcello Piacentini, *Le vicende edilizie di Roma dal 1870 ad oggi* (Roma: Palombi, 1952).

¹⁷ In this respect, the monument fit into a trajectory of national representation and competition through the construction of monuments across Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth century. In Tyrol, a famous precedent was the erection of the

During the following decade, the arch came to mark the division between the old Bozen, inhabited by German speakers, and the newly emerging Bolzano, the Italian side of town – with its modernist apartment buildings, high shopping arcades and wide streets – inhabited by the Italian-speaking public employees, military personnel, workers, and their families flocking to the city.¹⁸

The arch moreover carried a straightforward message. Located eighty kilometers south of the Italo-Austrian border, the monument broadcasted a telling inscription: “*Hic patriae fines siste signa hinc ceteros excolimus lingua legibus artibus.*” – “Here are the borders of the fatherland. Set the sign. From here we educate others through language, law, and the arts.” Written in Latin with clear reference to the Ancient Roman past, the inscription unmistakably demarcated the border between “us,” the Italians, and the “others,” those who had not known language, culture, and the rule of law.

Figure 3 *Monument to Victory, detail*



Yet while the Roman Empire had stretched far into central Europe and reached even the British Isles, Fascism defined the Alpine watershed as the unmistakable northern border of the Italian nation. The monument celebrated the “civilizing mission” initiated by the Romans and now to be completed by the Fascists. And it indelibly marked the geographical and cultural border between “Italian” and “German” civilization, the latter posited as clearly inferior to the former.

(Contd.)

Walther von der Vogelweide statue in Bozen in 1889 and of the Dante Alighieri statue in Trento in 1896. The presence of the Walther von der Vogelweide statue on Bolzano’s main square continued to create controversy throughout the Fascist period, as Italian nationalists, foremost Ettore Tolomei, wanted it either removed entirely or at least relocated to a less prominent location. In spite of such pressures, the monument to Walther von der Vogelweide was removed from the town square only in 1935. A perceptive reading of the nationalist cooption of a monument is Jeremy King, “Shipmaster Lanna and the Nationalization of East Central Europe: Beyond Ethnicity,” in Wingfield, Nancy and Maria Bucur, eds. *Staging the Past. The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present*. (Purdue UP, 2001). On the more general relevance of monuments in nationalism see Rudy Koshar, *Germany’s Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) and Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). See also Charlotte Tacke, *Denkmal im sozialen Raum: nationale Symbole in Deutschland und Frankreich im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995) and Helke Rausch, *Kultfigur und Nation: öffentliche Denkmäler in Paris, Berlin und London, 1848-1914* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2006). For a broader, non-European context, see Michael E. Geisler, ed., *National Symbols, Fractured Identities: Contesting the National Narrative* (Middlebury, VT: Middlebury College Press, 2005).

¹⁸ On the urban transformation of Bolzano, see Karin Ruth Lehmann, *Städtebau und Architektur als Mittel der Kolonisation am Beispiel der Provinz Bozen: Städtebau und Siedlungsbau in Südtirol und insbesondere in Bozen unter dem Faschismus* (2000); Flavio Schimenti and Armando Ronca, *Armando Ronca: memorie di architettura a Bolzano e in Alto Adige, 1929-1969* (Bolzano: Praxis 3, 1999); and Oswald Zoeggeler and Lamberto Ippolito, *Die Architektur für ein italienisches Bozen* (Bozen: 1992). On the industrial zone of Bolzano, built in the 1930s, see Olivo Barbieri and Gabriele Basilico, *Bolzano città e contrasti: il centro e la “zona”* (Milano: Leonardo Arte; Bolzano: Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano, 1998).

In the Footsteps of Ancient Rome

Ancient Rome held a place of pride in the Fascist imagination. The Fascists and their erudite supporters obsessively sought to trace the genealogy of many Fascist principles and ambitions back to Roman times.¹⁹ The Fascist cult of the leader, the fostering of agricultural traditions, the claim of soldierly prowess and the glorification of war, the insistence on hierarchical and patriarchal relations, the exaltation of Italy's artistic faculties, all built on and perpetuated a selective and distorted reading of the Roman past. Most of all, the legacy of Rome underwrote Italy's aim of conquest and expansion.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the myth of Rome had carried enormous appeal among earlier advocates for a greater Italy. Following the unification of Italy, nationalist and colonialist activists invoked the myth of Rome when promoting territorial conquest and the pursuit of power and prestige. To the recently unified country, the idealization of the Roman past provided a sense of national grandness and purpose.

In fact, the myth of Rome firmly underwrote the vision of the Mediterranean as an Italian *mare nostrum*. Seeking to justify the Italian invasion of Libya, writer Vico Mantegazza explained in 1911:

The sea unites and does not divide, in particular when it is circumscribed, like the Mediterranean, and takes the form of an immense lake: the great lake of the Latin race. Woe betide Italy if she also lets this opportunity slip by, perhaps the last to be offered, to retake the place she deserves in the Mediterranean and in the concert of nations.²⁰

Well before the formulation of Fascist racial doctrine, Mantegazza was claiming the Mediterranean on behalf of the "Latin race."²¹ His call to "retake" the Mediterranean clearly posited a prior "possession" of maritime supremacy, territorial control, and global prestige. While rejoicing over his country's feat in Libya, Mantegazza bemoaned that the nation had rescinded its hegemony in the Adriatic, namely in the Gulf of Trieste on the Istrian peninsula, and on the Dalmatian and Albanian coastlines. His exposition clearly presupposed a necessary link between national and imperial assertions.

The correlation between Fascism and Ancient Rome acted as a powerful trope in the acquisition and incorporation of new lands. As illustrated in Mantegazza's exposition, the cult of Rome validated the invasion of Libya, an African colony, but it also lent itself to the promotion of irredentist claims in the Adriatic. And it was put to work in the Italianization of South Tyrol. More than serving as a tool of propaganda, spectacle, and legitimization, *Romanità* and the mindset it engendered shaped the regime's politics in these novel borderlands, defining the parameters of their incorporation into the Fascist nation and empire.

¹⁹ Romke Visser argues that it was precisely this association with Ancient Rome that made Fascism appealing to Italy's conservative and educated upper and middle classes. Scholars and enthusiasts of Roman history, law, and art readily provided expositions that linked the regime to its ancient "predecessor," justifying every move of the regime, independently of the specific policies pursued. See Romke Visser, "Fascist Doctrine and the Cult of the *Romanità*" *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27 (1992): 5-22. The enthusiasm for Ancient Rome conjoined experts of antiquity and fascists and led to an "autofascistization" of the scholarly community. On the history of classical studies during the dictatorship see also Luciano Canfora, *Ideologie del classicismo*, (Turin: Einaudi 1980); Canfora, *Le vie del classicismo*, (Rome: Laterza 1989); and Mariella Cagnetta, *Antichisti e impero fascista* (Bari: Dedalo libri, 1979).

²⁰ Vico Mantegazza, *Tripoli e i Diritti della Civiltà* (Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1912), 11: "Il mare unisce e non divide, soprattutto quando esso è, come il Mediterraneo, circoscritto e prende la forma di un immenso lago: il gran lago della razza Latina. Guai se l'Italia si fosse lasciata sfuggire anche questa occasione, l'ultima che forse le si è offerta, per riprendere nel Mediterraneo e nel concerto delle nazioni il posto che le compete."

²¹ On racial imageries, national identities, and conceptions of difference in liberal Italy see Aliza S. Wong, *Race and the Nation in Liberal Italy, 1861-1911: Meridionalism, Empire and Diaspora* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

Taxonomies of Difference: *Razza* and *Stirpe*

The “ideology of return” was specific to the Italian colonial imagination.²² Past footsteps purportedly conferred present entitlement. The notion of return coded Libya and South Tyrol as *a priori* Italian. Yet, the two regions were not empty lands – and the people who lived in them did not at first glance fit contemporary definitions of “Italianness” – no matter how elusive they might have been. Most importantly, the native populations of Libya and South Tyrol were not interested in being defined in those terms. They held their own ideas about who they were, where they came from, and how to best organize their societies.

The ideology of return, however, disregarded the contemporary inhabitants of these borderlands. What mattered to Italian nationalists were the traces left by “their” Roman ancestors.²³ However, such reasoning enclosed potential pitfalls, particularly in conjunction with the racial theories in vogue in the early twentieth century. The concurrent ideas of a Roman-Italian blood lineage and of an ancient Roman presence threatened to defy contemporary assertions of an Italian biological and cultural superiority over the “others.” Did the ideology of return, with its postulation of a Roman presence in the past, imply a common heritage or even parentage between the conquering Italians and the native populations? To what extent were the native inhabitants “heirs” of Rome and thus “related” to the Italians?

In a speech before the Italian parliament in 1927, Mussolini declared: “Up there, there is nobody but an Italian minority who speaks a German dialect... We regard [the South Tyroleans] as Italian citizens who lost themselves and who must find themselves anew.”²⁴ Reiterating one of the most popular notions employed to legitimize Italian rule in South Tyrol, Mussolini asserted that the native German and Ladin speakers were genuine but lapsed Italians.²⁵ He thus posited a historic parentage between the Italian “race” and the *alloglotti* (speakers of a different language) of South Tyrol. Such discourses found their implementation in harsh policies of assimilation. The assimilative power of the civilization of Ancient Rome, clearly affirmed in the Monument to Victory, was supposed to return these lapsed Italians to their origins. By outlawing German schools, restricting the use of the German language in public, and targeting youth in and out of school, the regime hoped to bring the South Tyrolean population into the fold of the fascist Italian nation.

The German-speaking South Tyroleans responded to such nationalist impositions with an analogous nationalist entrenchment, asserting their linguistic and cultural heritage and upholding a portended “Germanness” against an imposed “Italianness.” The increasing identification with a “German” culture and race was fanned by Nazi propaganda and led many to long for “liberation” through Nazi Germany, even though South Tyrol had not belonged to a unified Germany in the past and its strong Catholic traditions were not easily attuned to Nazi principles.

The Fascist policies of native denationalization and renationalization corresponded to the preeminent status afforded to nationalism in interwar Europe. A state claiming to represent a nation could comprise only one imagined “national” community.²⁶ In its most radical manifestation, such an ideology demanded that speakers of different languages be transformed, removed, or exchanged.²⁷

²² See Sergio Romano, “L’ideologia del colonialismo italiano,” 23 and Ester Capuzzo, “La proiezione oltremare della Nazione.”

²³ Such a viewpoint, however, had to confront the challenge of explaining the downfall of Rome while upholding the ideal of Romanità and its racial legacy. See Pisanty, 113.

²⁴ Walter Freiberg, *Südtirol und der italienische Nationalsozialismus* (Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner, 1990), 405.

²⁵ See the contemporary periodicals *Archivio per l’Alto Adige* and *Venezia Tridentina*. More generally on the topic of “otherness” in language, see Federico Faloppa, *Parole contro. La rappresentazione del “diverso” nella lingua italiana e nei dialetti* (Milano: Garzanti, 2004).

²⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

²⁷ On the topic of population transfers and ethnic cleansing across Europe throughout the twentieth-century see Benjamin Lieberman, *Terrible Fate: Ethnic Cleansing in the Making of Modern Europe* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006); Isabel Heinemann and Patrick Wagner, eds., *Wissenschaft, Planung, Vertreibung: Neuordnungskonzepte und Umsiedlungspolitik im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2006); Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Steven Béla Várdy and T. Hunt Tooley, eds., *Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Boulder: Social Science Monographs; New York: dist. by Columbia University Press, 2003); and Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001). Specifically on the “population exchange” between Greece and Turkey in 1923 see Bruce Clark, *Twice a Stranger:*

Fascism espoused such a radical stance of nationalism, but it was less clear whether an assimilative or segregationist approach was to be employed with respect to Italy's internal "others."

What then defined the Italians and what separated them from its "others"?²⁸ Italian theorists, like their colleagues across the Western world, sought to elaborate a racial theory of "Italianness."²⁹ The goal was to establish internal coherence, in particular between the Italian North and the South, and to differentiate the Italian "race" from other "races."

As was the case with other ideologies and cultural and artistic movements, Fascism did not enforce one exclusive line of reasoning with respect to racial theories.³⁰ In fact, the regime allowed and even sponsored the theorization of different positions, and the dictator changed his opinion regarding the characteristics of the Italian "race," favoring one approach, then another, then changing his stance yet again.³¹ Racial theorists, on their part, confronted various ideological contradictions as they attempted to comply with contemporary political expedencies.³²

In Italy, two principal positions on race emerged in the interwar period.³³ One strand built on biological notions of race and relied on the concept of *razza* (race) to define the peculiarities of the Italian people. The other espoused cultural and spiritual notions of race, maintained strong historical connotations, and rested on the concepts of *stirpe* (stock) and *nazione* (nation). Both strands believed in the intrinsic and inalienable characteristics of "the Italic people" and bolstered the idea of a homogenous nation-state. The two strands were in fact not entirely separate, as they borrowed each other's components and conceptualizations.

In everyday usage, but also in political treatises, government documents, and the mainstream press, the terms "*razza*," "*stirpe*," and "*nazione*" were often used interchangeably. Only in the late 1930s did the regime impose the use of the term "*razza*" over the term "*stirpe*," as the word "*razza*" communicated the presumed biological essence of the Italian "race" more plainly.³⁴

In fact, in the late 1930s the regime espoused the theory of "biological racism" promoted by Guido Landra and Lidio Cipriani. Their ideas defined races based on physiological markers, deducing psychological and character dispositions from them.³⁵ The "national racism" of Giacomo Acerbo, Nicola Pende, and Sabato Visco, which grounded the concept of race in cultural and historical factors, temporarily lost out against the more deterministic approach of the biological racists. A third theory, termed "esoteric racism," was promoted by Julius Evola.³⁶ He claimed that neither biological nor cultural-historical racism adequately explained racial differences and thus advanced a spiritual concept of race, meshing Roman traditions and Aryan components.

In 1938, the biological racists announced their newly achieved official status with the "*Manifesto della razza*" (Race Manifesto), published in the first issue of the journal *La Difesa della*

(Contd.)

The Mass Expulsion That Forged Modern Greece and Turkey (London: Granta, 2006); Roland Huntford, *Fridtjof Nansen and the Unmixing of Greeks and Turks in 1924* (Oslo: Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi, 1999); and Dimitri Pentzopolous, *The Balkan Exchange of Minorities and Its Impact upon Greece* (Paris: Mouton, 1962).

²⁸ See Michele Nani, *Ai confini della nazione. Stampa e razzismo nell'Italia di fine Ottocento* (Roma: Carocci, 2006).

²⁹ In terms of the European-wide context of interwar racism, it is important to note that there were also currents claiming that races did not exist. See, for instance, Julian Huxley, Alfred C. Haddon, and A.M. Carr-Saunders, *We Europeans; A Survey of "Racial" Problems* (London, Harper, 1936).

³⁰ For an insightful reading of the ways in which Fascism incorporated diverse ideologies and artistic currents, see Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) and Marla Stone, *The Patron State: Culture & Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998).

³¹ On the competition among racial theorists see Aaron Gillette, "Guido Landra and the Office of Racial Studies in Fascist Italy" *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 16:3 (Winter 2002): 357-375. The article also discusses the Fascist interaction with the Nazi Race Office.

³² See also Aaron Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

³³ On Fascist racism see Riccardo Banovita, Gianluca Gabrielli, and Rossella Ropa, eds., *L'offesa della razza. Razzismo e antisemitismo dell'Italia fascista* (Bologna: Pàtron Editore, 2005).

³⁴ Schneider explains that directives to use "*razza*" were issued for the press in August 1938 and then again in September 1940. Gabriele Schneider, *Mussolini in Afrika: die faschistische Rassenpolitik in den italienischen Kolonien, 1936-41* (Cologne: SH-Verlag, 2000), 71.

³⁵ See the many articles published by Guido Landra in the journal *La Difesa della Razza*.

³⁶ Julius Evola, *Il mito del sangue* (Milan: Hoepli, 1937) and Evola, *Sintesi di dottrina della razza* (Milan: Hoepli, 1941).

Razza (The Defense of the Race).³⁷ In launching biological racism as the official state doctrine, the manifesto declared that Italians formed their own race, which had developed over the last millennium. It presented all Italians as conjoined by blood parentage, related to other European races, but completely removed from non-European races.³⁸

Yet the preeminence of biological racism did not last long. Even at its highpoint, Telesio Interlandi, Carlo Costamagnas, Giuseppe Maggiore, Julius Evola, and others continued to publish their opposition to a purely biological-anthropological concept of *razza*.³⁹ Their emphasis on spiritual elements resonated with the Fascist idea that the spirit and the will could conquer anything. Landra, the main exponent of biological racism, was dismissed from the *Ufficio Razza* (Race Office) in the Ministry for Popular Culture in February 1939. For a brief period, the official stance moved closer toward the conception of a Mediterranean race, relying on spiritual elements and espousing a veiled anti-German stance, as recognizable for instance in the writings of Acerbo.⁴⁰ Subsequently Mussolini steered back toward Nordic racism, but preferred the kind propagated by Evola. Even during the relatively short time period of the late 1930s and early 1940s, the regime did not espouse one consistent ideology of race.

The position vis-à-vis the German “race” was particularly intricate. In the second half of the 1930s, Fascist foreign politics demanded the theorization of a racial parentage between the Italians and the Germans. Yet such assertions contradicted earlier claims which classified the Italians as members of a Mediterranean race that clearly did not include the Germans. Now it became necessary to assert a German-Italian racial relationship, while at the same time erasing Franco-Italian relations. The concept of *Latinità* (Latinness), which conjoined the French, Spanish, and Italians, was pushed aside and replaced by a theory of Italian Aryanism.⁴¹ The concept of Aryanism tied “the Italian race” closer to the European continent, and to Nazi Germany, and disbanded possible racial relations with Africa.⁴² There was also, of course, acknowledgement of the differences between Italians and Germans. But such differences were described in positive terms; at any rate the characteristics ascribed to the Germans were presented in such a light. Their “discipline” was represented as a beneficial trait, as was their “planning” and “circumspection.” Such comparisons were often presented in the form of analogies, whereby for example conscientious German car drivers were compared to audacious Italian ones.⁴³

Political necessity demanded that even when an “anthropological” difference was discerned between the “Italian” and the “German” race, similarities and even “brotherhood” were quickly reestablished. Edmondo Vercellesi, for instance, claimed that

it is however well known that even though Italians and Germans are anthropologically different, they are similar in their conscience; and from this conscience, where the sense of brotherhood is very deep, rises a communality of ideas and aspirations which, through historical and social events, ties the future destinies of the two peoples.⁴⁴

³⁷ The manifesto was first published anonymously in the “Giornale d’Italia” on July 14, 1938, and then appeared signed in the first issue of “La Difesa della Razza” on August 5, 1938. The manifesto had ten signatories, all scholars who in their previous and subsequent writings espoused different concepts of race.

³⁸ See Pisanty.

³⁹ Giuseppe Maggiore, *Razza e fascismo* (Palermo, 1939), Telesio Interlandi edited the journal *Vita italiana*, Costamagnas ran *Lo Stato*. See his “Il problema della razza” *Lo Stato* 9 (1938) and Julius Evola, *Il mito del sangue*. Evola was opposed to the modernity of democracy, communism, individualism and materialism. He wrote against spiritual standpoints that embraced such modernity, locating them in the bourgeoisie and opposing Jews as representatives of the bourgeoisie. Julius Evola, *Tre aspetti del problema ebraico* (Roma, 1936).

⁴⁰ Giacomo Acerbo, *Fondamenti della dottrina fascista della razza* (1940).

⁴¹ In Pisanty (58), Guido Landra, *Italiani e Francesi, due razze, due civiltà*, I, 5: 21.

⁴² Giuseppe Sergi, *The Mediterranean Race: A Study of the Origin of European People* (New York, 1914) had argued that Italians were part of a Mediterranean race originating from Africa.

⁴³ In Pisanty, 72, Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss, *Non si può parlare ragionevolmente della razza?*, III, 15: 6-11.

⁴⁴ In Pisanty, 72, Edmondo Vercellesi, *Gruppi etnici italiani e tedeschi*, II, 15: 21: “Si sa bene però che se antropologicamente italiani e tedeschi sono diversi, pur tuttavia nella loro coscienza essi sono simili; e da questa coscienza, dove è vivissimo il senso di fratellanza, scaturisce la comunanza delle idee e delle aspirazioni che, attraverso gli avvenimenti storici e sociali, lega i destini futuri dei due popoli.”

But while racial thinkers and politicians tried to assert a racial or at least spiritual parentage between Italians and Germans, their theorizations did not reflect the sentiments of the German speakers and Italian speakers living next to each other in South Tyrol. Italian nationalists across northern Italy tended to view the “German race” as dissimilar and antagonistic, particularly in consideration of the irredentist opposition to Austria in the past and the threatening demeanor of Nazi Germany in the present.

Italian speakers in South Tyrol, and in particular the emissaries of the Fascist regime, were greatly concerned about the image portrayed by the Italian state and its people vis-à-vis the “German” local population. Assertions of superiority like those emblazoned on the Monument to Victory were enacted through public works projects and educational endeavors. But the stance of superiority had to contend with the picture of poor Italian immigrants seeking employment in South Tyrol. The economic migration of Italian speakers into the area was not an entirely new phenomenon, as there had been a long history of seasonal workers employed in agriculture and door-to-door sales, particularly from Trentino. In light of such history, many native German speakers held a disparaging view of the “Italians,” and in the years of Italian oppression, they sarcastically called attention to the indigent and transient Italian immigrants. It thus became all the more important for the authorities to ensure the propriety and equanimity of Italian immigrants.

Unsurprisingly, the recent history of nationalist contention, the contemporary oppositional stance between the Fascist state and the native population, and the conflicting aspirations on the “Italian” and the “German” side did not find correspondence in the officially promoted idea of a German-Italian brotherhood. The politics and ideologies concocted at the center of Fascist power did not square with people’s beliefs and experiences in the borderland.⁴⁵ During the interwar years and in particular in the late 1930s in South Tyrol, anti-Germanism made more sense than the theory of Italian Aryanism to the Italian speakers living in the province.

There were some similarities but also some crucial differences in the way in which “race” was understood and lived in the eastern borderlands of the Venezia Giulia and Istria. There, the Italian and the Slav factions maintained an antagonistic relationship, with power clearly residing on the side of the Italian state. The Slavs were viewed as an unmistakably inferior “race,” tainted by Asiatic influences and Communist sympathies.⁴⁶ Yet in Italy’s eastern borderlands, there was greater correspondence than in South Tyrol between the political center and the periphery, as both concurred on the alleged inferiority of the “Slavic races.”

Libya and its inhabitants held yet another place in the constellation of the Italian racial imagination – a place neither agreed upon nor unchanging. Coveted as a fourth Italian shoreline, Libya was first occupied as a colonial territory but increasingly treated as a national region until its formal incorporation into the Italian nation-state in 1939.

There was some difference between the judgment of peoples of the Mediterranean, Libyans in particular, and the assessment of black Africans.⁴⁷ One colonial scholar, Raffaele di Lauro, maintained in 1940 that “in northern Africa, the dominating European powers are in contact not only with Negroids, but also and mainly with native (Berbers) or immigrant peoples (Arabs) with a high degree of civilization.”⁴⁸ In another example, a vademecum for party officials stationed in the colonies declared the imperative of protecting the Italian race in the colonization of Italian East Africa, but stated that Libya was “a land inhabited by Arab populations of white race and superior culture, kept moreover in check by the rigorous moral norms of the Muslim religion.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ On this issue, see Maura E. Hametz, “The Ambivalence of Italian Antisemitism: Fascism, Nationalism, and Racism in Trieste” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 16:3 (Winter 2002): 376-401.

⁴⁶ See Enzo Collotti, “Sul razzismo antislabo” in *Nel nome della razza: Il razzismo nella storia d’Italia 1870-1945*, edited by Alberto Bugio (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999). See also A. Nuvoli, “Il fascismo nella Venezia Giulia e la persecuzione antislabo” *Storia contemporanea in Friuli* 26: 27 (1996): 69-87.

⁴⁷ Gabriele Schneider, *Mussolini in Afrika*.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Fabio Foresti, “Il problema linguistico nella ‘politica indigena’ del colonialismo fascista,” *Movimento Operaio e Socialista* 7, no. 1 (1984), 134: “In Africa settentrionale le potenze europee dominatrici sono a contatto non soltanto con negroidi, ma anche e soprattutto con genti native (berberi) o immigrate (arabi), in un alto grado di civiltà.”

⁴⁹ Quoted in Foresti, 135: “questa è una terra abitata da popolazioni arabe di razza bianca e di cultura superiore, tenute a freno per giunta dalle rigorose norme morali della religione musulmana.”

The idea of the Libyans as superior to other Africans had been in circulation prior to the invasion. The Berbers were believed to be “closer to the Italian race than one would believe.”⁵⁰ Obviously there were also opposite interpretations, which conveniently served as a justification for the Italian invasion and the subsequent “pacification” campaigns.⁵¹ Scholars have debated whether there was an effective difference in treatment or whether there was just a proclaimed difference between the Arabs and Berbers of Libya and black Africans. Certainly, both populations were subjected to the most brutal warfare and relegated to a position of legal, social, and economic inferiority.

Race and Religion

Mussolini, for his part, proclaimed himself a friend of Islam and protector of all Muslims. The regime’s pro-Muslim stance of the 1930s served political purposes, as a denunciation of France and Great Britain, Italy’s competitors in the Mediterranean and Middle East. At the same time, Italy was altering Libya’s status from that of a colony to that of a national region. The position of the Libyan population in the Fascist system of dominance thus had to be redefined. On the one hand, its rights were curtailed; on the other, its culture and religion were declared valuable and afforded the label of a “civilization.” As a matter of fact, the Libyan environment was increasingly thought of as a separate space – separate from the Italian milieu but necessitating firm Fascist control.

The Muslim religion became a critical point of difference and separation between the two communities. The focus on religion allowed for the assertion of insurmountable differences and the need for segregation, while the government could simultaneously pretend to respect Muslim belief. Such pretensions allowed the regime to shift some of the responsibility for the enforcement of separation onto the native environment, arguing that it was their religion and morals that demanded it. Yet, appreciation of and respect for the Muslim religion did not seem to run very deep. Governor Italo Balbo, who liked to interact with the Arab elite and don his supposed admiration for Muslim traditions, clearly placed Islam below Catholicism. Indeed, his comments on the practice of religion were intermingled with assertions of racial superiority. Ordering all officers to attend Catholic mass, Balbo declared:

The officers’ mass constitutes a public manifestation of the difference of race which in this territory must be principally expressed on a superior level of high spirituality, that is in the difference of religion. ...Independently from every personal conception regarding religious practices, participation in the officers’ mass represents a duty that I want scrupulously followed.⁵²

The religious difference between Italians and Libyans was interpreted as affording a superior “racial” status to the Italians. Nothing was going to undermine this difference. In fact, there was to be no proselytizing of Muslims in Libya. As in other Islamic lands, Catholic missionaries were not allowed to engage in the conversion of Muslims.⁵³

To complicate religious classifications of difference, Libya also had a sizeable Jewish community, concentrated mostly in the city of Tripoli.⁵⁴ Anti-Semitic circles treated Libya’s Jewish population with both religious intolerance and racial discrimination. The anti-Jewish legislation

⁵⁰ S. Ottolenghi quoted in Schneider, 98. Schneider mentions also Aldo Meir, Alessandro Clerici, Renato Biasutti, and Maurizio Rava as representatives of this interpretation.

⁵¹ Schneider mentions Giuseppe Alongi, Mirko Ardemagni, and Mario Ratto. In Schneider, 99.

⁵² ACS, Ministero Africa Italiana (MAI), b 1950, f. 9: Circular issued by Governor Balbo regarding the officers’ participation in the officers’ mass, July 12, 1938: “La Messa Ufficiale costituisce una pubblica manifestazione della differenza di razza che in questa terra si deve principalmente esprimere su un piano superiore di alta spiritualità, e cioè nella differenza della religione.....Indipendentemente da ogni personale concezione sulle pratiche religiose, l’intervento alla Messa Ufficiale rappresenta un dovere che intendo venga scrupolosamente adempiuto.”

⁵³ Salvatore Bono, “La missione francescana a Tripoli. Antiche e recenti storie” *Africana* (1994): 31.

⁵⁴ On Libya’s Jewish community see Harvey E. Goldberg, *Jewish Life in Muslim Libya: Rivals & Relatives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Goldberg, *Jews in an Arab Land: Libya 1835-1970* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985); and Renzo De Felice, *Ebrei in un paese arabo. Gli ebrei nella Libia contemporanea tra colonialismo, nazionalismo arabo e sionismo (1835-1970)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1978). On the Jewish experience in Libya see also the novel by Victor Magiar, *E venne la notte: ebrei in un paese arabo* (Florence: Giuntina, 2003).

implemented inside Italy in the late 1930s affected the Jews of Libya as well, but some have argued that the pro-Jewish stance of Governor Balbo alleviated their plight. The Jews of Libya were not deported to concentration camps, but they were nonetheless exposed to anti-Jewish laws, prejudices, and acts of violence. Balbo protected the Jewish population because the economic life of the colony hinged on their presence. He thus took their side in his correspondence with Mussolini, but he also assured his “*capo*” (leader) that he was ready to comply with his orders, no matter what.⁵⁵

As in the rest of Italy, divergent opinions about the Jews and their proper place in Italian society circulated in Libya. What was the extent of their difference? Could they be assimilated? Interesting in this respect is a letter written by Alberto Monastero which advocated the Italianization of the Jews of Libya.⁵⁶ The letter portrayed the Jewish community of Tripoli in a starkly negative light. Yet the author advocated its transformation and assimilation. Arguing that “the Libyan Jews were infinitely more distant from us than the Arabs themselves,” it seems clear that Monastero did not believe assimilation would ensue automatically.⁵⁷ He thus suggested breaking up the community in order to absorb it more easily. In his view, the Jews in Tripoli were “16,000 individuals for the most part beggars, filthy, ignorant, spiritually absent.”⁵⁸ Italy had to “shake these people,... mix them,...Italianize them...”⁵⁹ He argued that schooling would turn the Jews into “real and faithful Italians...”⁶⁰ Their Italianization was to occur “without them noticing it and being able to oppose it.”⁶¹

A firm believer in the power of schooling, Monastero advocated that Jewish women be educated as well as the men. But to him, “what [seemed] rather necessary and opportune [was] not to fashion modern ladies useless to themselves and to others, or embroiderers competing with the poor Italian women.”⁶² He distinguished a modern European education for women from a sober Italian one, arguing that

the education of the kind a European lady would receive should only be given to the few wealthy metropolitan Italian families or more civilized and well-off indigenous families who desire it and can afford the related and not insignificant expenses; for the women of the people we need a practical, domestic, utterly Italian education, fulfilling Italian objectives.⁶³

He continued that what was needed were “good workers...good maids...good nurses.”⁶⁴

Moreover, Monastero favored extending Italian citizenship to the Jews of Libya, whose citizenship rights, like those of Muslim Libyans, were heavily restricted. In his view, granting citizenship only to select and deserving Jews was the wrong approach. Rather, it was essential to incorporate all Jews into the Italian legal community. Only as citizens would they behave responsibly, Monastero claimed. Whoever refused citizenship, on the other hand, was to be thrown out of the country. Monastero thus clearly identified citizenship as a tool of control.

The ideas of Monastero most likely did not typify contemporary attitudes. His words were certainly not the only ones commenting on the Jews of Libya and their place in the colony and in Italian society. There was much discussion about the Jews’ effective and ideal position, especially after the racial laws were issued in Italy. However, his stance is interesting in that it shows how the

⁵⁵ Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (ASDMAE), Archivio Storico Ministero Africa Italiana (ASMAI), Gabinetto, Archivio Segreto (GAB), b. 70, f. israeliti: Balbo letter to Mussolini, January 19, 1939.

⁵⁶ ASDMAE, Archivio Storico Ministero Africa Italiana III (ASMAI III), b. 36, f. Scuole Libia 1, scuole israelite: Letter addressed either to the governor of Libya or to Mussolini directly, October 20, 1929.

⁵⁷ Ibid.: “gli ebrei libici erano infinitamente più lontani da noi che non gli stessi arabi.”

⁵⁸ Ibid.: “sedecimila individui in massima parte pezzenti, luridi, ignoranti, spiritualmente assenti...”

⁵⁹ Ibid.: “scuotere questa gente,...rimiscolarla,...italianizzarla...”

⁶⁰ Ibid.: “italiani veri e fedeli.”

⁶¹ Ibid.: “italianizzare gli ebrei senza che essi se ne accorgano e possano opporvisi.”

⁶² Ibid.: “quello che appare piuttosto necessario ed opportuno è di non formare delle signorine moderne inutili a se e agli altri o delle lavoranti di fino (ricamatrici od altro) concorrenti delle povere donne italiane.”

⁶³ Ibid.: “L’educazione tipo signorina europea basta che sia data alle poche famiglie benestanti metropolitane o indigene più civili ed agiate che la desiderino affrontando le relative non lievi spese; per le ragazze del popolo occorre educazione pratica, domestica, prettamente italiana, ai fini italiani.”

⁶⁴ Ibid.: “buone operaie...buone cameriere...buone infermiere.”

utmost contempt could coexist with the prospect for assimilation. Whoever refused to assimilate, though, was to be removed.

The premium attached to religion in the Libyan politics of difference might lead one to believe that Catholicism represented a point of congruence in South Tyrol between the immigrant Italian speakers and the native German speakers. Yet this was not the case. Catholicism did not denote “sameness” in South Tyrol. There were fundamentally different ways of relating to religion and practicing it. Many immigrant Italians perceived the rural Catholicism performed in the German language as alien and exclusionary. They felt a strong need for Italian priests and Italian churches – a request with which the Italian authorities sought to comply.

Moreover, Catholicism did not automatically endorse Fascism even after the Lateran Pacts. In fact, the Italians made concessions to the Church in South Tyrol: the Pacts allowed churches there to teach religion in the German language. In practicing “Germanness,” Catholic institutions could serve as an oppositional force to the Italianization efforts of the Fascist regime. Local authorities were fully aware of the moral and material support given by the Catholic Church to the resistance against Italianization. Yet their demands for stricter measures against the Church did not meet much backing in Rome.

Italian Racisms

Among Italian officials and commentators, there was often mention of Italian virtue, culture, and civilization when discussing colonial projects. This fact has led some scholars to argue that, unlike in the Third Reich, racial and biological markers were not central to this Roman-inspired “civilizing mission.” Though the centrality of “race” ascribed to the Nazi project in recent years may be less certain in the Italian fascist context, the importance of racism — as defined by the presumption of superiority based on prejudices and ascribed, innate and unchangeable qualities — and its intensification during the ventennio are not.⁶⁵

The study of Fascist racism initially focused on anti-Semitism.⁶⁶ In recent years the analysis of colonial racism has also made great strides.⁶⁷ However, interwar Italy contained more than just the two strands of anti-Semitic and colonial racism; there were racisms directed toward other “others” inside Italy, such as gypsies, homosexuals, and *allogeni*. Policies of denationalization, for instance, deserve to be read in relation to this wider universe of racist ideas, which resulted in discriminatory practices and were eventually even written into law, with decisive psychological effects.⁶⁸ One of the foremost historians of Italian fascism, Enzo Collotti, has for instance advanced the analysis of forced denationalization as a racial policy.

⁶⁵ In recent years, the historiography of Nazi Germany has centered on the racial character of the Nazi regime. See, most importantly, Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Ippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991). For an overview of the state of the research see Geoff Eley, “Hitler’s Silent Majority? Conformity and Resistance Under the Third Reich,” Part I and Part II, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 42, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 550-583.

⁶⁶ In the early 1960s, Renzo De Felice published on the Jews in Italy, maintaining that Italian racism was entirely spiritual and not biological. See Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1961): VIII. On the topic of Fascist anti-semitism see Enzo Collotti, *Il fascismo e gli ebrei. Le leggi razziali in Italia* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2003), which also gives a longer trajectory of Italian racism, both colonial and nationalist. See also Michele Sarfatti, *Gli ebrei nell’Italia fascista. Vicende, identità, persecuzioni* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000). On the interrelationship and passage between different forms of racism see Francesca Cavalocchi, “La propaganda razzista e antisemita di uno ‘scienziato’ fascista: il caso di Lidio Cipriani” *Italia contemporanea*, (June 2000): 193-224. On the involvement of science see Roberto Maiocchi, *Scienza italiana e razzismo fascista* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1999). Other documents on racism are in Centro Furio Jesi, ed., *La menzogna della razza. Documenti e immagini del razzismo e dell’antisemitismo* (Bologna: Grafis, 1994), which is rich in images and primary documents. On the Europe-wide context of racism and anti-Semitism in particular see Gorge Mosse, Leon Poliakov, Jacob Katz (1980).

⁶⁷ Richard Pankhurst and Gene Bernardini brought the subject of Fascist racism to the fore in the 1970s from the colonial perspective, claiming that there was an internal dynamic to the emergence of racial legislation in Fascist Italy. See Richard Pankhurst, “Fascist Racial Policies in Ethiopia 1922-1941” in *Ethiopia Observer*, 12 (1969): 270-289 and Gene Bernardini, “The Origins and Development of Racial Anti-Semitism in Fascist Italy” *Journal of Modern History* 49 (1977): 431-453. See also the work of Giulia Barrera, Gianluca Gabrielli, Luigi Goglia, Nicola Labanca, Gabriele Schneider, Barbara Sòrgoni, and others.

⁶⁸ See *L’offesa della razza*, 16-17.

Collotti speaks of the need to recognize the continuity between colonial racism and anti-Semitism in order to understand the internal dynamics of Fascist racism and the ways racism worked in ideology and practice.⁶⁹ He posits racism as an “organic component of the political program” of Fascism, not just an expression of propaganda born out of expediency, as the model of the “New Italian” was regimented into a racial image already prior to the alliance with Nazi Germany.⁷⁰ There was a conscious effort by the regime to cement internal consensus through the marginalization of diversity, in order to “accelerate the concentration of all energy in only one direction.”⁷¹ Anti-Semitism became the focal point of Fascist racism perpetrated inside Italy. Yet Collotti claims that even though the principal object of Italian racism was “the Jew,” the message was intended for everyone who did not yet identify with the regime.

The interpretation of racism as a vehicle for Fascist consensus building, as a means to revitalize the “Fascist revolution,” in concurrence with similar developments across Europe, has gained widespread acceptance.⁷² The regime certainly sought to cement national identity via the language of biological racism. The creation of an “Italian race” was to increase the sense of unity and to overcome the dualism between the Italian North and South.⁷³ Scholars have investigated the relevance of internal difference and “otherness” in the formulation of an Italian national consciousness – not just under Fascism.⁷⁴ Italy’s “internal Africa” acted as a convenient counterweight to the liberal, bourgeois claims to their own superiority, heightening their perceived sophistication and Europeaness by comparison. This mindset of establishing one’s identity against a nearby “other” reflects similar attitudes in the European history of regionalism where the inferior “South” begins just south of one’s own home.⁷⁵

Gradations of Citizenship

Definitions of “Italianness” and “otherness” seek to set boundaries, forge internal cohesion, and cement the privileges of one imagined national group over those of others. Yet what do real as well as ascribed differences within a so-called national community portend? What differences are acceptable, even desirable, as they are taken to illustrate the strength and imagination of the population at hand?⁷⁶ And, on the other hand, which differences are deemed intolerable and demand intervention? At first sight, the delineation and enforcement of internal boundaries seems to contradict the ideal of a homogenous nation-state. Yet modern nation-states operate based on precisely such internal borders.

One of the central concepts of modern national communities is that of citizenship. The concept of citizenship has received ample scholarly attention across the disciplines in recent years.⁷⁷ Scholars have analyzed and theorized, among other topics, participatory rights versus proclamations of national belonging, the relationship between political and social citizenship, the moral implications of granting

⁶⁹ Enzo Collotti, “Il razzismo negato,” in *Fascismo e antifascismo. Rimozioni, revisioni, negazioni*, edited by Enzo Collotti (Rome: Laterza, 2000).

⁷⁰ Ibid., 362.

⁷¹ Enzo Collotti, *Fascismo fascismi* (Florence: Sansoni, 1989), 56-57.

⁷² *L'offesa della razza*, 28.

⁷³ See Schneider, 77.

⁷⁴ See Nani, *Ai confine della nazione*. The study combines the analysis of the Italian imagined idea of Africans, the Mezzogiorno, and Jews. Among the most interesting analyses of the Mezzogiorno as an antithetical vessel of national identity formation are Paolo Macry, “Se l’unità crea la divisione: immagini del Mezzogiorno nel discorso politico nazionale,” in *Due nazioni. Legittimazione e delegittimazione nella storia dell’Italia contemporanea*, edited by L. Di Nucci and E. Galli della Loggia (Bologna: Il mulino, 2003); Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002); Enrico Dal Lago and Rick Halpern, eds., *The American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno: Essays in Comparative History* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); John Dickie, *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860-1900* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999); Jane Schneider, ed., *Italy’s “Southern Question”: Orientalism in One Country*, New York, Berg, 1998. See also Antonio Gramsci, *The Southern Question. Translation and Introduction by Pasquale Verdicchio* (West Lafayette, IN: Bordighera, 1995).

⁷⁵ Nani, 101.

⁷⁶ On the ways in which Fascism promoted regional traditions within Italy in order to forge national unity, see Stefano Cavazza, *Piccole patrie: feste popolari tra regione e nazione durante il fascismo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997).

⁷⁷ For an overview of the term and concept in modern European history and its relevance in the study of class consciousness see Kathleen Canning, “Of Meanings and Methods. The Concepts of Class and Citizenship in German History,” in *Gender History in Practice. Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class, and Citizenship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

or refusing citizenship, the interplay of race, class, and gender in definitions and practices of citizenship, and the differences between formal citizenship and performative and experiential citizenship.⁷⁸ In tracing the latest developments in the analysis of citizenship in the German historical field, Kathleen Canning has succinctly expressed the overlapping connotations of the concept and its multiple applications:

One of the most porous concepts in contemporary academic parlance, citizenship can be understood as a political status assigned to individuals by states, as a relation of belonging to specific communities, or as a set of social practices that define the relationships between peoples and states and among peoples within communities.⁷⁹

In fact, citizenship carries many more meanings than the narrow definition of political participation as ensuing from the legal relationship with a state. At the same time, the multiple connotations of the term can easily lead to misrepresentations and misunderstandings.

The making of a nation occurs through the interrelated processes of developing “civic” as well as “ethnic” notions of belonging, which in conjunction define the boundaries of nationhood.⁸⁰ Ascriptions of difference and the delineation of citizenship rights are always interconnected.

Citizenship as a concept assumes and pronounces equality among those who enjoy it. Obviously many people within a state have been and continue to be excluded, by age and gender, wealth and race, from participatory citizenship. After World War I, Italian women were still denied the right to political participation and the right to vote; the right to political citizenship was extended to all men over the age of 21 only in 1913.

The expansion of the Italian state after World War I called for a redefinition of the political and national community and the incorporation of the annexed populations. The question was whether to extend the principles of citizenship to the “conquered.” If other peoples, indeed “races,” were identified as residing within the nation, what should be their legal status? All the native inhabitants of the new borderlands annexed after World War I were awarded Italian nationality (women and the young) or Italian citizenship (men), the latter entailing the right to vote. Since these populations had been “redeemed,” awarding citizenship seemed to be the obvious path. Yet the meaning and relevance of this citizenship was ambivalent.

For one, the acquisition of Italian citizenship became for the German, Slav, and Slovene speakers of the northern borderlands a means of denationalization. Not only had they become Italian citizens, they were to be turned into “true” Italians. As a political concept, citizenship promised equality among all members of the Italian state; yet in practice it endorsed intolerance, injustice, and inequality.⁸¹

Concurrently, with the consolidation of the Fascist dictatorship, citizenship no longer afforded political participation. Citizenship rights did not enable the Italian population at large, let alone linguistic minorities, to oppose the regime in any meaningful way. Only praise and support were now allowed in the public arena.

As a matter of fact, citizenship status did not secure German speakers the same rights as Italian speakers. The former were locked out of particular labor markets and denied access to some state privileges in their home regions. For instance, the Fascist state forced the industrialization of the province of South Tyrol precisely in order to facilitate its Italianization via the settlement of Italian workers. The disbursement of state subsidies was tied to the importation of workers from other provinces, thus effectively locking the native population out of the newly created industrial jobs. Likewise, agricultural developments in Africa almost exclusively aided the settlement of immigrant Italians rather than native Libyans.

⁷⁸ See, among many others, Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: the Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999); Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁷⁹ Canning, “Of Meanings and Methods”, 201.

⁸⁰ Nani, *Ai confini della nazione*, 327.

⁸¹ Enzo Collotti, “Sul razzismo antisloveno.” 55.

Moreover, the implementation of racial laws in 1938 sanctioned discrimination against those who did not fit into the category of “*razza ariana*,” the “Aryan race.” Like their fellow Jewish countrymen, the “Slavs” on the eastern border were Italian citizens. The racial laws of 1938 did not abrogate their standing as Italian citizens.⁸² Yet, irrespective of their citizenship status, the racial legislation limited their spheres of activity in public life. Citizenship, in theory an emblem of equality afforded by the state, did not protect against racial discrimination perpetuated by the state. Citizenship and race became two separate classifications for placing all inhabitants of the Italian state into a hierarchy sanctioned by the Italian state. In such a system of classification, race clearly carried greater weight than citizenship. Being an Italian citizen yet of “Jewish race” entailed the loss of fundamental rights, such as the ability to work in public employment, attend public schools, and marry non-Jews.

Within the Italian peninsula, neither race nor religion was considered in defining a person’s status vis-à-vis the state until the enactment of the racial laws in 1938. But citizenship within the confines of the nation is one thing; citizenship in the colonies is yet another. The colonial context was marked by a multiplicity of forms of “citizenship” carrying different meanings. There clearly was a hierarchy to them: after the “citizen” came the “special citizen” and finally the “subject.” Citizenship provisions created hierarchies between the Italian and the colonial population as well as among colonial peoples. While Libyans could initially achieve “metropolitan citizenship” and later “special citizenship,” the populations of Eritrea, Somalia, and Ethiopia were denied the possibility of attaining citizenship status at any time. From a legal standpoint, they could never be anything but “*sudditi*,” “subjects.”

The study of mixed marriages and the children born from such relationships has been particularly successful in showing the contradictions inherent in citizenship legislation in the colonies.⁸³ The 1937 prohibition of mixed marriages included relationships between Italians and Libyans. The law also prohibited relationships that did not entail formal marriage. And it moreover denied citizenship to the offspring of such relationships. Yet how did such legislation relate to people’s perception of who deserved to hold Italian citizenship? With respect to the treatment of “mixed-blood” children, Giulia Barrera has for instance illustrated that for many Italian fathers and Eritrean mothers, paternal descent rather than race defined the identity of their children – and in their view should have defined their legal status as well.⁸⁴

The accords of 1919 between Italy and the colonies of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica included provisions for citizenship.⁸⁵ The norms, inspired by French legislation for Algeria issued earlier in the year, created the categories of “*cittadino italiano libico della Tripolitania*” and “*cittadino italiano libico della Cirenaica*” (Italian Libyan citizen of Tripolitania and of Cyrenaica).⁸⁶ The new legislation conferred full citizenship status on all Libyan men in Libya; within Libya, they were equal to the metropolitan Italian citizens living in the colony. The provisions also granted freedom of the press and assembly, reflecting the principle of association underwriting the accords, which conferred local

⁸² Michele Sarfatti, *La Shoa in Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005), 86. Only the Italian citizenship of Jews who were awarded citizenship after 1918 is revoked. This provision excluded the Jews of the newly annexed territories who became Italian citizens after World War I. The program of the Republican Fascist Party, the successor party of the PNF in the Republic of Salò of November 14, 1943, denied citizenship to all Jews and declared them of “enemy nationality.” In Sarfatti, appendix, 153-54: “7. Gli appartenenti alla razza ebraica sono stranieri. Durante questa guerra appartengono a nazionalità nemica.”

⁸³ Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Lora Wildenthal “Race, Gender, and Citizenship in the German Colonial Empire,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, edited by Frederick Cooper and Ann L. Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and Ann Laura Stoler, “Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers. Cultural Competence and the Dangers of Métissage,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34 (1992). For the Italian context see Barrera, “Patrilinearità, razza e identità” and Gianluca Gabrielli, “Un aspetto della politica razzista dell’impero.”

⁸⁴ Barrera, “Patrilinearità, razza e identità.”

⁸⁵ The decree of June 1, 1919 n. 931 approved the norms for Tripolitania and the decree of October 31, 1919 n. 2401 approved those for Cyrenaica.

⁸⁶ See Florence Renucci, “La strumentalizzazione del concetto di cittadinanza in Libia negli anni trenta” *Quaderni Fiorentini per la storia del pensiero giuridico moderno*, 33/34 (2004/2005). On the issue of citizenship and subjecthood in colonies see also Ester Capuzzo, “Sudditanza e cittadinanza nell’esperienza coloniale italiana dell’età liberale” *Clio* (1995): 65-95. For a discussion of racial theories and citizenship legislation see Fabrizio De Donno, “La Razza Ario-Mediterranea: Ideas of Race and Citizenship in Colonial and Fascist Italy, 1885-1941,” *Interventions* 8, no. 3 (2006): 394-412.

legislative, administrative, and juridical powers to the Libyan population. Libyans held both passive and active voting rights for the parliaments of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. If a Libyan moved to Italy, however, he lost his right of political participation.

In granting full citizenship to the male Libyan population, the accords of 1919 represented a form of “national” rapprochement between the colony and the metropole. On paper, they placed the Libyan population on a par with the metropolitan population. Though the colonies of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were not labeled national provinces, the legislation pointed in that direction. Later, the Fascist regime was to officially incorporate the provinces of Tripoli, Misurata (Misratah), Bengasi (Benghazi), and Derna (Darnah) into the national administrative structure; yet the Libyan population would be excluded from such national incorporation.

Given the scarcity of sources and accounts of that short time period of cooperation, it is hard to assess whether the new legislation had any real effects on the majority of the Libyan population. Yet the spirit of collaboration inscribed in the accords was not to endure. A few years later, the liberal Italian government responded to new anti-colonial uprisings in Tripolitania with a brutal “pacification” campaign that the Fascist government would soon extend into Cyrenaica. In 1924, the Italians declared the accords of 1919 null and void. As Libyans and Italians, the latter heavily represented by Eritrean colonial troops, met on the battlefield, citizenship was no longer an issue.⁸⁷

In 1927, the Fascist state officially abolished local parliaments and the Italian Libyan citizenship afforded to all Libyan men.⁸⁸ The new overall legislation for Tripolitania and Cyrenaica instead redefined the category of “*cittadini italiani libici*” (Italian Libyan citizens) as a privilege requiring the approval of the Italian authorities on an individual basis. Applying for Italian Libyan citizenship, however, entailed the renunciation of Muslim customary laws. In fact, Italian colonial law demanded that Italian Libyan citizens stop abiding by the Muslim personal statutes which, based on the precepts of Islam, pertained to the family, personal property, and religious practice (*statuto personale, diritto di famiglia e successorio*). Applying for citizenship thus meant relinquishing (“*abiurare*”) one’s religious laws and by extension one’s culture and community. Apparently, during the eleven years in which this legislation was in force, only three or four Libyans asked to become citizens.⁸⁹

The acquisition of Italian Libyan citizenship did not require the same renunciations from the Jews of Libya, although the prerequisites were the same:

having served with faithfulness and honor in a military corps of the state, or holding a public government office or receiving a pension from the state, or having received a decoration or an honorary distinction granted from the government.⁹⁰

The restricted Italian Libyan citizenship was maintained after the two separate colonies of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were unified into the single colony of Libya in December 1934.⁹¹ The Libyan population at large was granted individual freedoms, such as the right to own property and to choose one’s residency and employment. Libyans could also hold some military and civil functions. The freedom of the press and assembly and the permission to work in Italy, already rescinded in 1927, were not reinstituted after the establishment of a single colony.

However, the new governor, who would more than anyone else come to define the destiny of the unified colony of Libya, did not support such subjection of the Libyan population. Italo Balbo oversaw the transformation of the colony into a national region, and he advocated granting full citizenship to the Arab population. In 1938, he presented his initiative to the Grand Counsel of

⁸⁷ On the use of Eritrean troops in the Libyan campaigns see Alessandro Volterra, *Sudditi coloniali: ascari eritrei 1935- 1941* (Milano: F. Angeli, 2005).

⁸⁸ Law of June 26, 1927 n. 1013.

⁸⁹ ASDMAE, ASMAI V, Materiale recuperato al Nord, b. 7, f. Lineamenti generali della nostra azione politica in Libia. Book manuscript, no author, but the last page seems to be signed “Riccardo Astuti.”

⁹⁰ Ibid.: “aver servito con fedeltà e onore in un corpo militare dello Stato, od essere titolare di una funzione pubblica governativa o di una pensione corrisposta dallo Stato, od essere insignito di una decorazione o di una distinzione onorifica concessa dal Governo”.

⁹¹ Law of December 3, 1934 n. 1012. The governorship had been unified under one person a few years earlier.

Fascism in Rome. Unsurprisingly, in light of the wave of racial laws issued that same year, the regime did not follow through on Balbo's proposal.

The governor's position vis-à-vis the Libyan people was more than incongruous. He demanded citizenship rights for them, but he also advocated segregationist policies. For instance, agriculture in Libya's most fertile areas was to be reserved only for metropolitan Italians. The agricultural village projects for Libyans were clearly run for propaganda purposes and in order to settle, and better control, the nomad population.

Balbo also created a separate military youth organization for Arabs, the *Gioventù Araba del Littorio* (GAL, Arab Fascist Youth), mirroring the *Gioventù Italiana del Littorio* (GIL, Italian Fascist Youth) in Italy.⁹² Then again, he defended the decision to hold a soccer tournament between a team of metropolitan Italians and a team of Arab GAL members in 1937, when the anxiety over racial mixing reached a highpoint in the rule of the newly attained empire in East Africa. Mussolini had read about the tournament in the paper and demanded that, in the future, Arabs be barred from participating in the same events as Italians.⁹³ Balbo explained that rescinding such interaction would yield to political repercussions and added: "Let it be said with full frankness, it seems to me that the young GAL members, militarily trained to fight on our side, may also play soccer with our soldiers and the youth of our organizations."⁹⁴

Balbo moreover defended the economic needs of Libyans, requesting that taxes for the export of native products to the Italian peninsula be lowered. He dined and celebrated with Arab elites, but his views were racist, as illustrated by the earlier quotation in which he exhorted Italian officers to attend mass so as to assert the alleged racial superiority of the Italian population in Libya. He defended the position of Libya's Jews, but did not hesitate to have beaten in public those who failed to comply with his ruling that all stores in the Italian part of town be open on Saturdays.

Balbo's request for full citizenship to all Libyans was denied. Yet Libya's new status as an Italian region in 1939 still demanded a reevaluation of the legal status of the Libyan population. The new citizenship provision of 1939 created two categories of citizenship for Muslim Libyans.⁹⁵ The "*cittadinanza coloniale*" (colonial citizenship) applied to all Muslim Libyans residing in one of the four Italian provinces. The Libyans living in the territory to the south were all considered colonial subjects. Then there was the category of "*cittadini italiani libici speciali*" (special Italian Libyan citizens). Arabs residing in the Italian provinces could apply for it. But attaining full Italian citizenship was out of the question as the decree of 1939 established that "the Libyans can no longer become Italian citizens *optimo jure*."⁹⁶

All forms of colonial citizenship required a period of military service. But only those with special citizenship could hold higher rank in the military or even carry arms. But even when holding special citizenship, Libyans could only occupy positions that did not involve commanding Italians (as per article 7). Libyan however needed this special citizenship in order to participate in public life, to become part of the *Associazione Musulmana del Littorio* (Muslim Fascist Association, the Arab section of the Fascist party), or to serve as *podestà* in municipalities where no Italians resided.

To qualify for special citizenship, one had to be employed in either the military, the civil service or the police and to know written and spoken Italian. This form of citizenship no longer

⁹² The GAL was created per gubernatorial decree August 7, 1935 n. 8416. The GIL emerged out of the ONB, the *Opera Nazionale Balilla*, which organized youth from 1926 to 1937.

⁹³ ASDMAE, ASMAI, GAB, b. 70, f. Problemi della razza (1): Article in the newspaper "Avvenire di Tripoli" on April 11, 1937, n. 88. Lessona wrote a telegram to Balbo on April 16, 1937 saying that Mussolini had read about the championship in the "Avvenire": "S.E. Capo Governo desidera che una volta concluso campionato in corso musulmani non siano ammessi partecipare gare sportive insieme nazionali."

⁹⁴ ASDMAE, ASMAI, GAB, b. 70, f. Problemi della razza (1): Balbo answered the following day, on April 17, 1937, defending the championship: "Sia detto con tutta franchezza mi pare che giovani G.A.L. addestrati militarmente per combattere nostro fianco possano pure giocare al calcio coi nostri soldati e coi giovani nostre organizzazioni." Balbo explained he would follow through on the order, even though it might provoke "political repercussions" and asked to discuss the matter with the Duce during his next visit to Rome.

⁹⁵ Law of January 9, 1939 n. 70.

⁹⁶ ASDMAE, ASMAI V, Materiale recuperato al Nord, b. 7, f. Lineamenti generali della nostra azione politica in Libia. Book manuscript, no author, but the last page seems to be signed "Riccardo Astuti": "I libici non possono più divenire cittadini italiani *optimo jure*."

demanding that one give up the Muslim personal statutes. There was tacit “respect” for Muslim customary laws, including the right to polygamy. Yet by October 1940, no more than 2,500 Libyans had applied for special citizenship.⁹⁷ According to Claudio Segrè, many Libyans applied only because they believed that “special citizenship” had become a necessary requirement to retain their jobs.⁹⁸

Italian colonialist circles acclaimed the new legislation, arguing that by upholding the Muslim personal statutes, Italy was showing respect and tolerance for Islam. As a matter of fact, the new citizenship law was just one of the ways in which the Italian state sought to enforce greater distance and separation between the Italian and the Libyan population.

Ironically, the personal statutes were used as a rationale to erase full citizenship for native Libyans. Given the very few applications for citizenship submitted since 1927, when Libyans were required to rescind Muslim personal statutes, legal experts claimed that the special citizenship law of 1939 sought to accommodate the desire of Libyans to retain their personal statutes. But preoccupations existed about the incompatibility between the “Western” and the “Muslim” civilization:

The greatest legal obstacle, the cliff around which colonizing states have circled until now, is constituted however by the upheaval of the national ethical as well as legal order of metropolitan society and derives from the moral incompatibility between the native personal and familial statute and the metropolitan statute, when they ought to be conjoined in the same citizenship: incompatibility, in particular the Muslim one – for example – which with regard to such a field is most interesting for colonial law, reflects that the two conditions of individual and social life between the two states are not only different but antithetical in terms of civilization (Roman-Christian and Islamic).⁹⁹

Like the Muslim population, the non-Muslim, non-Italian Libyan population – mainly of Jewish, Greek, and Maltese origins – was also denied full citizenship, but on less clear juridical grounds.¹⁰⁰ In addition, the special citizenship open only to Muslim Libyans was not available to them. This condition applied above all to Libya’s Jewish community, who could only be considered “subjects.” Prior to 1939, though, there had been a distinction between “native” Jews and “metropolitan” Jews, which included Jews of foreign nationality.¹⁰¹ At that point, Jewishness alone did not yet constitute an official category of distinction in Libya but was further qualified by one’s origin and level of local assimilation.

The special citizenship law of 1939 only mentioned “religious,” that is Muslim, prerequisites, but some interpreted the law as having clear racial connotations. According to one commentator, native Libyans were afforded a special Italian citizenship:

but that does not mean that their capacity for public rights, limited to the territory of Italian Africa, is limited only for religious reasons, thus ultimately in order to inhibit them from abandoning their statute: it implies also and primarily a racial limitation...¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Graziani quoted in Renucci, 329.

⁹⁸ Segrè, *Italo Balbo*, 399.

⁹⁹ Mandaini, “Il problema della cittadinanza ai sudditi coloniali” *Rivista delle Colonie*, 1939: 57. Quoted in Renucci, 339: “L’ostacolo giuridico maggiore, lo scoglio al cui largo hanno girato finora gli Stati colonizzatori, è costituito invece dal turbamento dell’ordine etico, nonché giuridico, nazionale della società metropolitana, derivante dall’incompatibilità morale fra statuto personale e familiare indigeno e statuto metropolitano quando vogliano essere accomunati in una stessa cittadinanza: incompatibilità, nella fattispecie musulmana – ad es. – che più interessa in tale campo il diritto coloniale, che riflette quella fra due condizioni non conciliabili di vita individuale e sociale, fra due stati non diversi soltanto ma antitetici di civiltà (romano-cristiana ed islamica).”

¹⁰⁰ See Renucci.

¹⁰¹ ACS, Ministero Africa Italiana (MAI), b 707 Movimenti popolazione Libia (1936-41), f. 2: Note on a report card for Derna for the period August-December 1936: “Per la popolazione israelita si usano schede “Metropolitani” o quelle “Indigeni”, rispettivamente se gli israeliti a cui si riferiscono appartengono alla popolazione metropolitana o straniera, oppure a quella indigena od assimilata.”

¹⁰² Sertoli Salis, “Il nuovo statuto libico” in *Il Diritto Fascista*, 1938, p. 44, quoted in Renucci, 337: “Occorre a questo punto non equivocare. Quando l’art. 4 del nuovo statuto libico prescrive che la cittadinanza italiana speciale per i nativi mussulmani delle quattro provincie libiche non modifichi lo statuto personale e successorio di costoro, ciò non significa che la loro

He went on to say that “metropolitan citizenship is however in any case prohibited to the Libyan, precisely for racial reasons.”¹⁰³

National status, colonial status, citizenship: the rather ambiguous nature of these distinctions created anxieties among colonial observers. Not everyone was happy about Libya’s coastal areas gaining the status of Italian national provinces in 1939. A book manuscript on the political administration of Libya specifically took up the issue of citizenship for the Libyan population.¹⁰⁴ Ironically, it argued that giving full citizenship to Libyans would undermine Italy’s “sovereignty” over Libya. The author claimed that the special citizenship of 1939 had been instituted to create a class of native leaders, but that it might result in a class of “privileged natives.” The author believed that after the war, the relationship between Libya and Italy would have to be rethought. Libya would have to be treated again like a colony rather than equated with the motherland:

Libya is not Italy..., to the native populations we cannot apply assimilative processes,... the very Italians who settle in Libya cannot expect to find unchanged the political, social, and economic conditions of the motherland.... The Libyan problem is still an exclusively colonial problem.¹⁰⁵

Different understandings of what assimilation meant were circulating during this time. For this particular author, granting special citizenship was already too much of a gesture of assimilation. With respect to citizenship, there were clear differences between the diverse populations of the northern border regions and those living in Italy’s African colonies. Unlike the German speakers of South Tyrol, the Arabs, Berbers, and Jews of Libya were not full Italian citizens. However, the parameters of citizenship in a Fascist dictatorship are also restricted for the representatives of the “master race.” Political citizenship was meaningless under such a government. Civil rights were curtailed. Social citizenship as an entitlement to state welfare provisions was meted out as a gift imparted by the state rather than a public good. Moreover, citizenship alone did not codify superiority and privilege; many other ordinances did, most importantly the racial laws of 1938, by institutionalizing difference in the political, economic, social, and cultural realm.

To what extent though did citizenship play a role in people’s self-identification and in the encounter between Italians and “others,” both within the nation and in the empire? “Citizenship” denotes not only a set of rights and duties, but can also represent forms of experience and subjectivity. It is the analysis of this particular level of citizenship that has produced some of the most intriguing studies on the topic.¹⁰⁶ Experiential and performative instances of “citizenship” can be quite different from the legislative ones – though not necessarily more inclusive or equalizing.

Thinking about the meaning of citizenship, I am compelled to differentiate between the various historical actors. The Fascist state devised many different categories of citizenship to navigate and negotiate its own contradictory views of nation and empire. Individual Italian citizens sometimes felt that even the concession of a “special citizenship” awarded too many rights to select Libyans. And the “others” often either ignored citizenship provisions or complied with them out of practical necessity. For them, citizenship was yet another imposition imparted by the colonial state; it did not resonate with the ways in which the native population positioned the (male) self inside its own public sphere.

(Contd.) _____

capacità di diritto pubblico, limitata al territorio dell’Africa italiana, sia limitata per soli motivi religiosi, cioè in definitiva per impedire loro l’abbandono di tale statuto: significa anche e soprattutto una limitazione razziale...”

¹⁰³ Ibid.: “la cittadinanza metropolitana...è invece in ogni caso vietata al libico appunto per motivi razziali.”

¹⁰⁴ ASDMAE, ASMAI V, Materiale recuperato al Nord, b. 7, f. Lineamenti generali della nostra azione politica in Libia. Book manuscript, no author, but the last page seems to be signed “Riccardo Astuti.”

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.: “La Libia non è Italia..., alle popolazioni native non possono applicarsi processi assimilativi,...gli stessi Italiani che si stabiliscono in Libia non possono pretendere di ritrovarvi immobili le condizioni politiche, sociali ed economiche della Madre Patria.... il problema libico è ancora un problema esclusivamente coloniale.”

¹⁰⁶ See, for instance, the work of Lauren Berlant, Aihwa Ong, Elizabeth Thompson, and also Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

Assimilation or Segregation

For both liberal and Fascist Italy, Ancient Rome represented a crucial referent in the transformation of the borderlands. The idea of imperial takeover, with its recreation of the Roman past and its exaltation of Roman glory, implicitly judged the native population, consigning it to an inferior status within an idealized, resurgent Italy.

Yet was interwar Italy a nation that everyone could join, or was it a nation demanding particular, predetermined characteristics of its citizens? Fascist Italy chose a specific conception of nationhood based on the vision of a linguistically, religiously, and increasingly racially homogenous populace. The implementation of this notion entailed a redefinition of the territory and its people, an imposition of social order. The regime seeded this notion of forced “national” uniformity across the state territory, but it pursued it with particular vengeance in regions where difference and non-compliance with the ideal were most evident.

A question arising in conjunction with notions of “Italianness” and “otherness” is that of assimilation or absolute difference. In territories that posed concrete challenges to an irrefutable claim of “Italianness,” native populations were at times included in and at times excluded from the “nation.” This depended on who was (or felt) entrusted with the task of assimilating “others” or distancing oneself and one’s community from them. Some believed that the “Italians” could absorb the “natives.” Others felt the difference was too great and pushed for segregation or even annihilation.

Yet these approaches were not mutually exclusive. Assimilative and segregationist efforts coexisted; strategies of assimilation and dissimulation alternated, overlapping at times. In fact, the sustenance of rule at both the national and imperial levels required complex systems of differentiation, assimilation, and segregation. Each approach entailed violent impositions.

Certain approaches and attitudes displayed in Libya and South Tyrol are part of the Fascist repertoire. However, they are also part of a longer trajectory of Italian self-understanding and aspiration in the Alps, toward Austria, in the Mediterranean, and as a European colonial power. Yet there were also important differences. In fact, Libya was a colony, and thus the Italian government approached it within a European framework of colonial rule. Adding race to the concept of “Italianness” was without doubt more pronounced in the colonial context, where international discourses of European superiority and the earlier colonial practices of liberal Italy influenced Fascist images of the “colonizer” and the “colonized.” Relations in the colony were moreover underwritten by Italy’s imagination of the Orient and ideas about its relation to Islam.

Given the wide acceptance of colonial racism, Libya’s status as a colony allowed for the open, unapologetic differentiation between colonizer and colonized. Yet, the nationalization of Libya, the transformation of the colony into a national province, in theory could have engendered the equalization of all inhabitants of Libya. Now that Libya was Italy, what was the place of native Arabs and Jews to be?

In making a national province out of Libya, the Fascists retained the uncomfortable realization that “foreigners” would live amidst “Italians.” The regime also experienced discomfort about its inability to achieve total “Italianness” in South Tyrol. There was great hope that the education of local children could, in time, accomplish Italianization. However, the perception of innate and insurmountable differences grew more powerful in the late 1930s even with regard to the native South Tyroleans, and dissimulation came to be accepted more readily as a possibility in South Tyrol as well.

Transformation of the native population turned out to be complicated and not even necessarily desirable. Neither group could be assimilated, nor was either at all interested in the prospect. Thus immigration came to be viewed as the path to an inalienable claim to Italianness. But obviously even settlement could not escape the bounds of a nationalist mindset seeking to set clear borders where there could be none.

Roberta Pergher
Max Weber Fellow 2008-2009