

**Fascism and the Southern Question: Race, Rhetoric, and Reciprocity**

by

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Submitted to the Department of History  
School of Humanities  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College  
State University of New York

December 2021

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## Introduction

When it comes to the study of Italian nationalism, there is perhaps no quote as frequently referenced as Massimo d’Azeglio’s “We have made Italy, now we must make Italians,”<sup>1</sup> referring to both the need to do away with the regional divisions which separated fellow Italians from one another, and to bridge the gap between commoners and the government— “real” and “political/legal” Italy.

Far less quoted, however, is when he referred to the South as an “Augean stable.”<sup>2</sup> Or, when he declared “In every way, unification with the *Napoletani* scares me. It’s like getting in bed with a smallpox patient,”<sup>3</sup> and “[Naples] is an ulcer that gnaws at us and costs us.”<sup>4</sup>

Yet, less than 100 years later in a speech given from Naples’ San Carlo Theater just a few days before his infamous March on Rome, Mussolini would endearingly call that very same Naples “the ardent soul of all of Italy’s south.”<sup>5</sup>

Looking past the different contexts in which these utterances were made, the dichotomy between them is nevertheless a striking one. With unity and collectivism being core components of Fascism,<sup>6</sup> failing to instill these values in the Italian people would compromise the entire

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<sup>1</sup> Salvatore Lupo, *Il Fascismo: La politica in un regime totalitario* (Rome: Donzelli, 2000), 94-98, quoted in Christopher Duggan, *Fascist Voices: An Intimate History of Mussolini’s Italy*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 51.

<sup>2</sup> Denis Mack Smith, *Cavour and Garibaldi 1860: A Study in Political Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 414.

<sup>3</sup> Collection of letters from Massimo d’Azeglio and Diomede Pantaleoni, *Massimo d’Azeglio e Diomede Pantaleoni*, Giovanni Faldella pref. (Turin: L. Roux, 1888), 430.

<sup>4</sup> *Atti del XXXVII congresso di storia del Risorgimento italiano* (Rome: Istituto per la storia del Risorgimento italiano, 1961), 100, quoted in Nelson Moe, “Altro che Italia! Il Sud dei piemontesi (1860-61),” *Meridiana*, no. 15 (September 1992): 68, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23192582>.

<sup>5</sup> Antonio Scurati, *Il figlio del secolo* (Florence: Bompiani, 2018), 538.

<sup>6</sup> “The Doctrine of Fascism, Benito Mussolini (1932),” World Future Fund, <http://www.worldfuturefund.org/wffmaster/Reading/Germany/mussolini.htm#APPENDIX>.

ideological foundation that the movement was built upon. Thus, to eradicate the *campanilismo*<sup>7</sup> which permeated the minds of so many Italians and instill a cohesive national identity across all of Italy was paramount. How was Fascism to resolve a regional divide which permeated the mindsets of both Italy's commoners and elites from its very conception as a nation?

This project was inspired by the contradictory nature of Fascism's assertion that Italians belong to a superior Aryan race in the face of a pre-existing narrative that southerners are racially inferior to the Nation's northerners. Understanding this contradiction can provide insight as to how political figures use their rhetoric to shift preexisting social narratives, creating and redefining the boundaries of groups of insiders and outsiders—even beyond the context of race.

This is especially relevant considering recent research criticizing the approach historians have taken in studying the Southern Question. Acknowledging the vagueness of the term "race" due to the many varying historical contexts in which it's used, and subtle changes in the word's meaning from one language and culture to another, some find it better to frame the Southern Question above all else as a problem of ethnocentrism—whether that be differences constructed between races, "...city and country, center and periphery, colonizer and colonized, [or] believer and heathen..." it's always a question of "us" and "them."<sup>8</sup> Others have argued that each of Italy's regions had its own "South" from which wealthy landowners could reap profits.<sup>9</sup>

Historian Angelo Matteo Caglioti's publication "Race, Statistics and Italian Eugenics: Alfredo Niceforo's Trajectory from Lombroso to Fascism (1876-1960)," served as the jumping-off point for this paper, specifically in his quoting of a speech Mussolini gave in Calabria, in

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<sup>7</sup> Defined as "an exaggerated and narrow-minded attachment to one's town or city," from the word *campanile* (bell tower).

<sup>8</sup> John Dickie, *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860-1900* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy: Life Under the Fascist Dictatorship* (New York: NY, The Penguin Group, 2007), 37.

which he denies the existence of the Southern Question. This was presumably done in order to paint an image of the South which was in line with Fascism's claim of being a superior Aryan civilization, discourage feelings of resentment directed towards the State for their historical apathy towards the welfare of the South, and promote a message of national unity so that those listening think of themselves as "Italian" above all else, rather than "southern" or some other regional identity.<sup>10</sup> This Senior Project further investigates Mussolini's rhetoric both towards and about Italy's southerners, describing the relationship that existed between them as a mutually shallow glorification.

Works that conduct rhetorical analyses of Mussolini are hardly a novel concept. However, this paper attempts not only to better understand his rhetoric specifically along regional lines, but also utilizes excerpts from letters and journals in order to better understand how Fascism was received by the southerners themselves. While this proved to be difficult at times due to the limitations of the research process and its dependence on secondary sources, these glimpses of southern voices allow us a deeper understanding of how Fascism worked not just from the top-down, but from the bottom-up as well.

Chapter 1 points to examples of Mussolini's denial of the Southern Question, his exaggerated claims about southerners' devotion to Fascism, and his eventual denunciation of the character of all Italians in support of this argument. It also discusses the southerners' shallow glorification of Mussolini, pointing to both the absence of ideology behind Fascism's rise in the

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<sup>10</sup> Benito Mussolini, "Al Popolo di Reggio Calabria," in *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini XXIX*, eds. Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel (Florence: La Fenice, 1959), 257, quoted in Angelo Matteo Caglioti, "Race, Statistics and Italian Eugenics: Alfredo Niceforo's Trajectory from Lombroso to Fascism (1876-1960)," *European History Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (2017): 476-477, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265691417707164>.

South, and reports of southerners displaying an intense loyalty to Mussolini himself, but not to Fascism as a whole.

Chapter 2 focuses on Mussolini's glorification of southern stereotypes, calling attention to the fact that nearly all of the characteristics which made up the archetype of the new Fascist man best described a southerner rather than a northerner—a notion which appears to be fairly novel in the study of Fascism. Mussolini ignored the fact that these stereotypes arose from a historical context of anti-unity to the Italian nation, and ultimately failed to deliver meaningful improvements in the facets of life with which these stereotypes were concerned, such as fecundity and rurality.

The conclusion discusses aspects of the Southern Question in contemporary Italian society, focusing on the recent success of the Northern League in the South following their rebranding to the League. Exploring notions of a shared historical experience between southerners and clandestine immigrants in the process of Italian identity formation, the conclusion suggests that, ultimately, rhetoric and the perception of threat matter more to voters than politicians' ideological consistency. Through looking at how the League—a party founded upon the very idea of the South being an inferior “other” from which the North needed to secede—managed to find success in the South by absorbing it into an “us” group which is now national in scope in the context of a new foreign “they,” we can better understand how Fascism sought to repair an Italian identity which was originally developed within the context of the southern “other.”

## Chapter 1

### **Imperialism, Race, and the Southern Question: A Mutual Idealization Between Mussolini and Italy's Southerners**

Although the Southern Question is an issue which is rooted in the modern era, one can look back long before conceptions about Italy (or even any modern nation-state at all) existed in order to understand why Italy's north and south developed differently. According to author A.L. Maraspini in his work *The Study of an Italian Village*, this divergence emerged from as long ago as the Western Roman Empire's collapse. The North found itself frequently at war with competing powers, leading to the growth of city-states whose hegemony was based on commerce and military strength rather than land acquisition, due to insecurity which was caused by the constant conflict.<sup>11</sup>

The South however, saw a vastly different political development, with a feudal system having been introduced during the Norman Occupation that gave ultimate authority to the local lordling/land-owner, whose power eclipsed that of even the Crown.<sup>12</sup> Methods of farming would go on to be mostly unchanged for centuries, with peasants struggling to survive by working on tiny plots of infertile soil leased to them by "wealthy absentee landowners whose attitudes to the rural workforce were feudal in still in both spirit and practice" even as late as the start of the 20th century.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the deep-rooted differences in their historical development, the Kingdom of Two Sicilies which made up Italy's south found itself in a relatively healthy economic position at the start of the 19th century compared to the North in the years before unification: Although not

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<sup>11</sup> A.L. Maraspini, *The Study of an Italian Village* (Paris: Mouton & Co, 1968), 100.

<sup>12</sup> Maraspini, *The Study of an Italian Village*, 101.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Duggan, *Fascist Voices: An Intimate History of Mussolini's Italy*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 12.

prosperous in comparison to other European countries, the southern Kingdom was only slightly less well-off than the northern parts of Italy. While agriculture was by far the biggest component of the economy—with 80% of the Kingdom of Two Sicilies’ population being made up of farmers and peasants—some industries existed as well, funded by both local and foreign investments.<sup>14</sup>

As we know, this position of relative economic well-being would then change following Italy’s unification—a recent influx of scholarship even going as far as referring to it as an act of “internal colonization,” in which a process of “othering” the South was done in order to produce a contrasting “modern” Italian identity in the North.<sup>15</sup> Modernization through industrialization was restricted to the North (particularly in the “industrial triangle” of Turin-Milan-Genoa)<sup>16</sup> which planted the seeds of inequity by leading to a snowball effect of unequal economic development, as investors were far more likely to invest in industries in the North where an industrial structure already existed unlike the South.<sup>17</sup>

Arguably the most important historical figure when it comes to the discussion of the Southern Question was the Sardinian Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci. His essay *Notes on the Southern Problem and on the Attitudes Toward it of Communists, Socialists, and Democrats* was written shortly before his imprisonment by the Regime, and discussed the problematic social stratification of Italy’s south which kept the agricultural peasant oppressed through the “mediation of the intellectual.”<sup>18</sup> In this essay, Gramsci called out the Socialist party for its

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<sup>14</sup> Piero Bevilacqua, *Breve storia dell’Italia meridionale: dall’Ottocento ad oggi* (Rome: Donzelli, 1993), 56, quoted in Goffredo Polizzi, “Postcoloniality and the Italian South: Race, Gender, Sexuality, Literature” (master’s thesis, University of Utrecht, 2013), 11.

<sup>15</sup> Polizzi, “Postcoloniality and the Italian South,” 3.

<sup>16</sup> Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Bevilacqua, *Breve storia dell’Italia meridionale*, 97-98.

<sup>18</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *The Southern Question*, trans. Pasquale Verdicchio (New York, NY: Bordighera Press, 2015), 38.



diffusion of anti-southern prejudice, specifically naming several writers of the Positivist school, among them a critical figure when it comes to the discussion of race: Alfredo Niceforo.<sup>19</sup>

Niceforo was a criminologist who, despite being Sicilian himself, argued that the many economic and criminal problems which the South was facing post-unification were ultimately due to race. He wrote that whereas a “Celtic-Aryan” race existed in the more civilized North, a more primitive “Mediterranean” race occupied the South, using phrenology and other measures of physical characteristics in conjunction with crime rates to explain their inferiority.<sup>20</sup>

A large part of his research focused specifically on a crime-ridden area on the island of Sardinia—Gramsci’s homeland. The stereotypes about Sardinians being violent criminals which Niceforo diffused even followed Gramsci all the way to the outskirts of Moscow, where he was hospitalized after falling ill on his way to represent Italy at the Communist International. Having displayed frightening symptoms such as “convulsive trembling and ferocious-looking tics,” Nurses and other visitors reported being incredibly frightened of him. “They knew I was Sardinian, and thought I might have been on the point of knifing someone!” said Gramsci.<sup>21</sup>

The fact that these racial stereotypes were profound enough to follow Italians like Gramsci all the way north to Moscow meant that they also had the potential to follow Italians south to Africa in their imperial endeavors. Imperialism in Italy was of particular importance within the context of the internal divisions and conflict which defined the Italian process of

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<sup>19</sup> Gramsci, *The Southern Question*, 20.

<sup>20</sup> Alfredo Niceforo, *La delinquenza in Sardegna* (Sandron, 1897); id., *L’Italia barbara contemporanea (studi ed appunti)* (Remo Sandron, 1898); id., *Italiani del nord e Italiani del sud* (Fratelli Bocca, 1901); Alfredo Niceforo and Scipio Sighele, *La mala vita a Roma* (Roux, 1898), quoted in Angelo Matteo Caglioti, “Race, Statistics and Italian Eugenics: Alfredo Niceforo’s Trajectory from Lombroso to Fascism (1876-1960),” *European History Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (2017): 465. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265691417707164>.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Ginsborg, *Family Politics: Domestic Life, Devastation and Survival 1900-1950* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 158.

unification—a “cohesive device” which could bring about feelings of national consciousness and eradicate the *campanilismo* which plagued the Italian people.<sup>22</sup>

Imperialism found itself easily justified in Fascist Italy in other ways as well, pulling from both the present and past. Regarding the present, in 1925, the newspaper *Cremona Nuova* wrote that imperialism was “the central idea of Fascism” and that Italy was owed to a greater international presence considering how much was sacrificed for WW1.<sup>23</sup> For what concerns the past, Mussolini declared during a speech in Fiume titled “The Adriatic and the Mediterranean” that Italy had more of a right to imperialism than any other people, “because Italy—which created modern civilization through the Roman Empire and the Renaissance—still has to speak for the third time its word of light, which will carry an idea of universal value”.<sup>24</sup> As always, the legacy of Ancient Rome was capitalized on whenever possible to create ideological support for the Fascist movement.

One of the biggest justifications for imperialism, however, was race. In fact, imperialism and race in Fascist Italy were so inextricably connected that in 1926, Mussolini explicitly told an American news agency that Italy had “no choice” but to expand because of the Nation’s “racial vitality.”<sup>25</sup> Yet, how could Mussolini proudly proclaim that the Italian people needed a “place in the world so as to complete their mission of civilization,”<sup>26</sup> when so much of Italy held the belief

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<sup>22</sup> Sandra Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Post-colonial Culture: Contemporary Women Writers of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), quoted in Polizzi, “Postcoloniality and the Italian South,” 16-17.

<sup>23</sup> Lorenzo Santoro, *Roberto Farinacci e il partito nazionale fascista 1923-1926* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2008), quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 122.

<sup>24</sup> Benito Mussolini, “Speech in Fiume, May 22, 1919: The Adriatic and the Mediterranean,” Biblioteca Fascista, March 3, 2012, <https://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/speech-in-fiume-may-22-1919.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Benito Mussolini, “La Nuova Italia,” in *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini XXII*, ed. Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel (Florence: La Fenice, 1957), 190.

<sup>26</sup> Mussolini, “Speech in Fiume, May 22, 1919,” <https://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/speech-in-fiume-may-22-1919.html>.

that their country's lower half and islands were completely lacking in said civilization thanks to the scientific racism diffused by Niceforo?

Indeed, this contradiction proved to be troublesome as can be seen in the Regime's attempt at imperializing Ethiopia. To one middle-class Tuscan journalist, Ciro Poggiali, even the Ethiopian peasants were more desirable than his fellow countrymen, as he wrote the following report during his time in Ethiopia:

They (southern Italians) are too backward to have authority and impose what is called European civilization. Some of them are perfectly happy in the filth of the mud huts [*tukuls*], because in their Apulian or Calabrian village they have never known anything better. To hear people talk about the prestige of the race is laughable. If you take away the color of the face, what difference is there between some of our ragamuffin fellow countrymen, miserable physical specimens, who have been sent here God knows why, and the Ethiopian peasants who by contrast have very beautiful physiques and appearances.<sup>27</sup>

The idea that "Africa began below Rome"<sup>28</sup> is one that existed since unified Italy's conception, as one government official reported to Cavour from the South that "This is Africa: the Bedouin are the flower of civil virtue compared to these peasants,"<sup>29</sup> and another northerner in the South wrote "Here we are amongst a population which, although in Italy and born Italian, seems to belong to the primitive tribes of Africa."<sup>30</sup> Similar to the Poggiali quote which places the Ethiopians above the Southern Italians, Niceforo wrote in his 1898 book *L'Italia Barbarica Contemporanea* (Contemporary Barbarian Italy) that "The wild lower orders of Sicily's urban

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<sup>27</sup> Ciro Poggiali, *Diario AOI. 15 giugno 1936 - 4 ottobre 1937* (Milan: Longanesi, 1971), 127, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 287.

<sup>28</sup> Don H. Doyle, *Nations Divided: America, Italy, and the Southern Question* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 71.

<sup>29</sup> Farini to Cavour, October 27, 1860, quoted in Dickie, *Darkest Italy*, 35.

<sup>30</sup> Bianco di Saint Jorioz, *Il brigantaggio alla frontiera pontificia, 1860-63* (Milan: Daelli, 1864), 391, quoted in Dickie, *Darkest Italy*, 36.

population are capable of acts of ‘cannibalistic ferocity’ and of scenes ‘that an African tribe would hardly have committed.’<sup>31</sup>

In Libya, the North/South divide proved to be too strong to facilitate peace amongst newly settled colonial families, except this time insults flew in both directions. Despite hopes by the Regime that settling families from a variety of different regions together would help garner a feeling of national spirit, southern colonists called the northerners *polentoni* (as northerners frequently ate polenta) while northern colonists called the southerners *terron-magnasavon* (referring to them as soap-eaters, rather than soap-users).<sup>32</sup>

The past decades of scientific racism that was accepted as fact by the Italian government now stood directly at odds with Fascism’s fundamental component of racial superiority, and as seen from the previous examples, these notions were clearly proving to be problematic for the colonization process. How was the Regime to reconcile the contradiction that Italians were both part of an Aryan master race, while the lower half of them were considered inferior to the upper half?

Well, Mussolini went beyond simply ignoring past claims of southern inferiority: he outright rejected it. In a speech given in Calabria, Mussolini praised the Calabrians for their fecundity, and stated they were “in line with all the other provinces of Italy.” Furthermore, and essentially, he added “The previous [liberal] government had invented the Southern Question with the goal of not ever solving it. There are no Southern or Northern Questions, there is only a

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<sup>31</sup> Niceforo, *L’Italia barbara contemporanea*, 210-211, quoted in Dickie, *Darkest Italy*, 3.

<sup>32</sup> “La colonizzazione e la valorizzazione agraria,” Report, ASMAI III Opere Pubbliche, b. 73, f, quoted in Joshua Arthurs, Michael Ebner, and Kate Ferris, eds., *The Politics of Everyday Life in Fascist Italy: Outside the State?* (New York, NY: Springer Nature, 2017), 193.

National Question, because the nation is a family where there are no privileged or derelict sons,” a statement which was met with enthusiastic applause and cheers from the crowd.<sup>33</sup>

To deny the systematic struggles which plagued the South post-unification and claim that the nation has no privileged or derelict peoples is not only incredibly shallow—it’s blatantly false. The idea that any peoples, from any nation, don’t face different circumstances and levels of hardship is ignorant at best and delusional at worst. Because of this, Mussolini’s attitude towards the Southern Question is best described as shallow and superficial.

It’s evident that being grounded in reality was of no great concern to Mussolini however, as can be seen in his praise of Sicily in 1937, who after visiting Palermo, stated that the region was “Fascist to the bone-marrow.”<sup>34</sup> Not only is this not true—many historians consider Sicily to be the *least* Fascist of all of Italy’s regions, citing not only the virtually nonexistent presence of Fascism on the island in its early years,<sup>35</sup> but also the existence of an anti-Fascist resistance group called the *soldino* movement, which Mussolini himself once described as “the most dangerous anti-Fascist movement.”<sup>36</sup>

And yet perhaps one of the most interesting aspects about the relationship between Mussolini and Italy’s southerners is that in many cases, this baseless praise was returned back unto him. Many in the South shallowly glorified him in a similarly superficial way, with his reputation as an individual rising far above that of Fascism as a whole. Parts of the Fascist party

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<sup>33</sup> Benito Mussolini, “Al Popolo di Reggio Calabria,” in *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini XXIX*, eds. Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel (Florence: La Fenice, 1959), 257.

<sup>34</sup> Giuseppe Savona, *Il neo-pseudo-separatismo siciliano* (Palermo: Messagerie Italiane, 1944), 18, quoted in Jack E. Reece, “Fascism, the Mafia, and the Emergence of Sicilian Separatism (1919-1943),” *The Journal of Modern History* 45, no. 2 (Summer 1973): 261.

<sup>35</sup> Denis Mack Smith, *A History of Sicily: Modern Sicily after 1713* (New York: Dorset Press, 1968), 509, quoted in Reece, “The Emergence of Sicilian Separatism,” 261.

<sup>36</sup> Antonio Trizzino, *Che vuole la Sicilia?* (Rome: S.T.E.I., 1945), 10-12, quoted in Reece, “The Emergence of Sicilian Separatism,” 262.

were aware of this phenomenon even in the early years of the Regime, worried that “in certain parts of the country, *the south especially*, support for Fascism was based primarily on personal admiration for Mussolini and not enough on any ideological commitment.”<sup>37</sup>

This would still be the case even a decade later, when in 1932 an official party report by OVRA (Organization for Vigilance and Repression of Anti-Fascism) wrote the following:

In a rapid tour around southern Italy we have been able to observe how public opinion is almost everywhere—and strangely—becoming ever more sympathetic to the Duce and ever less so to Fascism, which is viewed through the prism of local squabbles and the conduct of party leaders. This conduct is not always—indeed is hardly ever—exemplary... The masses seem every day to become more and more attached to the Duce, who is never blamed in any way at all for the faults that are attributed to the local party officials.<sup>38</sup>

OVRA agents from this tour also reported that this attitude was found more commonly among the lower classes of society. Many explained that the economic hardships they were facing was the result of Mussolini being “betrayed” by his fellow statesmen, rather than his own fault.<sup>39</sup>

This lack of ideological commitment towards Fascism was also described by former Nationalist Nicolò Castellino in a warning he wrote to Fascist party leaders regarding the spread of Fascism throughout the South. He wrote that considering propaganda was practically non-existent throughout the region, the Party couldn’t take the rise of Fascist branches throughout the region at face value. He observed “a complete lack of knowledge of the ideas and principles which inspired the triumph of Fascism,” and explained that the Fascist branches and Blackshirts

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<sup>37</sup> Santoro, *Roberto Farinacci*, 149, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 79.

<sup>38</sup> A. Imbriani, *Gli italiani e il Duce. Il mito e l’immagine di Mussolini negli ultimi anni del fascismo (1938-1943)* (Naples: Liguori, 1992), 112-113, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 232.

<sup>39</sup> Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 232.

were multiplying for other reasons: “the love of novelty, the romantic fascination of *squadrismo*, the spirit of imitation, and, above all, the aim of conquering local government.”<sup>40</sup>

This same sentiment of skepticism was echoed in the writing of a Calabrian Prefect who explained the rise of Fascism to be based solely on local contests for power because “there could be no reaction to Bolshevism where there was none.”<sup>41</sup> Describing Fascism as primarily a reactionary movement by calling attention to the fact that before 1922 only arose in parts of the Country where a strong Socialist party existed, historian Adrian Lyttelton writes that “Southern Fascism suffered from the lack of an enemy.”<sup>42</sup>

So then if not from a place of ideological commitment, where did the personal admiration towards Mussolini on behalf of the southerners come from? Some answers to this question are suggested by Christopher Duggan based on the work done by Ethnologist Charlotte Gower Chapman, who found herself conducting a study in the Sicilian village of Milocca at the end of the 1920s. This remote village, like many others in the South, had a population of 2,500 mainly illiterate agricultural workers, and no running water, electricity, or radios. The village was extremely difficult to reach until an asphalt road was constructed in 1929, and Gower observed that there was little interest among the village residents regarding what was happening throughout the rest of Italy, and a deep-rooted disdain for the Italian government based on past relations.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Report to the P.N.F., August 12, 1923, ACS, MRF, b. 69, quoted in Adrian Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power: Fascism in Italy 1919-1926* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 165.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from a Calabrian Prefect, ACS, GF, b. 8, fasc. 79 Reggio Calabria, quoted in Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power*, 156.

<sup>42</sup> Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power*, 155.

<sup>43</sup> Charlotte G. Chapman, *Milocca: A Sicilian Village* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973), 11-19, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 97-98.

Despite these facts, Gower observed a “general enthusiasm” for Mussolini. Ignoring the fact that one might not want to speak ill of a dictator to a stranger who was taking notes for some kind of report, propaganda of Mussolini’s charitable actions—the idea that someone out there was performing good deeds in a world of poverty and hardship—was viewed with “a potent mixture of hope, awe, enthusiasm, and solicitude.”<sup>44</sup> Mussolini became an icon who rose above the bad reputation of the Italian State, what historian R.J.B. Bosworth calls “Mussolinism.”<sup>45</sup>

News of Mussolini’s good deeds spread throughout the nation, often consisting of him giving money to those who wrote or approached him in need. Many stories of Mussolini in the Pontine marshes of Lazio consist of him riding around on a motorbike in a disguise deliberately to meet the poor and help them. “The idea of a powerful figure moving secretly in the midst of the common people to remedy their injustices,” according to Duggan, was a common trope in many rural societies’ folklore that would have likely been present in a village like Milocca.<sup>46</sup> One poem which circulated around Milocca echoed these sentiments, which read “Great Duce, minister of Italy... man of genius... How beautiful is that divine mind that speaks and sounds like a bell. Duce, give aid to the poor unfortunates, to the little old people who suffer hunger. The blood is water in our veins, poor afflicted Sicilians.”<sup>47</sup> In times of hardship and uncertainty, such as during World War Two, the desire to feel connected to Mussolini grew even stronger, as was the case with one Neapolitan woman who wrote to him in 1941 and said, “In you I see an Apostle of God.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 100.

<sup>45</sup> Bosworth, *Mussolini’s Italy*, 339.

<sup>46</sup> Raffaella Valenti, “Cronaca,” November 28, 1925, March 12, 1926, AND, DP/ 00, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 222-223.

<sup>47</sup> Chapman, *Milocca*, 249.

<sup>48</sup> Merope Panizzi, February 4, 1941, ACS, SPD, CO, Sentimenti, b. 2830, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 359.



However many resources might have been directed by Mussolini towards improving the state of the South, towards the end of the 20 year period Italians were beginning to get the sensation that even more money could have gone to the South rather than be spent on imperialization and war abroad. Even though Mussolini had stated in a speech in Calabria in 1939 that a main goal of Fascism's colonial endeavors in Africa was to further agricultural development for the well-being of the Country's rural population,<sup>49</sup> harrowing scenes from the South made it clear that this goal was not achieved. In 1937, soldiers from Naples wrote "First redeem the Neapolitans, then the blacks. Naples is below the Negroes, the Chinese, the whole world."<sup>50</sup> A similar sentiment was echoed in that same year by the aforementioned journalist Ciro Poggiali, who upon his arrival to Messina from Ethiopia described the following distressing scene:

Every time a steamship arrives from Africa the people of Messina come out and play music on cylinder pianos, hand-organs, guitars and mandolins for the returning passengers. There are hawkers, priests, friars and nuns—who knows if genuine or not—with things for sale... But above all there is a crowd of people in rags begging. They are asking for bread, clothes, money, cigarettes, anything. To fetch a packet of cigarettes, children will throw themselves into the sea. These are the signs of the profound poverty of the city and of Sicily in general... I remember that perfidious article that The Times published on its front page when Italy decided to invade Ethiopia. 'Italy,' it said, more or less, 'is about to spend several billion lire... How much better if those billions could instead have been devoted to the totalitarian regeneration of Sicily, which is a potential earthly paradise waiting to become a real paradise and richly productive, if only every strip of its coastal, interior or mountain land could be given the water that it lacks. With the billions... Italy would have on its doorstep that agricultural and non-agricultural wealth that it is going in search of so far away with its risky enterprise.' However much inspired by traditional English egoism, perhaps the article was not entirely wrong.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Benito Mussolini, "Ai Rurali della Campania," in *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini XXIX*, ed. Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel (Florence: La Fenice, 1959), 259.

<sup>50</sup> "Letter from a numerous group of soldiers returned from Africa," August 1941, ACS, PNF, b. 9, Naples, quoted in Paul Corner, *The Fascist Party and Popular Opinion in Mussolini's Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 211.

<sup>51</sup> Poggiali, *Diario AOI*, 283-284.

The conditions of the South would only deteriorate further with the failures of the Second World War, as its largest ports such as Naples, Taranto, Palermo, Messina, and Catania became subject to bombing raids. One woman from Milan thought the state of her city was harrowing, but found the situation to be entirely worse upon her arrival to Sicily on a trip to visit her son who was stationed there in 1942:

Palermo has things of indescribable beauty... but they are all in streets of irredeemable filth; and the ragged people that stream by put the loveliness in the shade for me, because the grimness, the disease and the poverty evident in their rags is totally overwhelming... How can people be allowed to live in such degradation? I would like everything to be swept away and rebuilt... Is it surprising if the adults are stunted, with short legs and rachitic heads and have poison in their characters? You only need to look at the children. Ragged, with shirts in shreds, bloated stomachs, emaciated shoulders and wrinkled skin. I saw three of them begging: a terrifying sight. There were tears behind my glasses and my heart ached. They were three skeletons, three little old men, but their immense black eyes were filled with so much evil. No need to show us the Russian children in the 'Luce' films!<sup>52</sup>

A similar scene was reported in Sicily as well, this time in a letter from Mussolini's own daughter Edda, who was working as a Red Cross nurse in a town close to Palermo, to the Duce himself:

The city near to the port is all but flattened and even parts of the main streets are half destroyed. Terror is written on everyone's face . . . The problem of food is becoming increasingly serious. After the last air raid on 9 May the population was left without bread for six days, in part because the stores were hit, but mainly because not one of the 300 ovens was working. Nobody thought of using their authority to get them reopened. There has been no water for about a month, the telephones are not working, and there is only sporadic lighting... The civilians here feel abandoned and say so. At the moment they are not rebelling, but the local party leader tells me that if no provision is made for bread and pasta, something will happen... Medicines are needed, clothing, and transport to get this wretched cannon fodder out of the city... When asked for lorries, the military commanders promise two on one day, and on another, none. For God's sake, they should give fifty at a time and get the evacuation underway... As for the soldiers, I have been told by the Federal Secretary that they are making a more unseemly show of fear than the civilians, fleeing like rabbits into the countryside. But this is nothing. When the air raid is over, they stand idly by instead of rushing forward to help, in contrast to the Germans

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<sup>52</sup> Magda Ceccarelli De Grada, *Giornale del tempo di guerra* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 168, quoted in *Duggan, Fascist Voices*, 379-380.

who set to work. The population used not to be able to stand the Germans: now they not only put up with them but admire them for their sense of organisation and their altruism. To sum up: send provisions. In particular bread and pasta (that is all they are asking for), medicines and clothing. I am in a civil hospital, where the people are lying naked in their beds and the surviving family members come and ask for the piece of bread their relative has saved from his board... I have been in Albania and Russia, but I have never seen suffering and pain on this scale. I personally have the impression of having ended up by chance somewhere a thousand miles from the Fatherland and civilization. For the time being people are still saying the Duce does not know what is going on. Now you do.<sup>53</sup>

Towards the end of the war, when the Allied powers occupied the South, the destitution which was seen gave observers the impression of being in a “pre-modern world,” facing “food shortages, black marketeering, inflation, disease, homelessness, broken infrastructures, corruption, petty crime and banditry,” and a huge resurgence in the Sicilian Mafia which the Fascists had worked so hard to eradicate.<sup>54</sup> One British soldier stationed in Naples from 1943-1944 described Naples as a city that had been “pushed back into the middle ages.”<sup>55</sup>

One could speculate that if Mussolini were to be asked who was culpable for the situation, he certainly would not allow the blame to be placed on him—but on the Italians themselves. This can be inferred from Mussolini’s agitation over the lack of desire expressed by the Italians to join World War Two in the early months of 1940. Explicitly referencing race, Mussolini said to his son-in-law and Foreign Minister Gian Galeazzo Ciano in January of 1940 “Have you ever seen a lamb turn into a wolf? The Italian race is a race of sheep. Eighteen years are not enough to transform it. You need 180, or perhaps 180 centuries,”<sup>56</sup> and then in June, “It is the raw material that I lack. Even Michelangelo needed marble in order to make his statues. If he

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<sup>53</sup> Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l’alleato 1940-1945: I. L’Italia in guerra 1940-1943*, vol. 2, *Crisi e agonia del regime* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990), 1149-1150, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 380-381.

<sup>54</sup> Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 405.

<sup>55</sup> Norman Lewis, *Naples ’44: An Intelligence Officer in the Italian Labyrinth* (London: Eland, 1983), 108-110, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 406.

<sup>56</sup> Galeazzo Ciano, *Diario 1937-1943*, ed. Renzo De Felice (Milan: Rizzoli, 1980), 391, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 147.

only had clay, he would simply have been a potter. A people that for sixteen centuries has been the anvil cannot, in a few years, become the hammer.”<sup>57</sup>

Duggan explains this intense ridiculing of the Italian people as a way to deflect blame from Mussolini’s shortcomings and the failures of Fascism as a whole.<sup>58</sup> An example of this—returning to the theme of imperialism—can be seen in how Mussolini would eventually fully embrace the concerns expressed by the journalist who wrote from Ethiopia about the inferiority of southerners and their inability to “bring civilization,” but encompassing all Italians rather than just southerners. In a secret speech he gave to the Fascist Party’s National Council in October of 1938, Mussolini explained that a recent uprising in Ethiopia had been caused by a “lack of racial dignity,” as the Ethiopians had first accepted Italian rule, “but when they saw the Italians going around more disheveled than they were, living in the *tukuls*, and taking their women, they said ‘this is not a race that is bringing civilization’.”<sup>59</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Mussolini’s deflection of blame is that it exactly mirrors the strategy of the previous Liberal Government’s dealing with the Southern Question: Niceforo’s “scientific” proving of the inferiority of southerners gave the post-unification political elite a way to deflect blame for the failure of the Risorgimento to create an Italy that was not just unified, but equal as well.<sup>60</sup> Mussolini’s attack on the past Government for “inventing the Southern question” now takes on a strong level of irony, as he fell into the same strategy of blaming race as they did, except this time not just concerning the Southern half of the peninsula, but instead all of it.

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 394, 444-445.

<sup>58</sup> Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 292.

<sup>59</sup> Luigi Preti, *Impero fascista, africani ed ebrei* (Milan: Mursia, 1968), 91-92, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 292.

<sup>60</sup> Polizzi, “Postcoloniality and the Italian South,” 19.

In this way, we can conclude that despite Mussolini's strategy of placing blame on the previous Government in order to deny the existence of a Southern Question, he ultimately ended up in the same position as they did, but even worse. All Italians according to him—not just southerners—were incapable of bringing Italy to glory. As will be discussed in Chapter 2 however, many of the traits which defined the ideal “Fascist man” are ones which, while perhaps primarily stand to deal with the divide between city and countryside, could more readily be applied to southerners than northerners.

Regardless of his eventual denunciation of the entire Italian people, there clearly existed a unique kind of relationship between him and the southerners. This is made evident from the examples provided from Mussolini's speeches, official Party reports, and the ethnological study on Milocca—the lack of meaningful ideological commitment to Fascism making this relationship best described as a two-way street of superficial, one-dimensional admiration.

Whether he truly believed in the praise he directed towards the South or not, Mussolini ultimately defaulted to placing blame on the whole of Italy, making him no better, if not worse, than the past Liberal government he loved to criticize so much—the one responsible for the invention of the Southern Question to begin with.

## Chapter 2

### The Ideal Fascist Archetype as a Southerner: A Historical Inconsistency

“Bravery and love of risk, ‘abhorrence of all that is sedentary,’ ‘revulsion towards craven comfort,’ discipline at work, respect for authority, and ‘pride in feeling Italian every moment of the day’”—these are just some of the characteristics which Mussolini declared to be the hallmarks of Fascist Italy’s newly created men and women.<sup>61</sup>

Despite developing in the northern city of Milan,<sup>62</sup> Fascism stood vehemently opposed to urbanism, and the bourgeoisie which occupied the Italy’s cities were thought to be sterilizing the Nation with their descent into decadence.<sup>63</sup> Mussolini lamented that in cities all across Europe, people were falling victim to “exotic habits,” seeking to promote “social-democratic humanitarianism,” and abandoning religion for the worship of money.<sup>64</sup>

Italy’s new Fascist men and women would instead live in the countryside, remembering not to take for granted the beauty of Italy’s natural landscapes. They would have many children, helping grow the size and strength of the Nation. They would be endlessly devoted to the State, and much like in a traditional religion, always have faith. They would selflessly give their lives for their country, willing to storm the battlefield with pride in defense of the *patria*. All of these characteristics, this chapter will argue, are ones which best describe a southerner, rather than a northerner.

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<sup>61</sup> Benito Mussolini, *Opera omnia*, vol. 21, 362, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 126.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Corner, *The Fascist Party and Popular Opinion in Mussolini’s Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 23.

<sup>63</sup> Benito Mussolini, “Speech of the Ascension, May 26, 1927,” *Biblioteca Fascista*, March 3, 2012, <http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/speech-of-ascension-may-26-1927.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Luigi Federzoni, *Diario di un ministro del fascismo*, ed. A. Macchi (Florence: Passagli, 1993), 34-35, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 120.

“Gentlemen, if Italy is to count for anything in the world, then she must reach a population of no less than 60 million inhabitants by the middle of this century” was the goal that Mussolini declared during the Ascension Day Speech in 1927, just after having expressed his dissatisfaction with Italy’s population of 40 million, compared to those of countries such as Germany, France, England, and all their colonial populations as well.<sup>65</sup>

The great importance placed on population growth served two functions: One was to justify colonial expansion, and the other was to create a larger (and therefore cheaper) labor force. The latter was a line of reasoning appropriate for a primarily agricultural workforce, especially applicable to the Country’s south, islands, and rural north, where population booms were hoped to spark economic growth as had previously happened in England and France in the eighteenth-century.<sup>66</sup> It goes without saying then, that the promotion of families (the larger, the better) by the Regime would be crucial in reaching Mussolini’s goal of increasing the Italian population by 20 million in 33 years.

Quoting Hegel, Mussolini once said “He who is not a father is not a man,” in a speech in which he spoke of the importance of Fascist demographic laws.<sup>67</sup> In fact, fatherhood was deemed to be so important that after 1937, being married and having children became a prerequisite for receiving promotions in government jobs. Some jobs such as mayor, or university professor were positions only able to be held by fathers.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Mussolini, “Speech of the Ascension,” <http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/speech-of-ascension-may-26-1927.html>.

<sup>66</sup> Victoria DeGrazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 42.

<sup>67</sup> Benito Mussolini, “Il Numero Come Forza,” in *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini XXIII*, ed. Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel (Florence: La Fenice, 1957), 216.

<sup>68</sup> DeGrazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, 43.

Regarding women, the Regime made it clear that motherhood was to be their ultimate mission in life. “[F]or real women there is only one female ‘sport’: love, and only one goal: motherhood” said one Fascist writer named Adolfo Dolmetta in a 1939 article in the periodical *Critica fascista*. Feminism was deemed a “morbid and unhealthy phenomenon,” as the ideal Fascist citizen was selfless and lived not for themselves, but for others (striving for the emancipation of women was apparently deemed to be a selfish endeavor). This, Dolmetta wrote, meant sacrificing the use of “make up, cigarettes, and hair dye” and instead putting their money towards giving “men and soldiers to the Fatherland.”<sup>69</sup> Although mothers were glorified for their essential role in the Fascist mission, tying their value in Fascist society strictly to motherhood acted to further exclude them from the public sphere, and disregarded all wants which weren’t directly related to bearing and raising children.<sup>70</sup>

Women’s exclusion from the workforce remained the norm outside of large cities, even well after the end of Fascism. Author A.L Maraschini described the situation regarding women’s illiteracy rates in a village called Calimera as part of his 1968 work *Study of an Italian Village*, written after spending time in several rural communities across Salento (the lower half of Puglia):

The high rate of illiteracy among women is due to the fact that there is no logical reason why a girl should be educated, since she will have no need of such education in her life. Her future career will be that of wife and mother, neither of which jobs are taught in school; and she requires no academic qualifications, since she is not expected to do other than marry and bear children. This attitude is prevalent even among the wealthier classes of the Salento, and indeed of Italy as a whole. It is still true to say that, in Italy, with the exception of Rome, Milan, and Florence, a woman has no role to play beyond that of wife and mother.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Adolfo Dolmetta, “Woman in the Fascist State,” *Biblioteca Fascista*, March 9, 2012, <http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/woman-in-fascist-state.html>.

<sup>70</sup> DeGrazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, 44.

<sup>71</sup> Maraschini, *The Study of an Italian Village*, 172.



Of significant importance to the Regime, was that it was in rural southern villages like these that the Country's highest birth rates could be observed. Describing the situation in the mid-1930s, DeGrazia writes "In industrial Turin, birth rates were 14.6 per thousand; in impoverished rural Lucania,<sup>72</sup> they were more than double at 33.7 per thousand. Among urban professionals, the median family size was 3.28 persons; among peasants, it was nearly twice that figure, 6.43 persons."<sup>73</sup>

Mussolini recognized this, as can be seen in several examples of him praising the South for its high birth rates, such as during his Ascension Day Speech when he commended Basilicata for leading the Country in births—a sign that the region had “not yet been sufficiently infected by all the pernicious currents of contemporary civilization.”<sup>74</sup> Twelve years later he could be seen expressing the same exact sentiment during a tour in Calabria, where he asked them to influence those who were weakening the country by having small families and following “exotic trends.”<sup>75</sup>

Although the Fascists perpetuated Italy's exclusion of women from the workforce, they did establish the foundation for the first public services established for the welfare of mothers.<sup>76</sup> The instrument through which this would be carried out was ONMI (National Agency for Maternity and Childhood), an agency dedicated towards providing both material assistance and education to mothers and their children.

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<sup>72</sup> Known today as Basilicata.

<sup>73</sup> Massimo Livi Bacci, *A History of Italian Fertility* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 236, quoted in DeGrazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, 46.

<sup>74</sup> Mussolini, “Speech of the Ascension,” <http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/speech-of-ascension-may-26-1927.html>.

<sup>75</sup> Mussolini, “Al Popolo di Reggio Calabria,” in *Opera Omnia XXIX*, 257.

<sup>76</sup> DeGrazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, 45.

In the South however, ONMI wasn't as effective a tool as had been hoped for, in great part due to the way ONMI provincial federations received funding through grants. The size of the grant issued to each provincial federation was awarded conditionally, proportional to how many women and children their ONMI administrations had provided aid to—an unequal funding system which “freed ONMI of any financial responsibility to create services where they did not already exist.”<sup>77</sup> As a result of this system, between 1926 and 1931, provinces in central Italy had received over half of all the provincial subsidies—of the remaining money, northern provinces received over double that of the southern provinces.<sup>78</sup>

The South remained at a disadvantage throughout the 1930s, as ONMI decided its central directorate would give 50 *lire* annually to its provincial federations for every newborn in a province in an attempt to deal with a rise in both demand and cost for childcare in densely populated areas with high birth rates. This system neglected rural provinces, and as a result less than a third of national grants were given to the South and Italy's islands from 1932 to 1938.<sup>79</sup>

One example of the consequences of this funding system can be seen in the independent investigation of the ONMI federation's office of Agrigento, Sicily, carried out by the city's prefect in 1933. ONMI's provincial president had bragged that they had built twenty-four mothers'-kitchens in the city and its surrounding communes, but the investigation revealed that these kitchens actually didn't even exist, and that all the organization had managed to

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<sup>77</sup> ONMI, *Report on the Development of the Work of the National Institution for the Protection of Maternity and Childhood, 1926-1930* (Rome, 1932), 28, quoted in Maria Sophia Quine, “From Malthus to Mussolini: The Italian Eugenics Movement and Fascist Population Policy, 1890-1938” (PhD diss., University of London, 1990), 79-80.

<sup>78</sup> ONMI, *Report on the Development*, 28.

<sup>79</sup> C. Bergamaschi, *L'ONMI: Motivi e proposte di riforma* (Rome, 1937), 12-13, quoted in Quine, “From Malthus to Mussolini,” 81.

accomplish was occasionally provide small subsidies to impoverished families in a manner that was “irregular and discontinuous.”<sup>80</sup>

In 1940, the full extent of ONMI’s failures in Agrigento (and Sicily as a whole) was discovered in a report conducted by the organization itself. For what concerned its mother’s-kitchens, by 1938 only twelve of them had been established for the whole province’s population of over 400,000, and they weren’t even directly financed by ONMI. A home-visit system had attempted to have been established, but only two volunteers were ever enrolled in it, and they were limited to staying inside of the city due to inadequate access to transportation. ONMI had also attempted to start a medical service program with the help of the city’s seven pediatricians, but this was only open for four hours a week. Due to a lack of funds and pre-existing infrastructure in the South and islands, “...ONMI’s presence was destined to be superficial.”<sup>81</sup>

To not only have a large family, but to raise this family in the countryside was deemed of the utmost importance by the Regime. Speaking of the value that growing up in a rural environment had, one unnamed Fascist writer published in the newspaper *Il Popolo d’Italia* wrote the following in a 1936 article titled “Rural Italy”:

A life in the farmlands is one of physical and spiritual health. Oxygen and solar radiation make the body resilient. In rural areas, the family has the most favorable conditions for safety and development. While industrial and urban civilization take women away from the hearth and children, rurality makes women the queen of the home and of the family. In all the areas touched by the decay of industrial and urban civilization, coffins outnumber cradles, morality decays and the race becomes enslaved. The demographic strength of Italy is still and always in the countryside.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Report from the prefect of Agrigento to ONMI leaders, February 4, 1933, ACS, PCM, 1931-1933, f. 1, sf. 6.2, P. 8230, quoted in Quine, “From Malthus to Mussolini,” 82.

<sup>81</sup> “Relazione sul riordinamento della Sicilia, piano tecnico-finanziario e situazione attuale nella provincia di Agrigento,” ACS, Min. Interno, GB, 1940-1941, b. 1, f. 97, quoted in Quine, “From Malthus to Mussolini,” 81.

<sup>82</sup> “Rural Italy,” Biblioteca Fascista, March 9, 2012, <http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/italia-rurale.html>.

Rurality was promoted heavily by Mussolini himself, who in a 1938 speech stated that “for at least 1500 years, our people have been unified among themselves, the reason for which our race is pure, especially in the countryside.”<sup>83</sup> One might find Mussolini peddling the idea of a historically continuously unified Italy absurd, but that didn’t stop him from frequently deeming the Italian people to be the “most homogenous” in all of Europe.<sup>84</sup>

During a speech in Campania, Mussolini declared that his “unchanged rural soul” rejoiced at the fact that important housing works were beginning in the countryside, which would be “structurally sound, respectable, and able to house many children.”<sup>85</sup> He could also be seen on video threshing wheat shirtless in some LUCE documentaries which were shown in schools, whose image even caused some girls to become infatuated with him.<sup>86</sup> In the early 1930s, tales of Mussolini traveling into the Pontine Marshes to thresh wheat were spread among the laborers who worked there—one man named Tullio Lucetto recalling how he watched Mussolini finish up his work and report to the union official for his pay “just like an ordinary peasant.”<sup>87</sup>

Yet, the Regime’s campaign for the self-sufficiency of wheat production, dubbed “the Battle for Wheat” actually ended up furthering the disparity between North and South.<sup>88</sup> Infertile

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<sup>83</sup> Benito Mussolini, “Al consiglio nazionale del P.N.F.,” in *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini XXIX*, ed. Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel (Florence: La Fenice, 1959), 190, quoted in Aaron Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 74.

<sup>84</sup> Benito Mussolini, “Il fascismo e i problemi della politica estera italiana,” *Il piccolo della sera di Trieste*, no. 371, February 7, 1921, quoted in Aaron Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 74.

<sup>85</sup> Mussolini, “Ai rurali della Campania,” in *Opera Omnia XXIX*, 258.

<sup>86</sup> Zelmira Marazio, *Il mio fascismo: Storia di una donna* (Baiso: Verdechiaro, 2005), 42-43, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 189.

<sup>87</sup> Oscar Gaspari, *L’emigrazione veneta nell’agro pontino durante il periodo fascista* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1985), 154-155, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 223.

<sup>88</sup> Valerio Castronovo, “La politica economica del fascismo e il Mezzogiorno,” *Studi storici* 17, no. 3 (1976): 33, quoted in Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 151.

land was overtaxed,<sup>89</sup> there was a stagnation/decline of horticulture, truck and dairy farming, animal husbandry, and the farming of wheat rather than more lucrative crops had “malignant consequences particularly affecting the South,”<sup>90</sup> where large landowners who were resistant to innovations in farming refused to adopt the modern techniques required for intensive production.<sup>91</sup> As historian John A. Davis writes, “By the time of the fall of Mussolini’s regime, conditions in the rural south were as bad as they had been before the great pre-World War I emigration.”<sup>92</sup>

Paul Corner also explains that despite the Regime’s promotion of ruralism, it did little in acting as a cohesive device for the Nation. This was due not only to the fact that the often arduous and squalid reality of rural life was well-known by the majority of Italy’s population,<sup>93</sup> but also Italy’s history of *campanilismo*:

Rural values and traditions varied so much throughout the peninsula that they had little unifying force. One of the problems with Mino Maccari’s Strapaese movement of the mid-1920s, which had claimed to refer to ‘authentic’ and ‘genuine’ Italian provincial values and to defend them against national and modernizing incursions, was that it seemed to refer to a model (the Tuscan model) with which relatively few Italians could identify.<sup>94</sup>

Among those who were most familiar with the arduous reality of rural life were the Country’s southern peasants, such as those encountered by Carlo Levi during his exile to Lucania (modern day Basilicata) in his memoir *Christ Stopped at Eboli*. The poor conditions in

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<sup>89</sup> John A. Davis, “A Tale of Two Italys? The ‘Southern Question’ Past and Present,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Italian Politics*, ed. Erik Jones and Gianfranco Pasquino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 57.

<sup>90</sup> Gustavo Corni, “La politica agraria del fascismo: un confronto fra Italian e Germania,” *Studi storici* 28, no. 2 (April-June 1987): 407, quoted in Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*, 151.

<sup>91</sup> Castronovo, “La politica economica del fascismo e il Mezzogiorno,” 25-39, quoted in Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*, 151.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Corner, *The Fascist Party*, 133.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-134.

which they lived their lives, and the eternal neglect which they received from the State were reflected by the fatalism of their religious beliefs.

One story explains the origin of the feudal system which the peasants had lived under for much of their history. The tale goes that, in ancient times, there was a prince who saved the Lucanian peasants from being terrorized by a dragon, slaying it with the help of divine intervention from the Madonna. When it came time to discuss rewarding the prince, one group of peasants with a reputation for avarice suggested they give him feudal rights over the Agri river rather than their lands—the lands, they thought, were much more valuable than the river. At first, they thought that they had successfully swindled the prince and gotten the better end of the deal, but soon realized they had overlooked the fact that the river served to irrigate their crops. From that moment on, the peasants had to pay the prince and his descendants for its use.<sup>95</sup>

This fatalist acceptance of their reality is described by Author Ignazio Silone, who described the reaction to a devastating earthquake in his poor town of Marsica, Abruzzo. “In thirty seconds killed thirty thousand people... What surprised me most was to see with what matter-of-factness the people accepted this tremendous catastrophe. In an area like ours, in which so many injustices went unpunished, the frequency of earthquakes seemed so plausible a fact that it required no explanation.”<sup>96</sup> The response by the State was equally predictable, as he described the reconstruction process as a scheme to enrich the wealthy—an opportunity for “intrigue, fraud, embezzlement, favoritism, scheming and thievery of every sort.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Carlo Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli: The Story of a Year* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1947), 111.

<sup>96</sup> Ignazio Silone, *Emergency Exit* (London: Gollancz, 1969), quoted in Richard Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy: Life Under the Fascist Dictatorship* (New York: NY, The Penguin Group, 2007), 26.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

In Silone's novel *Fontamara*—which was inspired by the hardships he endured growing up in his impoverished rural village—one character dreamt of a conversation between the Pope and Jesus. In this conversation, Jesus proposes helping the poor peasants, but his suggestions are constantly shot down by the Pope, because to help them would inconvenience the rich in some way or another. Eventually, the Pope concludes he can “help” the peasants by flying overhead their houses and pouring lice all over them, so that they will be distracted from sin in their moments of idleness.<sup>98</sup>

In response to hearing this dream, one character praised the Pope, expressing her gratitude that he was there to save them from damnation.<sup>99</sup> This expression of loyalty towards an oppressor is one which has historically permeated the southern Italian peasants' mindsets, as is described by A.L. Maraschini. In both the cases of the Napoleonic Wars and the Risorgimento, rhetoric about a northern invader was enough to convince the peasants to fight and die for their landlords who kept them economically oppressed.<sup>100</sup> This level of devotion and loyalty is one that Mussolini undoubtedly would have hoped to find in the Italian people toward the Regime.

The aforementioned dream—albeit fictional—serves as a stark contrast to the very real dream of Rosina Leto, a Calabrian woman from a small town called Crucoli who described her dream in a letter to Mussolini in 1941:

The heavens seemed closer and closer to me, and I raised my eyes and saw carved in the sky your figure walking onwards and onwards, and I immediately gave a salute. But you walked straight ahead and took no notice of anyone. Further back, tied together in a bundle, were our tricolor flag, the fascist symbol, a fascist banner and the German flag, and hanging from them was a huge swathe of gold and silver medals, all shining. Further back still was a great battalion of soldiers singing happily, and behind them was

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<sup>98</sup> Ignazio Silone, *Fontamara* (London: Penguin Books, 1940), 28-29.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Maraschini, *The Study of an Italian Village*, 260.

the figure of an angel guiding everyone with open arms and carrying in his right hand a gilded sash on which was written in large and clear letters the word: VICTORIOUS.<sup>101</sup>

Another contrast between the realities of peasants and commoners can be seen in the portraits of Mussolini that could be found in the homes of millions of Italians, which historian Christopher Duggan believed served to put Italians and their families at ease in times of uncertainty and hardship.<sup>102</sup> This phenomenon can be contrasted once again with nearly all the peasant homes that Levi encountered in *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, which displayed no pictures of Mussolini (or any governmental figures for that matter), but instead one picture of the Madonna of Viggiano, and another of President Roosevelt.<sup>103</sup>

Despite the many ideological overlaps between the Church and the Fascists, such as the promotion of ruralism and large families, the Second World War was strongly denounced by the former.<sup>104</sup> This, however, didn't stop the countless Italians who went to war who cited religious reasons as their reason for joining wars, as can be seen in the letters from the 50,000 troops sent from Italy to Spain in order to support Franco in the Spanish Civil War. The soldiers who wrote home expressed that not only were they fighting for Italy and the greater Fascist mission, but also “for the defense of ‘Christian,’ ‘Latin,’ or ‘Catholic’ civilization against godless Bolshevism.”<sup>105</sup>

This exact sentiment can be seen in the letter of one soldier—a rural laborer from Basilicata—who was writing to his wife from the Eastern Front in 1942: “You should be proud

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<sup>101</sup> Rosina Leto, letter to Mussolini, ACS, SPD, CO, Sentimenti, b. 2822, April 2, 1941, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 246.

<sup>102</sup> Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 245.

<sup>103</sup> Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, 122.

<sup>104</sup> Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 372.

<sup>105</sup> Letters from soldiers in Spain to Mussolini, Cf. ACS, SPD, CO, Sentimenti b. 2810, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 298.



to have a husband who is fighting against those who do not know the Catholic Religion... It is not against Russia that we have to fight here, but against Bolshevism, which believes it can dominate the world.”<sup>106</sup>

While those who were devout believers may have had a religious motivation behind their enlistment, war undoubtedly provided a unique opportunity for young men to find employment and adventure. This can be observed in the diary of one medical officer from Lecce who wrote that the main reason he wanted to go to Ethiopia was to experience adventure in an exotic place.<sup>107</sup> This same rationale can also be found in a dialogue between Carlo Levi and a young man he found in Grassano’s recruitment office enlisting himself as a volunteer in Africa, who said that he must escape from the remote village by any means possible, and that he had nothing to lose if his experience turned out to be a poor one.<sup>108</sup>

Some joined the military for vastly different reasons, as can be seen in the case of 25-year-old Giuseppe Caronia who came from a middle-class family of intellectuals in Palermo and sought to rid himself of his bourgeois values. In his journal which he brought with him to the front in Albania in 1940, he reflected on how his experience being enlisted has shaped him:

I have learned to appreciate hundreds of things on the material plane: the joy of not having lice, of sleeping when I like, of eating when it suits me... But on the spiritual plane I have further strengthened a number of attitudes and beliefs; I have defined my anti-bourgeois personality more clearly. Hatred of four walls, of what is restricted, of closed horizons. I appreciate tents, the open air, the mountains and the valleys, even when the weather is bad...<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Bianca Ceva, *5 anni di storia italiana 1940-1945* (Milan: Edizioni di comunità, 1964), 112, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 376.

<sup>107</sup> Manlio La Sorsa, “Il mio viaggio in Africa,” ADN, DG/95, January 30, 1936, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 269.

<sup>108</sup> Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, 23.

<sup>109</sup> Giuseppe Caronia, “Fronte greco. Diario di guerra 1940-1941,” ADN, DG/90, October 12, 1940, quoted in Duggan, *Fascist Voices*, 363-364.

Regardless of one's motives for joining the war effort, the harmful stereotypes regarding southerners and their proclivity for violence which were propagated by Niceforo strongly imply that southern Italians in particular would make the best soldiers. He argued that crime in the South—citing brigandage and the mafia—was primarily violent in nature, due to “an Arabic or medieval spirit of independence and rebellion against the principle of authority,” in contrast to the North where crimes of fraud were more common.<sup>110</sup> Sicilians in particular, he argued, had a general “love of weapons and aggression— ‘an essential characteristic of primitive and savage peoples.’”<sup>111</sup>

The fact that at its peak, it's estimated that roughly 2/3rds of the Italian army was deployed solely to deal with the brigandage in the South,<sup>112</sup> certainly speaks to southerners' resilience and combativeness. Mussolini was no doubt referring to this same impression of vigor when he complimented a crowd of Calabrians on their people's temper, which he described as "one of good metal, with which spades, swords, plows, and muskets are made."<sup>113</sup> At a different speech during that same tour of Calabria, Mussolini praised the Calabrians for having the honor of being a region from which one of the *quadrumviri*<sup>114</sup> came, Michele Bianchi. He said that he could rely on Bianchi's virtues, “which were virtues of your land and your *race: typically Italian virtues.*”<sup>115</sup>

Yet, despite his constant use of the language of race, Mussolini stated in an interview with journalist Yvon De Begnac that “There are no superior or inferior races,” after having

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<sup>110</sup> Niceforo, *L'italia barbara contemporanea*, 45.

<sup>111</sup> Niceforo, *L'italia barbara contemporanea*, 212.

<sup>112</sup> Giorgio Rochat and Giulio Massobrio, *Breve storia dell'esercito italiano dal 1861 al 1943* (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), 49, quoted in Dickie, *Darkest Italy*, 25.

<sup>113</sup> Mussolini, “Al Popolo di Reggio Calabria,” in *Opera Omnia XXIX*, 256.

<sup>114</sup> Term used to describe the four leaders of the March on Rome, appropriated from Ancient Rome.

<sup>115</sup> Benito Mussolini, “Al Popolo di Cosenza,” in *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini XXIX*, ed. Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel (Florence: La Fenice, 1959), 255.

responded with a “no” to the question “Does there exist an Italic race?”<sup>116</sup> As previously mentioned, the idea of a unified Italic race is one that Mussolini had continuously spread in the past, but this was likely nothing more than an attempt to bring the Country together.<sup>117</sup> This exact technique can be observed in the aforementioned quote about Calabrian virtues being both characteristic of their region, but also typically Italian. Mussolini even criticized the distinction made between northern and southern Italians in the American immigration system, a distinction which he felt had given past generations of Italians an inferiority complex.<sup>118</sup>

Mussolini did observe a difference between the Country’s northerners and southerners, however—not regarding the question of race, but rather the question of national unity. At the beginning of his time as Prime Minister, he told playwright Sem Benelli that he had “low esteem for Neapolitans in particular and southerners in general, exclaiming that, from Tuscany on down, the Italians, deep down, were not willing to do anything to be Italians.”<sup>119</sup>

This importance placed on national unity can be observed in the writings of Niceforo himself who, although convinced that northerners and southerners were of two different races, thought that they both shared one “spirit of nationality.”<sup>120</sup> Niceforo also referred to Italy as a “great colony to civilize,”<sup>121</sup> speaking not only from a place of supremacy over the southerners, but from a place of pride in seeing Italy expand and unite: “Niceforo writes not as a southerner or as a northerner, but as an Italian.”<sup>122</sup> While Niceforo is certainly concerned with race, the growth

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<sup>116</sup> Yvon de Begnac, *Palazzo Venezia: Storia di un regime* (Rome: La Rocca, 1950), 642, quoted in Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy*, 73.

<sup>117</sup> Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy*, 74.

<sup>118</sup> Mussolini, “Al consiglio nazionale del P.N.F.,” in *Opera Omnia XXIX*, 190.

<sup>119</sup> Sam Benelli, *Schiavitù* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1945), 54, quoted in Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy*, 56.

<sup>120</sup> Niceforo, *L’Italia barbara contemporanea*, 292.

<sup>121</sup> Niceforo, *L’Italia barbara contemporanea*, 6.

<sup>122</sup> Dickie, *Darkest Italy*, 4.

and success of the Italian nation is his top priority. Historian John Dickie puts it best when he says, “The worrying thing about *L’Italia barbara contemporanea* is not its excessive regionalism, but the particular form of its nationalism.”<sup>123</sup>

While it is true then that Mussolini differed from Niceforo in that he denounced claims of a division of northerners and southerners along racial lines, they both shared the same idea that northerners and southerners differed in their willingness to join the Nation. Despite his lack of racist sentiment towards the South, Mussolini’s low esteem for southern Italians not wanting to “be Italians” came from the same nationalist sentiment that Niceforo had as well.

Ironically then, all of the things that Mussolini praised the southerners for—their large families and birth rates, rurality, religious-like devotion, and disposition to war—are products of the same history in which they were against unification with the Italian state. Whereas Niceforo can at least criticize these southern stereotypes as being signs that they are a people in need of being civilized and Italianized, Mussolini glorifies them for these instead—ignoring the fact that these stereotypes developed within the historical context of a non-unified Italy, and are of a people which were strongly opposed to unification.

In Chapter 1, it was argued that Mussolini ultimately fell back on the same kind of theory of inferiority that Niceforo and the Liberal Government used to justify the Southern Question, but with all Italians rather than just southerners. In this chapter, we can see that Mussolini shared the same disapproval for southerners not wanting to join the Nation and “be Italian” as Niceforo. Mussolini, however, glorified the same southern stereotypes which Niceforo denounced, failing to acknowledge the contradiction that lies in the historical context of both non-unity and anti-unity which they arose from.

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

### Italian Identity and the “Other”

Originally inspired by the contradiction that lies between Fascist claims of Aryan superiority against a pre-existing narrative of southern inferiority, this project has sought to better understand the relationship between both Fascism and the Southern Question, and Mussolini and the southerners. How did Mussolini reconcile the ideological incongruencies of race between his Regime, and the Niceforian ideas of southern inferiority held by the Liberal government which came before him? At least in his rhetoric, Mussolini both denied the very existence of the Southern Question and glorified stereotypes of southernness.

Both Niceforo and Mussolini attempted the historically arduous task of building a unified Italian nation—their ideologies stemming from an inclusive nationalist perspective. Where Mussolini differed from Niceforo, however, was in his lack of logical consistency. Mussolini praised many of the same stereotypes of southerners that Niceforo had denounced, but ignored the fact that said stereotypes arose within the context of their opposition to a united Italy. Not only was Fascism unable to bring about meaningful change in the South, it actually furthered the disparity between North and South in two major areas of these stereotypes: Fecundity—which ONMI failed to improve due to its unequal funding system and the South’s lack of preexisting infrastructure—and rurality, with the Battle for Wheat ultimately harming the South more than it helped it.

Furthermore, Mussolini denied the existence of the Southern Question in an attempt to unite Italy into one national entity, ignoring the reality of neglect which Southern Italians faced,

and instead choosing to propagate a false narrative of equality in the name of national unity.<sup>124</sup>

Yet, this same shallowness can be observed on behalf of the southerners themselves: in the early years of Fascism when loyalty to the movement was for many nothing more than an ideologically absent power grab, and in the southerners praise of Mussolini specifically, but not of Fascism as a whole.

Although Niceforo advocated for a unified Italy, he was a federalist who believed that whereas a liberal government would be best for the North, the South must instead have an authoritarian government.<sup>125</sup> Interestingly, voter demographics show that this belief was held in the minds of northerners and southerners as well, as the vote for Italy to become either a republic or a monarchy in the 1946 Institutional Referendum was split along regional lines: the North voting for the former, and the South the latter.<sup>126</sup>

The notion that liberalism is tied to the North, and authoritarianism to the South, would later be echoed in 1992 by the then leader of the Northern League,<sup>127</sup> Umberto Bossi, who commented on the recent success of his party in the North, saying “The North has chosen federalism and Europe, the South has chosen Africa and Fascism.”<sup>128</sup> In another instance, Bossi said “We are tired of being a land of invasion, first from the South and now from the Third World.”<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Mussolini, “Al Popolo di Reggio Calabria,” in *Opera Omnia XXIX*, 257.

<sup>125</sup> Niceforo, *L’Italia barbara contemporanea*, 297.

<sup>126</sup> Paolo Di Martino, Emanuele Felice, and Michelangelo Vasta, “A tale of two Italies: ‘access-orders’ and the Italian regional divide,” *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 68, no. 1 (2020): 12-13, DOI: 10.1080/03585522.2019.1631882.

<sup>127</sup> The Northern League emerged as a northern separatist movement in the early 90s.

<sup>128</sup> Umberto Bossi, *La Repubblica*, April 7, 1992, quoted in Dickie, *Darkest Italy*, 145.

<sup>129</sup> Umberto Brindani and Daniele Vimercati, eds., *Il pensiero Bossi: 1979-1993. La prima raccolta di scritti e discorsi per capire chi è e che cosa vuole davvero l’uomo più temuto d’Italia* (Milan: Mondadori, 1993), quoted in Pasquale Verdicchio “Introduction,” in *The Southern Question*, 8.

The grouping together of southerners with clandestine immigrants reflects an idea in Italian studies which emerged in the early 2000s which recognizes the historical similarities in their experiences: both migrants (southerners to the North, and immigrants to the Peninsula) who have been deemed by both the State and society as the “other.”<sup>130</sup> Citing a quote about northern hostility to southern migration during the Fascist period, journalist Pino Aprile writes “Everything that happens today with the clandestine immigrants happened to the Italians from the South.”<sup>131</sup>

Yet, rather than being met with solidarity on the behalf of Italy’s southerners, they are often met with “discrimination, exploitation, intolerance, and violence” instead.<sup>132</sup> Having successfully rebranded themselves from the “Northern League” to simply the “League”, the Party has seen widespread success, even in the South.<sup>133</sup> Matteo Salvini has successfully transformed the League from a party which originally represented only those in the North based on anti-southern sentiment, to one which is now national in scope based on both anti-E.U. and anti-clandestine immigrant sentiment.

Similar to how contemporary Italian studies has seen further attention paid to the idea that Italy’s unification was an act of “internal colonialism”<sup>134</sup>—a national Italian identity founded based on the “othering” of the South—we can see that modern Italian identity is now being forged in opposition to the international “other.”

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<sup>130</sup> Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Post-colonial Culture*, 128.

<sup>131</sup> Pino Aprile, *Terroni*, trans. Ilaria Marra Rosiglioni (New York: Bordighera Press, 2011), 138.

<sup>132</sup> Polizzi, “Postcoloniality and the Italian South,” 101.

<sup>133</sup> “2019 European election results: Italy,” European Parliament, accessed May 4, 2020, <https://europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/national-results/italy/2019-2024/>.

<sup>134</sup> Polizzi, “Postcoloniality and the Italian South,” 99.

Today, Southern Italy remains the largest underdeveloped area in all of Western Europe,<sup>135</sup> and a 2010 report from the Organizations for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shows that “Italy suffers from the widest geographical dualism of all the European Union states.”<sup>136</sup> Thus, while one must be wary of assuming the recent success found in the South by the League to be solely the result of ardent nationalism rather than also indicative of southerners’ desperation for meaningful change in a historically troubled political system, there’s no doubting the role which is played by the alluring sway of nationalism, at least for some.

In studying how Italy’s past political leaders have handled the Southern Question in their rhetoric, one can better understand the actions of Italy’s politicians today. Much like how descriptions of Naples transformed from an “Augean stable”<sup>137</sup> according to d’Azeglio, to the “ardent soul of all of Italy’s south”<sup>138</sup> according to Mussolini, Naples has once again undergone a depictional transformation under Salvini.

In 2009, Salvini was recorded on video singing in unison with others “*Senti che puzza, scappano anche i cani. Stanno arrivando i napoletani. O colerosi, terremotati, voi col sapone non vi siete mai lavati*”<sup>139</sup> at a festival in Lombardy, beer in hand.<sup>140</sup> Yet not even a decade later,

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<sup>135</sup> Emanuele Felice, “Regional income inequality in Italy in the long-run (1871-2010): patterns and determinants,” in Joan Ramón Rosés and Nikolaus Wolf, eds., *The economic development of Europe’s regions. A quantitative history since 1900* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), quoted in Di Martino, Felice, Vasta, “A tale of two Italies,” 1.

<sup>136</sup> Francesco Barbagallo, *La Questione Italiana. Il Nord ed il Sud dal 1860 a oggi* (Rome and Bari: Laterza Editori, 2013), quoted in John A. Davis, “A Tale of Two Italys? The ‘Southern Question’ Past and Present,” 53.

<sup>137</sup> Smith, *Cavour and Garibaldi 1860*, 414.

<sup>138</sup> Scurati, *Il figlio del secolo*, 538.

<sup>139</sup> Translation: “Smell that stink, even the dogs are running away. The Neapolitans are arriving. Sick with cholera, hit by an earthquake, you Neapolitans have never washed yourselves with soap.”

<sup>140</sup> La Repubblica, “Quando Salvini cantava: ‘Senti che puzza, arrivano I napoletani,’” December 1, 2017, video at festival, <https://video.repubblica.it/politica/quando-salvini-cantava-senti-che-puzza-arrivano-i-napoletani/291156/291766>.



he said in an interview with the Neapolitan newspaper *Il Mattino* “Bossi tells me ‘What are you going to Naples for?’ But my home is also here.”<sup>141</sup>

During a 2012 speech in Milan, he said “The South doesn’t deserve the euro. In Lombardy and the North, it can be permitted. I want it in Milan, because here we’re in Europe. The South, rather, is like Greece, and needs another currency. The euro can’t be permitted there.”<sup>142</sup> Yet just five years later, he would go on to tweet “Naples is my home, Milan is my home, Bari is my home.”<sup>143</sup>

Whereas the changes in southern sentiment between d’Azeglio and Mussolini stretched the better part of a century and were uttered by two very different individuals who were part of two (eventually) radically different types of government, Salvini’s change in rhetoric occurred in not even a decade, and yet has been largely successful. Whether it be political desperation or authentic nationalism, the League’s southern supporters seem not to care about it or Salvini’s anti-southern past.

The hope from scholars which arose at the start of the 2000s that a coalition may arise between Southern Italians and clandestine immigrants based on their awareness of the historical similarities between their experiences dealing with the Italian state now seems hardly plausible post-rebranding of the League. Many of Salvini’s supporters from the South either choose not to look even ten years into his past of anti-southern sentiment, or deem it as unimportant compared to the perceived benefits of the Party’s success.

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<sup>141</sup> “Salvini e il Sud, forum al Mattino «Primarie a destra per leadership pronto a sfidare anche Berlusconi» «Le frasi contro Napoli? Mai dette,»” *Il Mattino*, March 8, 2017, [https://www.ilmattino.it/pay/napoli\\_pay/salvini\\_forum\\_al\\_mattino\\_napoli\\_scontri-2304557.html](https://www.ilmattino.it/pay/napoli_pay/salvini_forum_al_mattino_napoli_scontri-2304557.html).

<sup>142</sup> “Salvini: ‘Napoli? Non Ho Mai Detto Frasi Contro La Città’. Ma Nel 2009 A Pontida Cantava: ‘Senti Che Puzza, Arrivano I Napoletani,»” *Napoli Time*, <https://www.napolitime.it/95801-salvini-napoli-non-mai-detto-frasi-la-citta-nel-2009-pontida-cantava-senti-puzza-arrivano-napoletani.html>.

<sup>143</sup> Matteo Salvini, Twitter post, March 11, 2017, 1:19pm, <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/840628347101155329?lang=en>.

It would seem then—whether it be Mussolini’s many contradictions regarding race and his denial of the Southern Question, or Salvini’s success in the South just years after his diffusion of anti-southern sentiment—that ordinary people are ultimately going to support the politician with whom they share a common worldview and perceive to have their best interest in mind. Academic studies of the contradictions of political rhetoric are unimportant to the average person who simply wants to improve their quality of life, especially those who feel left behind and/or unrepresented in a broken political system.

This fact becomes even more salient when fear is thrown into the mix: Whether it’s Mussolini warning a crowd in 1927 that Italy must expand or become a colony,<sup>144</sup> The Northern League in 1988 writing “I find it humiliating that we have been invaded and colonized [by the South],”<sup>145</sup> or Salvini saying “An effort at ethnic replacement is underway,”<sup>146</sup> people are prone to panic and fearmongering. The politician who claims to have an answer to an immediate problem will find support, regardless of the historical consistency of their rhetoric.

Both Mussolini and Salvini have gone against the narratives of southern inferiority which came before them (by the Liberal government and the Northern League) and succeeded in absorbing the southerners into an Italian “us” in the face of a foreign “them.” Regardless of what the future holds for the success of the League and right-wing populism, the path Italians choose to take in determining their political future won’t be calmly strolled with scholarly works in hand, but rather cautiously traversed, apprehensive of what may lie further up ahead.

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<sup>144</sup> Mussolini, “Speech of the Ascension,” <http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/speech-of-ascension-may-26-1927.html>.

<sup>145</sup> Luciano Costantini, *Dentro la Lega: Come nasce, come cresce, come comunica* (Rome: Koinè, 1994), 155, quoted in Dickie, *Darkest Italy*, 145.

<sup>146</sup> Sylvia Poggioli, “Italy’s Matteo Salvini Hopes To Lead Nationalist Wave In Upcoming European Elections,” NPR, May 22, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/22/725023096/italys-matteo-salvini-hopes-to-lead-nationalist-wave-in-upcoming-european-electi>.

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