

**IDENTITY IN TRANSATLANTIC PLAY:  
IL DUCE'S NATIONAL PROJECT IN ARGENTINA**

By

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A Dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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**ABSTRACT****Identity in Transatlantic Play: Il Duce's National Project in Argentina**

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This project examines fascist Italy's propaganda and its impact on notions of identity in Argentina. During the 1920s and 1930s the fascist regime went to great lengths to penetrate the Italian community in Argentina and aggressively propagandize its interests and ideology. Fundamental to their work was exporting a fascist version of Italian identity that strove to incorporate its emigrants back into Italy's national project. This propaganda provoked lively debates over nationhood and identity from divergent groups within Argentina. Fascist and anti-fascists within the Italian community, as well as, Argentine nationalists and ultimately members of the government all weighed-in. Whether supporting and reinterpreting its content, or challenging and discrediting it, each of these groups revealed their own visions, assumptions, preoccupations and tensions about nationhood, nationality and identity. It is insights from this debate from which this dissertation draws its conclusions on how national identities are negotiated and defined. Touching upon a number of fields, this work adds to the debate over Italian identity and fascist culture within Italy, but as well as contribute to our understanding of immigration and identity formation in Latin America.

*To the memory of Philip V. Cannistraro*

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The research required to complete this project involved an extensive use of the archival collections housed in Rome in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato, the Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, as well as the Archivio Storico della Camera dei Deputati; and in Buenos Aires in the Archivo Intermedio del Archivo General de la Nación, the Archivo del Congreso de la Nación, the Centro de Estudios Migratorios Latino Americanos, and the Biblioteca Nacional de la República Argentina. I would therefore like to thank the archives and the Italian and Argentine governments for granting me access to their collections as well as the archivists who helped me navigate through the inventories and folders related to my topic.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2001 during the economic crisis that gripped Argentina, thousands lined up with applications in hand around the Italian Embassy in downtown Buenos Aires hoping to take advantage of an Italian citizenship law granting passports to foreign nationals of Italian descent. Based on the principle of *jus sanguinis* descendants of Italians who were born abroad could claim their Italian citizenship so long as they could demonstrate a direct line of descent and so long as their ancestors had never renounced their Italian citizenship. More than a few skeptical Italian commentators at the time were quick to question the sincerity of those Argentine applicants who had conveniently rediscovered their Italian identity in the midst of an acute economic recession and rising unemployment. Whatever their motivations may have been, these newly recognized Italian citizens chose to identify with the nation of their ancestors and were once again able to participate fully in Italy's national life. Though they had no way of knowing it at the time, they were soon to play a decisive role in Italian national politics.

The question of Italian citizenship in Argentina is but one expression of the broader more complex question of Italian identity in Argentina. While conducting my research in Buenos Aires, I was immediately struck by the casual and familiar way in which the Argentines I met spoke about Italy. Even if their knowledge of Italian language and culture was not always accurate, and even if they had never actually been to Italy, Argentines express an intimate knowledge and identification with Italy. You cannot in fact get very far in Argentina without seeing signs of Italian identity; it is intertwined into the fabric of Argentina's culture, from its language and mannerisms, to its music and cuisine. The Italian imprint is undeniable.

These impressionistic glimpses of the presence of Italy within Argentina suggest a complex and entangled relationship between the two nationalities and illustrate the ambiguity of identity formation in the modern era. This dissertation uses Mussolini's attempt to spread fascist Italian influence in Argentina and the responses it provoked to question the ways in which national identities are defined. In broad theoretical terms it raises the question of how we understand national identity: its construction and negotiation, and how the dynamics of identity change outside of the nation-state. Specific to the topic at hand, this study asks: how the Italian fascist regime conceptualized and propagandized its version of a national identity abroad; what the responses by members of the Italian community and the wider Argentine public tell us about their own conceptions of the nation as well as what constellation of myths and images were employed by Italian and Argentines to promote these competing visions of identity. Underlying these questions is the issue of how Italian and Argentine identities are conceived of and negotiated across borders and political divides.

One of the expressed goals of the fascist regime was to spread its version of Italian identity abroad reaching Italian communities throughout the world. As Piero Parini, the Director of Italians Abroad during the 1930s, declared "If there is a sector in which fascism has radically renovated a mentality and consciousness, it is undoubtedly that of Italian-ness outside of its borders... across the world there are eight million Italians; *a nation outside of the Nation*."<sup>1</sup> His words allude to an intriguing, and still underdeveloped topic, namely fascist Italy's attempt to create and propagate a fascist identity tailored to Italian emigrant communities in an effort to reclaim these emigrants for Italy's national project, and to garner support and sympathy for the regime abroad.

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<sup>1</sup> Piero Parini, *Gli italiani nel mondo*, (Fasci all'Estero: Roma, 1935), 9.

At the time of the fascist seizure of power in Italy, the Italian Foreign Ministry counted 1,797,000 Italian citizens in the Republic of Argentina. For the *Duce* this number alone demonstrated the importance of reaching out to this Italian emigrant community. Although it is perhaps too much to claim that Argentina was one of the fascist regime's first priorities, Italian fascist interest in the South American republic is undeniable. Some of the regime's most talented propagandists, along with high-ranking cultural and political figures, traveled to and wrote about Argentina and its potential value to the regime. The fascists invested a significant amount of resources bombarding Argentina with their propaganda in order to spread their version of Italian identity and advance their political ideology. The Italian fascists thought that Argentina could be the ideal nation to spread their cultural and political influence. Argentine realities were not, however, how the fascists had imagined them to be.

It is my main contention that members of the Italian community did more than simply accept or reject fascist Italy's version of Italian identity but instead actively engaged in a debate over their own identity as Italians living in Argentina, all-the-while revealing an understanding of identity, which was informed as much by the Argentine circumstances in which they lived as by national discourses emanating from Italy. Together their responses demonstrate the dynamic relationship between the Italian nation-state and its emigrant communities in envisioning the nation.

Adopting a transnational perspective, I also contend that the Italian fascist propaganda played a key role in the debates over Argentina's own national identity. The wider Argentine public was also negotiating its own cultural and political identity at precisely the same time that fascist Italy overwhelmed Argentina with its propaganda. It

was a topic of much debate and one of many rhetorical battles between the competing visions of Argentina's national identity. From the congressional halls where politicians delivered impassioned speeches defending Argentina's democratic character against the totalitarian menace, to the pages of the nationalist press which borrowed selectively from the fascist model to create their own concept of the nation, Argentines of all persuasions used the fascist propaganda to advance their own politically-charged definitions of identity.

This study approaches the issue of identity mainly from a cultural perspective, using a close analysis of textual material to examine the ways in which my subjects conceive of and articulate their notions of identity. The discourses on identity which I examine are however also firmly grounded in the social and political context in which they were written. By providing both a narrative of events and personalities as well as a textual analysis of the debates themselves, I demonstrate the interrelatedness of imagined communities and the realities that they reflect and are informed by.

This study's methodology is based primarily on an analysis of public discourses on the question of Italian and Argentine identities in both Italy and Argentina. I use the material evidence of the fascist propaganda effort and the published responses their effort provoked in Argentina to explore how different members of the Italian and Argentine communities defined and debated their identities. I begin by focusing on what members of the fascist regime in Italy said and wrote about the notion of an Italian identity outside of Italy and analyze how they attempted to transmit that identity through the print propaganda they sent to Argentina. I then analyze Argentina's Italian language press to determine how prominent members of the Italian community created their own

discourses on Italian national identity and finally examine the wider Argentine public debate on identity and fascist propaganda through an analysis of Argentine newspapers as well as the proceedings of Argentina's congressional debate.

Chapter 1 situates the work within the broader historiographical fields of inquiry which have approached the questions I pose here related to Italian and Argentine national identities, Italian fascism, and Italian emigration to Argentina. In this chapter I identify the theoretical and historiographic influences which have informed my approach as well as offer a review of the literature related to my topic.

The following three chapters examine the view from Italy: what the fascists hoped to accomplish in Argentina, how they went about doing it, and the messages they communicated in their propaganda. The last two chapters present the view from Argentina: how members of the Italian community and the wider Argentine public viewed the fascist regime and responded to its propaganda.

Chapter 2 discusses the debate among members of the fascist regime in Italy over the question of Italian emigration in general, and the potential value to the regime of Italian emigrants in Argentina in particular. Using their articles, speeches and reports, I focus on the changing ways in which key political and cultural figures in Italy defined their mission to promote Italian identity abroad. I argue that the imagined value of Argentina to the regime trumped ambivalent reports on the actual state of affairs, and that in the end Mussolini's regime would decide to commit a significant amount of resources to penetrate the South American republic with its propaganda.

Chapter 3 narrates the actual activities of the Italian fascist regime within Argentina. Analyzing the telegrams and dispatches sent by Italian consuls and fascist

envoys to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, I study how the fascists tried to spread their influence in Argentina. I focus especially on their use of the media: newspaper, radio and film as well as their use of Italian organizations abroad: the *Fasci italiani all'estero*, the *Società Nazionale "Dante Alighieri,"* the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* and especially the *Scuole italiane all'estero*. I argue that the regime's cultural programs and mission to promote an Italian identity abroad ultimately proved more successful than the promotion of its more extremist fascist political ideology. In recounting the personal rivalries and conflicting agendas of many of the officials involved in the fascist initiatives, this chapter also provides insight into the internal dynamics of the fascist regime as well as the tension between its nationalist and universalist tendencies.

Chapter 4 provides a close textual analysis of the propaganda materials sent to Argentina. I examine a wide array of materials sent by the Ministry of Popular Culture and other fascist ministries to Argentina. The main focus of this chapter is on the school textbooks produced by the Italian fascist regime and disseminated to the Italian schools in Argentina. I analyze how the regime articulated its conceptualization of Italian identity and communicated it to the children of Italian emigrants as well as how it strove to inspire loyalty to the distant patria and devotion to the Duce and to fascism.

Chapter 5 discusses the various ways in which members of the Italian community responded to fascist Italy's propaganda. Focusing on the public debate in the Italian-language press over fascism and its claims on Italian identity, I examine both pro-fascist and anti-fascist reactions to the Italian regime. These members of the community actively engaged in a lively discussion over the question of Italian identity within Argentina.

Whether they supported or opposed Mussolini's regime, I contend that these community members expressed an Italian identity fundamentally different from the version emanating from the regime in Rome. Anxious to assimilate into Argentine society and influenced by Argentine notions of identity, these Italians had developed their own understanding of an Italian identity abroad.

Chapter 6 explores the reception of Italian propaganda by the wider Argentine population and places the question of a fascist Italian identity into the context of Argentine debates over its own identity. To consider these Argentine viewpoints I again make use of newspapers to reconstruct the public debate. I analyze in particular the way in which Italian fascist propaganda influenced right-wing nationalist movements in Argentina as well as how that propaganda was used by left-wing parties to discredit their political opponents. This chapter concludes by recounting the Argentine government's investigation of the Italian fascist activities and discusses the debates they inspired in the halls of Argentina's congress.

Note to the reader: all of the translations from the original Italian and Spanish are my own unless otherwise indicated. I have decided not to capitalize the words "fascism" or "fascist" unless it is in direct reference to the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* or if the word is included as part of a quotation in which the word is capitalized in the original.

## CHAPTER 1

### Preliminary Essay: A Question of Identity

*A national identity is fundamentally multi-dimensional; it can never be reduced to a single element even by particular factions of nationalists, nor can it be easily or swiftly induced in a population by artificial means*  
—Anthony D. Smith<sup>1</sup>

As Anthony D. Smith suggests, the question of identity is a complex one, informed by many different elements of collective identity. By studying the content and experiences of *Il Duce's* national project in Argentina and the public debate it provoked, this dissertation sheds light on the intricate ways in which national identities are imagined and negotiated. Using the case of Italian identity in Argentina during the period of the fascist regime in Italy, it examines the web of intersections between culture and politics, ethnicity and ideology, and the state and the collective in the complex construction of a national discourse. As such, it touches upon a number of other broad topics, such as the question of Italian national identity; the nature of Italian fascism; and immigration and the development of Argentina's identity as a nation. This chapter discusses the variety of theoretical and historical approaches to the questions of identity posed by my work.

The pioneering works of Benedict Anderson, Anthony D. Smith, Eric Hobsbawm, and others have re-shaped the way in which scholars approach the question of identity. Their definitions of identity serve as the theoretical foundation of my study. Anderson moved away from *sui generis* and static definitions of the nation and instead defined national identities as cultural constructs, which are imagined, contested, and re-elaborated over the course of a nation's history. According to Anderson, the nation is “a cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 14.

artefact;” “an imagined political community imagined as both limited and sovereign.” Central to Anderson is the question of how the nation is conceived and delimited, creating a sense of commonality among a people living within the boundaries of a nation-state.<sup>2</sup>

Anthony D. Smith similarly defined the nation as “a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths, and historical memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights for all of its members,” but distinguished between the “ethnic and vernacular” components of nationalism and the “civic and territorial” ones. He characterized national identity as, “fundamentally multi-dimensional,” arguing that “it can never be reduced to a single element, even by particular factions of nationalists, nor can it easily or swiftly be induced in a population by artificial means.”<sup>3</sup>

Eric Hobsbawm added another layer of complexity to our understanding of nationalism by reminding us that other social and political factors also influence a subject’s social consciousness and that a people’s priorities and loyalties shift over time depending on the context. Thus according to Hobsbawm, “The progress of national consciousness is neither linear nor necessarily at the expense of other elements of social consciousness” and “the acquisition of national consciousness cannot be separated from the acquisition of other forms of social and political consciousness during this period.

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<sup>2</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, Verso, 1983), 1-11.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991).

they all go together.”<sup>4</sup> These approaches to nationalism provided a new theoretical lens from which to explore the question of national identity.

Using these perspectives on identity as its theoretical basis, my project explores how the fascist regime conceptualized its version of an Italian identity abroad as well as how Italian anti-fascists and members of the Italian community in Argentina imagined the nation and created their own distinctive collective identities, identities which were informed by the Argentina context in which they lived. In this regard, the project is especially indebted to Anderson’s conceptualization of the ‘imagined community,’ which makes the ways in which the nation is envisioned and defined central to understanding a national identity as well as to Hobsbawm’s consideration of other social and political forces in forming an identity.

### **Imagining the Italian Nation**

The present study uses the Italian fascist regime’s project in Argentina as an optic for understanding the broader question of Italy’s national identity and the changing ways in which it was conceptualized. Beginning especially in the 1990s, the question of Italy’s national identity has been debated across a number of fields. While varying in degree of emphasis and political perspective much of the debate within Italy on national identity, until quite recently, had addressed a shared set of themes which were identified as peculiar to the Italian case: the division between the North and the South, Italy’s allegedly uneven path toward modernity, localism and the lack of a national civic

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<sup>4</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, and Reality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 130.

consciousness.<sup>5</sup> Hand-in-hand with these self-doubting evaluations of Italian character was a particularly negative assessment by many of these authors of the history of modern Italy. The unification of Italy itself was presented as problematic: fissures between radicals and moderates, along with the way in which the South was incorporated into the Kingdom of Italy are identified as a foreshadowing of the liberal state's failed nationalizing endeavor. In their treatment of the liberal period a number of peculiarities hindering national unity were emphasized, such as: the selection of Rome as the capital in country with numerous metropolitan centers, the southern question, the divided loyalties posed by Church-State relations, the liberal state's lack of modernization compared with Britain and France, and the very limited ability of the regime to communicate to the masses of Italians and incorporate them into a democratic civil society.<sup>6</sup>

Moving beyond studies which have entangled the issue of Italian identity to its perceived weaknesses in terms of character, modernity, or national history, recent works, influenced by the theoretical approaches of Anderson, Smith, and Hobsbawm among others, have used a variety of innovative frameworks from which to understand the issue of identity, including identity through the study of intellectual elite visions of the nation and national identity as a political religion and the myths and symbols it entailed.

Anderson's characterization of national identity as an imagined cultural construct has in particular led to a number of recent studies on Italian identity that analyze the origins of discourses on the nation and the particular national characteristics and

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<sup>5</sup> Silvana Patriarca has highlighted this feature of the Italian debate both in a recent article, "Italian Neo-Patriotism: Debating National Identity in the 1990s," in *Modern Italy*, as well as in her contribution to the collection of essays entitled, *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Aurelio Lepre, *L'Italia addio? L'unità e disunità dal 1860 al Oggi*. (Arnaldo Mondadori, Editore, Milano, 1994) 124.

ideological ingredients which coalesce during crucial historical junctures into the creation of a national identity.<sup>7</sup> Alberto Mario Banti in *La nazione del Risorgimento* (2000) adopts this approach by focusing on the literary “cannon” of the Risorgimento: the writings of the young intellectual patriots who developed their own particular vision of a unified national community during the first half of the nineteenth century. Beginning especially with the Jacobin period of French occupation, Banti argues that intellectuals in their writings began to envision Italy as an indivisible and sovereign national community. Over time, Banti asserts that these “Risorgimento intellectuals formed the image of an ethno-cultural community, a compact subject, endowed with blood, land, memory, culture, and its own self-awareness.”<sup>8</sup> The goal of these writers was not only to create a unified image of Italy, but also to present their vision, not as a created construct, but rather as a discovered long-existing reality.<sup>9</sup>

Silvana Patriarca also examines how the nation was conceived and envisioned in her work, *Numbers and Nationhood: Writing Statistics in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (1996). She studies how statistical information was used toward the development of an Italian national identity in the nineteenth century. According to Patriarca, statistics became a popular way to evaluate the performance a nation, demonstrate the character and essence of a people, and to forge a national sense of unity.<sup>10</sup> Far from objective in their outlook, nineteenth century statisticians compiled and presented information to actively promote their own political or social beliefs. In this way they not only interpreted

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<sup>7</sup> Linda Colley’s work, *Britons: Forging the Nation*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), is illustrative of this approach. Colley argues that over the course of the century British elites cultivated a national self-image unified by a set of values premised on Protestantism, commercial enterprise, imperial expansion, and patriotic images of the monarchy, in opposition to all things French.

<sup>8</sup> Alberto Mario Banti, *La nazione del risorgimento*, (Torino: Einaudi, 2000) 200.

<sup>9</sup> Banti, 201-203.

<sup>10</sup> Silvana Patriarca, *Numbers and Nationhood: Writing Statistics in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 171.

the nation but also helped to create it. Recently, Patriarca has approached the question of Italian identity by examining discourses on Italian national character by Risorgimento-era patriots, and demonstrates the importance of cultural tropes and narratives in the formation of national identity.<sup>11</sup>

Two collections of essays, *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento* (2001) edited by Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg, and *Immagini della nazione nell'Italia del Risorgimento* (2002) edited by Alberto Mario Banti and Roberto Bizzocchi both approach the question of Italian national identity through the optic of the myths and images that came to be associated with the Risorgimento.<sup>12</sup> Relying primarily on cultural sources, including literature, the visual arts, music, and later film, the contributors to these collections examine much of the iconography employed by intellectuals and politicians in their construction of an Italian national identity designed to unify the country culturally and politically. As Ascoli and Henneberg explain in the introduction to their volume, “Cultural Italianness, in this sense, was a form of selective and largely elite consciousness that ennobled some traditions while excluding many others. It was on the basis of this consciousness that certain Italians and foreigners came to agree on the idea of consistent and continuous existence of an Italian national culture and ‘character’”<sup>13</sup>

Lucy Riall’s recent study of the Risorgimento leader, Giuseppe Garibaldi, *Garibaldi: The Invention of a Hero* (2007) similarly traces the way in which the myth of Garibaldi was

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<sup>11</sup> Silvana Patriarca, “Indolence and Regeneration: Tropes and Tensions of Risorgimento Patriotism,” in *The American Historical Review* volume 110 Issue 2 (2005).

<sup>12</sup> Alberto Mario Banti, and Roberto Bizzocchi eds, *Immagini della nazione nell'Italia del Risorgimento*, (Roma: Carocci, 2002); Ascoli and Henneberg *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Ascoli and Hennenberg, 7.

consciously cultivated by Italian political leaders during as well as after his death in order to promote their own visions of Italian identity.<sup>14</sup> More than mere representations of the nation, these conceptualizations provided a powerful intellectual framework from which Risorgimento leaders and liberal politicians set out to establish a unified nation. Taken together these recent works demonstrate the tremendous impact intellectual conceptions of the nation played in the creation of a particular national identity.

The contributions by Claudio Fogu, Roberto Dainotto and David Forgacs in *Making and Remaking Italy* are especially relevant to my study. Each of these authors examines how fascist artists and intellectuals used Italy's national past to advance their own ideological vision of Italy and Italian identity. In his more recent book, *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy* (2003), Fogu speaks to the centrality of modernist cultural images and exhibitions to the creation of a fascist historical discourse. According to Fogu, "the institutionalization of Fascist culture led to and was sustained by the formation of a collective *historic imaginary* that was at the root of fascism's mass appeal and the intellectual challenge that observers recognized in the fascist politics of history."<sup>15</sup> I similarly examine how these fascist narratives were expressed through exhibitions, films, and books although Fogu focuses mainly on cultural and historical exhibitions within fascist Italy, while I examine instead the cultivation of identity through the fascist propaganda materials sent to Argentina, with a focus on the textbooks that the regime commissioned for the Italian schools abroad. I also adopt a similar approach in my discussion of the anti-fascist Italian historic imaginary articulated through the Italian anti-fascist press in Argentina.

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<sup>14</sup> Lucy Riall, *Garibaldi: The Invention of a Hero*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Claudio Fogu, *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 10.

This study builds on all of the above approaches to national identity in that it closely examines how members of the fascist regime as well as their political opponents in Argentina each used a series of myths and images of the Risorgimento and created their own competing national narratives of Italy's past in order to re-conceptualize the nation to serve their own ends. This project also examines the various ways in which members of the Italian community envisioned the nation and conceptualized their identity, demonstrating that fascist officials and anti-fascist exiles were not the only ones creating national discourse through the creation of myths and imagery to create a collective identity.

### **Nationalism as Political Religion**

Anderson identifies the origins of the nationalism with the emergence of a print capitalism along with the decline of religious modes of thought, citing language in particular as a unifying force in creating a national consciousness which began to fill the spiritual needs of a people inhabiting an increasingly secular world.<sup>16</sup> I also approach the content of the Italian fascist propaganda from this perspective, raising the question of how the fascist regime constructed its nationalization project and how that project changed when it was exported to Argentina.

Many historians have in fact understood national identity in terms of a political religion. They argue that nations and nationalist movements borrowed freely from religious imagery and strove to inspire the same sense of devotion traditionally attributed to religious faiths. These theorists of nationalism highlight in particular the promulgation of national symbols, myths, historical memories, and images to create a

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<sup>16</sup> Anderson, 1-11.

sense of unity among a people.<sup>17</sup> George L. Mosse was among the first to examine how a nation-state employed such devices to promote a national project. According to Mosse, monuments, aesthetics, symbols and ceremony were used in Germany to inspire unity and a national German identity. This national spirit was expressed through a combination of classical Greek ideals with German *volk* traditions. National monuments, linked to public festivals, which promulgated national mythology, developed into a new secular religion, attracting mass appeal and designed to transcend class lines and political divisions.<sup>18</sup>

Applying Mosse's interpretive framework to the Italian case, Emilio Gentile argues that fascism also established itself as a political religion, whose goal was to complete Italy's nationalization project. According to Gentile, through solemn rituals fascists honored patriotic symbols, such as the flag and war monuments and associated themselves with the Italian nation and mixing its own rituals and symbols with those of the State. As the regime became more powerful fascist holidays honoring Mussolini's March on Rome and the founding of the Party were added to the litany of national holidays and celebrations. Religious symbols, such as the use of bells and holy relics were also co-opted by the fascists and locations such as fascist headquarters and memorials became sacred sanctuaries. Carefully orchestrated processions, bonfires, ceremonies and celebrations were all designed to instill a collective sense of identity and communion with the fascist regime.<sup>19</sup> One of the limitations of Gentile's analysis is that

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<sup>17</sup> Anderson; Smith, 11.

<sup>18</sup> George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1975), 27-34.

<sup>19</sup> Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) 32-53. 80-102. Also see more recently Gentile, *La grande Italia* (Roma: Laterza 2006 ). Two other works of note which explore national identity through symbolic imagery and ritual are Bruno Tobia, *L'Altare della Patria* (Bologna: Il Mulino: 1998); David Atkinson and Denis Cosgrove, "Urban Rhetoric

he focuses on the fascist regime's perspective without analyzing how the Italian people responded to its program.

This dissertation complicates Gentile's portrayal of the fascist political liturgy in that it not only examines how Mussolini repackaged this national liturgy for export to Argentina, but also takes into account the way in which it was challenged and redefined by members of the Italian community in Argentina as well as native Argentines who provided it with their own alternative set of national symbols and images. Michael E. Geisler in a recent study of national symbols in the formation of identity, *National Symbols, Fractured Identities* (2005), stresses this need to recognize the "coexistence of competing and contested national narrative systems," explaining that "the role played by national symbols in the formation and maintenance of collective identity is an ongoing, dynamic process in which historical symbolic meanings are constantly recycled, actualized, challenged, renegotiated, and reconfirmed, or re-written."<sup>20</sup> In the case of Argentina, I argue that many members of the Italian community did not receive the fascist message the way in which the regime had intended, but instead attached their own meanings and symbolism to the fascist national liturgy providing it with their own assumptions and conceptualizations of the nation.

The strategies employed by the members of the fascist regime to promote Mussolini's national project in Argentina also resembled the way in which other nation-states have sought to nationalize the masses within their own territorial boundaries.

Anderson makes note of this relationship between state-building and nationalism

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and Embodied Identities: City, Nation, and Empire at the Vittoriano Emanuele II Monument in Rome, 1870-1945" in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 88 (1), 1998. Both works explore the changing symbolic role in national discourses of the Victor Emmanuel Monument in Rome.

<sup>20</sup> Michael E. Geisler, ed. *National Symbols, Fractured Identities*, (Middlebury, VT: Middlebury College Press, 2005), xviii.

describing the process as “a systematic, even Machiavellian, instilling of nationalist ideology through the mass media, the educational system, administrative regulations and so forth”<sup>21</sup> For Anthony Smith, “national agencies of mass socialization” were also central to what he defines as the civic, or Western model of national identity “whose members were united, if not made, homogenous by common historical memories, myths, symbols, and traditions.”<sup>22</sup> Eugen Weber’s *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (1976), illustrates in great detail how this process of nation-building worked on a local level by demonstrating how social-economic change and government involvement integrated peasants into France’s national project during the Third Republic. In particular, Weber highlights the role of military service as well as a state school system in promoting a national culture and identity.<sup>23</sup> The Italian government, especially during the fascist period, similarly attempted to nationalize its Italians living in Argentina by offering an Italian education through a state sponsored network of Italian schools abroad, by calling on Italian emigrants to return to serve in the Italian military, and through the use of mass media. Of course, if the methodology was similar, the context was quite different. Lacking the coercive mechanisms of the state, the Italian fascists had no way of requiring Italian emigrants in Argentina to attend their schools or join their military. This speaks to the fundamental difference between fascist Italy’s national project within Italy compared to its project abroad and questions the nature of nationalism outside of the territory of the nation-state.

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<sup>21</sup> Anderson, 113-114.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, 11.

<sup>23</sup> Eugen Weber, *Peasants in Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford University Press, 1976) 336.

In promoting a nationalist agenda outside of the nation, the Italian fascist initiative in Argentina also resembles in part Anthony D. Smith's ethnic concept of nationalism: "Whether you stayed in your community or emigrated to another, you remained ineluctably, organically, a member of the community of your birth and were forever stamped by it. A nation in other words, was first and foremost a community of common descent."<sup>24</sup> This dissertation will demonstrate that elements of this ethnic conceptualization of a nation were indeed present in the Italian fascist propaganda sent to Argentina, as children of Italian emigrants were told that they were born into an 'Italian community abroad' and that their true loyalty rested in the nation of their ancestors and cultural heritage, rather than in the 'foreign' territories in which they lived. In exhibiting elements of both the civic as well as ethnic model of nationalism, this study confirms Smith's conclusion that, "the nation has come to blend two sets of dimensions, the one civic and territorial, the other ethnic and genealogical, in varying proportions in particular cases."<sup>25</sup>

### **Towards an Understanding of Fascism**

Gentile's treatment of fascism as a political religion brings us to another much debated aspect of Italian history: namely the nature of fascism and its programs. Given that this dissertation is as much about fascism as it is about identity, some discussion of fascism is warranted here. But what exactly is the nature of fascism and how can it be defined?

Many historians have echoed the words of Angelo Tasca, one of the first historians of fascism who commented that to understand fascism was to write its

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<sup>24</sup> Smith, 11.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, 15.

history.<sup>26</sup> To this day historians are still struggling to define fascism. To some fascism was a capitalist reactionary movement, to others a revolutionary movement of the right which only became conservative after assuming control over the state. To others Mussolini was a buffoon and fascism all talk with little ideological substance. Fascism has eluded concrete definitions for so long mainly because even within the regime, fascism meant different things to different people at different times. Among its ranks were former leftist radicals who viewed fascism as a vehicle for change and the establishment of a new world order; to former nationalists, fascism meant making Italy a dominant imperial power; to others fascism was simply an opportunity to protect their self-interest. Despite the regime's totalitarian façade, these different personalities and agendas were often in conflict as different factions and cliques vied for Mussolini's favor. This study of the regime's activities in Argentina illustrates the dynamics of these personal rivalries and competing agendas and how they complicated the fascist agenda.

Another one of the difficulties in defining fascism is the fact that it changed over time and espoused conflicted and contradictory notions. The fascists adopted a modernist rhetoric, made innovative use of mass media and promoted youth, change, and physical fitness, while at the same time favored traditional female gender roles, exalted the patriarchal family, and promoted ruralism and idealized the peasant lifestyle.<sup>27</sup> Fascism was also at once an Italian phenomenon to regenerate Italy as well as a universal ideology, the dawning of a new civilization.<sup>28</sup> This dissertation sheds light on this particular tension within the fascist program, specifically its nationalist mission to spread

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<sup>26</sup> Angelo Tasca, *The Rise of Italian Fascism* (London: Methuen, 1938).

<sup>27</sup> These contradictions were succinctly expressed by historian Bruno Wanrooij in *Liberal and Fascist Italy* edited by Adrian Lyttelton, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Both these aspects can be found in Roger Griffin's edited volume *Fascism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Italian culture and influence abroad and its internationalist goal of promoting a universal fascist political ideology. It will be demonstrated that in the case of Argentina these conflicting tendencies undercut one another and undermined the regime's efforts abroad.

Highlighting fascism's inconsistencies, R.J.B. Bosworth in *The Italian Dictatorship* (1996) writes that "fascist philosophy was shot through with contradictions and banalities. A pinch of Social Darwinism here, a pinch of Victorian values there; an uneasy mixture of populism and productivism; a servility to a leader who was in turn anxious to cut an intellectual dash but who lacked constancy or profundity" Following in historian Denis Mack Smith's footsteps, Bosworth uses fascism's inherent contradictions to suggest that the regime was devoid of any true intellectual content. Mussolini is likewise all bluster, a shallow opportunist quick to change his beliefs in order to garner support and maintain power.<sup>29</sup>

While it cannot be denied that the nature of fascism changed over time and that within the fascist movement there were contradictory tendencies, this should not in itself negate the presence of an ideology. Furthermore, even though historians and theorists continue the debate over a precise definition of fascism, a cursory look at literature from Fascist intellectual and political figures, from Giovanni Gentile to Giuseppe Bottai demonstrate the presence of an ideological program with identifiable, if not always consistent, features.<sup>30</sup> Other than the oft-cited fascist negation of liberalism and bolshevism, recent historians who have tackled the question of how to define fascism have identified its exultation of violence and the efficacy of will, its turn toward youth

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<sup>29</sup> R.J.B. Bosworth, *The Italian Dictatorship* (London: Arnold, 1996), 43.

<sup>30</sup>For a survey of this literature see Griffin's reader which provides a well-organized compilation of excerpts from primary material cataloging many of Fascism's defining aspects as well as documenting Fascism's evolution throughout the course of its existence.

and modernism, its appeal to authoritarian leadership, its anti-materialist philosophy, its ultra-nationalism, its belief in corporatist ideals and the collective over the individual, and its depiction of a national society in crisis and the need to spiritually regenerate the nation.<sup>31</sup>

In the first volume of his groundbreaking biography of Mussolini, *Mussolini Il Rivoluzionario, 1883-1920*, (1965), Renzo De Felice asserts that fascism began as a radical revolutionary movement of the left and argues that fascism as a movement was the idealization of “an emerging middle class” with an impulse to renew, renovate and radically transform the structures of Italian society by creating an alternative to traditional ruling elites.<sup>32</sup> For De Felice, the First World War and its aftermath was the key moment in the crystallization of this fascist ideology. As a regime, De Felice argues that by compromising with traditional elites, Mussolini, abandoned the revolutionary impulse of fascist ideology in an effort to normalize the regime, preserve social order, and consolidate his dictatorship.<sup>33</sup> While never precisely defining this “emerging class,” that filled the early ranks of fascism, or fully reconciling the conservative tendencies of the movement with its radical roots, De Felice’s suggestive characterization of fascism’s origins and objectives has inspired a whole generation of scholars.

Zeev Sternhell in *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (1994) follows De Felice’s lead by identifying fascism as a revolutionary, intellectually cohesive, and self-sufficient ideological and cultural phenomenon. According to Sternhell, in the years leading up to

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<sup>31</sup> For recent discussion of the nature of Fascism see Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004); Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), as well as Griffin’s introduction to *Fascism*.

<sup>32</sup> Renzo De Felice, *Fascism, an Informal Introduction to its Theories and Practice* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1976)

<sup>33</sup> De Felice, 44.

the First World War, Georges Sorel and other revolutionary syndicalists lost faith in the proletariat, and replaced it with the myth of the nation. Ultimately, this change in orientation united revolutionary syndicalism with the nationalist movement and formed the foundation of fascism, which for Sternhell was “on the one hand a rejection of democracy, Marxism, liberalism, the so-called bourgeois values, the eighteenth century heritage, internationalism, and pacifism; on the other hand a cult of heroism, vitalism, and violence.”<sup>34</sup> While clearly over-emphasizing the role revolutionary syndicalism over other important influences on fascism’s development, Sternhell does present fascism as a coherent alternative political culture.

Emilio Gentile also expands upon De Felice’s characterization of fascism. He argues that the fascists pursued their revolutionary program to “fascistize” the Italian state and ultimately the Italian people throughout Mussolini’s tenure in power. For Gentile, fascism is best understood as a totalitarian “anthropological revolution,” which extended its influence over all aspects of Italian life in its attempt to mobilize the masses in support of the fascist program and create the “new fascist man.”<sup>35</sup> His interpretation of fascism’s ideological program for the new Italy adds a new cultural dimension to De Felice’s socio-political analysis. Mass media, propaganda, and fascist popular organizations all assume a new, more central importance to the study of fascism.

To understand the nature of fascism many historians have in fact turned to the study of culture under the fascist regime. Philip V. Cannistraro suggests a close linkage between fascist cultural programs and the promotion of a new Italian identity. In describing the various cultural initiatives of the regime, Cannistraro asserts that, “The

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<sup>34</sup>Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.) 5, 32.

<sup>35</sup> Emilio Gentile, “The Totalitarian Experiment” in *Liberal and Fascist Italy*, 162.

Novecento art movement with its emphasis on Roman styles and *Italianità*, its rejection of the recent past, and its embracing of cultural nationalism, clearly reflected the nationalist basis of fascist cultural theories.” For Cannistraro, the fascist “cultural revolution” aimed at creating a new Italian citizen inspired by Roman principles of discipline, duty, martial valor, and national unity.”<sup>36</sup> In his biography of Margherita Sarfatti, *Il Duce’s Other Woman* (1993) written with Brian Sullivan, Cannistraro further highlights role of culture to the understanding of fascism, explaining that, “The *Novecento* consciously evoked classical principles, just as Fascism deliberately revived the symbols and ceremonies of the Roman Empire. Both encouraged devotion to hierarchy and discipline.”<sup>37</sup>

Ruth Ben-Ghiat also makes an innovative use of fascist culture to understand the nature of fascism. In her work, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (2001), she places fascist aesthetics, literary narratives, and films in the broader context of European modernism, while asserting that culture played a key role in the fascist projects of regenerating the nation and creating a new fascist man. According to Ben-Ghiat, “Many fascist intellectuals viewed culture as a carrier of values and moral norms and endowed it with the power to transform as well as represent: both the practitioners and audiences, these Italians believed, could be reborn and renewed by contact with Art”<sup>38</sup> Ben-Ghiat

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<sup>36</sup> Philip v. Cannistraro, “Mussolini’s Cultural Revolution: Fascist or Nationalist?” in *Journal of Contemporary History* (Vol. 7, No. ¾ July-October 1972) 124. This theme of Romanità was more recently examined by Romke Visser who writes that, “the cult of romanità was...a more or less coherent set of nationalist, ‘organic’ and corporatist set of ideas, which became both the legitimation and the inspiration for the ‘Roman’ totalitarian state and its ‘Roman’ imperialistic mission.” Romke Visser, “Fascist Doctrine and the Cult of Romanità” in the *Journal of Contemporary History* (vol.27, 1992) 17.

<sup>37</sup> Philip V. Cannistraro and Brian R. Sullivan, *Il Duce’s Other Woman: The Untold True Story of Margherita Sarfatti, Benito Mussolini’s Jewish Mistress, and How She Helped Him Come to Power* (New York: William Morrow Company, Inc. 1993.) 269.

<sup>38</sup> Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 6.

identifies through her discussion of fascist cultural policies and productions an underlying modernist fascist agenda which strove to remake Italians at home and enhance Italy's power and prestige abroad.<sup>39</sup>

Emily Braun, through her studies of the fine arts under fascism, also elaborates on the connections between the visual arts and fascist politics. As Braun explains, "The visual arts thrived under fascism, leaving a body of works now accepted in the canon of twentieth century modernism; at the same time, artistic production was inextricably linked to the propaganda imperatives of the regime"<sup>40</sup> Analyzing the different groups which vied for recognition as the "official" style of the fascist regime, she identifies competing ideological tendencies among fascist leaders. According to Braun, Sarfatti's *Novecento* group of artists in painting, along with the Italian Rationalist movement in architecture are both indicative of the modernist avant-garde tendencies of fascism in the arts. It was only later in the regime during the 1930s, thanks in part the scathing critique of the modernist *Novecento* group by Roberto Farinacci, that the anti-modernist and ruralist *strapaese* style would gain some degree of influence.

Critics of these cultural approaches to fascism have argued that fascist ideology did not penetrate the arts to the extent that these historians would have us believe, suggesting instead that commercialized popular culture, along with the preexisting values of the Catholic Church had far more of an influence on Italian society.<sup>41</sup> While it is indeed difficult to determine the degree of influence fascist ideology had on modernist aesthetics, this cultural approach to the study of fascism does provide useful insight into

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<sup>39</sup> Ben-Ghiat, 4-10.

<sup>40</sup> Emily Braun, "The Visual Arts: Modernism and Fascism" in *Liberal and Fascist Italy*. 168.

<sup>41</sup> See for example, RJB Bosworth, *The Italian Dictatorship*, 132-153; and more recently Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 215.

how the fascist regime defined itself and envisioned the nation. This study builds on this discussion of fascist culture by examining what the cultural propaganda sent to Argentina tells us about how the fascists understood their movement and its place in Italian history.

### **Fascism and the Italian Nation**

In analyzing fascism's national project in Argentina, the present study questions whether the fascists truly succeeded in identifying their regime with the Italian nation as well as the extent to which they achieved popular consensus. In his aforementioned study on identity, Geisler asserts that the power of symbolic national imagery in defining a nation depended, "on changes in public consensus or the ability or inability of a particular hegemonic societal group to maintain its hold on the collective imaginary"<sup>42</sup> Central to the issue at hand therefore is whether or not fascism held hegemonic sway over Italy's national project.

In his essay, *Perché gli italiani si disprezzano* (1995), the journalist Sergio Romano writes that, "If Mussolini had brought to the king 'the Italy of Vittorio Veneto' as he declared at the Quirinale on October 30, 1922, it was by then [after the war] impossible to speak of Vittorio Veneto with patriotic accents. National pride was high-jacked by the fascist inspired radical right and became anomalous, illegitimate."<sup>43</sup> His words hit upon a much debated aspect of the question of Italian identity: fascism's appropriation of Italian nationalism and the problem of Italian national identity in the postwar republic.

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<sup>42</sup> Geisler, XVIII.

<sup>43</sup> Sergio Romano, *Finis Italiae: Declino e morte dell'ideologia risorgimentale*, (Milano: All'insegna del pesce d'oro, 1995) 54.

Fascism's attempted appropriation of Italy's national identity as well as its use of patriotic imagery complicated how Italians after the Second World War defined the nation. Avoiding the tainted nationalist themes associated with fascism, the new post-war Italian Republic was founded on a series of myths surrounding the role of the anti-fascist resistance and the Italian people during the war years. Italian identity was connected to the ideals of liberty and democracy and the resistance during the war years was interpreted as a mass-based popular movement of liberation to overthrow the much-despised fascist controlled government.<sup>44</sup> Over time however, these images were challenged by a number of scholars. Renzo De Felice argued that there was in fact a large measure of popular consensus for the fascist regime during the 1930s and from a different ideological perspective Claudio Pavone defined the period from 1943 to 1945 as a 'civil war' between fascists and anti-fascists.<sup>45</sup> Together these works challenged the accepted foundational myth of the Italian Republic.

Ernesto Galli della Loggia in his essay, and later book, *La morte della patria* (1994), along with Gian Enrico Rusconi, in his work, *Se cessiamo di essere una nazione* (1993) were particularly harsh in their assessment of Italy's postwar identity, characterizing the war years as a period of crisis and defeat for the concept of the Italian nation.<sup>46</sup> In the end these writers conclude that the post-war governments failed to cultivate a patriotic and inclusive national identity and favored factionalism and party politics, leaving Italy with a precariously weak self-image. My work however questions

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<sup>44</sup> Nicholas Doumanis, *Italy*, (London: Arnold, 2001), 162.

<sup>45</sup> Renzo De Felice, *Fascism: An Informal Introduction to its Theory and Practice*; Claudio Pavone, *Una Guerra civile: Saggio storico sulla moralità nella resistenza* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> Ernesto Galli della Loggia, "La Morte della Patria" in Giovanni Spadolini ed., *Nazione e Nazionalità in Italia: Dall'Alba de secolo ai nostri giorni* (Bari: Laterza, 1994), and Gian Enrico Rusconi, *Se cessiamo di essere una nazione* (Bologna, Il Mulino: 1993) 45-101.

whether the fascist regime truly succeeded in co-opting Italian identity as well as addresses an issue central to the debates on fascism: the question of consensus.

In the second volume of his biography, *Mussolini Il Duce: Gli anni del consenso, 1929-1936* (1974), Renzo De Felice asserts that after Mussolini consolidated fascist control over the mechanisms of the state, his regime worked towards and largely achieved popular Italian consensus for fascism, a consensus which culminated in the Italian invasion of Ethiopia.<sup>47</sup> Philip V. Cannistraro also examines the fascist regime's search for consensus in *La fabbrica del consenso* (1975). He argues that the regime's cultural policies and use of the mass media was indeed intended to achieve a broad-base of popular support. For Cannistraro this "cultural revolution" was however limited and not as complete as De Felice suggests.<sup>48</sup> Victoria De Grazia directly challenges De Felice's thesis in her work *The Culture of Consent* (1981) by arguing that consumerism and religion, as well as other social factors exerted far more influence over the Italian populace than the fascist regime's cultural attempts at remaking the Italian people.<sup>49</sup>

Paul Corner has recently recast the debate over consensus by questioning whether consensus can in fact truly be determined under a dictatorship. He argues that historians from De Felice on who have drawn definitive conclusions on the issue have failed to take into account not only the repressive nature of the fascist dictatorship but also what he terms, "aspects that are not directly repressive but that nonetheless constitute instruments

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<sup>47</sup> Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini Il Duce: Gli anni del consenso, 1929-1936*, (Turin, 1974).

<sup>48</sup> Philip V. Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso: fascismo e mass media*, (Bari: Laterza, 1975) and Cannistraro "Mussolini's Cultural Revolution: Fascist or Nationalist: *Journal of Contemporary History* 1972.

<sup>49</sup> Victoria De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

of a fairly rigid social control.”<sup>50</sup> Given the coercive mechanisms at the disposal of the fascist state, Corner effectively challenges an historian’s ability to truly measure fascism’s influence over the Italian people.

By examining fascist Italy’s program outside of its national territory, my study contributes to our understanding of the regime’s search for consensus. Unlike within the confines of Italy where it was difficult challenge the regime’s message, Italian fascist propaganda entered a contested space when it arrived on Argentina’s shores. Without the tools of coercion and armed only with the power of persuasion, the fascists had to compete openly with alternative visions of the Italian nation. Following the Italian fascist propaganda and the reactions it provoked in Argentina provides the unique opportunity of examining how an authoritarian dictatorial regime operates within a relatively free democratic society outside of the coercive mechanisms of state control. This situation makes it possible for me to use the ways in which fascism’s vision of the Italian nation was debated, challenged, contested, and re-defined by Italians living in Argentina to argue that fascism’s supposed claims over the national discourse during the period were illusory. Although the degree in which Italians in Argentina supported the regime is difficult to measure quantifiably, in terms of controlling national discourse, this study will conclusively demonstrate that fascism’s “hold over the collective imaginary” was far from hegemonic.

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<sup>50</sup> Paul Corner, “Italian Fascism: Whatever Happened to Dictatorship,” *The Journal of Modern History* vol. 74 (2002), 325-351.

### **Emigrants and the Italian Nation**

By actively engaging in a debate with the fascist regime's propagandists over Italian identity, the Italian emigrants in Argentina involved themselves in the construction of Italy's national discourse. At the heart of this present analysis is the question of how Italian emigrants imagined their own identity and interacted with their nation of origin.

In his classic work, *A History of Italy 1871-1915* (1927), Benedetto Croce writes, "The persistency of national character among emigrants is primarily determined by the prestige of their home country and the vitality of its culture."<sup>51</sup> Few historians to date have elaborated on the issue this passage suggestively posed: namely the relationship between emigrant communities and the national identity of their homeland and while there are a number of works detailing the various Italian immigrant experiences in their adopted countries, emigration has received all too little attention in a transnational perspective. Historical works on Italian emigration generally focused on contributions made by Italians to their adopted country as well as on their social-economic conditions within their new countries. Donna R. Gabaccia's groundbreaking study, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (2000), is among the first to place Italian emigration into a transnational context, relating as much as possible the emigrant experience with developments in Italian history as well as the history of their new nations. In her highly suggestive work, Gabaccia writes that "national histories obscure the most outstanding characteristics of migrations from Italy—their worldwide dimensions and their circulatory character—and ignore connections between Italy's villages, towns, and government and the Other Italies around the world."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Benedetto Croce, *A History of Italy 1871-1915* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1929), 229.

<sup>52</sup> Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 9.

In the realm of cultural studies, Pasquale Verdicchio in *Bound by Distance: Rethinking Nationalism through the Italian Diaspora*, (1997) also adopts a transnational approach to the study of the Italian emigration. With a textual analysis of a variety of works, including Edmondo De Amicis's *Cuore*, Giovanni Pascoli's poetry, and the Nationalist novels of Enrico Corradini, Verdicchio links emigration to debates within Italy at the turn of the century pertaining to national identity and government policy, illustrating how a critique of the mass emigration out of Italy was used as a device to promote a new society at home and an imperialist agenda abroad.<sup>53</sup>

Mark Choate's dissertation, *Defining Greater Italy Abroad: Migration and Colonialism in Africa and the Americas 1880-1915* (2002) also links emigration to debates over Italy's national project. He examines the different ways in which liberal and nationalist figures debated the role of emigration in terms of Italian national expansion linking it to the debates over colonization in Africa.<sup>54</sup> His approach to the changing contours of the Italian debate over emigration during the liberal period parallels my own treatment of this debate during the fascist period and also highlights the interconnectedness between Italian emigration and national discourse in shaping the way in which the Italian nation was defined. While exploring a related theme, this study, however, de-centers the debate over emigration and identity by focusing not only on the Italian perspective but also examining how it was debated across the Atlantic among members of the Italian community as well as by native Argentines.

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<sup>53</sup> Pasquale Verdicchio, *Bound By Distance: Rethinking Nationalism through the Italian Diaspora*, (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997) 42.

<sup>54</sup> Mark Choate, "Defining Greater Italy: Migration and Colonialism in Africa and the Americas," (Yale University, 2002); See also Choate's forthcoming book, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2007).

Adopting this transnational approach to understanding Italian identity through migration, this study not only examines the content and impact of fascist Italy's program abroad, but also the ways in which Italian emigrants actively participated in Italy's national discourse. It shows that their different conceptualizations of the nation were no less valid than that of the fascist regime and equally important to our understanding of how identities are constructed and negotiated over time and across space.

### **The Nation and Otherness**

Another important theme in this dissertation is the way in which Italian fascists and anti-fascists as well as Argentine nationalists and socialists defined their own identities in opposition to their rivals. Each group depicted themselves as 'true' Italians or Argentines while labeling their opponents as fundamentally different and foreign aberrations, as "anti-Italians" or "anti-Argentines."

In his classic work, *Orientalism* (1978), Edward W. Said asserts that the Orient served as an 'other' against which Europe defined its own identity. As Said explains, "Orientalism was a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them')"<sup>55</sup> As Said himself recognized, the creation of the self in opposition to the other need not be limited to the study of Orientalism, for as a basic concept, "the sense in which one feels himself to be not foreign is based on a very unrigorous idea of what is 'out there,' beyond one's own territory. All kinds of suppositions, associations, and fictions appear to crowd the unfamiliar space outside of one's own."<sup>56</sup> It is therefore an

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<sup>55</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Books: New York, 1978), 43-44.

<sup>56</sup> Said, 54.

imaginative geography providing a framework from which to delineate one's own identity as well as domesticate what is foreign and threatening. This definition of the "Self" in opposition to the "Other" has been applied with much profit by many historians of national identity. Gerald Newman in his work, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, along with Linda Colley's aforementioned *Britons: Forging of a Nation*, demonstrates the key role played by the stereotypical image of Catholic France in opposition to Protestant England. As Newman explains, "English national identity was formed in an anti-French mold...one myth was projected against the other, the self-glorifying national abstraction against the horrid foreign counter-abstraction."<sup>57</sup>

Cultural historians of the Italian South have readily identified and employed this methodological framework by analyzing how stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno inform our understanding of the construction of national identity in Italy. According to John Dickie in *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno 1860-1900* (1999): "The South was one of nineteenth-century patriotic culture's most important images of alterity. The barbarous, the primitive, the violent, the irrational, the feminine, the African: these and other values—often but by no means always negatively connoted—were repeatedly located in the Mezzogiorno as foils to definitions of Italy."<sup>58</sup> In this way, representations of the South for Dickie are more than just evidence of regional prejudice and a manifestation of Italy's oft-lamented lack of national unity, but instead play an essential role in understanding how Italians created and defined their national identity.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830* (New York: St. Martin's Press) 124.

<sup>58</sup> John Dickie in *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno 1860-1900* (1999), 1-2.

<sup>59</sup> Dickie, 14.

Using a more subtle literary, rather than documentary, analysis of sources, Nelson Moe's work, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (2002), further elaborates on the role of the South as Other in the formulation of Italian identity. According to Moe, "liberal elites in Italy set their sights on the formation of an independent nation that would take its place in the constellation of leading European states; they imagined their future in the image of modern Europe. At the same time they were haunted by a sense of their country's backwardness," therefore, Moe concludes that in order to resolve this perceived weakness and make Italy a more "northern nation the southern part of the country was identified as different"<sup>60</sup> Moe's analysis of representations of the South, including not only political and popular tracts but also the works of literature, emphasizes the constructive role and rhetorical power such that an imagined geography can play in articulating thoughts and ideas relevant to the national project as a whole.<sup>61</sup>

Said's approach has also been employed as a way of viewing aspects of Argentina's national project. For example, David Brading in *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State* (1991), illustrates this oppositional dynamic in the Argentine statesman Juan Doming Faustino Sarmiento's classic work, *Civilización y barbarie: vida de Juan Facundo Quiroga* (1848). Expressing a desire associate Argentine identity with the modern nations of North America and Europe, Sarmiento defined Argentina by a set of contrasts between civilization and

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<sup>60</sup> Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 2.

<sup>61</sup> Moe, 299.

barbarism, progress and stagnation, liberty and despotism, the city and the countryside.<sup>62</sup> Following Sarmiento's lead, by the late nineteenth century elites throughout Latin America, many of them imbued with positivist ideas, attempted to define their national identities within the context of civilized Europe, and in opposition to their own internal Other: in this case the mass indigenous and mixed race populations of the countryside.<sup>63</sup>

Making use of this approach to the study of identity, this project examines oppositional dynamics at work in the development of national discourses by illustrating how the Italian fascist regime, members of the Italian, and wider Argentina community strove to create a collective sense of identity, by defining themselves against their opponents. The question of Italian identity in Argentina is however much more complex than this framework alone allows. It is therefore also essential to understand how the Argentine context shaped the interplay of competing national projects.

### **Argentina's Debate on the Nation**

The New World context in which the debate over Italian identity is played out is of fundamental importance to this study, raising the question of how the dynamics of identity formation change across the Atlantic. In a recent collection of essays on New World nationalisms, Don H. Doyle and Marco Antonio Pamplona explain how the contours of the debate on national identity differ from European models. According to Doyle and Pamplona, "The pluralism, as well as, the newness of American nations undermined any attempt to envision the nation along the lines of the European paradigm

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<sup>62</sup> David A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 623.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

as a people bound and distinguished by common descent, a deep collective past, or homogeneous cultural traditions.”<sup>64</sup> Although this New World context changes the contours of the debate over identity it does not lessen the importance of creating a national consciousness, as Doyle and Pamplona explain, “The need to construct a common national identity was every bit as pressing in the multiethnic immigrant societies of the Americas as in other countries, but immigrant nations had to work with different materials.”<sup>65</sup> Nations of immigrants therefore tended to stress a shared set of values and beliefs rather than ethnicity or a shared cultural heritage.

Though the context was quite different, Argentina’s national project was no less complex than that of Italy. At the very same moment that the Risorgimento intellectuals in Banti’s account attempted to construct a unified Italian cultural identity Argentine elites were also struggling to forge their own national culture. Just as was the case in Italy several national factors in Argentina complicated this project: its vast territorial expanses and sparse population, Spain’s ambiguous cultural legacy, and the divide culturally between the city and countryside and politically between the provinces and Buenos Aires. Furthermore, unlike in other parts of Latin America, Argentina lacked a rich indigenous cultural heritage which Creole elites could use to construct a distinctive national narrative. Without much of a mythical past to fall back on Argentina was by necessity defined as a nation of the future. In light of these obstacles to a cultural construction of identity Argentine elites relied on ideational definitions of the nation.

Jorge Myers, in his recent analysis of Argentina’s national identity, “Language, History, and Politics in Argentine Identity, 1840-1880” in *Nationalism in the New World*

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<sup>64</sup> Don H. Doyle and Marco Antonio Pamplona eds., *Nationalism in the New World* (University of Georgia Press, Athens: 2006) 5.

<sup>65</sup> Doyle and Pamplona, 6.

(2006), highlights in particular civic virtue and democratic ideals in early formulations of the nation. According to Myers, “a persistent theme in Argentine life from independence onward has been the emergence of a powerful republican discourse.” As Myers went on to explain, “the tendency was toward the establishment of a national identity defined primarily in terms of political principles and objectives rather than the cultural attributes of the country’s inhabitants.”<sup>66</sup> Along these lines, Argentine leaders like Sarmiento and Juan Bautista Alberdi in the nineteenth century encouraged immigration as well as a public education system based on the North American model in the hopes of creating an inclusive national identity based on the principle of an informed and democratic civil society. Central to my own argument is the persistence of this ideational conceptualization of the nation into the 1920s and 1930s.

Jeane Delaney, in her article, “Imagining *El Ser Argentino*: Cultural Nationalism and Romantic Concepts of Nationhood in Early Twentieth Century Argentina,” in *Journal of Latin American Studies* (2002) identifies the rise of an ethno-cultural nationalism in Argentina during the early twentieth century which challenged, though never completely replaced, earlier national formulations. According to Delaney, by 1910 the new nationalist concept of an ethnic “*raza argentina*” began to dominate national discourse. Ricardo Rojas, one of the leading intellectuals of this movement defined the Argentine race by exalting its Creole national character which was symbolized by idyllic representations of the gaucho and the pampas. According to Rojas, new immigrants would be transformed by the Creole environment in which they lived and become ethnically Argentine by assimilating Argentine customs and receiving a state education

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<sup>66</sup> Jorge Myers, “Language, History, and Politics in Argentine Identity, 1840-1880,” in *Nationalism in the New World*, 121.

which exalted Argentina's history, literature, and geography. Other nationalists like Manuel Gálvez defined Argentine identity more narrowly highlighting its Spanish and Catholic roots.<sup>67</sup>

David Rock in *Authoritarian Argentina: The Nationalist Movement, its History and its Impact* (1993) argues that the 1920s and 1930s were a key moment in the elaboration of a particular form of ethno-cultural nationalism which laid the groundwork for Argentina's future authoritarian regimes. By then Argentine nationalism had become more of a right-wing political movement and nationalist visions were increasingly nativist and xenophobic in character. These nationalists resented Britain's historic dominance over the economy, but were far more troubled by the menacing anarchistic and radical tendencies of the immigrant working classes and wrote on the corrupting influences of migration to Argentina, which tarnished the purity of Argentina's Spanish-Creole cultural heritage. Unlike earlier nationalists, they openly criticized Argentina's civil traditions and democratic paradigms.<sup>68</sup> My project builds on Rock's analysis by examining the nature and extent in which these writers were influenced by Italian fascism.

Most historians of Argentina agree that the 1930s, the so-called *década infame*, was a key moment in the creation of Argentina's modern national and political identity, the very same decade in which fascist Italy bombarded Argentina with its propaganda.

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<sup>67</sup> Jeane H. Delaney, "Imagining *El Ser Argentino*: Cultural Nationalism and Romantic Concepts of Nationhood in Early Twentieth Century Argentina," in *Journal of Latin American Studies* (2002), 265-658.

<sup>68</sup> David Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina, The Nationalist Movement, its History and its Impact* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). For discussions on Argentine cultural nationalism see: Eduardo J. Cárdenas, *El primer nacionalismo argentino en Manuel Gálvez y Ricardo Rojas*, (Buenos Aires: A. Peña Lillo, 1978). Sandra McGee Deutsch, and Ronald H. Dolkart eds., *The Argentine Right: Its History and Intellectual Origins, 1910-present*, Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1993. Marisa González de Oleaga, *El doble juego de la Hispanidad: España y la Argentina durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial*, (Madrid: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, 2001).

There has, however, been relatively little written on the influence of the Italian regime's propaganda on this transformation in Argentina's national character.<sup>69</sup> I use the way in which Argentines debated the question of Italian fascism and the presence of an Italian identity in Argentina to understand the dynamics of Argentina's own negotiation of its national identity. While many scholars highlight the emergence of an ethno-cultural construction of identity during this period, I contend that the ideational underpinnings of the Argentine nation played a fundamental role in the responses to fascist Italy's propaganda in Argentina.

### **Italian Emigration and Fascism**

The specific focus of this study is on the Italian community in Argentina and its interaction with the fascist regime, raising the question of Italian emigrant experiences with fascism as well as Italian emigrant political identities.

Over the past thirty years there has been a significant amount of historical studies examining Italian immigration to Latin America, especially to Brazil and Argentina. Fernando Devoto, Angelo Trento, Gianfausto Rosoli, and in English, Samuel Baily have provided a tremendous amount of quantitative and social analysis of Italian immigration to these nations, especially during the period of mass migration during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Recently historians have now moved beyond works of social history and have begun to examine Italian immigrant cultural and political identities, this especially being the case after Donna Gabaccia's aforementioned study. Now more and

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<sup>69</sup> Two articles which discuss the fascist and antifascist ideology in the Argentine political context are: Alistair Hennessy, "Fascism and Populism in Latin America" in Walter Laqueur, ed., *Fascism: A Reader's Guide*, (Berkeley, 1976) and James Cane, "'Unity for the Defense of Culture' The AIAPE and the Cultural Politics of Argentine Antifascism, 1935-1943" in *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 1997, 77 (3), 443-482.

more historians are adopting transnational and comparative approaches to a wide range of cultural topics. Some of these topics include Italian influences on Latin American culture, the role of memory and nostalgia among Italian immigrants as well as the complex identities of the children of those immigrants. Much of this scholarship is being produced by young scholars within Italy, as Italians have begun to show more interest in issues of emigration, a renewed interest which is in part the result of Italy's recent transition from a nation of emigration to a nation of immigration. Well-established historians, such as Emilio Franzina, Angelo Trento, and Eugenia Scarzanella have also led the way, editing or introducing many new volumes which address these themes. Of particular relevance to my dissertation, more emphasis is being placed on the political identities of Italian immigrants. Recent works are now analyzing Italian immigrants as political, as well as social actors.

Historians have also begun to specifically examine the political and cultural implications of fascist Italy's activities abroad. Emilio Gentile set off this particular aspect of the historiographical debate with a highly suggestive article in a 1995 issue of *Storia Contemporanea* on the activities of the *Fasci Italiani all'estero*, the Italian fascist party abroad.<sup>70</sup> Since then a number of articles and books have analyzed this formerly neglected aspect of the Italian fascist regime. Luca de Caprariis, for example, examines the organization and goals broadly, focusing on the regime's policies, while a number of other historians examined its experiences in specific countries. Philip V. Cannistraro's *Blackshirts in Little Italy: Italian Americans and Fascism 1921-1929* (1999) focused on its activities among Italian immigrants in the United States, while Claudia Baldoli has

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<sup>70</sup> Emilio Gentile, "La Politica estera del partito Fascista. Ideologia e organizzazione dei Fasci italiani all'estero (1920-1930)." *Storia Contemporanea* (1995).

more recently examined the impact of these fascist activities on Italian immigrant identity in Great Britain in her work, *Exporting Fascism: Italian Fascists and Britain's Italians in the 1930s* (2003). Another recent collection edited by Emilio Franzina and Matteo Sanfilippo, *Il Fascismo e gli emigrati: la parabola dei fasci all'estero (1920-1943)*, comparatively analyzes the experiences of the Italian fascist party abroad in a number of countries throughout the world including Argentina and Brazil in Latin America.<sup>71</sup> For fascism's impact in individual Latin American nations there are a number of important articles, though still few monographs. Studies on Argentina and Uruguay, especially those by Ronald C. Newton and Clara Aldrichi, have emphasized the important role played by antifascists in undermining many of the regime's efforts; while in the Brazilian context, João Fabio Bertonha argues that fascism was comparatively more influential.<sup>72</sup> Most historians have focused only on Brazil and Argentina which had the largest Italian collectivities, articles by Orazio A. Ciccarelli and Franco Savarino however stress the importance of studying Peru and Mexico as well; countries which had relatively small, yet very influential middle class Italian collectivities that were greatly influenced by

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<sup>71</sup> Luca de Caprariis, "Fascism for Export? The Rise and Eclipse of the Fasci italiani all'Estero," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (April 2000); Philip V. Cannistraro's *Blackshirts in Little Italy: Italian Americans and Fascism 1921-1929* (Bordighiera, 1999); Claudia Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism Italian Fascists and Britain's Italians in the 1930s* (Oxford: Berg 2003); Emilio Franzina and Matteo Sanfilippo eds., *Il Fascismo e gli emigrati: la parabola dei fasci all'estero (1920-1943)* (Roma: Laterza, 2003). See also: Renzo Santinon *Fasci all'estero*, (Edizioni Settimo Sigillo, Roma: 1995) Domenico Fabiano, "I Fasci Italiani All'Estero in *Gli Italiani Fuori d'Italia* edited by Bruno Bezza (Franco Angelli Editori).

<sup>72</sup> Ronald C. Newton, "Ducini, Prominenti, Antifascisti: Italian Fascism and the Italo-Argentine Collectivity, 1922-1945," in *The Americas* (1995); Juan Oddone, "Serafino Mazzolini: Un misionario del Fascismo en Uruguay, 1933-1937," *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos*, Año 12, No. 37, 1997, 375-387. João Fabio Bertonha, "Fascism and the Italian Communities in Brazil and America" in *Italian Americana*, Summer, 2001. Bertonha, João Fabio, "Emigrazione e politica estera: la diplomazia sovversiva di Mussolini e la questione degli italiani all'estero, 1922-1945" in *Altre Italie*, July-December 2001. Bertonha, João Fabio, *O fascismo e os imigrantes italianos no Brasil*, Porto Alegre: EDIPUCRS, 2001.

fascism.<sup>73</sup> For the most part these works are narrative studies which focus on fascist political activities and their influence on the national life of their respective countries. With the exception of Bertonha, these authors only discuss in a superficial manner the content of fascist initiatives and their implications on Italian identity.

Since the inception of this project, this has begun to change. A recent volume of collected essays tracing this theme, entitled *Fascisti in Sud America* (2005), edited by Eugenia Scarzanella has begun to adopt a more comparative as well as cultural approach to the questions of fascism and identity. Her work analyzes a variety of issues including the question of Italian patriotism and the construction of immigrant identities. Its chapters focus on very specific cases such as the role of the Banco Italiano de Lima as an influential lobbyist for the Italian regime within Peru, and the life of Vittorio Valdani, a wealthy Italian immigrant industrialist who financed fascist activities in Argentina. A particularly interesting chapter studies the fascist Italian-language daily in Argentina *Il Mattino d'Italia*. Its author, Camilla Cattarulla, focuses on an especially precious type of evidence that I have also found useful in my own research: a survey published by the paper in 1934, which asked the question "What would you say to the Duce if you had the opportunity to speak to him." Cattarulla makes particularly innovative use of this wonderful piece of evidence. She examines what these responses tell us about Italian immigrant perceptions of the regime and their relationship to their new world nation. She

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<sup>73</sup> Ciccarelli, Orazio A., "Fascist Propaganda and the Italian Community in Peru during the Benavides Regime, 1933-39" *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol.20, No. 2 (Nov., 1988), 361-388. Ciccarelli, "Fascism and Politics in Peru during the Benavides Regime, 1933-39: The Italian Perspective" *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (August, 1990), 405-432. Franco Saverino, "Bajo el signo del *Littorio*: la comunidad italiana en México y el fascismo 1924-1941," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, vol. 64, no. 2, January-March, 2002. 113-139.

argues that their use of language as well as their thoughts and ideas reflect a mix of pride and nostalgia for their homeland and their own anxieties and desires within their new nation. Taken as a whole this work suggestively, and perhaps provocatively, concludes that many of the ideas contained in the Italian fascist propaganda influenced Italian immigrant political identities after the war, asserting that the corporatist ideology, distrust in democracy, and the leader cult persisted among members of the Italian community manifesting itself in the new political rhetoric of Perón's postwar authoritarian populist regime.<sup>74</sup> I pose similar questions and make use of some of the same archives and sources as the authors of Scarzanella's volume. This dissertation however adopts a broader, more comprehensive approach to the question of Italian fascism in Argentina and draws fundamentally different conclusions about the impact of its propaganda in Argentina. By closely examining Italian anti-fascist as well as Argentine responses to fascism, I contend that many Italian emigrants rejected fascism's initiatives by reaffirming their faith in democracy and individual liberty all-the-while provided alternative conceptualizations of Italian national identity.

Much of the recent focus on the communities' experiences with fascism have not analyzed the anti-fascist movement, in spite of the fact that many Latin American Italian communities, most notably within Argentina and Uruguay, had especially large and well organized anti-fascist movements. Italian anti-fascist exiles living in Argentina and other South American states played a pivotal role in presenting Italian immigrants with an alternative image of Italian national identity. Beyond Charles Delzell's classic study of

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<sup>74</sup> *La Patria di Riserva: L'emigrazione fascista in Argentina* by Federica Bertagna (Roma: Donzelli, 2006) is a particularly interesting recent work of note addressing the issue of Italian Fascist exiles living in Argentina during Peron. She explores the relationship these former fascists had to the long established Italian community in Argentina as well as their political involvement during the decade of Juan Domingo Perón's rule in Argentina.

the anti-fascist movement, *Mussolini's Enemies: The Italian Anti-Fascist Resistance* (1961), relatively little has been written on the specific anti-fascist experience in Latin America.<sup>75</sup> This dissertation contends that the relationship between these anti-fascists and notions identity and culture among Italian immigrants warrants the same treatment that historians are only now beginning to pay to the pro-fascist members of the Italian communities in Latin America. In addition to providing my own perspective of Italian fascist initiatives, my work also examines Italian emigrant opposition to fascism, providing an important counterbalance to many of the new studies on Italian fascism in Latin America. I will demonstrate that Italian immigrants were politically active on both the right and the left and that immigrant identities defy easy categorization.

Taken together these different approaches to the questions of Italian identity, fascism, emigration, and Argentina's identity have all informed various aspects of this project. Adopting a transnational approach I examine the way in which nations are imagined and constructed through the use of symbolic imagery and historic myth and the use of the "other" from which to define itself against. I also build on these approaches by offering new perspectives on the politics of identity formation while providing a transatlantic example of the dynamic interplay between the Italian state and its emigrant communities in the conceptualization of the nation.

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<sup>75</sup> Some works which have treated this topic include M.L. Leiva, "Il movimiento antifascista italiano in Argentina (1922-1945)" in Bezza *Gli Italiani fuori d'Italia*;" Pietro Rinaldo Fanesi, "El anti-fascismo italiano en Argentina (1922-1945), *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos*, and Clara Aldrichi work on Luigi Fabbri's activities in Uruguay *Antifascismo italiano en Montevideo: El Dialogo politico entre Luigi Fabbri y Carlo Rosselli*, and "Luigi Fabbri en Uruguay, 1929-1935," *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos*.

## CHAPTER 2

### Emigration and Argentina in the Fascist Imagination

*Gli italiani debbono sempre piú interessarsi all'Argentina e a tutto il sud-america, conoscerne sempre meglio la storia, l'attività, le possibilità, le aspirazioni. Gli Argentini ed i sud-americani in genere debbono orientare il loro spirito verso l'Italia. --Franco Ciarlantini<sup>1</sup>*

#### Introduction

Franco Ciarlantini, a prominent fascist cultural figure and journalist, penned these lines after having just completed a book tour in Argentina in 1927. With his eyes opened to what he viewed as the tremendous potential of Italian fascist cultural penetration into Argentina, Ciarlantini lobbied Mussolini to increase his propaganda efforts in the South American republic. Ciarlantini was not alone. He was but one of many fascist writers who viewed Argentina, with its large Italian emigrant population, as political capital for the fascist regime. Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, many members of the regime discussed the potential role that Italian emigrant communities in nations such as Argentina could play in fascist designs. Ideas ranged from the ambitious goals of political and economic expansion through the use of Italian emigrants around the world to the more subtle proposals of ideological and cultural exchange among nations with common Italian and Latin roots. Taken as a whole, all shared the common desire to somehow use Italy's emigrant communities in Argentina and elsewhere as vehicles in spreading Italy's identity, culture, and especially political ideology throughout the world. They called for bold and ambitious initiatives which would enhance fascism's image and prestige abroad.

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<sup>1</sup> "Italians must take more of an interest in Argentina and more generally South America, to better learn its history, activity, possibilities, and aspirations. Argentines and South Americans likewise must turn their spirit toward Italy," Franco Ciarlantini, "L'Italia e America Latina," *Augustea*, December, 15, 1927.

High on rhetorical flourish and bombast much of their discussions were wanting in precision and practicality. What the fascists concretely hoped to gain from the Italian community in Argentina and exactly how they proposed going about doing it was far from clear. They were, however, highly effective in portraying Argentina as fertile ground for fascist penetration, enough to stir Mussolini to action.

Argentina in the fascist imagination at once offered great possibilities along with troubling obstacles. It was a land which seemed have swallowed up and assimilated the millions of Italians who arrived on its shores, but which also for the same reason showed the greatest potential for realizing fascist Italy's agenda abroad. To best understand this Argentine paradox, I examine here what the fascist regime sought to accomplish in Argentina, providing insight into its overall agenda abroad and the problems inherent in its project. By analyzing changing fascist views on the issue of Italian emigration in general and emigration to Argentina in particular, this chapter sets the stage for subsequent discussion on the fascist regime's activities and propaganda in Argentina. After tracing the fascist regime's changing views and policies towards its emigrant communities throughout the world, this chapter focuses on how prominent fascists and members of regime viewed Argentina and the goals that they developed in order to penetrate the republic with their propaganda.

The issue of Italian emigration to Argentina has often been examined in the context of Italy's liberal regime. In recent years, attention has focused on the impact of this emigration on Italian political life and in particular on the different ways emigration was debated during the era.<sup>2</sup> Very little has however been written on the final years of the

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<sup>2</sup> See especially, Angelo Trento, "Argentina e Brasile come paesi di immigrazione nella pubblicistica italiana" in Fernando J Devoto and Gianfausto Rosoli, *L'Italia nella Società Argentina* (Roma: Centro

debate which occurred under fascist rule or how emigration fit into the fascists' broader political program. Emilio Gentile's groundbreaking article "Emigrazione italiana in Argentina nella politica di espansione del nazionalismo e del fascismo" in *Storia Contemporanea*, and Alessandra Ruberti in her article, "Il fascismo e l'emigrazione italiana in Argentina nella stampa di Regime (1922-1930)," in *Affari Sociali Internazionali* speak most directly to these themes. Gentile traces the evolution of fascist policies toward emigration from its nationalist precursors through 1920s. He identifies fascist views on emigration as an outgrowth of nationalist stances on the issue during the immediate postwar years. According to Gentile, the fascists actively promoted an ambitious and expansionist agenda in Argentina until 1927 when they reformulated their stance on emigration adopting a decidedly negative view on the issue, losing at the same time much of the earlier interest in Argentina.<sup>3</sup> Ruberti makes a similar argument suggesting that international and specifically Argentine resistance to fascism's expansive overtures towards its emigrants were the main reasons for the Italian regime's abandonment its emigration agenda.<sup>4</sup> Although agreeing with much of Gentile's and Ruberti's overall treatment of the 1920s debate, this chapter draws quite different conclusions from the evidence examined. It argues that Mussolini's 1927 shift in policy represented a new beginning instead of a conclusion to the debate over Argentina and its emigrants. As will be shown, it was in fact the regime's reformulation of the problem,

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Studi Emigrazione, 1988) and Mark Choate, "Defining Greater Italy: Migration and Colonialism in Africa and the Americas," (Yale University, 2002); See also Choate's forthcoming book, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Emilio Gentile, "Emigrazione italiana in Argentina nella politica di espansione del nazionalismo e del Fascismo" in *Storia Contemporanea*, 1986, 17 (3) 355-396.

<sup>4</sup> Alessandra Ruberti, "Il Fascismo e l'emigrazione italiana in Argentina nella stampa di Regime (1922-1930)" in *Affari Sociali Internazionali*, n. 3, 1992; Ludovico Incisa Di Camerana, *L'Argentina, gli Italiani, e l'Italia: Un'altro destino* (Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, 1998).

which created new cultural and ideological areas of opportunity in the republic, spurring more rather than less activity in Argentina well into the 1930s.

Other authors have in fact recognized the fascist regime's continued interest in Latin America through the 1930s. Aldo Albonico in his article, "Immagine e destino delle comunità italiane in America Latina attraverso la stampa fascista degli anni '30" in *Studi Emigrazioni* briefly sketches the different ways in which the Fascist magazines, *Gerarchia* and *Critica Fascista* depicted the nations of Latin America reflecting a wide range of attitudes and both positive and negative assessments of these nations value to the regime. Although providing very suggestive evidence, Albonico offers little in the way of conclusion.<sup>5</sup> Ludovico Incisa di Camerana in his work, *L'Argentina, Gli Italiani, L'Italia: Un Altro Destino*, and Mario Mugnaini's article, "L'Italia e America Latina: Alcuni aspetti della politica estera fascista," in *Storia delle Relazioni Internazionali*, also touch upon the issues explored here, but focus mostly on official diplomatic relations between Italy and the nations of Latin America.<sup>6</sup> Building on this scholarship, this chapter explores the ideological basis to fascist emigration strategies during the 1920s and early 1930s. It will account for the regime's policy changes over time, as well as explain why Italian fascists viewed Argentina as a nation well suited to their penetration.

### **The Context: Italian Migration to Argentina (1870-1930)**

Italian migrants and their children are interwoven into the history of Argentina from the nation's inception. Manuel Belgrano, one of Argentina's founding fathers, was in fact the

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<sup>5</sup>Aldo Albonico, "Immagine e destino delle comunità italiane in America Latina attraverso la stampa Fascista degli anni '30," in *Studi Emigrazione*, March 1982.

<sup>6</sup>Ludovico Incisa Di Camerana, *L'Argentina, gli Italiani, e l'Italia: Un'altro destino* (istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, 1998); Mario Mugnaini, "L'Italia e America Latina: Alcuni aspetti della politica estera fascista," in *Storia delle Relazioni Internazionali* (Vol. 2, 1986).

son of an Italian merchant, while the famed Italian Risorgimento leader, Giuseppe Garibaldi, honed his skills as a revolutionary on the Argentine pampas. Mass migration to Argentina began during and in the years immediately following Italian unification, a full generation before the period of Italian mass migration to the United States. The number of Italians entering Argentina jumped from approximately 3,000 annually in 1857 to 23,000 annually by 1870.<sup>7</sup> Between 1871 and 1930 approximately 1.4 million Italians entered Argentina, constituting 43 percent of all immigrants entering Argentina and roughly 16 percent of Argentina's total population of 9 million in 1930, a percentage which does not include the children and descendants of Italian immigrants.<sup>8</sup> All in all it is commonly accepted that over 40 percent of all Argentines are Italian or at least partially of Italian descent, making Italians the largest single ethnic group in Argentina. The majority of the Italian immigrants came from northern Italy, mainly from Liguria, Piedmont, Friuli and the Veneto. Between 1876 and 1895 roughly 75 percent of Italians arriving in Argentina were from northern and central Italy. After the turn of the century more southern Italians began to arrive and by 1914 only 55 percent of arriving Italians were from the north, which still differs from Italian immigration to the United States in which the majority came from southern Italy.<sup>9</sup>

During the nineteenth century Argentine presidents encouraged and in some cases even subsidized Italian immigration in an effort to whiten or Europeanize their population as well as to populate their vast sparsely inhabited territorial expanses as the Argentine

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<sup>7</sup> Luigi de Rosa, "L'Emigrazione Italiana in Argentina: Un Bilancio," in Fernando Devoto and Gianfausto Rosoli eds. *Italia nella società argentina* (Roma: Centro Studi Emigrazione, 1988), 77.

<sup>8</sup> Arnd Schneider, *Futures Lost: Nostalgia and Identity among Italian Immigrants in Argentina*, (Oxford-Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), 313.

<sup>9</sup> Schneider, 315.

statesman Juan Bautista Alberdi famously declared, “To govern is to populate.”<sup>10</sup> The first Italian migrants were contracted as rural tenant farmers cultivating wheat, and played a key role in the commercialization of agriculture on the Argentine pampas.<sup>11</sup> Italian immigrants migrated to the city of Buenos Aires and other urban centers right at the moment in which Argentina began to industrialize and represented an especially high proportion of the nation’s industrial proprietors as well as laborers. In 1887, 56 percent of all industrial proprietors and 51 percent of industrial laborers were Italian born, and as late as 1935, even after the period of mass migration, 21 percent of all Argentine industry was in Italian immigrant hands.<sup>12</sup> The vast majority of these businesses were small or mid-range manufacturing establishments, mainly in textiles, shoes, metallurgy, furniture, ceramics, and other crafts, although a few immigrant families would emerge as leading Argentine capitalists, such as the De Marchi in pharmaceuticals, the Devoto in commerce and banking, and the Di Tella in heavy industry. Already established Italian entrepreneurs also set up shop in Argentina around the turn of the century such as Enrico Dell’Acqua, Gaetano Dellachà and Ernesto Piaggio. They were soon followed by major Italian companies such as Pirelli, Fiat, and Cinziano which each set up regional factories and offices in Argentina by 1923.<sup>13</sup> In spite of these individual Italian investors, Great Britain continued to dominate over all foreign investors in Argentina’s economy. In 1900 Britain’s investments made up 81 percent of all foreign investments and in 1927 British investment capital continued to account for 58 percent of all foreign investments,

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<sup>10</sup> David Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 139.

<sup>11</sup> James Scobie, *Revolution on the Pampas: A Social History of Argentine Wheat, 1860-1910*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964).

<sup>12</sup> María Inés Barbero and Susana Felder, “El rol de los italianos en el nacimiento y desarrollo de las asociaciones empresarias en la Argentina,” in Devoto and Rosoli, 140.

<sup>13</sup> Barbero and Felder, 144-145.

followed by the United States, a distant second with 14 percent. Great Britain also remained Argentina's main trading partner, in 1927 accounting for 28 percent of all Argentine exports and 20 percent of all imports.<sup>14</sup>

Between 1887 and 1914, 35 percent of all real estate owners were Italian, just behind native Argentines, who made up 42 percent of real estate owners; and well ahead of the next foreign group, the Spanish, who made up 11 percent. The vast majority of Italian held properties were however small in size, while the native Argentine elite continued to control most of the nation's land and resources.<sup>15</sup>

Italians were also at the forefront of Argentina's labor movement. According to the historian Samuel L. Baily, in 1914 approximately 40 percent of all organized workers in Argentina were Italian, many occupying leadership positions in unions.<sup>16</sup> In 1878 three of the nine organizers of Argentina's first strike were Italian-born, and in 1889 the majority of leaders in a strike led by free-masons were of Italian origin. By 1890 Italian workers ran seventy-nine mutual aid societies, comprising 42 percent of the total such organizations in Argentina. In 1901 Italians were again prominent in the founding of Argentina's first major labor confederation, the *Federación Obrera Regional Argentina*, with Italians making up 52 percent of the participants at its founding congress.<sup>17</sup>

In short, by the time the fascists came to power in Italy in 1922, Italian immigrants had firmly established themselves within Argentina's social-economic landscape. Although only a very few had managed to enter into Argentina's closed circle

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<sup>14</sup> Rock, 192; 224.

<sup>15</sup> Schneider, 317.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel L. Bailey, "The Italians and Organized Labor in the United States and Argentina: 1880-1910," *International Migration Review*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Summer, 1967), 56-66.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

of elite landowners, Italian immigrants swelled the ranks of its growing middle and working-class populations, becoming an integral component of Argentine society.

During the First World War many members of the Italian community responded to their homeland's call, donating millions of pesos to the Italian war effort, and volunteering to serve in the Italian army. All told 32,430 Italians living in Argentina returned to serve in the war, including many elite members of the community, like Antonio De Marchi, and Torcuato Di Tella.<sup>18</sup> This expression of Italian patriotism, along with the community's numerical and economic significance, would not be ignored for long by the new fascist regime in Italy. Argentina would in fact figure prominently in the debates over Italian emigration during the 1920s.

### **The Fascist Views on Emigration (1922-1927)**

Emigration was one of the many Italian realities, much debated and still unresolved, that the fascist regime inherited from its liberal predecessor and it was never a comfortable fit with fascism's overall ideological and political programs. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century millions of Italians left their homeland in search of a better life, prompting lively debates among many prominent public figures of the liberal era. Volumes of speeches, essays, and monographs on the emigration problem flooded the presses of liberal Italy. During this period three distinct ways of viewing Italian emigration emerged. Sidney Sonnino, along with a number of other politicians of the time, viewed emigration as a social safety-valve and by the turn of the century a possible solution the "Southern Question," while Luigi Einaudi, in *Un principe mercante*, argued that emigration presented the possibility of expanding Italy's cultural and commercial

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<sup>18</sup> Incisa di Camerana, 388.

influence and power overseas, creating an informal mercantile empire. These positive representations of emigration were followed by the more negative image of emigration as a national disgrace and a drain on Italy's pool of creative manpower.<sup>19</sup> The poet Giovanni Pascoli and later the nationalist Enrico Corradini used emigration to emphasize the need for new formal colonies as an outlet for Italian migration. By the end of the liberal era, the Nationalists and their negative view of emigration came to dominate the debate.<sup>20</sup>

In the 1920s the massive Italian migration out of Italy was a fact of life rather than a policy of choice for the fascist regime. Fascism had supposedly ushered in a new age, creating a bold and regenerated Italy from the ashes of the disgraced and prostrate Liberal regime. Yet in Mussolini's first years in power, emigration, the nationalists' symbol of Italy's weakness as a nation, was still prevalent. Its continued presence made it an unavoidable issue. In one of his first speeches on emigration, given on March 30, 1923, Mussolini admitted as much, "For better or for worse, emigration is a physiological necessity of the Italian people. We are forty million people enclosed in our narrow peninsula that has too many mountains, a land that cannot feed everyone."<sup>21</sup> In the same speech, Mussolini redefined the emigration problem, turning a supposed weakness into a strength declaring:

Italian expansion in the world is a problem of life or death for the Italian race. I say expansion: expansion in every sense: moral, political, economic, demographic. I declare here that the Government intends to protect Italian emigration: it cannot be indifferent to those who travel beyond the Ocean, it cannot be indifferent because they are men, workers, and above all Italians. And wherever there is an Italian there is the tricolor, there is the Patria, there is the Government's defense of these Italians.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Trento, 213; Choate, 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> Choate, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Benito Mussolini, "Il problema dell'emigrazione" *Il Popolo d'Italia*, April 1, 1923, cited in *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, a cura di E. e D. Susmel, vol.XIX (Firenze: La Fenice, 1957) 191.

<sup>22</sup> Mussolini, "Il problema dell'emigrazione," 192.

By turning emigration into expansion, Mussolini attempted to put a positive spin on the debate. According to Mussolini, rather than losing vital manpower, emigrants by retaining their Italian identity, expanded and strengthened the *Patria*, creating an “empire without borders” as had their Roman ancestors who “gave the world civilization.”<sup>23</sup> In a 1923 message to Italians living in North and South America, Mussolini went on to claim that Italians, even after emigrating, kept the *Patria* close to their hearts. He declared, “The Government does not make its appeal to its citizen emigrants abroad in vain because it knows that distance makes love for the *Patria* more alive and cogent...Italy to the Americas is like a gigantic extended arm, the *Patria* extends out to its distant sons, to attract them to itself, enabling them to participate ever more in its pain, its joy, its work, its greatness, and its glory.”<sup>24</sup>

Throughout the 1920s fascist writers and journalists, in books and newspapers, followed Mussolini’s lead and worked to incorporate emigration into the larger constellation of fascist myths. They argued that if emigrants did in the past lack a sense of pride in their Italian identity, this was entirely due to the incompetence of liberal governments which could not stir the hearts and minds of Italians neither at home nor abroad. It was, therefore, the liberal government’s neglect in its obligation to the *Patria* and its lack of imagination in policymaking that emigration was long thought of as a weakness in Italy’s national character. According to one fascist writer, liberal parliamentarians mistook emigration as, “a sign of pauperism,” and depicted the emigrants themselves as poor humble masses “abandoned and derelict on top of a bundle

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<sup>23</sup> Mussolini, “Il problema dell’emigrazione,” 192.

<sup>24</sup> Mussolini, “Agli italiani del nord e sud America” *Popolo d’Italia*, April 19, 1923, included in *Opera Omnia*, vol. XIX, 408.

of bags.”<sup>25</sup> Ignoring the many positive and expansive contributions to the emigration debate of the liberal period, fascist writers made the liberals easy scapegoats and provided yet another justification for the fascist revolution. Liberals were of course to blame for all that went wrong. Leaving the emigrants to their own devices without the proper government support had made them vulnerable to assimilation in their new societies and a loss for Italy. To these writers, because of liberal Italy’s abandonment, Italian emigrants were nothing more than a pool of anonymous manual laborers open to exploitation, “the Chinese of Europe.”<sup>26</sup>

Fascist journalists spoke of Italy’s victory in the First World War as the “great spiritual redemption” of Italy’s emigrants. The crucible of war reawakened emigrants who had been abandoned by liberal Italy and were losing their Italian identity. In a 1922 message to Italians living in America, Mussolini himself declared, “A greater, more august Italy emerged from Vittorio Veneto and this renewed consciousness must give you pride to feel Italian and to carry tall everywhere the name of Italy.”<sup>27</sup> Others described the cheering crowds of Italians throughout the Americas which greeted General Diaz, the victorious Italian World War I commander, demonstrating, “These Italian communities’ impassioned attachment to Italy.” Likewise the contributions Italian emigrants had made to the war effort, both in money and manpower, was, “the most beautiful proof of the devotion Italians beyond the Ocean feel for the Mother Country, a source of great pride and hope for the future.”<sup>28</sup> Italy’s victory and the fascist ‘revolution,’ so the story went, reawaked long dormant national pride among emigrants and created renewed interest in

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<sup>25</sup> Giovanni Borsella, *L’Emigrante italiano e l’Argentina* (Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1925), 3.

<sup>26</sup> Alighiero Micci, *L’Emigrazione*, (Roma: A. Mondadori, 1925) 16.

<sup>27</sup> Mussolini, “Agli Italiani dell’America del Nord” *Il Popolo d’Italia*, November 5, 1922 and *Opera Omnia*, vol. XIX, 407.

<sup>28</sup> Antonino Cordova, *Gli aspetti presenti e futuri dell’emigrazione*, (Torino: Lattes, 1923) 59.

the Patria. It was up to the fascist regime to cultivate these sentiments of Italian-ness abroad and to put them to the service of the “New Italy.”

Mussolini’s pronouncements changed the way in which emigration was viewed in fascist Italy. “Emigration is no longer considered from the point of view of the need for assistance and the protection of individuals, but is now a collective manifestation of the national life...no longer a thing of shame but a vibrant expression of vigor and energy.”<sup>29</sup> No longer an anonymous mass of manual laborers Italian emigrants thanks to the fascist regime were now ambassadors of the New Italy abroad: “the pioneers of Italian civilization.”<sup>30</sup>

“In the name of Italy you move in compact legions, always advancing ever further, like the legions of Ancient Rome, to the Empire’s frontiers, creating works of peace with your new empire of labor.”<sup>31</sup> The fascist conception of an expansive Italian emigration led to bold, if imprecise, rhetoric militaristic in tone. For, “Emigration is a battle, those who are the most tenacious and relentless in their work will win... conquering the world with their tireless energy.”<sup>32</sup> It was to be a ‘battle’ like so many in the past, “the greatness of Italy in the world lay in the memory of its fifteen battles from Isonzo to the Piave, in Vittorio Veneto, and in the valorization of our emigrants.”<sup>33</sup>

Mussolini’s declaration that emigrant citizens would not be forgotten by the regime and that their Italian identity would be used to the nation’s benefit was central to fascist discussions on emigration. To that end the fascist regime needed to create a sense of national consciousness in the emigrants abroad in order to make them useful to the

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<sup>29</sup> Celestino Arena, *Italiani per il mondo; politica nazionale dell’emigrazione* (Milano: Alpes, 1927), 6.

<sup>30</sup> Borsella, 1.

<sup>31</sup> Borsella, 11.

<sup>32</sup> Borsella, 14.

<sup>33</sup> Borsella, 182-183.

regime, “making such a consciousness, creating such a personality, means not only elevating the tone of a worker’s life, but creating a dignified spirit, that would allow themselves to be exploited and humiliated; it means raising their moral level and the prestige of the *Patria* in the eyes of the civilized world.”<sup>34</sup> With this consciousness and pride in their Italian identity re-established, “Then through the force of expansion, emigrant social groups abroad will not only maintain the esteem of their native civilization but will gradually impose it on their new country, to the moral and political advantage of the mother country, raising its prestige and dignity.”<sup>35</sup>

The “valorization” of emigrant communities to the nation was the cornerstone of the fascist conception of emigration. Valorization meant reclaiming the emigrant for the *Patria* by providing the Italian abroad an important role to play in the New Italy. This implied validating the emigrant’s natural inclinations toward their homeland and channeling this primordial sense of Italian-ness into collective action abroad, enhancing Italian prestige, spreading Italian culture, and garnering support for the fascist regime. As one writer explained, national valorization abroad meant, “Converting our demographic strength into an instrument to expand the *Patria* abroad.” Since the advent of fascism, emigration was “no longer a question of demographic congestion, but rather a question of moral and economic valorization.” Italy was no longer supplying laborers for the nations of the world, but instead sending forth its sons to spread the “proud genius of its race.”<sup>36</sup> Validating emigration also meant validating the emigrants themselves as legitimate members of the Italian nation: “Italians far from the country, are not inferior to those living on Italian soil, in fact distance and the painful separation from the homeland can

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<sup>34</sup> Micci, x-xi.

<sup>35</sup> Micci, 15.

<sup>36</sup> Arena, 9.

inspire the most beautiful idealism and render an Italian abroad a better and more pure Italian than those living in Italy.” Citizenship was, therefore, “not so much the result of residing in the territory of the State, as love and attachment to a national sentiment.”<sup>37</sup>

Fascist writers optimistically predicted that by maintaining their Italian identity and validating their mission, emigrants could spread Italian influence throughout the world: “With a population in need of expanding, for Italy today imperialism means the rush of its masses onto the roadways of the world to conquer the labor market with the sweat of their brows and their hard-working hands, enabling us to better compete with the other peoples of the world.”<sup>38</sup> In practical terms, this expansion meant the increase in Italian prestige and influence through the establishment and maintenance of communities abroad, which remained loyal to the *Patria* and true to their Italian identity. To realize this mission, writers called on much more aggressive action on the part of the regime and its diplomatic corps, lest these emigrants be lost to the *Patria*. What was needed were new schools abroad to educate the children of immigrants as well as the establishment of new Fascist organizations abroad to serve as beacons of Italian identity in distant lands.

### **The Allure of Argentina (1922-1927)**

To many within the fascist regime, Argentina was the nation that seemed to offer the best potential for the realization of its expansive emigration designs. Italian observers enthusiastically noted that Italians comprised the largest single ethnic group within Argentina, a land in which the Italian language and culture was widespread.<sup>39</sup> According to Ottavio Dinale, a *Gerarchia* contributor sent by Mussolini to Argentina in 1923 to

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<sup>37</sup> Cordova, 63.

<sup>38</sup> Arena, 4-5.

<sup>39</sup> Cordova, 41.

form the Buenos Aires *Fascio*, “Since 1857, Italy has on its own sent two million emigrants to Argentina, who have exercised an ethnic, political, and economically dominant influence over the development of the nation...in no other nation in the world, has our race been offered the greatest and most easy possibility of penetration.”<sup>40</sup>

Italian writers believed that their emigrants to Argentina, thanks to their Latin culture, European roots, and proportionally higher numbers, would be able to assume positions of high prominence in the Argentine nation without being forced to assimilate into a foreign culture. These writers contrasted Argentina, with the United States, where it was thought that Italian emigrants were forced to either assimilate or remain a marginalized ethnic minority in an Anglo-Saxon cultural milieu. Giovanni Borsella, one of the first writers to produce a monograph on Argentina’s potential value to the fascist regime explained that, “the United States views emigration as a form of servitude...our countrymen find themselves in the powerful republic of the ‘dollar’ always between the devil and the deep blue sea, in unstable positions and risky situations, victims of political and social change and of ‘trusts.’<sup>41</sup> The increasing restrictions placed on Italian emigration by the United States government led Borsella to conclude that “The United States has now closed its door on us after all of their labor and all the wealth we have created we have been labeled “undesirables.”<sup>42</sup> In contrast, “One could say that Argentina is the great Nation best suited for our emigration...especially if one wanted to establish a position for themselves...one could have great luck in countries like Argentina, especially in the field of commerce and industry.”<sup>43</sup> To demonstrate how Argentina was a

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<sup>40</sup> Ottavio Dinale, *La Gerarchia*, September 1923, 1207.

<sup>41</sup> Borsella, 107.

<sup>42</sup> Borsella, 15.

<sup>43</sup> Borsella, 18.

favorable destination for Italian emigration, Borsella filled his account with evidence of the prosperity of Italian immigrants and their cultural penetration of Argentine society.

In 1924, to better assess the situation, Mussolini dispatched one of his trusted *gerarchi*, Giovanni Giuriati, to serve as the regime's special emissary in Latin America, accompanying Prince Umberto's goodwill tour to the region on board the *Italia*. Giuriati, an irredentist and nationalist, had served with distinction in the First World War and was a member of Gabriele D'Annunzio's Fiume expedition. A fascist from very early on in the movement, Giuriati was a member of the Grand Council, a fascist deputy, and later the president of the Chamber. Giuriati would later serve as the Secretary of the Fascist Party from 1930-1931.<sup>44</sup> At the end of his nine-month tour, Giuriati returned home and penned a comprehensive study of each nation that he had visited in Latin America and their potential value to the regime.

In the published version of this report, Giuriati noted with optimism the passionate patriotism he had found among the Italian collectivity in Argentina and was impressed with both the success that many had attained in their new country, as well as their loyalty and interest in the New Italy.<sup>45</sup> With Argentina in mind, Giuriati wrote that "instead of sending Latin America emigrants in disordered flocks, we should send them in pacific battalions to establish productive enterprises, disciplining our movement of demographic expansion to our incalculable advantage."<sup>46</sup> In many ways conflating Italian emigration to Argentina with colonial expansion, Giuriati concluded his observations by declaring that through the labor of its emigrants, "Italy must begin a wide-ranging policy

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<sup>44</sup> *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana), 120-122.

<sup>45</sup> Giovanni Battista Giurati, *La crociera italiana nell'America latina*, (Roma: Arti Grafiche Affini Roma, 1925) 9-10.

<sup>46</sup> Giurati, 13.

in Latin America, following the example of ancient Rome, a constant inspirer...armed with workers who will break new grounds, constructing roads, and excavating mines, leveling fields...the fruitful collaboration of [Italy with Argentina] will establish indestructible links between the Campidoglio, the citadel of Latin-ness to the Latins beyond the sea.”<sup>47</sup>

Giuriati’s unpublished report to the government was far more pragmatic and less optimistic. He wrote that despite their strong numerical presence Italian emigrants had in the past lost their identity in Argentina. To Giuriati the reasons for this “denationalization” were many: Argentine arrogance, emigrant ignorance, and of course liberal Italy’s neglect of its compatriots. Giuriati described Argentines as fiercely proud of their country, haughty and self-absorbed. Anxious to participate in Argentina’s national life, emigrants from all over worked hard to assimilate, “‘Soy argentino’ says the Italian, German, Turk or Russian, with pride as if his adopted nation was worth abandoning his homeland without regret.”<sup>48</sup> According to Giuriati, the emigrants themselves were also to blame. Arriving in Argentina at the turn of the century, “they were illiterate and ignorant of just about everything. They had no sense of the Patria, and were incapable of understanding it.”<sup>49</sup> To Giuriati, this was the fault of the liberal regime, for not only had the liberals failed to provide them with an adequate patriotic education, but their humiliating defeats in the international arena left their emigrants ashamed of their identity. In short, “they left without ever knowing their great Patria, and would

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<sup>47</sup> Giurati, 19.

<sup>48</sup> Giovanni Giuriati, “Studio dei paesi dell’America Latina” in Archivio Storico della Camera dei Deputati (ASCD), Archivio Giuriati, pp. 521-539.

<sup>49</sup> Giuriati, 523.

never know it.”<sup>50</sup> For once these emigrants left Italy, Liberal institutions abroad did little to protect or educate them.

To Giuriati the war changed everything. Referring to the Italians in Argentina who responded to their nation’s call to duty and served in the army, Giuriati wrote that “On the battlefield, the school of courage and sacrifice, they rediscovered their great Mother and understood its power and greatness.” The “monotone, plain, and tedious Argentine metropolises” were no match for splendid beauty of their ‘real’ Patria. Upon returning to Argentina, they formed veteran associations, becoming the emissaries of the New Italy. No longer the old emigrant ashamed of his identity, “the new Italo-Argentine veteran declared ‘Go ahead and call me gringo, I know who I am and what I am worth.’”<sup>51</sup> For Giuriati, this new spirit created possibilities for the regime in Argentina. Now was the time to act.

Rodolfo del Mineo, a member of Prince Umberto’s delegation on the same voyage as Giuriati, further elaborated on the problem of assimilation in Argentina in a letter to the Foreign Ministry. He highlighted: “Our race’s natural ability to adapt, the similarity of our language to Spanish, the willingness—unknown to Anglo-Saxons—of learning foreign languages, the fact that the children of Italians born in Argentina are legally considered citizens of the republic, and the hospitality of the country.”<sup>52</sup> Del Mineo recommended a more active government intervention to counteract this state of affairs: “It is up to the ‘Dante Alighieri’ and the Italian schools to propagate and more

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<sup>50</sup> Giuriati, 530.

<sup>51</sup> Giuriati, 532.

<sup>52</sup> Rodolfo del Mineo, Tenente di Vascello, Bordo September 6, 1924, ASMAE Archivio Scuole (1923-1928) b. 634.

than anything defend the Italian language.”<sup>53</sup> The president of a local section of the *Società Nazionale ‘Dante Alighieri’* echoed these sentiments, declaring, “We have to fight against this great country’s natural attraction which more than any other foreign land has the power to absorb and assimilate young people, and our people more than any other is susceptible to this phenomenon.”<sup>54</sup> Undeterred by the seemingly inevitable loss of Italian identity, the fascists vowed to fight against the natural tendency to assimilate.

### **Fascist Illusions Confront Emigrant Realities (1922-1927)**

During the 1920s, the realities of Italian emigration fast exposed the illusionary nature of Mussolini’s bold rhetoric. In terms of actual policy little in fact changed during his first five years in power. Mussolini chose to rely primarily on pre-existing liberal institutions, which operated relatively unaltered though placed under fascist supervision. At the top, Mussolini left the *Commissariato Generale dell’Emigrazione* relatively unchanged. The *Commissariato Generale dell’Emigrazione* was founded in 1901 for the task of providing services to Italian emigrants abroad. Oft-criticized for its overly technocratic approach to the problems emigration entailed, the *Commissariato* compiled vital statistics about the various countries of immigration. It published numerous manuals and handbooks for emigrants. These works provided travel information, compared the labor markets of various countries provided data on salaries and job opportunities abroad as well as collected foreign legal codes relevant to emigrant laborers. The main organ of the *Commissariato* was the monthly *Bollettino dell’Emigrazione*, which provided readers with reports and telegrams from the various Italian embassies, legal codes, travel

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> President of Dante Alighieri committee of Rufino A. Baretta.1930, ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935), b.778.

advisories, parliamentary debate, and statistical information on Italian migration as well as feature length articles on important international political developments.<sup>55</sup>

Mussolini was at first reluctant to completely overhaul the *Commissariato*, explaining, “I am convinced that it would be a mistake to destroy a technical organization than in its twenty-five years of experience has demonstrated so well its efficiency.”<sup>56</sup>

During the early 1920s Mussolini allowed the head of the *Commissariato*, Giuseppe De Michelis, to continue unhindered, and the *Commissariato*'s activities under the fascist regime differed little from that of the previous liberal governments. In 1923, he placed the *Commissariato Generale dell'Emigrazione* under the direct authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Such a move demonstrated the potential political and diplomatic importance of emigration at the time. With emigrants viewed as potential political capital for the regime, close and more direct coordination between the government through its embassies and consular services was essential.<sup>57</sup> Thereafter, the *Commissariato*'s manuals for emigrants gave high praise to Mussolini's new call for the spread of Italian identity abroad, although much of its work continued to focus narrowly on the more mundane issues of providing emigrants with technical training, economic assistance, and assurances of employment.<sup>58</sup>

Other than the pre-existing *Commissariato* and Italian Consulates throughout the world, the fascist regime also created the *Fasci all'estero*, the fascist party abroad, exported the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*, a government sponsored recreational

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<sup>55</sup> *Il Bollettino dell'Emigrazione*, 1922-1927.

<sup>56</sup> Mussolini, “Per il Consiglio Superiore dell'Emigrazione” *Popolo d'Italia*, January 23, 1925, and *Opera Omnia*, vol. XXI, 245-246.

<sup>57</sup> Mussolini, “Per il Consiglio Superiore dell'Emigrazione,” 245.

<sup>58</sup> *Commissariato Generale dell'Emigrazione, Manuale di Geografia economica di legislazione sociale e di notizie utile per gli Italiani all'estero* (Roma: Commissariato Generale dell'Emigrazione, 1926).

institution, as well as restructured the *Scuole italiane all'estero*, an Italian elementary school program targeting foreign born children of Italian descent. The regime hoped that these efforts would expand fascist Italian influence on Italian emigrant communities abroad. The experiences of these organizations in Argentina will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. Suffice it to say here, that with the partial exception of the *Dopolavoro*, these fascist organizations in the 1920s failed to accomplish their ambitious goal of exporting Italian fascism abroad. The *Fasci all'Estero* activities provoked outbreaks of violence which terrified the local governments where they were operating and seriously undermined the Italian diplomatic missions in these countries, while the schools abroad remained throughout the 1920s in a state of disarray and did little to promote or teach the fascist agenda.

Far from expanding Italian power and influence through its emigrants, as fascist writers were proclaiming, Italy was in fact on the defensive throughout the 1920s. It was scrambling to protect its emigrant masses from legal abuses and attempting to turn back the severe restrictions being placed on immigration, most notable among them the 1924 United States immigration quota act which limited Italian immigration to 3,800 per year. The regime also struggled to maintain existing Italian institutions abroad designed to help Italian emigrants such as savings banks and credit institutions. The defensive tone of fascist writers in the face of a United States' campaign to nationalize foreign savings banks reveals the difficulties the regime was encountering. In an article in *Gerarchia*, Gino Arias wrote, "We must resist these nationalistic North American policies by opposing propaganda with propaganda, organization with organization...we must come to the defense of the Italian nationality wherever it is threatened in the world...we must

preserve the right of our emigrants to remain Italian and operate in an Italian manner.”<sup>59</sup>

At the very same moment that fascist theorists were proclaiming Italian expansion abroad through emigration, the actual Italian emigrants themselves were facing legal restrictions and prejudicial legislation in their new adopted nations.

Mussolini responded to the pressures placed on Italian emigration by convening the first International Conference on Emigration and Immigration in Rome from May 15-31, 1924. Inaugurated with much publicity by Mussolini himself, the expressed purpose of the conference was nothing less than to establish an international accord regulating the flow of immigration and standardizing legal protections and services for immigrants, although the underlying idea was without a doubt to enhance Mussolini’s international prestige.<sup>60</sup>

The Italian delegation at the conference pushed an ambitious emigration agenda: defining citizenship on the principle of *jus sanguinis*, based on blood, the Italian delegation insisted that emigrants and their children, wherever they may be, legally remained subjects of their nation of origin. To that end, the Italian delegation introduced resolutions which would ensure that emigrants were placed under the legal protection of their original nation’s government and, since priority was given to their nation of origin, that emigrants should be exempt from their host nation’s military service and instead be obligated return home for to serve their nation of origin’s military. Needless to say these assertions provoked heated debate at the conference. The delegations from all of the nations in the Americas rejected the Italian *jus sanguinis* definition of citizenship. They argued on the principle of *jus solis* that once emigrants chose to live and have children in

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<sup>59</sup> Gino Arias, “La nuova politica dell’emigrazione” in *La Gerarchia* 1924, 33.

<sup>60</sup> Conference Internationale de l’Emigration et de l’Immigration= Rome 15-13 Mai 1924, “Travaux de la Conference,” (Rome: Commissariat General Italien de L’Emigration, 1924), 255.

a new nation, they became citizens of that nation. No longer obligated to serve their former nation, nor under its protection, these immigrants had the same rights and duties of all other citizens living in their adopted nation.<sup>61</sup> With two fundamentally different and irreconcilable definitions of citizenship on the table, any agreement between Italy and the nations which received its emigrants was unlikely.

In the end, few resolutions of substance were passed at the conference. Only those resolutions which affirmed immigrant laborers' human rights were approved, while those that attempted to promote Mussolini's expansive agenda were not.<sup>62</sup> In the final acts of the conference most of the foreign delegations approved resolutions which provided for the passage of emigrants, their reception in the host country, the assurance of sanitary conditions and medical attention, and the protection of women and children traveling alone. Also approved were measures providing for the cooperation between immigration and emigration services.<sup>63</sup> The regime's more ambitious proposals did not however succeed. The Italian delegation tried to pass proposals which would have given its consular officials the authority to intervene in the judicial proceedings of other nations, would have required emigrants to serve in their birth country's military, and would have allowed government-sponsored 'patriotic organizations' to operate unrestricted within the host nations. Seen as a violation of their national sovereignty, most nations rejected these proposals.<sup>64</sup> While Italian commentators claimed that this conference demonstrated the leading role played by Mussolini and the fascist regime in promoting an expansive policy

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ministerio das Relações Exteriores, *Mensagem apresentado pelo Senhor Presidente da Republica ao Congresso Nacional em 3 de maio de 1925*, 54.

<sup>63</sup> Conference Internationale de l'Emigration et de l'Immigration= Rome 15-13 Mai 1924, "Acte Finale" (Rome: Commissariat General Italien de L'Emigration, 1924).

<sup>64</sup> Acte Finale.

of emigration and validating the work of Italians abroad, the conference did little to ebb the tide of international restrictions.<sup>65</sup> Emigration, even dressed up by the fascists as “expansion,” was fast becoming an issue that could only serve to tarnish the image of the regime and was clearly not a policy that Mussolini was willing to favor much longer.

In 1926, just three years after making his bold pronouncements on Italian expansion through emigration, Mussolini changed his mind: “To tell you the truth, I am not an emigration enthusiast; it is a sad and painful necessity that we can endure, but emigration at its core is nothing but the pauperization of the people and the Nation itself. Millions of the strong most courageous and audacious Italians are emigrating.”<sup>66</sup>

Beginning with Mussolini’s 1925 appointment of Dino Grandi to the position of Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Italy’s policies towards its emigrants began to head in a new direction. Grandi had been the leader of the fascist movement in Bologna in 1920-1921, during the height of Black Shirt violence in the countryside. He led the provincial faction of the Fascist Party which challenged Mussolini’s hold over the PNF, but after reconciling with Mussolini in 1921, he became one of the Duce’s most trusted men and a key member of the Fascist Grand Council. A lawyer by profession, Grandi was particularly adept at diplomacy and was a voice of moderation in the regime. Under Grandi’s direction the Ministry of Foreign Affairs began to distance itself from its earlier emigration agenda, and developed in its stead a new fascist stance on the question.

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<sup>65</sup> Arena, 162-165.

<sup>66</sup> Mussolini, cited in Roberto Cantalupo, *Racconti politica dell’altra pace* (Milano: Istituto per gli studi di politica internazionale, 1940) 301.

### From “Emigrants” to “Italians Abroad” (1927-1935)

March 31, 1927 marked the official reorganization and redirection of fascist emigration policies. Fascist deputy Carlo Del Croix set the stage. Del Croix, a war veteran who had lost his sight and both arms in the war, was the national hero of choice employed by the Mussolini and the Fascist Party to stir patriotic emotion. On this occasion, he declared before the Italian Chamber of Deputies that the *Commissariato Generale dell’Emigrazione*, “the Sultanate of Via Boncompagni,” was an anachronistic institution filled with liberal technocrats who had little appreciation for fascism’s expansive vision and had failed miserably in its mission to preserve and promote Italian identity abroad. It was “one of many of the inheritances which fascism must liquidate,” for, according to Del Croix, “In Via Boncompagni there are still the same men with the same mentality of that bygone era when we were a poor people who had the shame of having too many children who had to leave in search of bread, and of men of power who used to do nothing but cry over this misery.”<sup>67</sup> Placing the blame squarely on the *Commissariato* rather than the regime, Del Croix declared that, “we must have the courage to confess that until yesterday our great collectivities for the most part lost their Italian identity after the first generation.” Del Croix concluded with rousing praise for the regime’s efforts through the foreign ministry and the Fascist Party abroad that “the New regime has given pride back to those of our people, even those farthest away....Fascism has made our human abundance a source of pride and joy.”<sup>68</sup> By distancing the regime from the work of the *Commissariato* and by praising the purely fascist initiatives abroad, Del Croix set the stage for Dino Grandi’s speech that would mark a dramatic shift in policy.

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<sup>67</sup> Del Croix, discorso all Camera dei Deputati , March 31, 1927 in *Atti del Parlamento italiano, Discussioni*: vol VII, 7415.

<sup>68</sup> Del Croix, 7414.

Grandi followed up Del Croix by announcing the dissolution of the *Commissariato General Dell'Emigrazione*. In a less harsh critique of the *Commissariato*, Grandi argued that in its “technical” functioning the *Commissariato* had served the Italian nation well, however, the changes brought about by emigration restrictions abroad and the fascist revolution in politics at home had rendered not only its work but also the very notion of emigration as outmoded. Grandi asked: “Must our Nation remain a human fish pond for the nourishment of other nations that are demographically poor or impoverished? Must our mothers continue to have children who will become soldiers for nations other than Italy?”<sup>69</sup> No longer the “pioneers of Italian civilization,” emigration was now seen as a loss to the nation, and as “de-nationalization,” which was defined by Grandi as the “total and violent assimilation of men, groups and classes of people who live within the orbit of other civilizations and races.” Denationalization, rather than valorization, became the key word used to describe the fate of the Italian emigrant. While Grandi maintained that the government through the Foreign Ministry would continue to promote Italian identity among Italians living abroad, emigration as a national policy was now a dead issue. “From now on there will no longer be *emigrants*, only *Italians abroad*.”<sup>70</sup>

The 1927 reorientation of fascist policies towards emigration was in many ways a logical response to the political situation both at home and abroad. The age of mass migration was ending and by 1927 it was no longer necessary for the regime to advocate it. Never enamored with emigration from the start, Mussolini took advantage of the opportunity created by the international situation, highlighted by the new restrictions on

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<sup>69</sup> Dino Grandi, “Discorso alla Camera dei Deputati” March 31, 1927 in *La politica estera dell'Italia dal 1929 al 1932*, Paolo Nello ed., (Roma: Bonacci Editore, 1985), 132.

<sup>70</sup> Grandi, 132.

immigration being imposed abroad, to put a halt to what was from its inception a very problematic policy; and to put forth instead a more coherent fascist ideological response to the debate.

In the years immediately following the regime's policy shift, Grandi consolidated the powers of the Foreign Ministry. He replaced the *Commissariato* with a new fascist *Direzione Generale degli Italiani All'Estero e Scuole* (DIES). Under the new organization all of the regime's efforts were more tightly coordinated, the *Fasci all'estero*, the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*, and later the *Scuole Italiane all'Estero* were put under the direct control of the DIES and transformed into propaganda arms of the regime. From 1927 onward, the Foreign Ministry implemented a less ambitious, but more clearly defined policy, which re-evaluated its relationship to Italian communities abroad, and focused more narrowly on propagandizing the regime.

A 1933 propaganda booklet, written by Piero Parini the new Director of Italians Abroad, is indicative of this post-1927 approach to emigration, demonstrating the possibilities created by the fascist regime's new approach. It declared that "The great migratory movement that culminated towards the late nineteenth century has ceased. The fascist regime is hostile to emigration. Proving capable of creating work in the country, multiplying industries and reclaiming lands, fascism intends to keep Italians for Italy."<sup>71</sup> Separating Italian identity abroad from the emigration debate, however, the booklet went on to declare that, "there remain nine or ten million Italians of the old emigration who live beyond Italy's borders...the fascist government feels united with them by the spiritual solidarity of a common origin and culture."<sup>72</sup> These lines suggest that the

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<sup>71</sup> Piero Parini, "Italians in the World" in *Italy* (Chicago: The Chicago Tribune, 1933), 26.

<sup>72</sup> Parini, 26.

regime, while rejecting emigration, continued to encourage and promote the idea of spreading Italian identity abroad.

Thus, while some historians have argued that Grandi's speech represented a conclusion to the debate on emigration, in many ways Grandi's suggestive reference to "Italians abroad" provided a new impetus to the regime's efforts at spreading Italian culture. In fact, with the issue of Italian identity abroad no longer chained to the debate over emigration, the regime's outlook was broadened rather than diminished. With the mass migration of Italians now over, the possibility remained of establishing a new relationship between Italian collectivities abroad and fascist Italy. Preserving Italian culture abroad and winning the support of Italian collectivities for fascism's international policies characterized the fascist regime's new interest in its emigrants.

Mussolini's shift in policy towards emigration coincided with the rise of the idea of a 'universal fascism.' Universal or international fascism was a supposed 'third way,' an alternative to liberal capitalism and Soviet communism. Fascism's political doctrine and corporatists policies purported to solve the economic crisis brought on by the depression and to create a new world order. Styling fascism as an international system which would challenge Bolshevism, the regime established its own 'Fascist International' in 1934 to counter the Soviet-led Comintern.<sup>73</sup>

In Mussolini's words "from 1929 to the present Fascism had been transformed from an Italian phenomenon to a universal phenomenon." Just as ancient Rome had given birth to European civilization two thousand years ago, so too would the fascist New Italy create a new world order. No longer just an Italian political regime, fascism became the

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<sup>73</sup> Philip Morgan, *Italian Fascism 1919-1945* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1995), 125; and Alexander De Grand, *Italian Fascism: Its Origins and Development* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 90-91.

dawn of a new age. In a 1933 article for *Il Popolo d'Italia*, Mussolini explained that fascism transcended the bankrupt and materialist ideologies of liberal democracy and Marxism. It not only provided a solution to all of the socio-economic problems of the day but was nothing short than the spiritual redemption of the modern world.<sup>74</sup> “Many who considered fascism an ephemeral movement within Italian politics have now started studying it seriously. All have been able to recognize, by seeing with their own eyes the profound transformation which fascism has brought about...and the Italian example inspired in many countries near and far the urge to emulate it.”<sup>75</sup> In the late 1920s and early 1930s the regime scanned the horizon looking for governments and nations that may be receptive to fascism’s ideological program, and everywhere they saw “Fascist seeds of political spiritual renewal at work.”<sup>76</sup>

### **Argentina in the New Fascist Agenda (1927-1936)**

The period from 1927 to 1936 represents the high water mark of Italian fascist interest in the South American republic.<sup>77</sup> With fascist policy no longer chained to the spread of emigration, it was thought that there was greater potential for the spread of Italian fascism’s political and cultural identity through greater collaboration with Argentina’s government and society. After 1927, representatives of fascist Italy in Argentina had acknowledged Italian immigrant assimilation into Argentine society, but felt that the regime’s desire to promote Italian identity abroad rather than expansion through

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Mussolini, “Fra due Civiltà” *Il Popolo D’Italia*, August 22, 1933, and *Opera Omnia* vol. XXVI, 44-5, Translation found in Roger Griffin ed. *Fascism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 72-73.

<sup>76</sup> Mussolini, “Fra due civilà”, *IL Popolo d’Italia*, August 22, 1933, and in *Opera Omnia* XXVI, 44-5.

<sup>77</sup> Disappointing results in Argentina along with world political events would shift the regime’s focus away from its programs directed towards Argentina. From 1936 onward the regime would focus primarily on defending its foreign policies and image abroad, not just in Argentina but all over the world.

emigration held great promise. One Italian diplomat wrote, “with rare exceptions, we consider a child with Italian parents born in Argentina as Italian, while they instead think of themselves as Argentine.”<sup>78</sup> Others posited that emigrant ignorance of the ‘New Italy’ regenerated by the fascist revolution explained this apparent desire to assimilate. As the teacher of the Italian school in La Plata explained, “Many children of our Compatriots know Italy from their parents’ descriptions, who, having emigrated many years ago, certainly know nothing of the Italy of today transformed and renewed by the war and by Fascism.”<sup>79</sup> According to this teacher, it was only a more active and aggressive propaganda intervention through the schools that the regime could dispel these negative images of Italy, enhancing its prestige and influence in Argentina.

After his appointment to the post of Italian ambassador to Argentina in 1930, Count Bonifacio Pignatti traveled across the country and reported to the Foreign Ministry on the situation of Italians living in Argentina. According to Pignatti things were indeed desperate: “Few children of Italians will ever admit their Italian origin. They are not only indifferent but hostile to everything Italian .... The children of Italians feel that they are Argentine to the very marrow of their bones ... they are therefore lost to us, they will never, under any circumstances consider themselves Italian citizens.”<sup>80</sup> For Pignatti, it would take ‘heroic’ measures to reverse this trend, “if things continue the way they are going in twenty or thirty years maximum, Italian influence in Argentina will be reduced to near zero.”<sup>81</sup> Despite such bleak descriptions, Pignatti did acknowledge the important

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<sup>78</sup> Consul in Cordoba to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 15, 1933, ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935) b.779.

<sup>79</sup> Carlo Guaschino, “Relazione didattica sull’anno scolastico 1928,” La Plata, December 10, 1928, ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935) b.779.

<sup>80</sup> Pignatti to Direzione Generale degli Italiani all’Estero, July 5, 1930, ASMAE, Affari Politici 1919-1930, b.808.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

role the local *Fasci* and Italian Schools Abroad were playing to stem the tide of assimilation. Like others, Pignatti was also not without his own ideas on how to improve conditions. He proposed a closer collaboration with Argentine officials, writing that “it is in our best interest to give the impression of renouncing our claims over the Italians that they are trying to assimilate,” but only if they agree in return to “help us develop Italian cultural and language programs for the children of Italians born on Argentine soil so that they may come to respect and revere the Patria of their origins.”<sup>82</sup> Pignatti’s suggestion begs the question not only of what Argentina would gain from such collaboration but also what Italy would have to gain if it was sincere in renouncing claims over its emigrants. While perhaps not a solution in and of itself Pignatti’s idea of designing policies with Argentina’s political establishment in mind is suggestive of the direction the regime’s policies in Argentina were headed.

Not all reports to Rome on the situation in Argentina were as somber as Pignatti’s. Augusto Mengiotti, captain of the Italian naval vessel *Alvise da Mosto* reported to the Foreign Ministry that the situation was more favorable than it would appear. After visiting Italian community centers, the local *Fascio* headquarters, as well as Italian schools and *Dopolavoro* centers, Mengiotti reported that “My stay in Buenos Aires has left with the sensation of fervid feelings of Italian-ness by our compatriots who live in this country, even those who have been away from the mother Patria for many years.”<sup>83</sup> Mengiotti did more than just visit with members of the Italian community. He also hobnobbed with Argentina’s high society. His itinerary included polo games, golf tournaments, receptions at the prestigious Jockey Club, and even dinner on the

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Augusto Mengotti to the Naval Ministry, November 18, 1932, ASMAE, Le Carte del Gabinetto del Ministro e della Segretaria Generale dal 1923 al 1943, b. 821

President's yacht. In giving his impression of Argentina's elites, he reported that "Italians in this country enjoy much consideration and Argentines are well disposed towards them."<sup>84</sup> The apparent receptiveness of Argentina's elites to Italian overtures in Mengiotti's account suggested that perhaps there were new avenues for the regime's promotion of its culture and identity by directing its efforts not only to members of the Italian community but also to Argentine society more generally.

In terms of the possibility of spreading fascism's political ideology abroad Argentina was also beginning to show promise. Throughout the 1920s, the Italian Embassy in Buenos Aires had expressed ambivalence toward the political scene in Argentina. After decades of conservative oligarchic rule, Argentina was experiencing once of its first periods of democratic mass politics under the rule of Hipólito Yrigoyen's Radical Party. With popular democracy fast establishing itself, there seemed to be little ground for fascist political influence. The rise of the Radical Party and the universal male suffrage which it enacted offered Italian immigrants a greater political voice in the republic, while at the same time impeded the spread of the fascist political agenda. The cornerstone of the Radical Party was democratic constitutional reform and Yrigoyen could only condemn the authoritarian nature of the Italian fascist regime. In private meetings, the Italian ambassador did however report to Mussolini that Yrigoyen was sympathetic to fascist Italy, explaining that "Although the president cannot publicly approve of Fascism, he has expressed on several occasions great admiration for Your Excellency and for the good work Fascism has accomplished in Italy."<sup>85</sup> In terms of the Italian community itself, the ambassador added that, "Yrigoyen relies politically on the

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Italian Ambassador in Buenos Aires Martin Franklin to Benito Mussolini, December 7, 1927, ASMAE, Affari Politici 1919-1930, b. 807.

support of the lower middle-class which is composed entirely of Italians and Spaniards, and their children. He has, therefore, also professed great sympathy towards Italy and Spain.”<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, the political climate under Yrigoyen limited Italian fascism’s ability to penetrate the republic’s political landscape.

Everything abruptly changed on the morning of September 6, 1930. On that date, General Jose F. Uriburu staged a *coup d’etat* taking over Argentina’s government. An open admirer of Mussolini, Uriburu’s right-wing dictatorship seemed to offer great promise. In reporting on the results of the September 6 ‘Revolution,’ the Italian Embassy indicated that Uriburu seemed to be working towards creating a fascist-style regime modeled after Mussolini’s Italy. According to the Italian ambassador, “the goal of the Government is to win a majority in the next election so that they can pass anti-democratic legislation.” To accomplish this task, Uriburu formed his own paramilitary group, called the *Legion Cívica Argentina*, in imitation of the Italian Black Shirt squads of the 1920s. The *Legion Cívica* immediately went to work establishing itself as a revolutionary party of the right, proclaiming Uriburu as their party leader and intimidating the opposition. To the Italian ambassador, “The creation of the *Legion Cívica* is a new development which will undoubtedly impact the political situation.”<sup>87</sup> Uriburu’s clear affinities towards Italian fascism seemed to offer new political opportunities for the regime; however, the role of the Italian community in all of this, along with the project of spreading Italian identity in the republic, was another question entirely. According to Embassy reports, while some Italians and children of Italians did in fact join Uriburu’s *Legion Cívica*, the vast majority of the Italian community did not support his regime. Likewise, while

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Italian Embassy Buenos Aires to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Situazione in Argentina,” August 5, 1931, ASMAE, Affari Politici, 1931-1943, Argentina b.1.

Uriburu's followers did "appreciate Italians and Argentines of Italian descent for their integrity, intelligence, and labor, they are opposed to granting them greater participation in the government."<sup>88</sup> Whether or not Uriburu's dictatorship would have opened the door to further Italian fascist penetration into Argentina's political life will never be known; Argentina's first flirtation with fascism died with Uriburu early in 1932.

After Uriburu's brief dictatorship, the conservative elite oligarchs who had ruled the country prior to Yrigoyen's Radical Party interlude (1916-1930), returned to power. Though many of them were sympathetic to some of fascism's ideas, they strove to maintain the political status quo and supported the democratic constitution, albeit fixing elections to ensure their hold over the country. In these years, a number of right-wing nationalist parties, many with Italians in their ranks, continued to offer Italian fascists glimmers of hope for the spread of fascism's political ideology. One party in particular seemed especially promising: *El Partido Fascista Argentino*. Founded in 1932, the party was created by Italian members of the *Legion Civica* just as the idea of universal fascism was reaching its high water mark in Italian propaganda. Its leader, Umberto Bianchetti, was "an admirer of Italian Fascism and is inspired by its goals" and according to Italian reports "the walls inside his house are covered by portraits of the Il Duce."<sup>89</sup> Bianchetti established connections with local Italian *Fasci* sections in Argentina and also affiliated his movement to the Italian *Fascio* of Milan. As will be shown in a later chapter, this movement along with others like it, would in the end not only fail to garner mass appeal but would also disappoint the regime in terms of its ideological commitment. In the early 1930s the prospect of an Argentine fascist regime with Italians in the community leading

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Foreign Ministry, *Movimenti Fascisti Esteri* (Rome, 1935), 2.

the way did however seem like a very real and immediate possibility and all the more reason for the regime to show a special interest in Argentina.

### **Fascism's Cultural Turn in Argentina (1927-1936)**

Italian cultural rather than political penetration into Argentina showed even more promise. The idea was to target both the Italian community in Argentina as well as the Argentine general public in the hope of not only spreading Italian culture abroad but also strengthening Argentina's identification with Italy: creating both a stronger sense of Italian identity among its emigrants as well as winning the admiration of the Argentine public as a whole. By emphasizing on a cultural level the shared Latin heritage of the two nations and highlighting the significance that the mass infusion of Italian blood had on Argentine society as a whole, fascist writers no longer confined their appeals to the Italian emigrant enclave. Mussolini demonstrated this new approach in a speech welcoming Argentina's ambassador to Rome. He emphasized Italy and Argentina's shared cultural heritage affirming that "the common origin of our two peoples is strengthened constantly by Italians who have brought with them to Argentina their intelligence and untiring activities."<sup>90</sup> The theme of a common Latin culture linking Italy to Latin America was even more explicit in a speech about neighboring Uruguay, in which Mussolini stated, "Under the aegis of our common Latin civilization ...cultural relationships have been established and will continue to be established."<sup>91</sup> Later in 1933,

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<sup>90</sup> Mussolini, "Italia e Argentina" *Il Popolo d'Italia*, September 2, 1927, and *Opera Omnia*, XXIII, 29.

<sup>91</sup> Mussolini "Italia e Uruguay" *Il Popolo d'Italia*, January 24, 1928 and in *Opera Omnia* XXIII, 88.

Mussolini spoke of Buenos Aires as “That great Latin metropolis across the Ocean, revealing our shared fundamental identity as developers of a common civilization.”<sup>92</sup>

Of all the intellectual figures of the fascist regime, Franco Ciarlantini lobbied the most energetically for this cultural agenda. Ciarlantini’s early life had followed the same trajectory as Mussolini. A school teacher and active socialist journalist in the turn of the century, Ciarlantini left the party and became an interventionist in 1915, volunteering to fight in the war. After the war, he collaborated closely with Mussolini for *Il Popolo d’Italia*, officially joining the Fascist Party in 1923. During the 1920s he was a member of the Fascist Grand Council and a fascist deputy in Parliament. Much of his work was devoted to promoting the fascist regime’s cultural agenda.<sup>93</sup> As the editor-in-chief of *Augustea*, one of the regime’s more prestigious cultural journals, Ciarlantini spoke often of the new cultural possibilities abroad created by the regime’s policies.

After completing a tour of the South American republic to promote the diffusion of Italian books and the creation of Italian language libraries, Ciarlantini penned his own thoughts on Argentina and its possibilities. In his *Viaggio in Argentina* and his editorials in *Augustea*, Ciarlantini spoke of Argentina as fertile ground for promoting the fascist agenda abroad. The context for much of this talk was the first ever “Mostra del libro Italiano,” a traveling exhibit of Italian books, which made its way to all of Argentina’s major cities. In talking of the positive Argentine reception of the exhibit, Ciarlantini wrote that the diffusion of Italian books in Argentina “would greatly increase the spread of our language in the republic, which until now has not been adequately studied, for reasons which remain a paradox, since everyone understands the language and it is still

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<sup>92</sup> Mussolini, “Italia e Argentina” *Il Popolo D’Italia*, April 11, 1933, and *Opera Omnia* vol. XXV, 219.

<sup>93</sup> *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana), 217-218.

spoken by the nearly three million of our compatriots who live there.”<sup>94</sup> According to Ciarlantini, while Italian influences permeated Argentine society and the physical presence of Italians in the republic was unmistakable, something was not quite right: Argentine elites turned to France and Britain for their culture, and Italian immigrants in the nation seemed to have made little effort to promote, or even preserve their Italian identity.

“In dealing with our compatriots who live in Argentina, we have to recognize that this community is not capable of immediately appreciating Fascism. We must keep in mind that this community is not composed of the new Italian men of today.”<sup>95</sup> Of the Italian immigrants in Argentina, Ciarlantini argued that much ground had been lost since “the demi-liberal governments never thought of cultivating our brother emigrants, by guaranteeing employment, obtaining land, preserving the mother language abroad, protecting their nationalism, or facilitating return to the *Patria*. Nothing!”<sup>96</sup> Due to this neglect, these emigrants “know nothing about Dante, Michelangelo, or Galileo, and were not given any reason to be proud of their nationality.”<sup>97</sup> This was however beginning to change thanks to the First World War and the advent of fascism, “The situation of Italians in Argentina today is absolutely different from that of before the Libyan War and the Great European War...the victories on the Piave and Vittorio Veneto had a decisive impact.”<sup>98</sup> Lest an opportunity be lost, much more work now had to be done to promote Italian language and culture in the community and strengthen its ties to the ‘new’ Italy brought on by fascism. To Ciarlantini, such was the mission of Italian fascists in

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<sup>94</sup> Ciarlantini, “Poeti del Argentina,” *Augustea* October 31, 1927.

<sup>95</sup> Ciarlantini, “Italia e Argentina,” *Augustea*, January 31, 1930.

<sup>96</sup> Franco Ciarlantini, *Viaggio in Argentina* (Milano: Edizioni Alpes, 1929) 196.

<sup>97</sup> Ciarlantini, 201.

<sup>98</sup> Ciarlantini, 195-196.

Argentina, to cultivate Italian patriotism within the community and build stronger bonds between the Fascist Party and members of the community, many of whom were still indifferent or even hostile to the fascist cause.<sup>99</sup>

Ciarlantini further argued that the regime should extend its cultural initiatives to the entire spectrum of Argentina's population. He insisted that Italian culture and civilization should be introduced to the populace as a whole with particular attention paid to the ruling classes in order to create "a nation of Italophiles."<sup>100</sup> To this end, Ciarlantini suggested that Italian schools abroad should be open to both the children of Italians as well as other Argentines. In detailing the scope of educational initiatives, Ciarlantini explained that "the first necessity above all else is to give to both the Argentine and the children of Italians a knowledge of Italy and of Italian life that goes beyond the image our emigration had provided." In short, "to replace the image of a proletarian nation that exported its people with that of a cultured Italy of learning and spiritual creation."<sup>101</sup> Rather than being simply a cultural support to the Italian collectivity, Ciarlantini argued that the *Dante Alighieri* should instead compete with the *Alliance française* as the most prestigious foreign cultural institute among the native elite population of Argentina.<sup>102</sup> Whereas earlier essays had stressed the need for mutual aid societies, credit institutions, and welfare programs to assist emigrants, Ciarlantini lobbied for the dissemination of Italian literature, art exhibitions, and the establishment of Italian theaters, all initiatives designed to win converts to Italian culture and fulfill the new interests of the regime. According to Cialantini, Argentina was engaged in a valiant defense of its culture from

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<sup>99</sup> Ciarlantini, "Italia e Argentina," *Augustea*, January 31, 1930.

<sup>100</sup> Ciarlantini, *Viaggio in Argentina*, 225.

<sup>101</sup> Ciarlantini, 218.

<sup>102</sup> Ciarlantini, 222.

Great Britain and the United States. American cartoons, cinema, and jazz were fast penetrating Argentine culture, not to mention Great Britain's traditional hegemonic influence over Argentine commerce and information services.<sup>103</sup> According to Ciarlantini Argentines valiantly resisted these intrusions, "turning to Rome, no less than to Paris for their spiritual needs, demonstrating once again that it is the depository of Latin-ness in America." To Ciarlantini this Latin-ness "is the basis of communality, continually welding ever stronger chains binding our two nations, our consanguineous peoples must above all else maintain, develop and perfect our common traits, which guarantee Latin civilization in America."<sup>104</sup>

During the late 1920s Ciarlantini used the pages of *Augustea* to further promote this cultural agenda. He reproduced words of praise for the recent book exhibit from the Argentine President Alvear and the Argentine nationalist intellectual Ricardo Rojas as well as excerpts from articles in both the Italian language press and mainstream Argentine press of Buenos Aires. Ciarlantini also invited Argentine writers to contribute articles to the journal; these writers spoke of the need for more Italian initiatives in Argentina. One such writer, Manuel Rojas Silveya, lamented the sorry state of Italian culture in the republic. "Here in Argentina, a country where over two million Italians live, and where nearly 60 percent of the population is of Italian stock, nobody reads, feels, or thinks in Italian." Worst of all, the children of Italians "already do not speak the language, and their children's children do not even understand it" and if Argentines wanted to read D'Annunzio, Papini, or Pirandello, they would have to read them in

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<sup>103</sup> Ciarlantini, 169-171.

<sup>104</sup> Ciarlantini, 168.

French translation.<sup>105</sup> For Rojas, Italy until now had simply not paid enough attention to a country which had such obvious physical and spiritual connections. Now was the moment for fascist Italy to claim its rightful place in Argentina's cultural milieu. As Rojas concluded, "To every Italian who loves their country and wants to spread its culture, to every Argentine who loves Italy and appreciates the contribution it has made to the formation of his character, now is the time to fix this sad state of affairs."<sup>106</sup>

*Le Pagine delle Dante*, the official magazine of the *Società Nazionale 'Dante Alighieri'*, which since 1889 had been sponsoring Italian language and cultural courses throughout the world often addressed the situation in Argentina and its potential. Upon completing a three-month tour of the country the Italian novelist Mario Puccini contributed an article to *Le Pagine delle Dante*. In describing his experiences he wrote, "I traveled, gave speeches, shook many hands, and looked many people in the eye, while I may forget some of the faces that I saw and confuse some of the hands I shook, I will never forget the sensation that Italy, so far away was also so close."<sup>107</sup> According to Puccini, it was up to the *Società Nazionale 'Dante Alighieri'* and the fascist regime to revive in its long abandoned emigrant sons a love for the Patria and restore their spiritual connections to Italy before "they are fatally lost forever."<sup>108</sup>

The noted Italian author, Massimo Bontempelli, in a work based on his 1934 tour of South America entitled *Noi, gli Aria: Interpretazioni sudamericane*, echoed many of the same concerns and aspirations. The spiritual state of Italian emigrants and their children troubled Bontempelli who reported that everywhere he heard people declare "I

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<sup>105</sup> Manuel Rojas Silva, "Lo Spirito Italiano in Argentina," *Augustea*, December 15, 1927.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Mario Puccini, "La 'Dante' nell'America Latina," *Le Pagine delle Dante*, November-December 1936.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

am an Argentine, son of Italians, while not one out of a hundred told me, I am an Italian, born in Argentina...even a ten year old boy, the son of thoroughly Italian parents who only spoke to him in Italian would affirm—I am an Argentine.”<sup>109</sup> Like Ciarlantini, Bontempelli however did acknowledge that Argentines were very anxious to cultivate and enhance their Latin identity. For, according to Bontempelli, “Until yesterday they looked to France for their culture...but now they are beginning to realize as we already have realized that France no longer has anything new to contribute to civilization...they are therefore beginning to feel more and more that only the renewed Italy could foment spiritual renovation. This is the easiest, most friendly, and intense field for [our] fertile collaboration.”<sup>110</sup> Fascist Italy’s halt to organized mass emigration therefore created the potential for fascism’s ideological expansion abroad by both allaying Argentine fears of an Italian demographic invasion and appealing to Argentina’s characteristic receptiveness to European cultural models. In the pages of Bontempelli’s work, one can see coming together both the need to restore and inspire a stronger sense of Italian identity in the Italian community, as well as the need to promote an Italian cultural identity which could appeal to the wider Argentine public.

Luigi Pirandello, one of Italy’s most famed playwrights and novelists also voiced support for the idea of promoting the fascist cause in Argentina. Pirandello, throughout most of his life remained expressly apolitical. In 1923 Pirandello did however express admiration for Mussolini and joined the Fascist Party officially on September 19, 1924 at the height of the Matteotti scandal. From 1924 to 1926 Pirandello actively supported fascism and Mussolini’s regime through a series of articles in fascist journals and in

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<sup>109</sup> Massimo Bontempelli, *Noi, gli Aria: Interpretazioni sudamericane*, Sebastiano Martelli ed. (Palermo: Sellerio, 1994), 72-73.

<sup>110</sup> Bontempelli, 78.

published interviews. After 1926 Pirandello privately expressed his ambivalence towards the regime and its suppression of individual liberty. He did, however, continue to publicly voice support for the Duce and continued to accept fascist honors and awards. In 1935 he defended Italy's invasion of Ethiopia and donated a number of gold personal effects, including his Nobel Peace Prize medal, to the fascist war effort.<sup>111</sup> In his correspondence to the Italian Foreign Ministry he often expressed interest helping the regime promote Italian culture and language in Argentina. Traveling to the country in 1927 and again in 1936, Pirandello offered his services to the regime while touring with his theatre company.<sup>112</sup> In talking of his experiences he noted the nascent patriotism among members of the Italian community. In a speech in the city of Rosario, he declared, "As an Italian I am proud to find myself among you in this wonderful center of Italian activity which inspires and spreads love for the mother Patria, its history, civilization and art."<sup>113</sup> From Ciarlantini and Puccini to Bontempelli and Pirandello, major cultural figures in the fascist regime all understood Italian identity more broadly than the regime had previously. Given the undeniable presence of Italians in Argentina's society, there appeared to be an opportunity for the regime to direct its promotion of Italian culture and identity towards Argentine society more generally.

## Conclusion

While not among its chief priorities or even a policy by design, the mass emigration of Italians, which was still prevalent in the early 1920s, imposed on the regime the challenge

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<sup>111</sup> Gaspare Giudice, *Pirandello: A Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 143-165.

<sup>112</sup> Luigi Pirandello to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 11, 1936, ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1943, Argentina, b. 11.

<sup>113</sup> Pirandello, "Pel teatro e per la lingua d'Italia in Argentina" no 3, 1927.

of formulating a fascist response to an issue long associated with the defunct policies of liberal Italy. Mussolini first responded by spinning a perceived weakness into a strength by conflating ‘emigration’ with ‘expansion.’ Emigrants were not abandoning the Patria but instead spreading its influence throughout the world. This treatment of emigration did harmonize emigration ideologically with the fascist’s program for the New Italy, but could not stand the test of time. The reality of Italian emigrant experiences simply did not match Il Duce’s bold vision of a nation expanding through emigration. In practice, the fascists were unable to turn their triumphal prose into a cohesive program of action, relying instead on the pre-existing liberal-era bureaucratic structure to pursue much of the same policies as the Italian governments of the past.

With the 1927 redirection of its emigration policy, the fascist regime finally distanced itself from its liberal predecessor by developing a more purely fascist approach to the question. Abandoning its support for emigration, the new concept of Italian-ness abroad shifted the focus from the emigrants themselves to the preservation and spread of Italian culture, politics, and ideology abroad. No longer encumbered by the burdens imposed on its support for emigration, the fascists were free to pursue more ideologically expansive relationships with the countries that contained significant Italian communities.

From 1927 onward Italy’s propaganda strategy in Argentina would consist in instilling fascism’s conceptualization of “Italian-ness abroad” within the Italian community, while at the same time courting the wider Argentine population with talk of a shared “Latin” identity and the political applicability of fascism abroad. The Italian roots of Argentina’s population and the Latin roots of its civilization seemed to offer great opportunities to a regime no longer limited by the exigencies of its emigration policy.

With Italian propaganda now more broadly aimed at the Argentine public in general the potential existed for greater fascist Italian political and cultural influence. Italy's ambitious, if ill-defined, cultural and political agendas in Argentina challenge our understanding of national identity across borders as well as expose the tension between nationalism and universalism inherent in fascism's project abroad. Just what impact all of this had on notions of identity both among Italians as well as Argentines will be explored in detail in the subsequent chapters.

With high hopes and a heavy dose of 'fascist tenacity,' the regime dispatched some of its most talented propagandists and established all of its new fascist organizations to strike while the moment seemed propitious, bombarding the South American republic with its propaganda. With little actually having been accomplished by the regime as late as 1930, Argentina was still a land of the future: high in potential but not much else. In the words of Ciarlantini, "There is much to be done!"

## CHAPTER 3

### Italian Fascist Activities in Argentina

*Camerati! Siate disciplinati all'estero come io esigo ed impongo che gli italiani siano disciplinato all'interno. Siate fedeli non solo con le parole vane, ma con le opera concrete al sacrificio dei nostri e dei vostri morti*  
 –Mussolini to the Fasci all'Estero, October 29, 1925.<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

With these words Il Duce sent off his cohorts to spread the Italian fascist movement throughout the world, dispatching some of his most talented propagandists and party operatives overseas to promote his agenda. Argentina appeared to be the ideal land to advance the new fascist Italian political and cultural project abroad. But if it offered great potential it also carried with it great risk. Much was at stake precisely because of the strong Italian presence in the South American republic. Without the coercive apparatus of the state at their disposal, these fascist propagandists had to compete with Italian anti-fascists for the hearts and minds of Italian emigrants. Were the fascist regime's efforts in Argentina to fail, its claims over Italian identity abroad would be called into question. The fascists therefore went to great lengths to penetrate the Italian community in Argentina, and aggressively propagandize their interests and ideology.

This chapter follows their activities in Argentina with a focus on the organizations that the regime established or took over to spread the fascist message. From an abrasive, disorganized, political movement abroad, this chapter shows how fascist activities evolved, becoming a much more coordinated effort, which strove to adapt itself to

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<sup>1</sup> “Camerati! You must be as disciplined abroad, as I require Italians at home to be disciplined. Be faithful to the sacrifices of our dead and your own, not only in your words but also in your concrete actions. Mussolini to the Fasci all'Estero, “I compiti dei fasci all'estero” *Il Popolo d'Italia*, October 31, 1925, and *Opera Omnia* vol. XXI, 430, a copy is also filed in ACS Carte Cornelio di Marzio, busta 47.

situation in Argentina. In the end, reorganization at top in Rome, along with the work of the regime's operatives on the ground in Argentina, created a much more organized propaganda operation which overtime shifted its focus from exporting its fascist political ideology to promoting Italian culture and identity. In this discussion of all of the organizations abroad particular emphasis is placed on the *Fasci italiani all'estero* which failed as an activist political organization, but later served the regime as a vehicle for its political and cultural propaganda as well as the *Scuole italiane all'estero* which had been neglected and disorganized during the 1920s but emerged as the regime's most important initiative by the 1930s. With the narrative of regime's efforts detailed here, the next chapter will analyze the content of the message itself through a close reading of its propaganda material and later chapters will discuss the strong Italian anti-fascist presence in Argentina and its responses to the fascist effort, as well as the reactions the Italian propaganda provoked within the wider Argentine community.

There is a very recent and growing literature on Italian fascist activities abroad. A number of articles, though still very few books, have analyzed the various Italian operations abroad. The historiography on the *Fasci italiani all'estero*, the Fascist Party Abroad is the most well-developed within this area of study. These historical treatments however judged the success or failure of the *Fasci italiani all'estero* by their political influence and their ability to spread fascism politically, and only discuss tangentially the role the *Fasci italiani all'estero* played in promoting their version of Italian identity abroad.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, while a number of works have studied fascist culture in the

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<sup>2</sup> See for example, Emilio Gentile, "La Politica estera del partito Fascista. Ideologia e organizzazione dei Fasci italiani all'estero (1920-1930)" in *Storia Contemporanea* (1995), Claudia Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism: Italian Fascists and Britain's Italians in the 1930s* (Oxford: Berg 2003) and Emilio Franzina and

context of the regime's search for consensus within Italy, few have examined its efforts abroad, least of all in Latin America.<sup>3</sup>

The historiography on fascist activities in Argentina is particularly small, although interest in the topic has increased over the past few years. Ronald C. Newton was the first to provide a narrative overview of both Italian fascist activities in Argentina, as well as community reactions and responses in his article, "Ducini, Prominenti, Antifascisti: Italian Fascism and the Italo-Argentine Collectivity, 1922-1945," in *The Americas* (1995).<sup>4</sup> More recent scholarship has focused narrowly on specific aspects or episodes in the Italian fascist project. Loris Zanetti, in his contribution to *Il fascismo e gli emigrati: La parabola dei Fasci italiani all'estero 1920-1943* (2003) sketches the *Fasci italiani all'estero's* activities in Argentina in the 1930s, downplaying Italy's interest in Argentina and its importance and impact. Eugenia Scarzanella, Vanni Blengino, and Camilla Catarulla in the collected volume, *Fascisti in Sud America* (2005), highlight different aspects of the regime's activities. Scarzanella offers a biographical sketch one of the regime's collaborators in Argentina, Vittorio Valdani, while Blengino traces the history of *Il Mattino d'Italia*, the main Italian Fascist daily in Buenos Aires, and Catarulla analyzes a survey conducted by that newspaper in 1934.<sup>5</sup> Building on these studies, my work pulls together the experiences of these various fascist organizations in Argentina and additionally places them in the broader context of the regime's overall project of promoting its version of Italian identity abroad.

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Matteo Sanfilippo's edited volume, *Il Fascismo e gli emigrati: la parabola dei Fasci italiani all'estero (1920-1943)* (Roma: Laterza, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> The exception is Marco Pluviano and Irene Guerrini, "L'Opera nazionale dopolavoro in sud america" in *Studi emigrazione*, 1995, 32 (119), who detail the Opera 518-537.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald C. Newton, "Ducini, Prominenti, Antifascisti: Italian Fascism and the Italo-Argentine Collectivity, 1922-1945," in *The Americas* (1995).

<sup>5</sup> Eugenia Scarzanella, *Fascisti in Sud America* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2005).

From devoted fascist zealots to opportunistic careerists, many of those involved in coordinating its efforts in Argentina were a veritable rogue's gallery of the regime. Out of the pages of their telegrams, confidential reports, and published dispatches, emerges the history of fascist Italy's activities in Argentina. What follows is the story of personal rivalries and competing ideological agendas. A story defined as much by its compromises and collaborations as by its inherent tensions and contradictions. In short, it is a story of the fascist experience.

### ***The Fasci Italiani all'Estero***

In 1923 soon after the March on Rome Mussolini inaugurated the *Fasci italiani all'estero*, the Fascist Party abroad, and appointed Giuseppe Bastianini to head the new branch of the party. Bastianini, a former Socialist, was a devoted follower of Mussolini and a fascist from the movement's inception, active in the *squadristi* violence of the early 1920s.<sup>6</sup> In July of 1923 the Fascist Grand Council gave the new *Fasci italiani all'estero* its marching orders: to unite Italian emigrants, to keep alive their love of the Patria, and to spread fascism's ideology abroad. The *Fasci* were given a relatively free hand with the only restrictions that they "avoid any action that could damage relations between Italy and the foreign States that host them" and that they "respect the laws of the host countries and abstain from local politics."<sup>7</sup> Bastianini was only answerable to the Duce. For each of the major countries or regions abroad, he appointed a Fascist Delegate, below him were presidents of the local Fascist Party sections, each of whom were ordered to organize: A) an office of inspection and organization, to form the party's male, female, and youth

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<sup>6</sup> *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana).

<sup>7</sup> *Il Legionario: organo dei Fasci italiani all'estero edito dalla segreteria generale*, October 3, 1925.

groups; B) an Administrative office; and C) a Press and Propaganda Office, charged with founding the party's local paper and disseminating information about fascism abroad. Members of the *Fascio* had to be of Italian blood and could not be Italian army deserters. Each member swore to "Obey the Duce's orders without question and to serve with all my strength and if necessary with my blood the great Fascist Italy."<sup>8</sup> The now officially sanctioned organization was unleashed on Italian communities throughout the world, becoming the first truly Italian fascist initiative abroad.

The Grand Council's directive left much to interpretation, inspiringly lively debate among members of the various local *Fasci* during the first years of the organization's existence. Many understood their mission as internationalist in scope: to spread fascism's political ideology abroad targeting foreign as well as Italian communities. Others saw their mission in nationalist terms: to unite Italian emigrants by instilling patriotism and loyalty to the 'new Italy' of the fascist regime. How to go about accomplishing their mission and what relationship, if any, they were supposed to have with the Italian government's embassies abroad remained unclear. Articles in *Il Legionario*, the official organ of the *Fasci all'estero*, illustrated a confused and often contradictory sense of mission throughout the 1920s. Under the young and ambitious Bastianini, *Legionario* articles stressed fascism's universal mission. One contributor to the magazine wrote that having "saved the Patria," fascism's new mission through the *Fasci* abroad was to serve as "a North Star guiding other Patrie to their salvation."<sup>9</sup> Although acknowledging that the Grand Council had prohibited the *Fasci* from interfering in other nation's politics, Bastianini pushed the internationalist agenda

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<sup>8</sup> *Fasci italiani all'estero*, "Statuto" Undated, Archivio Centrale dello Stato [ACS] Carte Cornelio di Marzio, busta 47.

<sup>9</sup> Orazio Laorca, "Il Fascismo in Italia e all'Estero," *Il Legionario*, January 3, 1925.

suggesting that communication and in some cases alliances could be made between the *Fasci all'estero* and foreign fascist parties. In an article in *Il Legionario*, Bastianini insisted that fascism was indeed an international movement to save the world from the “degeneration of society caused by parliamentary democracy and international bolshevism.”<sup>10</sup>

During these early years, Mussolini had high hopes for fascism’s ability to infiltrate the Italian community in Argentina. He dispatched Ottavio Dinale, a party propagandist and the Fascist Party Delegate for South America, to establish the Buenos Aires *Fascio* in 1923. Rome also subsidized the party’s own newspaper in Buenos Aires, *Il Littore*.<sup>11</sup> Dinale’s visit was, however, more successful in provoking street brawls than organizing a fascist network, and *Il Littore* enjoyed only a two-year run and very small circulation.<sup>12</sup> By the end of 1924 Bastianini could count 124 local *Fasci* in the United States of America and Brazil, but only eight in Argentina.<sup>13</sup> Within Argentina the *Fasci* faced tremendous opposition not only from anarchists and socialists in the community, whose presence was quite large, but also from republicans and monarchists, whose opposition Italian officials attributed to Freemasonry. Although there was indeed a significant Freemason presence within the community, their numbers and role in opposing the regime has not been documented. A more likely explanation is the fact that the Italian community in Argentina was one of the oldest in the hemisphere with an

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<sup>10</sup> Giuseppe Bastianini, “Fasci italiani e Fasci stranieri: L’utilità di una intesa,” *Il Legionario*, July 4, 1925.

<sup>11</sup> Ronald C. Newton, “Ducini, Prominenti, AntiFascisti: Italian Fascism and the Italo-Argentine Collectivity, 1922-1945” in *The Americas* 1994, 51 (1), 46; Emilio Gentile, “L’Emigrazione italiana in Argentina nella politica di espansione del nazionalismo e del Fascismo” in *Storia Contemporanea*, 1986, 17 (3) 379.

<sup>12</sup> Gentile, 389.

<sup>13</sup> Luca de Caprariis, “‘Fascism for Export?’ The Rise and Eclipse of the Fasci Italiani all’Estero,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 35, No.2 (April, 2000), 158.

already well-established network of community associations.<sup>14</sup> In areas where Italian emigrants were more recent arrivals, less organized, or in smaller numbers, the *Fasci* enjoyed more success due to the greater role they played in the community. This was true for example in other Latin American countries such as Peru and Mexico. Whatever the reason, the result was that the majority of the Italian community was ambivalent, if not openly hostile to the *Fasci's* arrival on their shores.<sup>15</sup>

Upon learning of the existence of the *Fasci* within their state, Argentine officials also expressed concern that these *Fasci* were Italian *agents provocateurs* sent to stir up trouble in the Italian community and attack anti-fascists. Argentine police were also alarmed by the violence *Fasci* activities provoked, and their paramilitary appearance. Ironically the *Fasci* were more often the victims of violence, militant rhetoric notwithstanding. By 1930, despite their small number, members of the Argentine *Fasci* had more casualties, or 'martyrs' as they called them, than any other country in the Americas.<sup>16</sup> Such was the state of affairs that all of the successful events the *Fasci* organized were confined to receptions held behind the closed doors of their halls, a sign that things did not go well when they dared venture out Black-Shirted in public.<sup>17</sup>

From 1923 to 1925 the *Fasci italiani all'estero* did not enjoy much more success in other countries, doing far more harm than good to the regime's image abroad. Historians on the *Fasci italiani all'estero* all agree that the *Fasci* during this early radical

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<sup>14</sup> Caprariis, 158.

<sup>15</sup> Italian community responses to Fascism and the anti-fascist movement in Argentina are examined in detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>16</sup> "Caduti in terra straniera per il Fascismo (1923-1933)" included in Piero Parini, *Italiani per il Mondo* (Milano: Mondadori, 1935), 87-93.

<sup>17</sup> Reports from the Argentine *Fasci* in "Vita dei Fasci," *Il Legionario* 1925.

period of their existence were a failure.<sup>18</sup> They were for the most part only able to recruit an extremist and marginal following, which was often outnumbered or outmaneuvered by anti-fascist members of the community. Their parades and ceremonies sparked violent street disturbances and succeeded only in alarming the host nations and in so doing endangering Italy's diplomatic relations with these countries. This in turn created tension within the Italian regime between the diplomatic corps and the Fascist Party. Bastianini openly criticized Italy's diplomats for their questionable commitment to fascism's revolutionary mission, while diplomats responded insisting that the *Fasci* were fast undermining the regime's credibility abroad.

In 1925, as Mussolini tightened his grip over the state by making himself dictator and outlawing the opposition, he turned his attention to the activities of the Fascist Party Abroad. The interests of state took precedence over that of the Fascist party and the party's extremist tendencies were curtailed. Mussolini's appointment of Dino Grandi, a moderate fascist, as Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs signaled this new direction in policy. An article in *Il Legionario* on the eve of the first congress of the *Fasci italiani all'estero* in October 1925 made the regime's new position clear: "Fascism is action and doctrine, as action it must remain strictly within the territorial confines of the peninsula, and its doctrine abroad must be restricted to the cultural and economic valorization of our emigrants."<sup>19</sup> While many ideas were debated at the congress, Mussolini of course had the final say, closing discussions by issuing his "Seven Commandments" to the *Fasci italiani all'estero*:

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<sup>18</sup> See for example, Gentile, "La Politica estera del partito Fascista. Ideologia e organizzazione dei Fasci italiani all'estero (1920-1930)," Cannistraro, *Blackshirts in Little Italy*; and more recently Franzina and Sanfilippo eds., *Il Fascismo e gli emigrati: la parabola dei Fasci italiani all'estero (1920-1943)*.

<sup>19</sup> "Il Fascismo all'Estero," *Il Legionario*, October 3, 1925.

1. Obey the laws of the host countries and show this obedience to the law in your daily activities setting an example for those nations' citizens.
2. Do not participate in the internal politics of the host countries.
3. Do not create discord within the Italian communities but heal division under the sign of the Lictor.
4. Be an example of public and private integrity.
5. Respect the representatives of the Italian government abroad.
6. Defend Italian identity past and present.
7. Offer assistance to Italians in need.<sup>20</sup>

Mussolini further exhorted them to “Consider yourselves in all of your works and in every moment of your life like pioneers, like missionaries, like the bearers of Latin, Roman, Italian civilization.”<sup>21</sup> Stressing the need to obey the law and respect diplomatic officials, along with the more limited goals of assisting Italians in need and promoting Italian identity, ultimately signaled the end of the *Fasci italiani all'estero*'s intransigent-internationalist stage. Articles in *Il Legionario* from 1925 onward stressed more and more the nationalistic mission to promote and defend Italian identity and culture abroad. As one contributor put it, “The defense of the nationality of Italians living abroad is a duty that Fascism has understood perfectly and Fascist propaganda developed by Fascists abroad is the valorization of Italy. If the Black Shirts speak of Fascism it is because Fascism has allowed them to speak with pride of Italy.”<sup>22</sup>

In 1925 the *Fasci* in Argentina was also embarking on a new course of action. In January of that year the regime found its man in Vittorio Valdani, naming him the new Fascist Party Delegate in Argentina. An engineer by profession, Valdani had arrived in Argentina in 1899 becoming an important industrialist and prominent member of the

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<sup>20</sup> Mussolini, “I compiti dei fasci all'estero” *Il Popolo d'Italia*, October 31, 1925, and *Opera Omnia* vol. XXI, 430, a copy is also filed in ACS Carte Cornelio di Marzio, busta 47.

<sup>21</sup> Mussolini, “I compiti dei fasci all'estero,” 431.

<sup>22</sup> E. Ceresole, “L'Italia e il Fascismo all'estero,” *Il Legionario*, October 30, 1926.

Italian community.<sup>23</sup> Valdani joined the Fascist Party Abroad in 1924 and remained a committed fascist to the end, becoming the republic of Saló's representative in Argentina in 1943, and accepting money from Nazi Germany to continue his work.<sup>24</sup>

Soon after his appointment, Valdani began to dismiss members of the *Fasci*, ensuring that those who remained, though few, were “good and of pure intentions.”<sup>25</sup> In addition to personnel changes, Valdani realized that, given the conditions on the ground, the *Fasci* had to rethink their tactics. Fascism was, in Valdani words, “a school and a priesthood of which the *Fasci* are the temples.”<sup>26</sup> Its mission abroad was: “to enhance the image of the Patria” by “earning the respect of friend and foe alike by the exemplary conduct of our members and by the faith that we openly profess.”<sup>27</sup> His goal was to defend the regime against its many detractors in Argentina while giving his *Fasci* an air of respectability so that they appeared less threatening and its ideology more appealing. He worked to transform a poorly organized activist political movement into a respectable public relations organization for the regime. As part of this new program, he founded a fascist weekly, entitled *Il Risveglio*, which served as the mouthpiece for the Italian Fascist party in Buenos Aires, and campaigned against Italian community organizations opposed to fascism.<sup>28</sup>

In 1926, Valdani formed new local branches, this time in close coordination with consular officials in the area. In a speech given to his *Fascio* in September, he announced

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<sup>23</sup> Cornelio Di Marzio, “Pro-memoria per il Duce,” September 15, 1927, ACS Carte cornelio di Marzio, b. 47.

<sup>24</sup> Italian Ambassador to Foreign Ministry, December 19, 1944, ASAME, Inventario della Serie Affari Politici (1931-1945), Argentina, b. 40.

<sup>25</sup> Vittorio Valdani “Vita dei Fasci; Argentina,” *Il Legionario* May 2, 1925. See “Vita dei Fasci, Argentina” sections from January to October 1925 for the names of those dismissed.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Cornelio Di Marzio to Mussolini “Pro-Memoria per Il Duce,” September 13, 1927 in ACS, Carte Cornelio Di Marzio b. 47.

that “Fascism is no longer a political movement, Fascism today is the ‘Religion of the Patria’” and the new “program of the *Fasci italiani all'estero* is one of morality, faith, and the defense of patriotism.”<sup>29</sup> Valdani, aware of the difficult position of the organization in Argentina, ordered his men not to resort to violence, arguing that this would only play into the hands of its opponents and work against the fascist cause in the Americas. Instead he instructed the *Fasci* to win converts in the community by demonstrating their discipline, faith in the cause, and love of Patria. Less overtly political and no longer as militant, Valdani was embracing the new social and cultural orientations of the *Fasci italiani all'estero*. By the end of 1927 things were coming together for the *Fasci* in Argentina; its more pragmatic, less abrasive cultural agenda, which was developed in coordination with the Italian consulates, was beginning to show promise.

In spite of the new direction Mussolini had given the party abroad, Bastianini continued to press his internationalist agenda and clash with consular officials until he was replaced by Cornelio Di Marzio in 1927. A professor of literature and a Nationalist before joining the PNF in 1920, Di Marzio had previously served the regime as a commercial attaché and press secretary to the Italian embassy in Istanbul.<sup>30</sup> During his tenure Di Marzio reorganized the *Fasci*, emphasizing its public image and cultural initiatives. He supervised the founding of *Fasci* publications, worked to improve relations with Italian societies abroad, and urged local *Fasci* to coordinate their activities with the Italian consulates.<sup>31</sup> Di Marzio wanted his *Fasci* to take the leading role in directing the regime’s efforts abroad, but was frustrated at every turn by Dino Grandi’s Foreign

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<sup>29</sup>Valdani, “Vita dei Fasci, Argentina” *Il Legionario* October 2, 1926.

<sup>30</sup>“Cornelio di Marzio,” *Il Legionario*, January 15, 1927.

<sup>31</sup> Cornelio di Marzio, “Relazione al Duce per la seduta del gran consiglio Fascista del 7 novembre 1927,” ACS Carte Cornelio di Marzio, b.47.

Ministry. Grandi, who had at the same time been working to consolidate all of the regime's efforts under his own authority, had grown tired of what he saw as the *Fasci italiani all'estero*'s amateurish meddling in affairs of state. Grandi was also disturbed by Di Marzio's ambitious agenda which undercut the role of the Italian Embassies abroad. Di Marzio complained privately to the Duce about Grandi's interference but to no avail.<sup>32</sup> It was a confrontation that Di Marzio could not win; Mussolini had already decided to favor Grandi and the state over Di Marzio and the party. On January 7, 1928, Mussolini dismissed Di Marzio, slighting the outgoing secretary by calling his service only "satisfactory."<sup>33</sup> In his place the Duce appointed Piero Parini to head the *Fasci italiani all'estero* which he placed under the direct authority of the Foreign Ministry.<sup>34</sup> There was no longer any ambiguity in the relationship between the Foreign Ministry and the *Fasci italiani all'estero*. Parini was a subordinate of Grandi, and reported directly to him. With the dismissal of Cornelio Di Marzio, the *Fasci italiani all'estero*, much like the Fascist Party at home after the 1926 dismissal of Roberto Farinacci, lost what was left of its autonomy and political activism. This changing of the guard also coincided with Mussolini's change in approach towards emigration discussed previously. Promoting "Italian-ness abroad" would be the order of the day.

Piero Parini, like Bastianini, was a young fascist zealot who had joined the movement early in 1920 and participated in the Black Shirt violence of 1920-1922. A savvy self-promoter, Parini understood perfectly that he was Grandi's subordinate and part of the regime's bureaucratic structure. He thrived in his role as the new Secretary-General of the *Fasci italiani all'estero*, earning the trust of the Duce and gaining greater

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<sup>32</sup> ACS, Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Riservato, b. 74.

<sup>33</sup> "Le dimissioni del dott. C. Di Marzio" ACS Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Riservato, b. 74.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

authority over the regime's efforts abroad. In 1929 he was promoted to the rank of Minister Plenipotentiary and appointed to head the *Direzione Generale degli Italiani all'Estero*; this office soon merged with the *Direzione delle Scuole All'Estero*, concentrating all of the regime's efforts abroad, outside of its diplomatic and consular missions, into the hands of one man. Having a keen sense of survival, Parini would remain in office until 1937, an unusually long duration for an official in Mussolini's Italy. He would go on to form a volunteer "legion" of Italians abroad to fight in Ethiopia and during the Second World War governed part of Italian-occupied Greece earning him the dubious distinction of becoming one of the few Italians convicted of war crimes.

When Parini assumed control of the *Direzione Generale degli Italiani all'Estero e Scuole* [DIES], the *Fasci italiani all'estero* became but one of many components to Parini's larger apparatus promoting a fascist Italian identity abroad. The newly formed DIES was a bureaucratic leviathan: it had inherited the intricate social and labor offices of the *Commissariato Generale dell'Emigrazione*, had swallowed up the *Direzione delle Scuole italiane all'estero*, and now absorbed the *Fasci italiani all'estero*. Although stripped of its autonomy, the *Fasci* played a key role in this new bureaucratic structure. The most ideologically fascist element within the DIES, Parini directed the *Fasci* to supervise and coordinate the DIES initiatives abroad in close conjunction with the Italian consulates in order to ensure that these efforts supported fascist interests. A failure as an extremist political party abroad in its first expression from 1923-1928, the *Fasci italiani all'estero* now became a vehicle for disseminating the regime's propaganda and coordinating its efforts. The *Fasci all'Estero* became an official part of the Italian

government's program abroad and was no longer an autonomous political party answerable only to Mussolini.

According to Parini, this new consolidated structure of the DIES “solved all of the disputes over competence which had poisoned the atmosphere in many of the communities that are difficult to manage.”<sup>35</sup> There were many however in the diplomatic corps who were far from thrilled with Parini's quick rise through the bureaucracy. In a confidential letter to the Duce, one Italian consul called Parini's appointment “a legal absurdity,” insisting that no one other than the Duce himself should be allowed to occupy at the same time both high-ranking state and party positions.<sup>36</sup>

In January 1928, Parini issued his first marching orders to the *Fasci italiani all'estero*. Discipline, obedience, and seriousness were the catch words of his message. Gone were the days when *Fasci* felt free to clash with consular officials and act on their own initiative as they had done under Bastianini's tenure. Defining fascism as a “Regime of authority,” Parini lashed out at Fascist Party members abroad who challenged the authority of Italian consulates and created discord among fascists in the community, declaring “we have other things to do than to waste time with this childish nonsense!”<sup>37</sup> Parini also berated those who “overvalued the *fuorusciti*,” commanding his *Fasci* not only to fight against them but more importantly to show that “Fascism is not afraid of them.” At the same time, Parini reiterated that the *Fasci* must abstain from local politics and obey the laws of host countries. In line with Mussolini's new directives, Parini emphasized the central importance of spreading the Fascist Italian identity abroad:

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<sup>35</sup> Parini to Grandi, October 7, 1930, ASMAE, Le Carte del Gabinetto del Ministro e della Segretaria Generale dal 1923 al 1943, b. 821-4.

<sup>36</sup> Consul of Cologne to Benito Mussolini, November 5, 1932, ASMAE, Le Carte del Gabinetto del Ministro e della Segretaria Generale dal 1923 al 1943, b. 819.

<sup>37</sup> Piero Parini, “Ai Camerati d'Oltralpe e d'Oltremare” *Il Legionario*, January 14, 1928.

“While living abroad among foreign races with other traditions you must be living representations of the new Italian: the Italian of the Fascist Era.”<sup>38</sup> To accomplish this task, Parini instructed his *Fasci* to educate and assist Italian emigrants in need, to teach them about the new Italy and rekindle their love of the Patria, “to win over their hearts so they may become among the best Italians.”<sup>39</sup>

Upon taking office, Parini took a special interest in Argentina. In a report to Grandi he identified Argentina, along with France, Belgium, Luxemburg, and Switzerland as among the most challenging environments for the *Fasci*: “Their work is dangerous, full of uncertainty. They must work against the sentiments of much of the local population, against the abuse of power of local authorities, and against the bloody criminal acts of the *fuorusciti*, but [these *Fasci*] are firm in their convictions and their courage is admirable.”<sup>40</sup> By 1930 many Italian anti-fascist exiles had indeed made their way to Argentina and were actively organizing the anti-fascist movement within the Republic. According to Parini the situation in Argentina was growing critical by the day. Before it was too late, he proposed that the *Fasci* redouble their efforts at winning over converts to fascism by targeting Italian youth, emphasizing educational programs, and supporting social and cultural initiatives. It was an approach Parini suggested would successfully penetrate the community without provoking open confrontations with local authorities and anti-fascists.<sup>41</sup>

In December 1931 Parini embarked on a tour of South America spending two months in Buenos Aires. At the end of his visit to Argentina, Parini unveiled his new

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Parini to Grandi, October 7, 1930, ASMAE Le Carte del Gabinetto del Ministro e della Segreteria Generale dal 1923 al 1943, b. 821-4.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

strategy for the republic. Speaking at a gathering of Italian fascists in Buenos Aires, he called on all Italians to exhibit “absolute agreement and unquestioned loyalty” to Mussolini’s regime and commanded them to intensify their educational efforts by spreading the Italian language throughout Argentina. Following the new more nationalist-cultural approach to the fascist regime’s strategy abroad, he ordered them to concentrate on “organized cultural actions” and to demonstrate “the beauty of Italian culture, the product of thirty centuries of intellectual and historical growth.”<sup>42</sup> Parini further commanded his followers to target the children of Italians living abroad, declaring that “It would be absurd, anti-national, and anti-historical for a generation of children of Italians to deliberately forget Italy and not be proud of their Italian origin.” It was up to fascist Italy’s organizations in Argentina to “bring them close to the sources of Italian culture and Italian spirituality, to capture their hearts and minds so that they do not become the degenerate brats of a noble race.”<sup>43</sup> To accomplish this goal Parini called on the *Fasci* to expand their own youth programs and supervise the schools and cultural institutes not directly under the Italian regime’s authority.<sup>44</sup>

Parini’s visit marked the final chapter in what remained of the infighting between intransigent fascists and the regime’s representatives abroad. The new leader of the intransigent faction in Argentina was Steno Bolasco, an abrasive Fascist Party commissioner who had been active in the *squadristi* violence of fascism’s early years and had supported Farinacci’s extremist faction of the Fascist Party. In 1930, Giovanni Giuriati, recently made head of the PNF, pressured Parini to allow Bolasco to travel to Buenos Aires as a special party envoy. Giuriati was no doubt looking to consolidate his

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<sup>42</sup> Piero Parini, “I problemi delle collettività italiane nel sud-america” in *Il Legionario*, February 20, 1932.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

hold over the party by sending fascist dissidents like Bolasco as far away from Rome as possible. Despite his evaluation of Bolasco as “mentally unbalanced and lacking good sense,” Parini acquiesced to Giuriati’s request. It was a decision that he would soon regret.<sup>45</sup>

Upon his arrival in Buenos Aires, Bolasco mobilized what was left of Bastianiniera activist fascists and immediately began to criticize both Valdani and Parini, declaring publicly that the *Fasci italiani all'estero* in Argentina, the Italian Embassy, and Parini’s DIES had all betrayed the fascist revolution abroad. In a bid to spread fascism throughout the republic, Bolasco did not limit his actions to the Italian community. He joined forces with the Argentine right-wing party the *Legion Cívica* and endorsed a program of violence and terror modeled after the fascist squads. He also funded a variety of local extremist fascist periodicals, not sanctioned by Valdani or the Embassy, a clear violation of Mussolini’s command to abstain from the internal politics of host nations. According to Parini, Bolasco’s agitation undermined the regime’s work in Argentina and created confusion and discord among Fascist Party members while also alarming the wider community. In March, Parini finally arranged for Bolasco to be recalled to Italy after denouncing his actions in letters to Grandi as well as to Achille Starace, the new head of the PNF.<sup>46</sup> Bolasco’s departure sent the message to other members of the party that discord would no longer be tolerated.

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<sup>45</sup> Parini to Starace March 16, 1932, Parini to Grandi March 16, 1932, ASMAE, Le Carte del Gabinetto del Ministro e della Segreteria Generale dal 1923 al 1943, b. 819.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

### **Fascism through the Media**

After Parini's appointment, fascist activities in Argentina moved from the streets to the pages of the Italian language press. The *Fasci italiani all'estero* in its early form had failed, but proved better suited to the new more official propaganda role it was to play. Key to this new agenda was influencing public opinion in the Italian community. In 1930, with the support of the Italian Embassy and under the supervision of Parini, Valdani founded the first fascist Italian language daily: *Il Mattino d'Italia*. The newspaper would become the fascists' main mouthpiece in Argentina. The Duce sent Mario Appellius, one of his most talented journalists, to Buenos Aires to serve as the editor-in-chief. Appellius had been a correspondent for Mussolini's *Il Popolo d'Italia*. According to a recent biography, Appellius was more devoted to adventure and amorous affairs than any particular ideology, but was nevertheless one of fascist Italy's most effective propagandists.<sup>47</sup> He was as eloquent in his praise of fascism's ideals as he was vicious in his invectives against its detractors. He would become the famed radio voice of the regime during the Second World War.<sup>48</sup> Under Appellius' directorship, *Il Mattino* counted 8,091 subscriptions and sold 5,800 copies on the street. While claiming to be free of outside influence, the obvious pro-fascist bias of the paper made many suspect the regime's hand in its operations. Parini and the Italian Embassy in Buenos Aires were in fact in frequent contact with Appellius, but tried to maintain the illusion that the paper was in no way connected to them. In a telegram to Rome, Ambassador Pignatti clarified the regime's actual relationship to the paper by confirming his involvement and his contact

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<sup>47</sup> Livio Sposito, *Mal d'Avventura*, ( Sperling and Kupfer Editori 2002).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

with its editor, while at the same time stressing that the “the newspaper is run by its editor, free from any influence or control of Italian government authorities.”<sup>49</sup>

In a battle over readership, the upstart *Il Mattino* was in no position to challenge the oldest and most respected community newspaper: *La Patria degli Italiani*. Founded in 1876, *La Patria* throughout most of the 1920s had strove to stay above the political fray: it supported the Italian government but did not walk the Fascist Party line. Despite pressure from the Embassy, it relied on a United States news service for all of its information on the regime and events in Italy. After Grandi and Parini began to concentrate their energies on the regime’s image in the press, more and more pressure was put on the newspaper to adopt a pro-fascist stance. This pressure had the effect of moving the paper more firmly into the anti-fascist camp. In December of 1929, an editorial in *La Patria* stressed the need for the Italian community to remain steadfast in the face of fascist pressure. In response *Il Legionario* charged the paper not only of anti-fascism but also ‘anti-Italianism.’ It declared in a full front page editorial that, “*La Patria* is no longer an Italian newspaper but an anti-fascist Argentine paper written in Italian.”<sup>50</sup> *La Patria* responded by charging that fascism divided the Italian people and that *La Patria degli Italiani* is only, “a rebel against abuse and bullying, and is for the defense of patriotic Italian emigrants and their search for the liberty that they have earned through their voluntary exile.”<sup>51</sup> *Il Legionario* responded, insisting that the paper cannot be patriotic if it is against fascism, “because Fascism is the strongest and most complete

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<sup>49</sup> Pignatti to Foreign Ministry, February 5, 1931, ASMAE, Inventario della Serie Affari Politici (1931-1945), Argentina, b. 3.

<sup>50</sup> “Parole Serene agli italiani dell’Argentina,” *Il Legionario* January 11, 1930.

<sup>51</sup> “Giudizi romani che ci riguardano,” *La Patria degli Italiani*, January 13, 1930.

expression of Italian patriotism.”<sup>52</sup> Such were the opening salvos in a two-year confrontation between members of the fascist regime and the editorship of *La Patria degli Italiani*.

*La Patria degli Italiani* struck the first blows of 1931 when it broke a scandal which threatened to discredit Valdani’s *Il Mattino d’Italia*. An anonymous informant in Italy provided the paper with evidence that Mario Appellius had abandoned his wife and young child in Alexandria and was currently living with his mistress whom he now claimed was his real wife. Reports soon followed of criminal charges awaiting him from Egyptian officials.<sup>53</sup> The Italian Embassy in Buenos Aires and the *Fasci italiani all’estero* scrambled to minimize the impact of the scandal, while ordering a top-secret investigation into who leaked the information. They concluded that the informant was actually a prominent fascist journalist, Ugo Imperatori, who had apparently leaked the story to get revenge after Appellius had refused to come to work for him. Just as more and more voices began to call for Appellius’ resignation, Parini and Italian Ambassador Pignatti struck back at *La Patria*. In a move which stunned the Italian community in Argentina, the *Fasci italiani all’estero*, through Valdani and other private investors, bought out *La Patria*’s creditors taking control of the paper only to shut its offices down and channel the assets into *Il Mattino*.<sup>54</sup> To Parini this was the resounding victory that he had been hoping for, a victory which he of course hastened to take all the credit. In reporting the affair to the Duce, Parini stressed that, “it was *only* thanks to the tenacious and cunning actions the Ministry, including the *Fasci italiani all’estero*, that this battle

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<sup>52</sup> “Peccati di orgoglio,” *Il Legionario* January 25, 1930.

<sup>53</sup> Telegrams from Pignatti to the Foreign Ministry from July through December 1931, ASMAE, Affari Politici (1931-1945), Argentina, b. 3.

<sup>54</sup> Pignatti to Foreign Ministry, December 16, 1931, ASMAE, Affari Politici (1931-1945), Argentina, b. 3.

was won.”<sup>55</sup> Though no blood was spilled, it was the symbolic death of the community’s oldest and most trusted voice. It was a pyrrhic victory which in the end damaged rather than improved the regime’s image within the community. All could see the underhanded tactics that the fascists had resorted to in order to silence an opponent who had refused to be intimidated.<sup>56</sup>

After their take down of *La Patria*, Ambassador Pignatti and Parini quickly lost patience with *Il Mattino*’s now scandalized editor. They insisted that he work more closely with them in disseminating fascist propaganda. Appelius resisted, exploiting the ambiguous relationship between the newspaper and the regime to assert his creative autonomy. His resistance to pressure from Parini, along with the deficit the newspaper was running, and the highly publicized scandals around his personal affairs, soon led to his dismissal in 1932.<sup>57</sup> In March of the following year, Rome sent Mario Intaglietta to serve as the new editor-in-chief. Of “irreproachable moral character” to some and “an adventurer without scruples” to others, Intaglietta was an accomplished propagandist for the regime having worked for a number of fascist journals, including eight years for *Gazzetta d’Italia*.<sup>58</sup> He was sent to Buenos Aires by the Duce himself, who upon his departure showered him with praise and encouragement.<sup>59</sup>

Upon taking over the editorship, Intaglietta began the wholesale reorganization of the fascist daily. In his words, he “rapidly and violently removed with surgical precision

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<sup>55</sup> Parini to Pellegrino Ghighi November 19, 1931 ASMAE Le Carte del Gabinetto del Ministro e della Segreteria Generale dal 1923 al 1943, b. 821-4.

<sup>56</sup> The perspective of the Italian community on this affair will be explored in detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>57</sup> Italian Embassy in Buenos Aires to Parini, August 31, 1932, ASMAE, Affari Politici (1931-1945), Argentina, b. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Italian Ambassador to Foreign Ministry, December 19, 1944, ASAME, Inventario della Serie Affari Politici (1931-1945), Argentina, b. 40.

<sup>59</sup> Michele Intaglietta to Vittorio Valdani, Buenos Aires March 30, 1934, ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 4.

all of the dishonest and dubiously committed personnel, while setting a serious and reserved tone so that everyone understood the system had changed.’<sup>60</sup> Aware that *Il Mattino* was intended to be much more than simply an Italian language newspaper, he wrote that “as the most important fascist daily abroad it has a *political and propagandistic function* that must not be forgotten for even an instant.” Intaglietta further explained that the newspaper “must be an example of Italy’s great journalistic tradition as well as a reflection of fascism’s fundamental directives.”<sup>61</sup> To “accentuate the paper’s fascist tone,” *Il Mattino* reported on the accomplishments of the fascist regime in Italy filtered through the Italian Ministry of Propaganda, responded to fascism’s detractors in Argentina, and ‘anonymously’ collaborated with Argentine periodicals sympathetic to the movement.<sup>62</sup>

To further propagandize the regime, Intaglietta sponsored a referendum of support for the Duce through *Il Mattino*. The newspaper collected signatures from Italian emigrants throughout the region in order to demonstrate that the Italians of Latin America were fully behind the Duce. In March of 1934, he claimed to have obtained over 100,000 signatures from all over Latin America. There is, however, no way to independently verify these figures. In a similar stunt to involve the community in the newspaper’s propaganda, Intaglietta asked his readers to clip and answer a survey which asked: “What would you say if you had the chance to speak to the Duce?” In its later investigation of fascist activities, the Argentine government recorded and saved over two hundred of these individual responses to *Il Mattino*’s query, a sign that members of the community did indeed participate in the paper’s campaign although probably not on the scale that

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

Intaglietta had claimed.<sup>63</sup> Under Intaglietta's stewardship, the functioning of the newspaper had changed and its editorship after 1933 was even more closely aligned to the regime's agenda abroad. Circulation also increased to 25,000 copies.<sup>64</sup> *Il Mattino* continued on throughout the 1930s with the added task of defending Italy's foreign policy in Ethiopia and Spain and would continue on into the war years backing the Axis war effort. Even after the fall of Mussolini in 1943, Intaglietta, now funded by the German Embassy, voiced ever more stridently a totalitarian fascist agenda.<sup>65</sup>

In 1934, just one year after he had taken over as editor of *Il Mattino*, Intaglietta broadened the scope of his propaganda to influence members of the wider Argentine public. During that year he inaugurated the *Roma Press*, a news service which provided daily information from the Italian Embassy's telegraph, from its own correspondents in Rome, and later from the Ministry of Popular Culture. The news wire and a number of articles were written in Spanish and intended to serve not only the newspapers in Argentina but also those of Uruguay, Chile, Paraguay, and Bolivia. Once established Intaglietta received direct financial support from the Italian government in the form of a 2,000 lire per month subsidy delivered through the Italian Embassy, and enjoyed the "unconditional support" of Galeazzo Ciano, then Secretary of the Press and Propaganda.<sup>66</sup> Its director, Tommaso Milani, reported to Rome that the mission of the *Roma Press* was to "disseminate the new principles of the Fascist doctrine and

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<sup>63</sup> Comision Investigadora de Actividades Antiargentinas, Archivo del Congreso de la Nacion (ACN) Caja, 22.3-23.2, legajo 15. An interesting analysis of these responses was done by Camilla Cattarulla in her article, "Cosa direste a Mussolini se aveste occasione di parlargli?: un inchiesta de "Il Mattino d'Italia," in Eugenia Scarzanella ed. *Fascisti in Sud-America* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2005).

<sup>64</sup> 1938 *Il Mattino* circulation numbers according to Italian Embassy in Buenos Aires, ASMAE Affari Politici, Argentina, b. 23.

<sup>65</sup> Italian Ambassador to Foreign Ministry, December 19, 1944, ASAME, Inventario della Serie Affari Politici (1931-1945), Argentina, b. 40.

<sup>66</sup> Italian Embassy Buenos Aires to Foreign Ministry, April 10, 1934, ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 4.

corporatism, as well as to make known the New Italy in all of its original thoughts and actions.”<sup>67</sup> From 1935 on its priority became supporting the Italian government’s war in Ethiopia and responding to its condemnation by the League of Nations, as foreign affairs monopolized its coverage.<sup>68</sup>

In its first year in operation, all of the major right-wing nationalist papers in Argentina subscribed to the *Roma Press* information service, most prominently among them *El Crisol*, *La Fronde*, *La Bandera Argentina*, and *El Pueblo*. The ideological affinities of these newspapers’ readership held out the possibility of greater collaboration between the movements they represented and the regime; however, their readership was limited. In April 1934, *La Razón*, a mainstream conservative daily newspaper also subscribed, enabling the fascist news service the possibility of reaching a much wider readership. Other various regional papers also joined in, totaling fifteen in all. Throughout the 1930s the *Roma Press* was distributing on average 3,000 articles, news reports, and photographs per trimester.<sup>69</sup> The *Roma Press* also sponsored radio transmissions buying air time from Radio Excelsior. It broadcasted news from Italy in both Italian and Spanish on a daily basis as well as transmitted a variety of Italian musical and cultural programming on the weekend.<sup>70</sup>

In April of 1935, news and propaganda services from the Nazi regime in Germany began to arrive on Argentina’s shores threatening the *Roma Press*’s sway over

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<sup>67</sup> Tommaso Milani to Eugenio Coselschi, January 2, 1935, ACS, Minculpop, Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 4.

<sup>68</sup> “Elenco degli articoli preparati da questa direzione generale in lingua spanuola e pubblicati nella stampa sud-americana, per intessamento della ‘Roma Press,’ durante el mes di gennaio” ACS, Minculpop, Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 4.

<sup>69</sup> Milani, “Relazione della Roma Press per il trimestre luglio-agosto-settembre, October 1936, ACS, Minculpop, Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 4.

<sup>70</sup> Milani to Ciano, April 12, 1934, ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 4.

Argentine right-wing movements. A rival German press agency in its first month of operation quickly took over the information services of three of *Roma Press*'s clients: *El Orden*, *Crisol*, and *Bandera Argentina*, others made selective use of both agencies.<sup>71</sup> Ciano, without any sense of irony, was outraged by the fact that "a German propaganda organization, opportunistically masquerading as an international press agency, unleashed a general offensive to incorporate the newspapers that until now have been associated with the *Roma Press* into the orbit of Nazism and Germanism."<sup>72</sup> The German initiative was in fact no different from the *Roma Press*, with the exception that it was better funded and better organized. And while the German community was much smaller than the Italian in size, the Germans were more successful at attracting the far-right nationalist press in Argentina. By May the shock subsided and Ambassador Arlotta reported that while the *Roma Press* had indeed lost its subscribers on the far right, it maintained its hold over the more widely distributed mainstream press.

No sooner had the *Roma Press* survived the German threat than a new rival emerged, this time a foe they knew all too well: the anti-fascists. In 1936 Italian anti-fascists founded their own news service in Argentina: the *Italpress*. With its head office in Buenos Aires, and correspondents operating out of Paris, the new press agency not only challenged fascist Italy's control over information, it also confused many Latin American subscribers who mistakenly thought that the *Italpress* had replaced the *Roma Press* as the fascist regime's press agency in the region.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Milani to Ciano, April 3, 1935, ACS, Minculpop, Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 6.

<sup>72</sup> Ciano to Italian Embassy in Buenos Aires, April 16, 1935, ACS, Minculpop, Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 6.

<sup>73</sup> Milani to Ministry of Press and Propaganda, December 15, 1936.

From 1936 onward interest in the *Roma Press* news services waned: not however because of the efforts of their Nazi rivals or their anti-fascist nemesis, but instead because of changing world events. It was the time of the Spanish Civil War, and the Argentine Spanish-speaking public, many of whom had family members and ancestral roots in Spain, were more preoccupied by Franco's offensive and less interested in Italy's Ethiopian campaign or the achievements of the fascist state. The *Roma Press*, especially after Mussolini's intervention in the civil war, made a clumsy effort to report on events in Spain but proved less reliable than other news services.<sup>74</sup> Many Argentines preferred instead to rely on the news reports from the Spanish Republic or Franco's Nationalist camp, and on this issue they were more likely to trust what they considered to be the more objective French and British news services over those from Italy. By the end of the 1930s, on the recommendation the Italian Embassy in Argentina, the regime formed its own government press agency, which made use of the *Stefani* news wire and took over the *Roma Press*'s offices.<sup>75</sup>

In addition to his newspaper and its news service subsidiary, Intaglietta was also well aware of the importance of film in propagandizing the regime. To that end, he organized the distribution of LUCE newsreels and documentaries throughout Argentina during the 1930s. These films were projected in local Italian consulates, *Fasci* meeting halls, and *Dopolavoro* centers. Intaglietta also negotiated contracts to have the newsreels projected in commercial Argentine theaters. This effort was however by- and-large unsuccessful since LUCE could not compete with Hollywood powerhouses Fox, Metro,

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<sup>74</sup> Milani, "Relazione della Roma Press per il trimestre luglio-agosto-settembre, October 1936, ACS, Minculpop, Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 4.

<sup>75</sup> Ministry of Popular Culture, "Appunto per la direzione generale per la stampa all'estero" August 26, 1937, ACS, Minculpop, Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 8.

and Paramount, who distributed weekly Movietone newsreels free of charge as part of their film packages.<sup>76</sup>

### **Fascist Italy's Cultural Organizations in Argentina**

In addition to influencing foreign public opinion through the media, Parini also relied on two of fascist Italy's most ambitious social and cultural organizations: the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*, and the *Opera Nazionale Balilla*. Founded in 1925 the *Dopolavoro* was a government run after work program, whose mission statement was to “improve the daily domestic and family life of the Italian laborer” through recreational activities, physical fitness and sports; and evening adult education programs, which included lectures, readings and film screenings.<sup>77</sup> Mussolini envisioned an even broader propagandistic role for the *Dopolavoro* abroad:

I think that this work of education and uplifting would also be valuable to our masses of emigrant laborers. In addition to the physical, moral, and intellectual improvement of our emigrants, which serve our national program of valorizing the emigrant, the *Dopolavoro* can also prevent our communities in foreign nations from falling into political subversion.<sup>78</sup>

It was in short an activity that would promote the “moral and patriotic” well-being of the emigrant living in different countries throughout the world.<sup>79</sup> The *Dopolavoro all'Estero*'s founding charter also emphasized the importance of using the initiative to promote the fascist regime by instilling love for the Patria. In addition to providing recreational and cultural events, it added the task of spreading “patriotic propaganda to

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<sup>76</sup> Direzione generale per i servizi della propaganda to LUCE, March 8, 1938, ACS, Minculpop, Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 8.

<sup>77</sup> Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro, *Scopi ed Organizzazione, Bollettino Ufficiale* (January 1, 1927).

<sup>78</sup> Mussolini to foreign embassies, November 30, 1926, ASMAE Archivio Scuole (1923-1928) b. 634.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

keep alive the emigrants' affection for the mother Patria: to remember its history and be aware of its future."<sup>80</sup>

Under the supervision of the Italian consulates, local fascist sections established *Dopolavoro* centers throughout Argentina. Its activities seemed to be one of the few successful initiatives associated with the *Fasci italiani all'estero*. This initiative especially took off under Parini's supervision. During the 1930s requests for Italian books, feature films from Italy, Luce newsreels and other propaganda materials flooded the Secretary-General's office and later the Ministry of Popular Culture, as did newspaper clippings and reports of successful lecture series on Italian culture and the Fascist regime.<sup>81</sup> According to historians Marco Pluviano and Irene Guerrini, the *Dopolavoro* enjoyed more success than other fascist initiatives in Latin America thanks to its more subtle political agenda and the variety of its social-cultural programs.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, even the most pessimistic reports on the experiences of *Fasci italiani all'estero* in Argentina acknowledged the positive work of the *Dopolavoro* and recommended that it expand its activities.<sup>83</sup>

"I hear the thundering shout of our young Fascists as a challenge to the future. That shout contains a certainty: in that shout vibrates the soul of the great Italian people."<sup>84</sup> Mussolini's first national effort targeting youth was the Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB). Founded in 1926 it was the youth section of the PNF. The ONB recruited

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<sup>80</sup> "Le Providence del regime per gli Italiani emigrati: Il dopolavoro all'Estero," *Il legionario*, March 22, 1930.

<sup>81</sup> See for example Luigi Bakunin, Secretary of the Fasci of Cordoba to the Secretary General, June 8, 1935 ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935), b. 779.

<sup>82</sup> Marco Pluviano and Irene Guerrini, "L'Opera nazionale dopolavoro in sud america" in *Studi Emigrazione*, 1995, 32 (119), 518-537.

<sup>83</sup> Pignatti to the Foreign Ministry, January 23, 1931 ASMAE Affari Politici (1931-1945), Argentina, b. 3. There are also numerous reports on *Dopolavoro* events in the sections of *Il Legionario*.

<sup>84</sup> Mussolini "Tempo di giovinezza," in *La Nuova Italia* (New York, 1939).

young children and was designed to inculcate fascist ideas in the next generation of Italians through physical fitness, and pre-military training. After school and while attending Balilla summer camps, children learned to obey orders, march in step, and prepare for military life. This youth organization was later reorganized into the *Gioventù Italiana del Littorio*, which was comprised of three groups: the Balilla: boys ages 6-12, the *Avanguardisti* for adolescent boys aged 13-17, and the *Piccole Italiane* for girls. The ten rules or commandments of the *Gioventù italiana del Littorio* included: “to give your body and soul to the country and to serve Mussolini without questioning” as well as “to thank God every day that He has made you an Italian and a Fascist.”<sup>85</sup> Over time, the regime’s youth organizations were incorporated into the Italian national school system and exported abroad.

Parini recognized that were fascism’s ambitious project of redefining national identity abroad to have any hope of success, it would have to instill in the next generation of children born outside of Italy both the beliefs and values of the regime along with love and pride for the new Italy. Just as the regime emphasized indoctrinating its youth at home, influencing the children of emigrants was fundamental to its attempts at reshaping Italian identity. In November of 1928, Mussolini ordered Italian representatives abroad to pay special attention to the Italian youth movement, directing them to assist the *Fasci italiani all'estero* in organizing *Balilla* sections and youth programs.<sup>86</sup> In a circular to consular officials, Parini likewise stressed the pressing need to organize Italian youth abroad “to keep alive their connection to Italy and prevent them from falling prey to the powerful foreign influences around them.” Aware of the negative reactions that the *Fasci*

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<sup>85</sup> “Il decalogo dei giovani Fascisti” in *Nuova Italia*.

<sup>86</sup> Mussolini to Italian Embassies, November 5, 1928, ASMAE, Le Carte del Gabinetto del Ministro e della Segreteria Generale dal 1923 al 1943, b. 821-4.

*italiani all'estero* had provoked by wearing their black shirts in public, Parini instructed the foreign sections of *Balilla* to choose a slightly different style uniform and in some cases to even go by a different name, such as “Young Explorers,” rather than *Balilla*. He made clear however that this was only for show, explaining that “in substance these societies are not and must not be anything other than genuine sections of the *Opera Nazionale Balilla*.” It was a thin camouflage, just enough to avoid being shut down by the local authorities while at the same time making fascist Italy’s presence in foreign nations unmistakable.<sup>87</sup> To increase membership in the *Balilla*, members of the local *Fasci* were required to register their children, and all children in Italian schools abroad, both those run by the government and those subsidized by the regime were also required to sign up.<sup>88</sup> Throughout the 1930s *Balilla* members figured prominently in the public events and ceremonies of the *Fasci italiani all'estero* and *Dopolavoro* in Argentina. Whether serving as the color guard or leading the audience in *Giovinezza*, *Balilla* activities were often mentioned in local newspapers and reports to Rome.

In 1932, Parini began a summer camp program for foreign-born Italian children enrolled in the *Balilla*. Every year around 4,000 children spent their summer vacation in Fascist summer camps in Italy. At the most famous of these camps: Campo Mussolini, children spent the summer months fraternizing and training with Italian sections of the *Balilla*, all the while being indoctrinated in the values of the fascist regime.<sup>89</sup> In full fascist regalia the summer camps were disturbingly reminiscent of military basic training: as young *Balilla* buglers sounded the call to attention and *Avanguardisti* trained with rifle

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<sup>87</sup> Grandi to Mussolini, Parini to Italian Embassies and *Balilla*, undated 1932 ASMAE Le Carte del Gabinetto del Ministro e della Segretaria Generale dal 1923 al 1943, b. 821-4.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Parini, “Appunto per S.E. Capo del Governo,” August 26, 1934, ASMAE Le Carte del Gabinetto del Ministro e della Segretaria Generale dal 1923 al 1943, b. 820.

and bayonet.<sup>90</sup> Their vacation ended with a September tour of Rome and the modern architectural marvels of fascist Italy. The highlight of the trip was an audience with the Duce himself at Palazzo Venezia. Pictures from these events show the young “Italians Abroad” parading in uniform down the Via Imperiale and as captivated crowds for one of Il Duce’s typically animated speeches.<sup>91</sup> Though the actual numbers of participants were relatively modest, the summer programs true value to the regime was as a propaganda device: photos from the summer camps figured prominently in all fascist publications abroad, not only monopolizing *Il Legionario*’s summer issues, but also finding their way into the Italian emigrant presses as well as mainstream foreign newspapers.

Few of the fascist youths in Argentina attended these much publicized summer camps for the simple reason that Italy’s summer was Argentina’s winter, and children were still in school. Since these children could not come to the Italian summer camps, the Italian summer camps came to them. In 1933 the Italian Consulate in Cordoba founded fascist Italy’s first ever summer camp in South America. In January and February, one-hundred children of Italian descent attended the camp, which was located in the sierras around Cordoba. According to all reports the experiment was a success, and the Italian ambassador, upon inspecting the camp, recommended that each of the Italian consulates in Argentina found one of their own.<sup>92</sup> The idea caught on and by 1935 three camps were fully operational in Argentina located in Cordoba, Mendoza, and Bahia Blanca, and others were soon established in neighboring Uruguay and Brazil. The activities of the camps followed the exact same guidelines as those in Italy, though as had been

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<sup>90</sup> *Il Legionario* photos 1936-1939.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Antonio Garaviglia to Mussolini, November 16, 1933 and “Appunto per il Gabinetto di SE Ministro” January 9, 1934, ASMAE, Le Carte del Gabinetto del Ministro e della Segreteria Generale dal 1923 al 1943, b. 820.

prescribed, the children wore slightly different uniforms. Photos from the camps show students in military formation, sounding roll call, marching in step, and giving the fascist salute to the Italian flag.<sup>93</sup> In its April 1935 issue, *Il Legionario* featured a full length glossy exposés of the camps and their activities, boasting that they instilled in their young members, fascist discipline, obedience, martial valor, and love of the Patria. For it was only thanks to the fascist regime that, “Italy which is so far away on a map is now so close to the children’s hearts.” It was metaphorically as if “one of Italy’s borders came alive and miraculously flew over the ocean to the distant lands of Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil, allowing young children the chance to breathe in Italian air and feel its spirit.”<sup>94</sup>

On 18 August 1937, thirty–seven Italian children, members of the fascist *Avanguardisti* and *Piccole Italiane*, disembarked in Buenos Aires from the ship “Augustus.” It was their last stop on a South American propaganda cruise organized by the DIES, and the high water mark of fascist Italy’s youth propaganda in the South American republic. Describing the large cheering crowds of both Argentines and Italians who came to meet the *Avanguardisti*, the Italian ambassador reported that the experience “has left Argentines as well as our compatriots the most authentic image of the renewed Italy.”<sup>95</sup> Ten years earlier such a cruise had not been possible. Martin Franklin, the Italian ambassador in 1927, had voiced his fears of bad press, Argentine government opposition, and possibly violent public protest.<sup>96</sup> The 1937 visit was therefore a small victory for the

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<sup>93</sup> “Le Colonie Estive Italiane nel Sud-America” *Il Legionario*, April, 15, 1935.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Martin to Foreign Ministry, ASMAE, Affari Politici (1919-930) b.807.

regime and an indication that much had changed from the street brawls of the early 1920s.

The fascist organizations operating in Argentina gained an important ally in their work when the regime back in Rome took over the *Società Nazionale 'Dante Alighieri.'* Founded in 1889, the society's goals were to preserve Italian culture and language abroad, and support irredentism. By the time Mussolini came to power, the '*Dante Alighieri*' was already the largest Italian initiative abroad. Thousands of students attended its cultural and language courses, and countless more made use of their extensive Italian language library collections. By 1933, the '*Dante Alighieri*' counted 174 committees abroad, with over 126,000 members and 304,050 participants in their programs.<sup>97</sup> With the promotion Italian identity central to its mission statement, the usefulness of the society to the fascist regime was readily apparent. In 1933, the regime stripped away its autonomy turning it into yet another vehicle to promote the fascist regime's programs.<sup>98</sup> New clauses were added to the society's statutes explicitly linking their promoting of Italian identity to the fascist cause. Article 1 of its new statute declared that, "The *Società Nazionale Dante Alighieri*'s mission is to promote and defend the Italian language and culture outside of the Kingdom and to hold high feelings of Italian identity in accordance with the spirit of the Fascist Revolution."<sup>99</sup> Article 8 placed members of the fascist regime on the society's governing body, including the director of the DIES, and representatives of the PNF, Balilla, and Dopolavoro.

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<sup>97</sup> Felicioni to Mussolini, "Relazione del Presidente della Società Nazionale 'Dante Alighieri'" January 1934, ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare [Minculpop], Gabinetto b. 91.

<sup>98</sup> Beatrice Pisa, *Nazione and Politica nella Società 'Dante Alighieri'* (Bonacci Editore: Roma, 1995) 435.

<sup>99</sup> "Il Nuovo Statuto della Società Nazionale 'Dante Alighieri' *Le Pagine della Dante*, (November – December, 1933).

Mussolini chose Felice Felicioni to head the revamped '*Dante Alighieri*.' Felicioni, a longtime associate of Il Duce and a lawyer by profession, had joined the Fascist Party in 1920 and was the head of the *Fascio* in Perugia during the party's violent rise to power. Before his appointment he had served on the PNF National Committee and was a fascist delegate to the Chamber of Deputies. While president of the '*Dante Alighieri*,' Felicioni worked closely with the Ministry of Popular Culture to, in his words, "spread the culture and ideals of the Fascist Revolution throughout the world."<sup>100</sup> He also collaborated with the Ministry of Press and Propaganda and Italian diplomatic authorities abroad, and provided Mussolini with annual reports of his society's activities.<sup>101</sup>

Parini always looking after his own self-advancement saw the '*Dante Alighieri*' as a rival rather than an ally. Before its incorporation into the fascist regime, Parini had attempted to block many of its efforts, claiming that all activities abroad were the sole responsibility of the DIES. When the regime took over the '*Dante*,' Parini had hoped that he would be named the new president and that it would be incorporated into his DIES. No doubt disappointed by the appointment of Felicioni, Parini tried to undermine and discredit him. In a letter to Ciano, by then the Foreign Minister, Parini called the work of the '*Dante*' a "bluff," its directives "inconsistent," and its committee members the "most anti-cultural people imaginable."<sup>102</sup> Felicioni responded in kind insisting in a letter to Mussolini that Parini had been given a dangerous amount of authority over fascist activities abroad and recommended that he be removed from at least one of his

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<sup>100</sup> Felicioni to Pavolini, ACS Minculpop, Gabinetto, b. 91.

<sup>101</sup> There are a number of letters by Felicioni which indicate this collaboration in ACS, Minculpop, Gabinetto b. 91.

<sup>102</sup> Parini to Undersecretary of State, September 28, 1933 ASMAE, Le Carte del Gabinetto del Ministero e della Segreteria generale dal 1923 al 1943, 820; and Parini to the Consul in Rosario di Santa Fe, December 14, 1934 ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935) b. 780.

positions.<sup>103</sup> Throughout the 1930s both vied for the favor of the Duce, taking credit for each other's accomplishments. Their power struggle, reminiscent of the earlier internecine fights between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the *Fasci italiani all'estero*, is a telling example of the competing ambitions and personal agendas that characterized the fascist power structure.

Within Argentina, the '*Dante Alighieri*' had eight centers of activity, operated nine Italian language schools, and housed a 20,000-volume Italian language library in Buenos Aires. In addition to their courses, the society organized trips to Italy, arranged classical music and opera concerts, and held art exhibitions. It also invited prominent Italian figures to give a series of lectures in their halls. In 1933, for example, Massimo Bontempelli lectured on Italian history and literature, and Gino Arias on fascist law and economics.<sup>104</sup> Not all of the Dante's members in Argentina were happy with the new fascist orientation of their society. Many left in protest and forming their own rival "Nuova Società Dante Alighieri."<sup>105</sup> During the late 1930s, much to the frustration of the regime, the "Nuova Dante" competed against and often undermined or discredited the activities of the official society in Argentina.<sup>106</sup>

### **The *Scuole italiane all'estero***

In the late 1930s all of the regime's aforementioned organizations and initiatives found some form of expression in the *Scuole italiane all'estero*, the Italian school system

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<sup>103</sup> Felicioni to Mussolini, Archivio Centrale Dello Stato [ACS] Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Riservata.

<sup>104</sup> Felicioni to Mussolini, "Relazione del Presidente della Società Nazionale 'Dante Alighieri'" January 1934, ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare [Minculpop], Gabinetto b. 91.

<sup>105</sup> Letter of Torquato di Tela, April 23, 1937, ASMAE, Inventario degli Archivi Microfilmati delle associazioni italiane in Argentina, Ruolo 89.

<sup>106</sup> The work of the Nuova Dante Alighieri will be examined in depth in Chapter 5.

abroad. In a 1932 letter to Mussolini, Parini reported that, “The *Scuole italiane all'estero* are without a doubt the most powerful and effective instrument for the defense of Italian-ness abroad and the diffusion of our language in foreign countries.” Its headquarters located in Rome, with instructional material and curriculums provided directly through the Italian consulates, the *Scuole italiane all'estero* was a shadow school system often operating outside of its host nations’ supervision. With a total of over 120,000 students and a budget by 1939 of over 67 million lire, the schools abroad were one of the regime’s most ambitious initiatives outside of Italy. Within Argentina, they were more than simply another organization taken over by the regime, but were also the central point of intersection for its other initiatives. These schools were designed as alternatives to the primary schools of the host nations. Many of these schools were organized and run by members of the local Fascist Party sections, others were operated by the ‘Dante Alighieri,’ all of the school children were enrolled in the ONB, and *Dopolavoro* events made use of the classrooms after school. Once Parini assumed directorship of the schools, he would turn them into the centerpiece of all of the regime’s initiatives abroad. The importance of the regime’s propaganda through the schools was also not lost on Argentine officials, for it was this initiative that would ultimately alarm the Argentine government and lead to the suppression of many of the fascist activities.<sup>107</sup> A close examination of the schools’ functioning, and their experiences in Argentina is therefore essential to understanding fascist Italy’s overall effort in Argentina. In the end, fascism’s attempts to export its version of Italian identity would succeed or fail in the classrooms of these schools.

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<sup>107</sup> I mention the Argentine government’s reaction here to illustrate the importance of the schools. I examine the issue of the Argentina’s response to the schools and the regimes other initiatives at length in Chapter 6.

The *Scuole italiane all'estero* were founded by Francesco Crispi in 1889 with the mission to “promote the diffusion abroad of the Italian language and the education and instruction of Italian emigrant communities by maintaining government schools abroad and subsidizing other academic institutes not directly dependent on the government.”<sup>108</sup> Under the authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and run by a central committee appointed by parliament, the schools followed the pedagogical guidelines of Italian public schools within the kingdom with a focus on basic literacy.<sup>109</sup> In 1923 Mussolini identified the *Scuole italiane all'estero* as a subject of “special importance.” In a circular sent to the Italian embassies he declared “we must with all of our energy ensure the existence and efficiency of our Italian schools abroad, because as shining lights of Italian-ness, they defend and conserve the national character among our emigrants.”<sup>110</sup> The new underlying goal of the schools was also without a doubt the promotion of Fascism’s ideology. Evidence of this comes from confidential reports sent to Rome from consular officials. In response to an inquiry on the possible creation of a scholastic and cultural center in Bahia Blanca, the Italian Consul of La Plata candidly explained “An institution with the appearance of Italian and Argentine membership and under the pretext of a cultural exchange would enable us to attract the children of our emigrants. It would then be possible to accomplish an educational mission beyond mere didactics by forming a ‘breeding ground’ for youths to later place in Fascist Sections.”<sup>111</sup> This political agenda

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<sup>108</sup> Legge Crispi “Regio Decreto [RD] 8 dicembre 1889, n. 6566,” *Raccolta Ufficiale delle Leggi e dei Decreti Del Regno d’Italia*, (Roma: Regia Tipografia, 1889), 4941-4991.

<sup>109</sup> “Regolamento,” RD. n.6566.

<sup>110</sup> Benito Mussolini to Ambassadors and Agents Abroad, “Circolare n. 94, Roma, December 9, 1923, Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri [ASMAE], Archivio Scuole (1923-1929), busta, 634.

<sup>111</sup> Romolo Bertuccioli, Consul in La Plata, February 12, 1930, ASMAE Archivio Scuole (1929-1935) b. 780.

along with promoting Italian language and culture from an early date focused the regime's attention on the schools abroad.

Beginning in 1923 new fascist government decrees reorganized the schools. Teachers were now required to swear an oath pledging “to instill in their students love for our Country, and deep devotion to the King and to the Patria’s institutions.”<sup>112</sup> The historian Giorgio Floriano, who analyzed at length all of the laws and decrees related to the schools abroad, asserts that the line the “Patria’s institutions” in the new oath was quite significant. Requiring loyalty to the state’s institutions then in the process of being infiltrated by the fascists, implied by extension loyalty to the emerging fascist regime.<sup>113</sup> Mussolini also placed all of the system’s authority in the hands of a Rome-based Director-General who was answerable only to the Foreign Minister.<sup>114</sup> In a *Gerarchia* article, Ciro Trabalza, the Director-General of schools from 1923 to 1929, made clear the new turn the schools had taken, defining as its new mission “To preserve and defend the national character of our emigrants across the ocean. And expand our nation’s culture.”<sup>115</sup> As was happening in many other facets of government during the 1920s, Fascist politicians found it convenient to blame lack of will and commitment on the part of the Liberal regime for the schools’ perceived failures. For rather than a pedagogical or technical problem, it was “essentially and above all else a problem of conscience, will, and national pride within the Government, the Country and the Colonies.”<sup>116</sup> In other

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<sup>112</sup> D.L. April 19, 1923, n.932.

<sup>113</sup> Giorgio Floriano, *Scuole italiane all'estero: cento anni di storia* (Roma: Armando Editore, 1974).

<sup>114</sup> RD 933 April 19, 1923 and RD 1481 June 17, 1923.

<sup>115</sup> Ciro Trabalza, *Gerarchia*, November 11, 1923.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

words, with a dose of Fascist patriotic fervor and force of will, the new Italian regime could succeed where the old had failed.

Although the schools abroad did enjoy some success in other parts of the world, most notably within North Africa, the case of Argentina was more troubling for the regime. The reports on the conditions of the schools in Argentina which flooded the now centralized *Direzione Generale delle Scuole all'Estero* soon dampened much of the regime's early enthusiasm. In addition to the all too common complaint over insufficient funding, consular officials and leaders of Italian organizations in Argentina stressed the need for greater supervision and more efficient dispersal of subsidies. Unlike the schools in North Africa which were run directly by the Italian government through their consulates, most of the schools in Argentina were subsidized schools, run by the Italian associations, the *Società Nazionale 'Dante Alighieri,'* or Catholic religious orders. These schools were supervised but not directly controlled by the Italian consulates in Argentina, making difficult to ensure that the regime's new directives were being followed.

According to the Italian Consul in Cordoba "there are many schools in this consular district, but very few that do more than just use the word 'Italian' in their name."<sup>117</sup> In a similar vein, the Italian Consul in Rosario wrote "I watch with justifiable worry the scholastic issue in general in Argentina, but my other duties which overwhelm me with work prevent me from keeping these schools under closer supervision."<sup>118</sup> Members of the community also noted the inability of consular officials to supervise the schools well, with one remarking, "the consular agents over-whelmed with urgent diplomatic affairs cannot find the time and do not always have the required competence to oversee, direct,

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<sup>117</sup> R. Consul, Cordoba to Foreign Minister, March 6, 1930, ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935), b. 779.

<sup>118</sup> Bruno Gemelli, Italian Consul Rosario di Santa Fe, "Relazione scuole provincia di Santa Fe 1928." July 13, 1929, ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935), b.780.

and administrate scientifically and conscientiously, these scholastic institutions.”<sup>119</sup>

Consular officials were further frustrated by their inability to influence the functioning of unsubsidized Italian schools, as one remarked “a new Italian subsidy would give me the opportunity and in a way the *right* to make frequent visits to the schools to ensure that the programs are developed properly.”<sup>120</sup>

Members of the local *Fasci* and DIES officials in Rome blamed the consular officials themselves for the schools’ woes. They saw the diplomatic corps as a remnant of the liberal regime, not fully committed to the new fascist ideological program abroad. The director of personnel for the schools complained, “There are consular agents who have thirty years of uninterrupted service in the Americas—How could they possibly represent the Italy of Vittorio Veneto and Mussolini, these poor devils who are part of the Italy when from Mantua to Udine there was not even enough polenta for people to eat in the winter.”<sup>121</sup> Whatever the reasons, distance, lack of funding, overburden, incompetence, or lack of commitment, all agreed that the schools were not promoting the new agenda set forth by the Fascist ‘revolution.’

Italian consuls and fascist officials were particularly bothered by the subsidized schools run by Catholic religious orders. In Argentina, nearly half of the schools offering courses in Italian language and culture were run by the Salesian Society and its sister order, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Founded by John Bosco in 1857, the order emphasized works of charity for poor and abandoned children as well as the education of young boys for a life in the priesthood. The Salesian Society established

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<sup>119</sup> Executive Committee of Pro-Schola Buenos Aires to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 4, 1922, ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1923-1928), b. 634.

<sup>120</sup> Consul in Cordoba to Foreign Minister, March 6, 1930, ASMAE Archivio Scuole (1929-1935), b. 779.

<sup>121</sup> Tonucci to Parini, “Relazione del Ufficio Personale” Roma, March 29, 1932, ASMAE Archivio Scuole (1929-1935), b. 776).

schools in Argentina as early as 1876 and was one of the Catholic Church's most influential orders among Italian immigrants in Argentina. While most of these schools were in fact run by priests of Italian origin and although Italian culture and language instruction were emphasized, they clearly had a different mission and ideological agenda. Just as the regime was negotiating compromises with the Catholic Church at home, it was forced to rely in part on this network of Catholic schools to help promote its language and cultural instruction, not however without some misgivings. Grandi instructed his ambassadors to pay special attention to the religious missionary schools in their reports to Rome.<sup>122</sup> In response, consular officials, while lauding the instruction of Italian within the schools, insisted that they were of little or no value in promoting the political agenda of the regime.<sup>123</sup> The Italian Consul in Mendoza, in fact, suggested that the government suspend its subsidy, explaining that "the Salesians' efforts have certainly been beneficial, especially since they are in part made up of good Italians and can turn to local institutions and committees, however their promotion of Italian-ness is very limited, I therefore do not think we should give them financial assistance, but instead send them Italian textbooks and scholastic material." According to this official, funds should be diverted to the establishment of a more ideologically pure fascist school.<sup>124</sup>

Italian officials were similarly frustrated with subsidized schools run by the local Italian community. The regime's relationship with the association Pro-Schola during the 1920s was emblematic of this problem. The Pro-Schola was a scholastic association run

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<sup>122</sup> Dino Grandi to R.R. Agents, "Circolare Riservata" Undated, ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935), b. 776.

<sup>123</sup> Paolo de Simone, R. Consul in La Plata to Foreign Minister, May 13, 1933, ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935), b.779.

<sup>124</sup> Consul in Mendoza to Italian Ambassador Buenos Aires, January 22, 1932, ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935), b.778.

by the Italian community in Buenos Aires which organized and for the most part funded the ten major non-religious Italian schools in Buenos Aires. Founded in 1868 by the *Società Mutuo Soccorso*, its mission was to provide a free rudimentary education to children of Italian workers. Relying almost entirely on donations from prominent members of the community, as well as on an Italian government subsidy, the association's schools were controlled by an elected committee.<sup>125</sup> The Pro-Schola committee resisted the new fascist reorientation of the schools' mission and refused to swear a fascist oath of allegiance. In a 1925 letter to the Italian ambassador, the Pro-Schola committee insisted that fundamental to the schools' success and the unity of its various supporting associations was their founding statute which "affirms perennial loyalty to the distant *Patria*, while avoiding any discussion of politics or religion."<sup>126</sup> Throughout the 1920s the Italian Embassy put more and more pressure on the Pro-Schola committee to support the fascist agenda, at one point even suspending its Italian government subsidy. Finally, the regime had its way and, in 1928, the members of the Pro-Schola who opposed fascism left in protest. It was a small victory for the regime although not without consequence since it led to a drop in enrollment and the closure of seven out of its ten schools.<sup>127</sup>

Other Italian schools did more than resist fascist overtures and directly opposed the regime. Three schools in particular, Italia Unita, Edmondo de Amicis, and Tito Luciani, provided an anti-fascist Italian educational alternative. As the Consul of La Plata lamented, "for the past three years the Italian schools in this district have been taken

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<sup>27</sup> Torelli to Trablaza, May 17, 1924, ASMAE, Le Carte del Gabinetto del Ministero e della Segreteria generale dal 1923 al 1943, b.624

<sup>126</sup> The Scholastic Commission Pro-Schola to Ambassador Count Aldovrandi Marescotti di Viano April 29, 1925, ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1923-1928) b. 634.

<sup>127</sup> Augusto Torelli to Ciro Trablaza, September 11, 1924, ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1923-1928) b. 634.

over by members of the anti-fascist group *Società Italia Unita*, which after eliminating all of their competent instructors has transformed the classrooms into hotbeds of antinational propaganda.”<sup>128</sup> Challenging fascist claims over Italian identity, the main anti-fascist newspaper of Buenos Aires, *Italia del Popolo* reported that these schools, “demonstrated to the Fascists the Italian-ness of free Italians without Judas’ thirty silver coins [the Italian government subsidy] and have with enthusiasm countered the Fascists’ supposedly exclusive patrimony over Italian identity.”<sup>129</sup>

From 1927 onward the Fascist regime reorganized the schools, tightened supervision, and emphasized a more politically fascist as well as patriotic Italian educational program abroad. Fascist reorganization culminated in 1929 when the *Direzione Generale delle Scuole italiane all'estero* merged into Parini’s DIES.<sup>130</sup> In a memorandum to Mussolini, using imagery the Duce no doubt appreciated, Parini characterized the schools under his direction as engaged in a ‘battle’ over identity, declaring “We are in fact involved in an international struggle over language and culture ... And in this struggle we must be present: wherever there is a nucleus of Italian-ness to defend, there is also the possibility of attracting new people into the orbit of our millenarian culture.”<sup>131</sup> Critical of what he perceived as the missed opportunities and lost ground of the previous administration, Parini wrote with a sense of urgency: “Never has the spiritual climate been more favorable for our cultural expansion. We must seize the

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<sup>128</sup> The anti-Fascist movement in Argentina and its other forms of resistance to the regime’s initiatives will be further explored in a later chapter. R. Consul in La Plata Romolo Bertuccioli February 12, 1930, ASMAE Archivio Scuole (1929-1935) b. 780.

<sup>129</sup> Un Vecchio Socio, “Le scuole italiane non Fascistizzate,” *Italia del Popolo*, Buenos Aires, December 8, 1932.

<sup>130</sup> Floriani, 76.

<sup>131</sup> Parini, “Pro-memoria per S.E. Il Capo del Governo,” August 5, 1932, ASMAE, Le Carte del Gabinetto del Ministero e della Segreteria generale dal 1923 al 1943, b. 819-2.

moment—a missed opportunity, a pause, or a moment of uncertainty represents a lost battle in this international struggle for culture.”<sup>132</sup>

Parini increased funding, opened new schools, preferably run by the *Fasci*, and reorganized the existing system to allow for tighter supervision. He also appointed better trained and ideologically more qualified teachers from Italy and required frequent reports from the schools to ensure their compliance with the new directives from Rome. Parini also hoped to expand the scope of the schools’ mission to attract foreign students to Italian universities and institutes of higher education through a scholarship program so that they may become upon their return home “the best propagandists of our culture.”<sup>133</sup>

In 1930 Parini commissioned a standardized series of textbooks specifically geared toward the fascist schools abroad. In justifying the need for an entirely new series of texts, the DIES textbook commission explained “As a result of the advent of Fascism, which has moved Italy and the world in a new direction, a complete revision of values and judgments in the moral sciences is necessary.”<sup>134</sup> The texts to be commissioned for adaptation must, therefore, “fully adhere to the spirit and actions of the regime.”<sup>135</sup> These texts were widely disseminated: not only were they sent to schools directly run by the government but to all schools in Argentina teaching Italian.<sup>136</sup> The context of these new textbooks is the focus of the next chapter.

For Parini, more than new schoolbooks were however needed: someone had to ensure that these texts were being used to promote the fascist agenda. To that end, in

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> DIES Undersecretary of Schools to Parini, June 6, 1930, ASMAE, Le Carte del Gabinetto del Ministero e della Segreteria generale dal 1923 al 1943, b. 821:4

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> “Le nostre scuole d’oltre confine” *Diritti della Scuola*, Rome, July 15, 1933.

1932 Parini established a national competition for teacher-agents to serve three-year appointments in the schools abroad in Argentina and Brazil. In addition to teaching, their task was to supervise the schools within their assigned area. Applicants were required to be Italian citizens between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five. This requirement was in order to avoid two of the major problems with the current teachers, who were either well-advanced in age or foreign nationals, making their knowledge of and commitment to the regime suspect in both cases.<sup>137</sup> Applicants were further required to pass an oral exam which would test their knowledge of “the History of Italy, the organization, ideas, and achievements of the Fascist State, as well as the geographic and political characteristics of the South American nations.”<sup>138</sup> By the late 1930s teachers were also forced to sign an affidavit certifying that they were “not of the Hebrew race,” or “a member of an Israelite community” or a “practitioner of the Israelite religion,” a disturbing indication that the schools abroad were not immune to the regime’s increasing anti-Semitism.<sup>139</sup>

Once selected, teachers were given the task of “founding in your assigned destination an Italian school, if one is not yet established, and promoting and developing an intensive program of activity in the heart of the Italian community of the area until the school itself becomes an active center in the diffusion of Italian language and culture.”<sup>140</sup>

The teachers’ contracts additionally required them “to promote the diffusion of Italian

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<sup>137</sup> Secretary of State to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Decree” Rome, May 16, 1932, ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935), b. 776.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> The affidavit that I found was undated but was included with other materials all dating prior to 1935. This dating is significant since it predates the institutionalized anti-Semitism which began in Italy with the passage of the racial laws of 1938. Given that Parini himself was an outspoken anti-Semite it is possible that he instituted this policy prior to the racial laws and Italy’s alliance with Nazi Germany. It is however a claim I am reluctant to make based on an undated piece of evidence. Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Direzione Generale degli Italiani all’Estero, “Scheda Personale Riservatissima,” ASMAE Archivio Scuole (1929-1935) b.778.

<sup>140</sup> Secretary of State to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Decree” Rome, May 16, 1932, ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935), b. 776.

culture in the students' families, and in all Italian compatriots in residence, through conferences, projections, theatrical performances, libraries and etc."<sup>141</sup> To ensure their ideological commitment to fascist doctrine teachers were to work closely with members of the local *Fascio*.<sup>142</sup> Given the ever-present need of money to run the schools, teacher-agents were additionally assigned the task of fundraising.<sup>143</sup> These new positions took over the work of consular officials and community leaders, who had been seen as questionably committed to the regime's ideology. Parini hoped that the appointment of new hand-picked teachers, given the added tasks of supervision, organization, and fundraising, would not only improve the quality of instruction but also make the schools more ideologically fascist. The new texts and teachers together ensured Rome's tighter control over the schools and the material being taught. It was in effect a fascistization of the schools abroad, paralleling the fascistization of other parts of the civil service during the same period.

Parini used his cadre of fascist teachers armed with fascist textbooks to spearhead his reorganization of the *Scuole italiane all'estero* in Argentina. He established fifteen new government schools during the 1930s. In each of these schools, located from Cordoba to Bahia Blanca, from Rosario to Mendoza, fascist teacher agents working with members of the local *Fascio* took control of the local Italian schools' day-to-day operations. In some places, like Bahia Blanca, the new teacher-agents took over old community-run schools. In other places, they established new schools as was the case in Mendoza and Cordoba. In Buenos Aires the Pro-Schola maintained control over its

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<sup>141</sup> DGIES, "Schema di contratto per maestri e per maestri agenti in Argentina," 1932, ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935), b. 776.

<sup>142</sup> DGIES, "Note allo schema di contratto per maestri e per maestri agenti in Argentina," 1932, ASMAE Archivio Scuole (1929-1935), b. 776.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

schools but its Committee, now purged of its anti-fascist members, left much of their schools' functioning to the five teacher-agents assigned to them. The largest Italian school system in Argentina: the '*Dante Alighieri*' schools in Rosario de Santa Fé, frustrated Parini to no end. The teacher agents under his authority often came into conflict with Felicioni, who as head of the '*Dante*' felt that he had control over the schools' operation. Despite his personal feud with Felicioni, Parini acknowledged that the schools in Rosario were a model of success. Beyond a primary education and Italian language instruction, these schools advanced the regime's propaganda initiatives, hosting *Dopolavoro* and *Balilla* activities as well as disseminating fascist propaganda material, often through the students, into the community.

By the end of the 1930s, the schools had become effective, well-coordinated vehicles for the regime's promotion of the 'New' Italy. In 1939 with twenty-three teacher-agents assigned to Argentina and government funding totaling 1, 643,765 lire, the number of students officially enrolled in government controlled schools totaled 3,374, with nearly twice as many students involved in after school activities, a 47 percent increase from 1930.<sup>144</sup> This increase demonstrated the greater commitment on the part of the regime to developing and expanding the school system, although given an Italian immigrant population in Argentina of over a million, these numbers are by no means impressive.

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<sup>144</sup> Italian Ambassador in Buenos Aires to Foreign Ministry, "Instituzioni scolastichi in Argentina" Buenos Aires, October 21, 1939, op. cit.

## Conclusion

Membership in all the fascist regime's organizations in Argentina numbered in the hundreds and in the best of times thousands—far from impressive given the size of the Italian population. Although these organizations did little to mobilize large numbers of the Italian community, the *Fasci italiani all'estero*, the *Dopolavoro* and *Balilla* did succeed in attracting attention to the regime, and played key roles in disseminating propaganda material. In this regard *Il Mattino d'Italia* and the *Roma Press* were especially important vehicles of propaganda for the regime, both the products of a collaborative effort on the part of the local *Fasci* and the regime's institutions in Rome.

Italian fascists had arrived in Argentina soon after Mussolini took power but accomplished little during the 1920s, and were instead plagued by a contradictory and ill-defined agenda, a confusing organizational structure, and competing personalities. By the late 1930s thanks in large part to the reorganization of the regime's efforts abroad while under Parini and the reorientation of the *Fasci* in Argentina by Valdani, the fascists developed a better coordinated and more ideologically coherent organizational apparatus in the republic. While never completely resolving the tension between its internationalist and nationalist agendas, under Grandi's directorship of the Foreign Ministry the ambitious goal of spreading fascism's political doctrine abroad gave way to the more pragmatic though no less significant goal of spreading a nationalist cultural program abroad. Under the less threatening guise of socio-cultural programs, the regime was better equipped to deflect criticism, while still propagandizing the Italian fascist state and its identity abroad.

In order to better understand and evaluate the full significance of the fascist regime's efforts in Argentina it is essential to closely analyze the content of its propaganda. The literature produced by the organizations and propagandists discussed above provide a striking image of how the regime sought to redefine perceptions of emigration and incorporate Italian expatriates back into the national project.<sup>145</sup> This propaganda also sheds light on how the ideology and literature of the initiatives outlined here relate to the regime's broader project of promoting its fascist version of Italian identity abroad. The following chapter will examine the message of that propaganda in Argentina before going on to analyze the debates that it engendered within Italian community in Argentina as well as among the Argentine general public and political establishment.

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<sup>145</sup> Comisión Investigadora de Actividades Antiargentinas, *Despacho e informe*, Buenos Aires, 1942.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Italianità all'Estero: The Fascist Message*

*Il libro ha qualche volta il valore di un ambasciata*  
–Benito Mussolini<sup>1</sup>

#### **Introduction**

Covered in dust in the basement files of the *Archivo del Congreso de la Nación* in Buenos Aires, in the midst of evidence for the Congressional Investigation on Anti-Argentine Activities, lies a curious little book. It is a pocket-sized handbook on how to be a good Italian fascist abroad, and but one of many striking examples of a wide range of books and other materials which articulate the messages underlying all of the Italian fascist regime's activities in Argentina.<sup>2</sup> From LUCE films and radio broadcasts to books, lectures, and exhibits, this chapter looks at the content of all of the different types of propaganda sent from Rome to Argentina and disseminated through the regime's organizations abroad.

Much of this propaganda offers highly suggestive, albeit fragmentary, glimpses at the content of the fascist regime's overall project abroad. The same tension between fascism's internationalist and nationalist agendas which were reflected in its organizational strategies in Argentina also found expression in the propaganda materials that the regime sent abroad. Defining fascism in opposition to both Bolshevism and liberalism, the materials depicted fascism as the solution to the world's socio-economic problems. Fascism's universal mission was to save the world from the Bolshevik menace,

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<sup>1</sup> "A book is sometimes worth as much as an embassy," Benito Mussolini, quoted in *Nuova Italia*, New York, 1938.

<sup>2</sup> The book was Piero Parini's *Norme di vita Fascista all'estero* (Verona: A. Mondadori, 1937). It will be analyzed below.

while establishing a new world order based on hierarchy and discipline. At the same time, the fascist material also emphasized a particularly Italian national agenda. It highlighted the great cultural achievements of Italian civilization, proclaimed a new robust Italy renovated by fascism, and defended the regime's aggressive foreign policies in Ethiopia and Spain. Throughout all of the material, one theme predominated over the others: that of spreading the Italian national project abroad. This was especially the case in the materials targeting Italian emigrants in Argentina, which attempted to instill devotion to the Patria by extolling the virtues as well as the privileges of being an 'Italian living abroad.' The propaganda further contended that emigrants were still an integral part of the Italian nation and could play an invaluable role in the 'New Italy' of the fascist era.

While discussing of the varied types of propaganda materials sent to Argentina, this chapter focuses especially on the textbooks of the *Scuole italiane all'estero*, a striking illustration of how the fascist regime attempted to shape an entire generation of children living abroad. These works targeted the children of Italian emigrants throughout the world between the ages of six to twelve and consisted in a five-year program of elementary study. The textbooks I examine were a standard series distributed to the Italian schools in Argentina as well other countries. In order to determine what was being taught in the actual classrooms in Argentina, I also examine the lesson plans, curricula, and Italian consular reports on each of the major Italian schools in the republic.

In analyzing the content and scope of the fascist Italy's national project through the use a textual and visual analysis of its propaganda abroad, this chapter is informed by the recent cultural approaches Italian fascism, Ruth Ben-Ghiat for example used modernist cultural productions in film and literature to understand how intellectuals

under fascism created an articulated fascist identities, while Claudio Fogu focused on fascist representations of history communicated through exhibitions and media.<sup>3</sup> This chapter elaborates on the fascist message through its propaganda and especially schoolbooks sent abroad.

This chapter also illustrates many of the defining characteristics of what Emilio Gentile described as the “Cult of the Fatherland” in his work the *Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (1996). The pages of the Italian schoolbooks abroad are in fact an especially telling example of how the fascists created a set of myths, rituals, and historical narratives to inculcate children into its national program. In particular, the schoolbook’s treatment of religion and spiritual devotion confirm Gentile’s characterization of fascism as a political religion which borrowed freely from Christian religious imagery and ritual.<sup>4</sup>

Many of the themes developed in the schoolbooks abroad are also found in the national textbook series instituted by the regime in 1929 and discussed by Tracy H. Koon in her work, *Believe, Obey, Fight: The Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Italy 1922-1943*, (1985). According to Koon, these state texts played a key role in the “fascistization” of youth in fascist Italy by inculcating adoration of the Duce, militarism, devotion to Italy and loyalty to fascist state.<sup>5</sup> Moving beyond the scope of Koon’s treatment of fascism’s youth projects in Italy, I demonstrate how the fascist message changed when it was exported to a foreign country. In some instances changes to the

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<sup>3</sup> Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) ; Emily Braun, “The Visual Arts: Modernism and Fascism” in *Liberal and Fascist Italy*; Claudio Fogu, *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Tracy H. Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight: Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Italy 1922-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985) 74-83.

message were made by members of the regime in a conscious effort to tailor their propaganda materials to the Italian emigrant experience. In other cases, the simple act of presenting the same text but to a different audience in a different context changed its meaning. This chapter analyzes how the fascist message was adapted for the schools abroad as well as identifies what new themes were introduced to specifically target Italian youth abroad.

To date no historian has written on the actual content of the fascist propaganda materials sent to Argentina and only two historical works have treated the topic of the *Scuole italiane all'estero*, the focus of this chapter. Giorgio Floriani's work *Scuole italiane all'estero: Cento anni di storia* (1974) is a general history which analyses the changing laws and decrees during the schools' history without examining the schools' content or experiences in individual countries.<sup>6</sup> Claudia Baldoli devoted one of her chapters in *Exporting Fascism: Italian Fascists and Britain's Italians in the 1930s* (2003) to the experiences of fascist-era Italian schools in Great Britain.<sup>7</sup> Baldoli makes similar use of the *Scuole italiane all'estero* records housed in the Italian Foreign Ministry, and her arguments parallel my own. However, in addition to examining the schools' experiences in a different nation, I also provide a close analysis of the actual textbooks sent abroad, a source previously unexamined by historians.

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<sup>6</sup> Giorgio Floriani, *Scuole Italiane all'Estero: Cento anni di storia* (Armando Armando Editore: Rome, 1974.)

<sup>7</sup> Claudia Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism: Italian Fascists and Britain's Italians in the 1930s* (Oxford: Berg 2003); see also Baldoli, "'Ho cambiato il cielo ma non l'animo' I Fasci italiani all'estero e l'educazione degli italiani in Gran Bretagna (1932-1934) in *Studi Emigrazione* (1999).

### Propaganda's Varied Forms

Propaganda materials sent by the Ministry of Press and Propaganda and later the Ministry of Popular Culture cast a wide net: not only targeting the Italian community but also the Argentine general public. Everything from Italian fascist magazines to LUCE newsreels and feature films found their way into the South American republic. Journal subscriptions requested by the Italian Embassy for the purpose of propaganda included: *Rassegna Italiana*, *Gerarchia*, *Nuova Antologia*, *Il Diritto del Lavoro*, *Biografia Fascista*, and *Il Legionario*, in short, official journals of the regime's cultural, social, and political programs.<sup>8</sup> The Embassy also ordered several books and pamphlets on fascist doctrine and the regime's accomplishments, for example, *Lo Stato Corporativo* and *La Dottrina del Fascismo* by Mussolini; and works by various authors on the 'new' Italian worker and the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*, fascist youth and the *Balilla*, the social work of the *Assistenza e Previdenza* and the role of women under fascism as well as the 'protection' of motherhood and childhood. The Embassy requested between 100-500 copies of each book, in both the original Italian as well as in Spanish translation.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to regular shipments of LUCE newsreels, some 129 propaganda films were also sent to Argentina, including titles such as *Camicia Nera* and *Marcia su Roma*, depicting the fascist 'revolution,' *Alle Madri d'Italia*, and *Per la Protezione della Stripe*, on the subject of motherhood and child-bearing, and *Decennalia*, celebrating the accomplishments of the regime's first ten years. The most popular films, judging by the number of times requested and places shown, depicted Italy's First World War victory;

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<sup>8</sup> Italian Embassy Buenos Aires to the Ministry of Popular Culture, December 19, 1937, ACS, Minculpop, Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Italian Embassy Buenos Aires, various book orders, ACS, Minculpop, Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 7.

titles included *La Diana del Piave*, *Guerra Nostra*, and *Vittorio Veneto*.<sup>10</sup> According to the director of the *Alianza Cinematográfica Italo-Argentina* these films were the most effective form of propaganda completing the dual function of “correcting the false impressions foreigners have of our Patria and its Regime, while also igniting a greater love of the Patria in the hearts of the millions of Italian residents here, who can now take pride in being children of a great Mother, who has restored them to their proper place in the world.”<sup>11</sup> These films were shown in *Dopolavoro* centers throughout Argentina, and were also made available to commercial movie theatres.<sup>12</sup>

For much of the 1930s, propaganda requests to Rome from the Italian Embassy emphasized the need for cultural, rather than overtly political propaganda for Argentine public consumption. The failure of the *Fasci all'estero*'s political activism of the 1920s, along with the adverse reactions that the blatant Nazi propaganda campaign was provoking in the 1930s, convinced the representatives of the regime that the best strategy was to win people over through cultural propaganda, only later working in the political message. In discussing the diffusion of propaganda on the Argentine radio waves the Italian ambassador explained, “To make our propaganda the most effective, and to have the greatest possibility of penetrating the community it must be of an artistic-cultural nature.” Over time “the political message would appear as a direct corollary, a spontaneous and natural outgrowth of the cultural.”<sup>13</sup> Along these lines the Italian embassy told Rome to tone down the political propaganda sent to the Argentine press,

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<sup>10</sup> Raffaele Mancini to Mussolini, “Memoriale su un progetto di lavoro per l’affermazione della cinematografia italiana in Argentina,” ACS, Minculpop, Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b 4.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Film shipments found in ACS, Minculpop, Direzione Generale Propaganda Nuclei di propaganda in Italia e all’Estero [NUPIE], b, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Italian Embassy in Argentina to Ministry of Popular Culture, “La radio in Argentina possibilità della propaganda italiana,” January 1, 1940, ASC, Minculpop, Reports (1922-1945), b. 18.

suggesting instead variety pieces, “like for example, Marconi, or Argentine celebrities in our country, or anything about soccer.” Other propaganda items for the general public included news on arts and leisure, Italian aviation and navigation, celebrity gossip, archeological discoveries, and religious festivals.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast, propaganda materials sent to the “Jockey Club,” the exclusive social club of Argentina’s elites, were of a more intellectual caliber, including *Critica Fascista*, the journal on fascist philosophy and culture edited by Giuseppe Bottai; *Domus*, the regime’s modernist architectural magazine; and *Il Popolo d’Italia*, the main Italian fascist daily newspaper. In commenting on the types of material to be sent to the club, Ambassador Arlotta stressed the need to demonstrate “the high quality of our publishing,” which would introduce the theoretical underpinnings of the fascist doctrine, and the corporatist state, as well as display the regime’s modernist artistic accomplishments.<sup>15</sup> Other notable books distributed to the Argentine elite included *DUX*, Margherita Sarfatti’s best-selling biography of Mussolini and *La storia del movimento Fascista*, a history of fascism by Italy’s renowned historian, Gioacchino Volpe.<sup>16</sup>

By the late 1930s Italian propaganda materials sent by the Ministry of Popular Culture took a decidedly political turn, no doubt more the result of international events rather than the situation within Argentina. From 1935 onward, the fascist regime bombarded nations throughout the world with films, photos, and books justifying the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Italians, according to the propaganda, stood fast against the condemnation of British and French plutocrats, and ‘liberated’ Ethiopians from the yolk

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<sup>14</sup> Arlotta to Foreign Ministry, “Propaganda attraverso la stampa locale,” April 28, 1934, ACS, Minculpop, Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Arlotta to the Undersecretary of Press and Propaganda, December 18, 1934, ACS, Minculpop, Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Various book requests found in ACS, Minculpop, Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 6.

of a brutal and rapacious king who terrorized his people and enslaved its women. In October 1935, Tommaso Milani, the director of the *Roma Press* agency, organized an exhibit in Buenos Aires to promote the war in Ethiopia. Rome sent enlarged photos, books, and pamphlets for display. These photos were designed to shock the Argentine public, showing in graphic detail “Ethiopian brutality: their atrocities, slavery, and barbarity,” while other photos highlighted the great civilizing work of Italian colonial officials, missionaries and anthropologists in neighboring Somalia. Of course large portraits of the Duce, Galeazzo Ciano, and the Italian generals in Africa, Emilio De Bono and Rodolfo Graziani, also figured prominently.<sup>17</sup>

In 1936 when Mussolini intervened in the Spanish Civil War, the Ministry of Popular Culture began to send materials recounting the fascist war effort. This war unlike the Ethiopian campaign had a direct and personal impact on the lives of many Argentines who had relatives in Spain. Out of fear that the Italian perspective on the war might alienate many members of an already divided Argentine community, Italian consulates in Argentina explicitly asked Rome not to send further propaganda.<sup>18</sup> Italian propaganda on the civil war was not widely disseminated and did not appear to be well-received. In its place the regime attacked the Spanish republic indirectly by launching a virulent campaign against its Bolshevik ally, the Soviet Union. From 1938-1939 an entire series of anti-Soviet, anti-Bolshevik books and pamphlets in Italian as well as in Spanish translation flooded Argentina. One such book characterized Russia as the “anti-Europe,” a “Mongolian-Muscovite” menace bent on the destruction of European civilization in the

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<sup>17</sup> Comitato d'azione per l'universalità di Roma to Mussolini, “Mostra del conflitto italo-etiopeico in Argentina,” October 21, 1935, ACS, Minculpop, Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Italian Consulate in Cordoba to Minculpop, ACS Ministero della Cultura Popolare Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 8.

Mediterranean, while another contrasted the “destructive and materialist Communism of Marx and Engels” to the “healthy, constructive and spiritual doctrine of Fascism.”

According to such works, social democrats, the Freemasons and the international ‘Jewish plutocracy’ were all complicit in the Bolshevik’s bid to destroy civilization.<sup>19</sup>

Beyond the more general goal of creating a favorable view of the regime and its actions abroad, a significant amount of material specifically targeted the Italian community. The goal underlying this effort was to promote Mussolini’s national project abroad in order to attract community support for the fascist regime and as well as direct participation in its efforts. Throughout the 1930s Piero Parini offered glimpses of his interpretation of the fascist regime’s mission abroad, in speeches, articles, and interviews in fascist periodicals. His 1937 pocket-manual *Norme di vita Fascista all'estero* was the most final and complete articulation of how Parini ultimately defined the Italian fascist identity abroad. It is a handbook on the life an Italian fascist must lead while living in foreign lands.

“Collected in these pages are the fundamental principles of the Fascist life: the universal and eternal ideas which inspired the Black Shirt Revolution, which more than a political event was the vast resurrection of mankind.”<sup>20</sup> According to Parini, fascism fundamentally changed Italy’s social and political landscape, and provided a model for other nations around the world: “Fascism, through the Revolution, smashed the scaffolding holding up the old lie of democracy and re-established the necessary hierarchy of authority and civil and moral order, without which human societies would be

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<sup>19</sup> Book orders from Italian Embassy to Minculpop, ACS, Minculpop, Direzione Generale Propaganda Nuclei di propaganda in Italia e all’Estero [NUPIE], b, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Piero Parini, *Norme di vita Fascista all'estero* (Verona: A. Mondadori, 1937), Preface.

wrecked and fall into ruin.”<sup>21</sup> Parini’s understanding of fascism’s mission was in this sense a universal one. For although Parini reiterated Mussolini’s command to abstain from the politics of host countries, he went on to explain that did not mean that one should not take sides on political issues, since “Fascism is not spiritually neutral: it must be on one side of the barricade or the other. The modern world is polarized by two political and religious conceptions of social, national, individual life: there can never be an agreement or truce between Fascism and Bolshevism.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, according to Parini, “wherever the Bolshevik menace threatens religious principles and political systems similar to those of Fascism, the Italian abroad must collaborate, honestly and frankly, to defend those principals that he holds dear.”<sup>23</sup> Much of Parini’s work would, however, focus more on the regime’s nationalist agenda of reshaping the identity Italian emigrants abroad.

Already assuming cult-like status Mussolini, the man “who in his infallible genius has ensured Italy’s triumph in the world,” also remade the Italian emigrant in his image: “Mussolini, the first Italian abroad, has given the Italian abroad his unmistakable features.”<sup>24</sup> No longer the forgotten humble laborer of the past the new Italian abroad was the proud member of a “superior civilization.”<sup>25</sup> To Parini, Italians abroad were an “aristocracy,” the heirs and custodians of Italian culture, “every Italian must remember that they have flowing through their veins the blood of a race that has given the world the

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<sup>21</sup> Parini, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Parini, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 22.

greatest civilization under the sun.”<sup>26</sup> Their birthright was, however, only an invitation to become Italian, to be a true Italian abroad was a privilege that had to be earned.

“Italy in the name of her living and her dead commands you to be worthy to love her, honor her, and serve her with all of your heart in peace and in war, now and forever!”<sup>27</sup> If Mussolini and the fascist revolution gave the Italian abroad a new sense of pride, these Italians now had an obligation to serve the regime and earn the new honor and respect bestowed upon them. To be a fascist Italian abroad meant to live the fascist lifestyle and believe in the values of the regime: “Mussolini’s Italian who lives beyond Italy’s borders is like all of the Italians living inside of the Kingdom: he is a citizen, a soldier, and a worker, his personal life must be a model and a mirror of the traditional values perfected and refined by the Fascist education.”<sup>28</sup> “He must be a model of order, discipline, and personal dignity, and his conduct, especially under difficult circumstances, must make the foreigner say in admiration: Here are the Italians of Mussolini!”<sup>29</sup> Parini further commanded Italians abroad to identify themselves first and foremost as Italians and forget their regional divisions, thinking only of the “Nation, the Regime and the family.”<sup>30</sup>

Beyond politics Parini also emphasized the regime’s cultural agenda to preserve Italian language and civilization abroad. “Italians abroad must speak and jealously defend the use of their language. Now is the time to stop this shameful habit of speaking to fellow Italians in a foreign language.” Parini’s fear was that the children of these emigrants, exposed to foreign languages at home, would corrupt the Italian language

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>28</sup> Parini, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 21.

turning it into a barbaric mixed tongue “worthy only of Harlem Negroes or the London underworld.”<sup>31</sup>

All of the themes addressed by Parini, found expression within the pages of the schoolbooks sent to the Italian elementary schools in Argentina. In commissioning these books the *Direzione degli Italiani all’Estero e Scuole* (DIES), laid out the goals and agenda that the texts were to promote. They were to “fully adhere to the spirit and actions of the regime.”<sup>32</sup> Subjects in “moral-historical” disciplines, such as literature, political science, geography, and religion were especially tailored to serve the regime’s interests since “these disciplines play a *formative* role they must be adapted to the special needs of the schools abroad, which must be secure bulwarks in the conservation and defense of Italian-ness around the world.” Given the varied locations in which these texts would be used, this posed an especially difficult challenge because “The instruction of these disciplines, must exalt the virtues of the race, and emphasize the historical continuity of our history from the Roman Empire of Augustus to the Fascism of Benito Mussolini, without however offending the political and religious sensibilities of the [foreign] States.”<sup>33</sup> Prominent contributors included the historian Gioacchino Volpe and the regime’s most prized modernist artist Mario Sironi, while the bulk of the elementary school primers were authored by Giuseppe Fanciulli and Clementina Bagagli, with illustrations by Angelo della Torre. Published from 1929 to 1934, the texts were widely disseminated, finding their way to Italian schools around the world. The DIES sent these

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>32</sup> DIES Undersecretary of Schools to Parini, June 6, 1930, ASMAE, Le Carte del Gabinetto del Ministero e della Segreteria generale dal 1923 al 1943, b. 821:4

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

texts both to schools in Argentina directly run by the Italian government as well as to other schools in Argentina which taught Italian.<sup>34</sup>

### **Shaping Young Minds: First and Second Grade Readers**

“Even you, little Italians far away from the Patria but closer than others to your father’s heart, must work and struggle everyday to become better and grow up strong, honest, and hard-working: to become Italians worthy of our great Patria.”<sup>35</sup> Directed towards children only six and seven years of age, first and second grade texts strove to shape young minds by inculcating the basic values and beliefs that the fascist “Italian Abroad” was supposed to embody. These values included, discipline, obedience, self-sacrifice, and most of all love and devotion to the distant patria, and allegiance to the fascist regime.

“A short time ago a little boy left his small village in Italy to go far away to a foreign city....he felt lost among so many people coming and going and speaking such a strange language. But as soon as he walked through the school doors what calm, what joy! Now he is surrounded by many other Italian children. How good he feels among them! How sweet is his teacher’s voice speaking the beautiful Italian language so well!”<sup>36</sup> So begins the second grade text, welcoming its young readers to the wonderful world of the Italian school abroad: a safe-haven, an oasis of Italian-ness in a foreign desert, a piece of Italy in a strange world. Beyond simply welcoming students to the Italian school, both the first and second grade readers immediately established an “us” versus “them” dichotomy. The people of the child’s new nation were strange, and foreign, and the child

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<sup>34</sup> “Le nostre scuole d’oltre confine” *Diritti della Scuola*, Rome, July 15, 1933.

<sup>35</sup> Bagagli, *Lecture classe seconda*, 91.

<sup>36</sup> Clementina Bagagli ed., *Lecture classe seconda, Scuole italiane all’estero* (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1932), 15.

felt lost and out of place among them. But upon entering the school the child is immediately put at ease and overcome with joy to be with his own people who speak his language and share his culture. In the first grade reader *Mimmo*, the book's young protagonist, after seeing all of the Italian children in his school asks his father: "Why are there so many Italian children in a country where they speak another language?" His father explained that many Italians "forced to live in foreign countries far from their Patria," joined together and formed an Italian community in which its members and the Italian Consulates help and protect one another. "Mimmo is so happy to hear this. He feels close to the Patria because of all the Italians who live and work nearby."<sup>37</sup> Torn from their Patria, Italian children in strange and unfamiliar lands could rest at ease since they have come to a place where they truly belong: among fellow Italians receiving an Italian education in an Italian school abroad.

Once their students felt comfortable, little-by-little, the fascist agenda was unveiled. As students flipped through colorful drawings of city and country life and learned the Italian names of animals and read popular fables, they found Italian patriotic as well as fascist messages interspersed throughout the text. Such messages varied from the relatively benign drawing of a young boy embracing a map of Italy declaring "Italy my land, I love you very much! We all love you!" to a description of King Victor Emmanuel III followed by: "Long live the King of Italy! Long live my King!"<sup>38</sup> In each case, students were reminded that, even though they did not live inside Italy, they were Italian first and foremost and must love and be loyal to their Italian patria.

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<sup>37</sup> Bagagli, *Lecture prima classe elementare*, 76.

<sup>38</sup> Clementina Bagagli ed., *Lecture classe prima, Scuole italiane all'estero* (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1933), 21, 41.

“Children’s thoughts often fly far away on the wings of big white birds across the ocean that separates their little school from the great Patria and they feel that Italy when it is alive in their hearts is not far away”<sup>39</sup> The texts infused their stories with nostalgic references to Italy, though physically far away, it was ever present in the thoughts of its members abroad. The children in school texts repeatedly think of the distant patria: on Christmas thoughts turn to Grandma and Grandpa who are in the distant patria; every morning children salute the flag and think of the distant patria; when their friends leave to visit Italy they tell them to say hello to their distant patria; and their fathers, “who were forced to work and live far from the Patria” when they hear the work whistle at the end of the day, “are warmly reminded of the sound of the church bells in their village and their loved ones far away.”<sup>40</sup>

“Daddy loves the Patria as much as his family and he reads his [Italian] paper with the same joy as he reads letters from loved ones.”<sup>41</sup> Along with Italian language newspapers, radio broadcasts in these texts enchant their listeners who were transported to the land they long for. “The elderly are moved, feeling as though they were back at home in the houses they left long ago. Next to them, the children open their hearts to these voices as if they were the voice of the Patria and they feel as though they have finally reached the country of their dearest dreams.”<sup>42</sup> These passages implanted the idea that Italy was much more than simply the country of its young reader’s origin: it was the land of their dreams, a heaven on earth, “the most beautiful of all of the countries blessed

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<sup>39</sup> Bagagli, *Letture classe seconda*, 67.

<sup>40</sup> Bagagli, *Letture classe seconda*, 48 and Bagagli, *Letture classe prima*, 44, 25.

<sup>41</sup> Bagagli, *Letture classe prima*, 87.

<sup>42</sup> Bagagli, *Letture classe seconda*, 114.

by God, the country with the bluest sky, the sweetest air, and the richest gifts of the land and sea,” the country whose “dear name you stammered out as your first word.”<sup>43</sup>

When first grade students turned to page forty-four of their reader they found the drawing of a six-year old boy, dressed in a Balilla uniform giving a fascist salute. The text reads: “God help Italy now and forever. Help me o Lord become a good Italian.”<sup>44</sup> A short passage and simple image, but filled with meaning. The passage implied a participatory sense of identity: one was not simply born an Italian but by his actions ‘became’ one. Furthermore, the image accompanying the text made unmistakably clear that being a good Italian meant being a good fascist. This passage and many others like it demonstrate that the fascist writers were attempting far more than simply fostering a nostalgic love for the distant patria. Despite the inconvenient fact that these students were living, and in many cases, were born in foreign countries their true loyalty was to the King of Italy, and they were obligated to do their duty as good Italians, which meant to faithfully obey and support fascist regime.

The first and second grade texts emphasized that to be an Italian abroad meant above all else to be obedient, and disciplined. The children in the books always knew their “place” and always “did their duty.” The second grade text explained that a good child must learn to obey in order to be able to command. Self-disciplined he must “command his mouth to be quiet when told; command his ears to listen to his mommy and his teacher; and command his eyes to focus on his work and studies.” By doing this “a strong boy learns how to command as well as to obey.”<sup>45</sup> Discipline is also taught through physical fitness. For example in gym class, “The children move and stop together

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>44</sup> Bagagli, *Letture classe prima*, 44.

<sup>45</sup> Bagagli, *Letture classe seconda*, 16-17.

as one, everyone at attention following the leader in perfect order.” Even the girls, “who are not as strong as the boys,” were disciplined and understand how to obey commands, “completing difficult exercises without ever tiring or complaining”<sup>46</sup>

Both the first and second grade readers also introduced students to the symbolism and ideology of the regime midway through the text by describing the regime’s official symbol: the fascist bundle. “*Il fascio littorio* is the symbol of Fascist Italy. The united and tied rods signify concord, union and love. The axe signifies courage and strength. Under this symbol unified and disciplined Italians work for the greatness of the Patria.”<sup>47</sup> To be a member of the patria you must be disciplined and obedient to the regime, for there is no room for discord in the New Italy. The second grade reader expanded upon this definition of the *fasci* asking, in an attempt at the philosophical: “What is more humble than a poor little drop of water? But from an infinite union of humble drops of water comes the sea’s superb strength..... What could be weaker than a thin reed that meekly bends with the slightest breeze? But many reeds tightly tied together form a strong fascio as tough as steel.”<sup>48</sup> In its simplistic way, this passage alluded to the idea of the anti-individualist corporate state, so common in fascist propaganda, for “Only the union and harmony of all citizens creates the strength and power of a people. For this reason the fascist bundle was chosen as the symbol of the new Italy.”<sup>49</sup> This discussion of the *fascio* also suggested that more than a mere political regime, fascism was supposedly an all encompassing ideological and moral system which guided one’s life and informed one’s worldview.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>47</sup> Bagagli, *Letture classe prima*, 88.

<sup>48</sup> Bagagli, *Letture classe seconda*, 89.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

On page eighty-nine of the first grade reader the image of Il Duce's austere face made its appearance, with the text reading, "All Italian children love Mussolini, the Duce who leads the New Italy and works tirelessly for the good of the Patria."<sup>50</sup> And Mussolini in turn loved all children, "Do children know why the Duce loves them so much? He loves them because children are the most beautiful hope for Italy, if they grow up strong, hard-working and good, Italy will also be strong powerful and happy."<sup>51</sup> No introduction to fascism would be complete without the Duce, and by the printing of these texts the cult of Mussolini as the embodiment of the fascist regime had been a well established trope in the propaganda. His life had already achieved mythological status, the first grade reader told its young audience that Mussolini, "just like you, used to live a humble life part of a modest family of workers." Marked for greatness Mussolini learned while working in his father's blacksmith shop that, "life is work and struggle, and if you want to win you have to want and to suffer."<sup>52</sup>

"Dario's dad fought bravely during the Great War like all Italian soldiers."<sup>53</sup> First and second grade readers also introduced their students to the sacrifices made by their fathers during the Great War. Students read about the Altar of the Patria, and learned that a permanent mark on the body is called a scar; and that scars were "glorious badges of honor carried by your fathers who fought heroically for the Patria as you too will some day."<sup>54</sup> In fact as early as the second grade students were told of their obligation to become Italians worthy of the First World War's great martyrs: "Today is

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<sup>50</sup> Bagagli, *Lecture classe prima*, 89.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Bagagli, *Lecture classe seconda*, 91.

<sup>53</sup> Bagagli, *Lecture classe prima*, 96.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

November 4th, the anniversary of the great victory, remember our soldiers with love and promise to be worthy of them.”<sup>55</sup>

So how did a small boy become worthy for future service to the patria? He joined the *Balilla*, Italy’s fascist youth organization.

Mimmo for the first time has signed an important document, he has signed up to become a Balilla. The uniform that mommy has sewn with care is ready, but Mimmo knows that to be a true Balilla it is not enough to just wear the uniform and march in step with the other children, He knows that a Balilla, even when he is not wearing the uniform is a small soldier of Italy and like all soldiers must be strong, loyal and courageous.<sup>56</sup>

Even at six years of age, the message was clear: youth should be devoted to becoming Italy’s soldiers of tomorrow. When they are old enough they will be able to go to Italy to serve in the Italian army, just like Mimmo’s friend Aldo, “who is happy and smiling. He will go across the mountains and over the seas to Italy to become a soldier for two years.”<sup>57</sup> Of the many passages in this theme within the texts, perhaps the most revealing is the following song, written by Giuseppe Fanciulli, found in a first grade song book specifically for children abroad entitled, “The Little Soldiers.”

1.

Lined up in order,  
We are at attention and ready,  
Like real soldiers  
The bugle calls

In step: left-right-left!  
March: left-right-left!  
Oh, how beautiful is this game,  
Forward, one-two,-three!

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>57</sup> Bagagli, *Lecture classe prima*, 36.

2.

For you, beloved Patria,  
 We are your distant sons,  
 You have called us to this game  
 We remember you only.

In step: left-right-left  
 We march: left,-right-left  
 Thinking of you far away,  
 Forward one-two-three

3.

Even though we are still children,  
 The day of glory will come  
 The bold little soldiers  
 will make new history.

Attention: one-two-three  
 Salute: one-two-three  
 Long live our Italy,  
 Long live our King!<sup>58</sup>

The lyrics of this song did not simply depict Italian children as the future soldiers of Italy, but instead specifically targeted Italian children abroad, the patria's "distant sons" who had been "called" by the patria to "play this game." After learning the basic values and requirements to becoming good Italians abroad, the children were now ready to appreciate the history of the fascist movement, to learn how fascism renovated the Italian nation, and the role its emigrant children must play in the "New Italy."

### **Making the Italians of Tomorrow: Third, Fourth, and Fifth Grade Readers**

"More glorious pages in the History of Italy are still yet to be written other goals are still to be conquered," concluded the third grade history text, "it is on you, children: the soldiers and citizens of tomorrow, to write these pages and accomplish those goals. Italy

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<sup>58</sup> Giuseppe Fanciulli, *Canzoncine italiane* (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1931), 15-17.

looks lovingly upon you, wants you, and waits for you.”<sup>59</sup> The more advanced texts for the third, fourth, and fifth grades expanded upon both the theme of Italians abroad as part of the patria, and the obligation of Italians abroad to devote their lives to the regime. Parini stressed the importance of an Italian military education for its citizens abroad, which in his mind, “can only contribute to the development of their awareness as citizens and heighten their pride in being Italian and their faith in the greater future of the Patria.”<sup>60</sup> According to Parini, these children must “always keep in mind the distant Patria, and in its name they must strengthen their spirit, intellect, and fiber in order to be ready to respond with all their fervor, and in full spiritual and physical vigor, when the great voice of Italy calls them.”<sup>61</sup>

In *Sole d'Italia*, the fifth grade reader, Parini retold the history of Rome’s founding highlighting his readership’s connection to Rome’s glorious past. According to Parini, this connection in blood and in spirit to their Roman ancestry came in turn with an obligation to return to the new fascist Rome.

In honor of the day of Rome’s founding, which you celebrate with solemnity in your school under the shadow of Fascist banners, I want to teach you a motto in Latin which should become the motto of all young Italians abroad so dear to the Duce’s heart. The motto is: ROMA REDIT-REDI ROMA which means ‘Rome returns-Return to Rome’ The first part of the motto is a certainty because Rome, that is its strength, prestige, and power has returned with the Duce and Fascism; the second part is an invitation to you, young Italians abroad. RETURN TO ROME! Return to the great mother that will protect you and always welcome you in her arms!<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Scuole italiane all’estero, *Il Libro della III classe elementare: Storia, geografia, aritmetica*, (Verona: Mondadori, 1933), 87.

<sup>60</sup> Parini, “Prefazione” in Luigi Luisi, *Manuale di cultura militare per le scuole italiane all’estero* (Rome: Ardita, 1935), 5.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Parini, “Roma Ritorna -- Ritorna a Roma” in *Sole d'Italia*, 48.

The message unequivocal: the children of emigrants though far away, remained integral to the Patria, therefore like their little brethren across the sea they too had to devote themselves to the Patria and prepare to fight and struggle for its greatness.

While still in school and living in a foreign land, the schoolbooks instructed children to defend the name of Italy, to continue speaking Italian, and resist being corrupted by foreign cultural and political agendas at all cost. The story of a young Italian boy forced to attend a French school in Tunisia, found in one of the books best captures this theme. Threatened by the strong Italian presence in their colony and disturbed by the great success of the Italian schools, sinister French officials shut down the schools. “What did the French think?” asked the author, “They believed that Italian children were weak and would easily abandon their Patria in order to become French.” For the French, like other foreign governments around the world, “want to forcefully remove our children’s Italian spirit and convert them into foreigners, to make them forget the glories of their Country, the memories of their fathers, the language of their parents, the sweet memory of their distant land, to make them bastardized strangers.”<sup>63</sup> But even as their new teachers tried “to poison them with Francophile propaganda,” the Italian school children remained steadfast and defiant, vowing “to remain Italian at all costs.”<sup>64</sup> The young protagonist of the story was quiet and disdainfully proud only responding to his new French teacher when necessary. Then one day after the teacher read aloud a passage from a French geography book which insulted the patria, calling it a land of poverty and criminals, the boy could stand no more and exploded: “And we are supposed to study these books, and learn this filthy slander about our Country!” he declared throwing the

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<sup>63</sup> Pedrazzi, 19.

<sup>64</sup> Pedrazzi, 20.

book at the teacher's head. When ordered to leave he calmly responded, "Sure, as an Italian, it shames me to spend a minute more in this school."<sup>65</sup> Just short of explicitly instructing students to challenge their host nations' authority, this tale sent a clear signal that they were duty bound to protect and defend the good name of Italy by resisting any form of assimilation and foreign indoctrination. It is a wonderfully ironic message since the Italian schools abroad had a political agenda no less propagandistic than the one so criticized in the story. In fact, the Italian agenda was even more insidious since, unlike the French in Tunisia, its agenda was being promoted outside of its political jurisdiction.

"The true Christian is not a slave to pleasure and material interests; he is loyal, devoted to his family, and ready to serve the Patria with all of his strength."<sup>66</sup> The same Giuseppe Fanciulli, the author of the fascist songbook discussed above also penned a two-volume work on religious instruction, a virtual gospel according to fascism. In it Fanciulli manipulated passages from the Bible and lives of saints to reinforce obedience to the regime and the tenets of fascism. To fascists, "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's" meant that it was Jesus' command to loyally obey the 'New' Roman Empire; and Saint Paul's letter to the Romans reminded students that "all authority comes from God, and the existing authorities are instituted by him. Anyone who rebels against authority is resisting a divine institution." Lest the message of obedience not be clear, Fanciulli went on to tell his young readers that "The true Christian knows that pain is necessary, as is suffering but not rebellion."<sup>67</sup> Of course, this did not mean obedience to

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<sup>65</sup> Pedrazzi, 23-24.

<sup>66</sup> Fanciulli, *Lecture di religione per le Scuole Elementare Italiane all'Estero* vol. II (Verona: A. Mondadori, 1934), 153.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

just *any* civil authority, for obedience was reserved for the patria and its institutions. It is a distinction driven home by the fascist exposition of the Fourth Commandment:

Honor thy mother and father. Following this commandment means that beyond our mothers and fathers we must also love, respect and obey *our superiors*: which in our religious life means the Pope, the bishop and the priest; and in our civil life means the King, the Head of the Government, and all who represent them.<sup>68</sup>

Notice that this quote made no mention of honoring and obeying the civil authority of whichever country the young reader lived in, but instead specifically stated that they had to be loyal to the King, Victor Emmanuel III; the Head of Government, which was Mussolini's official title; and all who represented them, in other words, members of the fascist regime. Although Christian teachings have often been used to teach obedience to secular power, few in the modern era explicitly equated devotion to the state with devotion to God. It is also especially rare to find an exhortation to obey the secular authorities a nation different from the one in which the reader was living.

Fanciulli went on to explain that the true Christian was “The best son, the best brother, the best soldier, the best citizen.”<sup>69</sup> It could not have been otherwise since “The Soldier of Christ is also the perfect soldier of the Patria in times of peace and times of war.”<sup>70</sup> Fanciulli went so far as to compare joining the fascist movement to being confirmed a Christian. “Every faith, every great Idea has need of soldiers.” Confirmation initiated “soldiers of Christ” ready to defend Jesus’ “celestial Patria,” just as the youth of the Fascist Regime trained, learned to follow military orders and “arm themselves to defend the Patria and offer to sacrifice their lives.”<sup>71</sup> Discipline, obedience and self-

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<sup>68</sup> Fanciulli, *Lecture di religione*, 30-31.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

sacrifice, thus was the gospel according to fascism, with the Christian message of peace and love lost in fascist bellicosity.

“His great heart,” Fanciulli wrote of Saint Francis, “while it longed for the celestial Patria, also beat with love for the terrestrial Patria.”<sup>72</sup> From Saint Benedict to Saint John Bosco the texts also used the lives of the saints to promote the fascist agenda. Not the humble servants of God with whom we may be familiar, the Fascist versions of the saints’ lives were marked by a “will” to achieve great things. Bold and audacious, their will to achieve made them the “holiest of all saints,” as well as apostles of patria. As Mussolini himself explained in his entry for Saint Francis in a fifth grade text, “The followers of Saint Francis were both missionaries of Christ and missionaries of Italian-ness....and so today in all of the lands of all of the continents where we find the splendid and humble works accomplished in the name of the Saint we find there the mark of our Patria.”<sup>73</sup> Along with Saint Francis, Catherine of Siena “devoted herself to both the Church and the Patria,” never mind that the Italian nation as such did not exist in her age. The texts also recognized John Bosco’s Salesian brothers, who ran many of the schools in Argentina, for their work promoting Italian-ness abroad, and for serving the Patria as much as God.<sup>74</sup> Not only were the greatest Saints of the Church Italian, but in one text Parini claimed that Italian was nothing less than “the language of God himself.”<sup>75</sup> Taken together the religious messages of these books tell us much about the political liturgy of the fascist regime, one of history’s most striking examples of the abuse of sacred imagery to promote a secular agenda. To them, to be a good Christian meant you must also be a

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<sup>72</sup> Fanciulli, *Lecture di religione*, 121.

<sup>73</sup> Mussolini, “San Francesco,” in *Scuole Italiane all’estero*, *Sole d’Italia*, *Lecture Classe V*, (La Libreria dello Stato, 1934, 79.

<sup>74</sup> Fanciulli, *Lecture di religione*, 147.

<sup>75</sup> Parini, “Prefazione,” in *Sole d’Italia*.

good Italian, and therefore, a good fascist: obedient, disciplined, and willing to fight and die for your distant country.

The schoolbooks abroad also manipulated the history of Italy to serve their ends. In these works, the fascist regime was at once a return to the glory of ancient Rome and the consummation of the virtues of the Risorgimento. Of Rome's rise to greatness Parini wrote, "Those poor peasants and shepherds who lived along the banks of the Tiber were men of will. They were strong and courageous in battle and had a will of steel which sustained their daring. The secret of their fortune and the immortality of Rome lies in that small word: *will*."<sup>76</sup> Two-thousand years later, the will to power and courage to achieve returned to Italy in the person of Il Duce, since "Mussolini's will is a Roman's will, and Fascism signifies the return of Rome."<sup>77</sup>

Next to Rome, the Risorgimento and its heroes figured prominently in these fascist historical narratives. The young readers did not however learn about Mazzini's republican ideals, or Garibaldi's concern for the poor and downtrodden. Instead they read of daring individuals who sacrificed themselves for the Nation. Visionaries, these heroes died before seeing the culmination of their great endeavor, which was only truly completed by the fascist 'revolution,' referred to by Volpe as "the New Risorgimento." Accordingly, fascist squads were a new *Giovine Italia* filled with the same youthful enthusiasm of Mazzini's movement. Aware of his sacred role in completing the

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<sup>76</sup> Parini, "Roma Ritorna -- Ritorna a Roma" in *Sole d'Italia*, 48.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

Risorgimento, Mussolini took on the mantle of Garibaldi solemnly proclaiming that “the Black Shirts are continuing and perfecting the work of the Red Shirts.”<sup>78</sup>

The First World War as fascism’s foundational myth of course occupied an inordinate amount of space in just about all of the texts. Schoolbooks from grades III to V devoted entire chapters to First World War martyrs, all of whom before their deaths movingly declared their love for the Patria. Decio Radde, for example, who died charging the enemy trenches, in his testament declared “O young Italy: admire my fortunate death! In the name of God, and in the hope of a better life for the nation, for its greatness and unity, for the honor of the Patria, for the liberty and independence of our oppressed brethren, in the sacred name of Italy, and for love of everything that is Italian, I die blessed!”<sup>79</sup> Nazario Sauro’s letter to his wife and child before facing an Austrian firing squad was the most often cited example of martyr prose. To his wife he wrote “I die happy to have done my duty as an Italian... Teach our children that their father was an Italian first, then a father, and then a citizen” and to his son he wrote: “swear in the name of the Patria ... that you will always be Italian, no matter where you go and above all else.”<sup>80</sup> This last line, “no matter where you go” is of special importance as a message to the children in the schools abroad. It was a voice from the grave reminding them that however far away they may be, they were still Italians.

Tailored to schools abroad the authors made clear that Italians abroad also did their patriotic duty during the war, and could participate in the devotion to First World War martyrs and pay homage to the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, a soldier who

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<sup>78</sup> Gioacchino Volpe, *I Fatti degli Italiani e dell’Italia: Letture storiche, Scuole italiane all’estero* (Verona: A. Mondadori, 1932), 334. The expanded second edition of Volpe’s history is entitled, *Il Risorgimento dell’Italia* (Rome: Direzione Italiana all’Estero, 1934).

<sup>79</sup> *Il Libro della III classe elementare*, 69.

<sup>80</sup> Nazario Sauro “testamento” in *Sole d’Italia*, 72; *Il Libro della III classe elementare*, 72.

according to Volpe may have even been born in the Americas and if so was no less an Italian than if he had been born in Italy, since “he carries the name of all soldiers living and dead.” And “Honoring him means honoring all those who fought and suffered in the war.”<sup>81</sup>

True to other fascist narratives of the postwar crisis, schoolbooks’ abroad blamed the liberal regime and socialist ‘subversives’ for ruining the fruits of Italy’s victory, plunging the nation into crisis, and worst of all dishonoring all those bold Italians who had given their lives for the Patria. Of postwar Italy Volpe wrote, “It no longer seemed like a victorious nation but rather a vanquished one: defeated by the Italians themselves.”<sup>82</sup> According to Volpe the government was to blame, “The government was weak and timid. Not a government worthy of victorious Italy. It lacked the necessary strength to ensure order, and the necessary spirit to guide Italian youth.”<sup>83</sup> As another text asserted, also to blame were the ‘subversives against the Patria’, who, filled with greed and selfish materialism cowardly provoked friction among the Italian people. Labeled ‘enemies from within’ and ‘anti-Italians,’ with the war won, “instead of being happy and working together, many only thought of their own interests and ambitions creating profound discord. They forgot the blood of our soldiers. They did not appreciate the newly restored sacred borders of the Patria. The heroism, sacrifice and glory all seemed in vain.”<sup>84</sup> The situation was indeed desperate, as Volpe explained “When a people are

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<sup>81</sup> Volpe, 321.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 371.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>84</sup> *Il Libro della III classe elementare*, 83.

not united a government has no strength; when a people has no will or ambition, or pride; a government does not have will, ambition or pride.”<sup>85</sup>

Fear not, Volpe reassured his young readers, for out of the darkness of the period a leader emerged from the trenches of the World War, a leader who started a national movement that soon saved the Nation from itself: “While on watch in the trenches and recovering in the hospital Mussolini thought of the new Italy which was being born out of the wartime experiences. Bold and audacious, Mussolini created in Milan the *Fasci di Combattimento* in order to save the Patria from ruin.” Risking everything the best and most daring youths throughout Italy joined together and formed *Fasci*. “Many youths died, but their blood sowed the seed of the regenerative ideal: Fascism which contains the seeds of new life widened and deepened becoming overwhelming.”<sup>86</sup> In Volpe’s narrative the spread of fascism was irresistible: “From that first Fascio came others, in Lombardy, Emilia, everywhere. Soon hundreds then thousands, from the cities and from the countryside, here is Fascism and the Fascists!”<sup>87</sup>

Disciplined, bold, courageous, the fascists “took comfort in knowing that they were not a mere sect or party but the nation, the best of the nation: and this was their strength.”<sup>88</sup> According to the narratives, the fascists not only validated the great patriotic sacrifices of the World War I martyrs, but were joined by the spirits of the fallen comrades in their movement to save the Nation: “It was as if the living and the dead returned to live together and the living listened to the words of the dead.”<sup>89</sup> It was at this moment that fascism transcended party politics, and became the Nation itself: “Soon Italy

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<sup>85</sup> Volpe, 317.

<sup>86</sup> *Il Libro della III classe elementare*, 84.

<sup>87</sup> Volpe, 319.

<sup>88</sup> Volpe, 323.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

was redirected towards the ideals that had inspired our martyrs and Italy and Fascism became one and the same.”<sup>90</sup> No longer just a struggle against subversives, it was now a national struggle against, “the Italians of disorder, of forgetfulness, of coward-ness: the fight against Italians who no longer want to be Italians.”<sup>91</sup> By equating fascism with Italian identity, these passages made explicit what was implied in all of the texts, namely that, the only true Italian was a fascist.

“The Duce gave the signal and all over Italy the action squads formed columns and marched towards Rome” continued Volpe, whose narrative was reaching its climax, “Wearing Black Shirts and bearing Fascist standards, they commanded and obeyed orders like soldiers, chanting war and Fascist anthems and shouting: *Eia, eia alalà!*”<sup>92</sup> Not the movement of a motley group of disaffected youths and war veterans who used violence and intimidation to destabilize the countryside, but instead the heroic movement of the Italian Nation itself led by Italy’s “greatest sons” to save the nation from its vile and cowardly internal enemies. Similarly, the King was not the indecisive and ambivalent monarch who acquiesced to Mussolini’s appointment but instead “saw in the Black Shirts the strength that would save Italy called on Mussolini and entrusted him with the government.”<sup>93</sup> True to other fascist accounts, it was Mussolini’s bold and decisive March on Rome that swept him into power, not the result of the political power-brokering arrangement which actually occurred before the so-called march.

“After the March on Rome the people now have the freedom to work and enjoy the fruits of their labor, to worship God publicly, to celebrate the victory, to feel Italian,”

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<sup>90</sup> *Il Libro della III classe elementare*, 84.

<sup>91</sup> Volpe, 320.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>93</sup> *Il Libro della III classe elementare*, 86.

Volpe concluded, “Discipline was restored, religion was promoted, people were punished and rewarded with the strictest justice, soldiers living and dead were honored, and the wealth of the nation was advanced. Other nations were reminded that Italy also counted, and wanted, yes, wanted to count for something.”<sup>94</sup> The third grade history textbook similarly told its readers that, “The Fascist Government under the Duce Benito Mussolini has renewed Italy. The discipline of the people has been strengthened and authority reestablished.” In addition to the battle of the grain, protection of maternity, public works, and youth programs, the third grade text emphasized the fascist regime’s special work abroad: protecting and honoring the millions of Italians living abroad.<sup>95</sup>

“Il Duce watches over all Italians and no one is closer to the Duce than you who seem so far away”<sup>96</sup> No longer abandoned to their fates, textbooks announced that under the fascist regime emigrants wherever they may be could now find support and protection in the Italian Consulate, Italian organizations abroad, and of course the *Fasci all'estero*.<sup>97</sup> For unlike in the past, the ‘new’ fascist Italy “has ensured the dignity and respect of all Italians abroad.”<sup>98</sup>

Fascist texts strove to win over their compatriots abroad by celebrating the Italian emigrant. Though mistreated and underpaid, so the narrative went, courageous Italian emigrants worked in distant countries: cultivating lands and building great cities. For all this in the words of Volpe, “We must be grateful to these tireless, daring, sober and

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<sup>94</sup> Volpe, 327.

<sup>95</sup> *Il Libro della III classe elementare*, 87.

<sup>96</sup> Piero Parini, “Prefazione” in *Sole d’Italia*.

<sup>97</sup> *Storia e geografia per la IV classe elementare, Scuole italiane all’estero* (Verona: A. Mondadori, 1938), 213.

<sup>98</sup> *Storia e geografia per la IV classe elementare*, 213.

intelligent Italians... Their work has served others and has served Italy. A monument needs to be made in honor of the Emigrant!”<sup>99</sup>

The schoolbooks depicted Italian emigrants as muscular, daring, and disciplined soldiers of labor rather than impoverished workers in search of a better life. One such illustration entitled “Emigration” showed a column of powerfully built men plowing a field, with helmets on their heads and rifles over their shoulders, another showed an Italian emigrant standing on top of the world, flanked by an eagle, driving a shovel deep into the globe.<sup>100</sup> Italians abroad were soldiers conquering the world in the name of the patria with their labor. “Nothing can stop the triumphal march of Italian labor. Great battles cannot be won just by the genius of a general. Behind him are an anonymous mass of soldiers ready for his commands, with their small movements and individual virtue they complete the boss’s great designs. Around the victorious Italian engineer, are technicians and a great mass of workers who work and fight for him.”<sup>101</sup> Italian emigrants in the fascist imagination were also missionaries of civilization, who, “beyond offering the treasures of their genius and hard work to the world, have contributed and defended our civilization in new countries.”<sup>102</sup> According to these texts, more than simply laborers Italians “conquered” important positions in industries, agriculture, and banking.

“Just like your dad, Mussolini was also an emigrant. He spent many gray and impoverished days as an exile in Switzerland because before ruling over the nation he wanted to first experience all of the melancholy and privations of the Italian people.”<sup>103</sup>

Oft-depicted in Fascist propaganda as the Farmer, the Athlete, the Soldier, and the

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<sup>99</sup> Volpe, 269-272.

<sup>100</sup> Pedrazzi, illustrations on cover and page 8.

<sup>101</sup> Virginio Gayda, “Fraternità nel lavoro,” in *Sole d’Italia*, 191.

<sup>102</sup> *Storia e geografia per la IV classe elementare*, 213.

<sup>103</sup> Orazio Pedrazzi, *I Nostri fratelli lontani* (Rome: Segreteria Generale dei Fasci all’Estero, 1929), 12.

Statesman, Mussolini was now cast as the Emigrant, as if his brief period in Switzerland to avoid conscription was somehow the same as the experience of the millions of Italians who left family and friends to start new lives across the ocean. This identification of il Duce with emigrants, was designed to reinforce the message that emigrants were still Italians: after all, Italy's great man himself had been one of them.

The work of Italian immigrants in Argentina figured prominently in these sections. It was, in fact, only because of the genius and labor of Italians that Buenos Aires became a great city. "In 1855 Buenos Aires was nothing but a miserable, muddy and dirty city. Houses were small and primitive built of mud and brick, without concrete." In came the Italians, first a trickle, then a deluge, and "Thanks to our compatriots the first civilized constructions were built."<sup>104</sup> Those great soldiers of labor built everything from apartments and theatres to hospitals and schools. So much so that one of the readings declared. "If by some miracle all the buildings constructed by Italians were to be a special color, red let us say, one would see all of Buenos Aires from the river to the western outskirts aglow." Not only the city of Buenos Aires, but all of Argentina owed a debt of gratitude to the great labor of the Italian. "If they ever decide to make a geographic map which would indicate the work completed by a people...all of Argentina from Chaco to the Tierra del Fuego, from the Andes to the River Plate, would be painted in a color which the key would indicate represents: The Work of Italians!"<sup>105</sup> The not-so-subtle implication here is that Argentina was more Italian than perhaps any other nation in the hemisphere: built from the sweat and blood of the Italian laborer, the builder of nations.

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<sup>104</sup> Luigi Barzini, "Il lavoro italiano nell'Argentina," in *Sole d'Italia*, 187.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

Emigrants were as loyal to their patria as they were hard-working. “Emigrants live very different lives but they all share one thing in common: a desperate love for the distant Patria.”<sup>106</sup> As if to will it so, textbooks depicted Italian emigrant communities as bastions of Italian-ness abroad:

Italians [abroad], save for rare exceptions, never adapt, never lose their national characteristics, never change their customs, and never feel alone or isolated in a foreign land. They instead live next to each other, in the same section of a city, so that over time in the middle of the largest city in the world they have formed a gigantic Italian city, with Italian streets, Italian businesses, Italian schools and Italian theatres, where they speak Italian, live in the Italian way of life, and print daily Italian newspapers, where the Italian flag waves and where their hearts beat for our Country.<sup>107</sup>

For rather than assimilating, Italians “bring with them everywhere a love for their distant native land and the colorful language of our country. If you go for example to America you will find Italian cities and countryside filled with Italian farmers.”<sup>108</sup>

Short exemplary stories of Italians abroad expressing their deep devotion to the Patria abound in the school texts. “Una Canzone Gratis,” found in *I Nostri Fratelli Lontani*, is perhaps the most obvious of these tales. It is the story of three Italian immigrants living in New York who came to America when they were young children but whose “love of their country never diminished in their hearts.”<sup>109</sup> In 1915 they answered the patria’s call to arms and prepared to depart for Italy. Fearful that they may “die in exile” if their ship sank before reaching their beloved homeland, they approached the great tenor Enrico Caruso and asked him to sing some Neapolitan songs for them before they departed, so that “if we must die, it would be as if we had spent one day in

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<sup>106</sup> Pedrazzi, 12.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

Naples.”<sup>110</sup> Moved to tears by the young men’s love of country Caruso agreed to give them a special free performance. On that night he performed the greatest concert of his life. In the end only one of the young men saw Italy again for tragically right as they approached the Bay of Naples their ship was torpedoed.<sup>111</sup> This example of heroism by Italian immigrants who volunteered to fight for the patria in the Great War was the image of choice to the fascist writers, at once demonstrating courage and martial valor as well as a love of the distant patria.

In Mussolini’s address to the Americas, “not one opportunity is missed to remind these dispersed brethren of their obligation to love, along with the new patria that hosts them, the old patria of their origins: the Italy of Dante and Mazzini, the Italy of Grappa and Vittorio Veneto, the Italy of Fascism.”<sup>112</sup> It was the very message that was developed throughout all of the fascist school texts. Fascism welcomed them to participate in the New Italy to become through their actions and deeds the fascist ‘new man:’ disciplined, obedient, courageous and bold. Just as Italians within Italy worked for the greater good of the Patria, Mussolini “wants Italians living abroad to participate with the rest of us: sharing the labor, and the pains and the joys of other Italians, so that everyone will be tied together into one strong fascio.”<sup>113</sup> The schools abroad have educated them well and allowed them to participate in the glories of the new Rome. In return, they had to defend the patria and its institutions abroad while preparing themselves for the return home when called to arms.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>111</sup> Pedrazzi, 69.

<sup>112</sup> Volpe, 353.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

“You are the dawn of life, you are the hope of the Patria, above all else the army of tomorrow.”<sup>114</sup> With youth and the molding of a new generation of fascist Italians central to the regime’s education initiative, no ink was spared in exhorting young Italians abroad to follow the Duce. Making the fascist ‘new man’ through the education of children abroad was perhaps the most insidious of all the agendas promoted in the school texts. The virtues of discipline, self-sacrifice, courage and, above all else, unquestioned obedience to the regime were driven home page after page. The *Balilla* “have learned how to obey and how to command. Ordered, ready, disciplined: their thoughts turn to great things.”<sup>115</sup> Fourth and fifth grade students learned from the Duce himself what it meant to become an Italian of the New Italy: “You must begin to live in the style of the New Italian. What is this style? Above all else it is work, then discipline, disinterest, sobriety, loyalty, frankness, and courage.”<sup>116</sup> In Volpe’s history, Mussolini’s new Italian had to possess the qualities of “the Farmer, the Sailor, the Aviator: he must be tenacious, daring, and firm, he must love his field, have a passion for open space, faith in the Patria, and the ability to adapt, to live, and to work for the good of everyone.”<sup>117</sup>

Taken together the fascist textbooks sent abroad articulated a clear ideological program, a program which focused on redefining Italian identity to incorporate Italian emigrants and their children within the orbit of Italian fascism. Evidence from both the Italian Embassy in Buenos Aires and the Argentine Department of Education both confirm that the texts discussed above were sent to many of the schools in Argentina. The question still remains how these texts were adapted to the situations on the ground and to

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<sup>114</sup> Benito Mussolini, “Ai giovani avanguardisti” in *Sole d’Italia*, 130.

<sup>115</sup> Volpe, 350.

<sup>116</sup> Mussolini, “Ai giovani avanguardisti” in *Sole d’Italia*, 130.

<sup>117</sup> Volpe, 349.

what extent each of the Italian schools incorporated the fascist Italian message into their lessons.

### **Fascism in the Italian Schools in Argentina**

In spreading this fascist Italian propaganda through the schools a delicate balance had to be struck so as not to offend host government officials, whose approval was necessary to ensure the prestige of schools and maintain enrollment, while achieving its mission of promoting a foreign national project within a sovereign state. For this reason Mussolini stressed that: “Subsidized primary and secondary schools must obtain parity with local government schools, as well as adhere to local rules, laws and requirements so that their degrees will be recognized and of equal value to those of the local government.”<sup>118</sup>

According to Mussolini, this was especially important for the schools in South America, where due to the high number and proportion of Italians living in those nations it was possible for Italian schools to potentially provide the children of Italian emigrants with a complete education to, in the words of Mussolini, “serve not only their practical needs, but no less importantly instill in them the ideals of the distant *Patria*.” The goals of attaining parity and local government recognition of the schools’ diplomas, while at the same time instilling in their students loyalty to Italy and the fascist regime were however inherently contradictory, a contradiction which would ultimately seal the fate of the fascist Italian schools in Argentina.

Although it is impossible know exactly what went on within the classroom walls, we can get a good sense of how the teachers in these schools attempted to promote the

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<sup>118</sup> Benito Mussolini “Scuole sussidite, Istruzione Circolare no. 1 riservatissima,” Rome, January 10, 1925 ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1923-1928) b. 634.

fascist agenda by examining the lesson plans and reports on the schools activities, which were sent both to Rome as well as to the Department of Education in Argentina. What follows below is a brief panorama of the lessons and programs of study from each of the major Italian schools in Argentina, with an analysis of how they did (or did not) incorporate the Fascist agenda into their schools.

The Italian elementary school ‘XXI Aprile,’ in the interior city of Mendoza run by the local *Fascio*, was perhaps one of the most ideologically driven of the schools in Argentina. Founded in 1932 with a DIES’ subsidy, the school was originally named the Scuola del Fascio, but renamed the Scuole ‘XXI Aprile’ in 1934 no doubt to avoid offending Argentine sensibilities by such an overtly political affiliation.<sup>119</sup> The elementary school boasted 180 students in its inaugural year and 250 the following. Connected to the elementary school were two nursery schools with over seventy children and run by six teachers all members of the *Fascio* who volunteered to work without compensation.<sup>120</sup> Described by the consul in Mendoza as “the first truly Italian school in Mendoza,” its mission was one of “intensive cultural and spiritual propaganda.”<sup>121</sup> The 1932 arrival of Amarillide Avoli, one of the newly appointed teacher-agents, bolstered the *Fasci*’s initiative. In addition to teaching, Avoli supervised evening programs for adults and Fascist after school activities. The DIES also supplied textbooks as well as Fascist uniforms for the students.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Piero Balducci, *Fasci italiane in Mendoza* to Orazio Laorca Italian Consul in Mendoza, December 12, 1934, ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935), b. 780.

<sup>120</sup> R. Consul in Mendoza to Parini, June 20, 1932, ASMAE Archivio Scuole (1929-1935), b. 778.

<sup>121</sup> R. Consul in Mendoza to Parini, March 1933, ASMAE Archivio Scuole (1929-1935), b. 778.

<sup>122</sup> Trevisan Ferruccio, “Relazione della Scuola Italiana XXI Aprile,” March 1, 1938 ASMAE, D.G.R.C. Archivio Scuole (1936-1945) b. 58.

While not the largest of the Italian schools, and located some distance from the capital, the school's close affiliation with the Fascist Party and its direct supervision by the DIES, makes its activities probably the closest semblance of what the regime was attempting to achieve through its educational program in Argentina. Its programs also demonstrate that ever present tension between achieving equivalency to Argentine government standards and promoting an Italian fascist agenda. Aware of the difficulty of such a task Trevisan Ferruccio, the school's principal, in a speech to the community explained, "Everyone must be convinced that the school, which teaches Spanish as well as Italian, is completing the delicate task of rapprochement and Italo-Argentine understanding."<sup>123</sup> To that end, Ferruccio explained that its goal was to instill "unlimited devotion to our *Patria* as well as to the Argentine *Patria*, indivisible in our thoughts and hearts, bonded by blood, labor, and civilization."<sup>124</sup> The problem is how to show 'unlimited' devotion to two different nations: one would have to have priority over the other, and as the school's curricula would show, Italy far overshadowed Argentina.

Unlike the rhetoric for public consumption, the school's curricula and lesson plans, both those sent back to Rome as well as those shown to Argentine inspectors, clearly emphasized a fascist Italian education.<sup>125</sup> "A very large amount of time is given to the Fascist culture, because the students are so young, the teacher never misses an opportunity to make them feel proud to be Italian and to be grateful that they are able to

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Lesson plans sent by the Fascist Italian schools to Argentine state inspectors, although lacking the some of the Fascist bravado found in the reports to Rome, did clearly place emphasis on subject matter related to Fascist Italy. See for example, "Programa" sent by Silvia Doglia of the Pro-Schola to the Argentine Inspector General of Private Schools on July 3, 1939, in the Archivo General de la Nación Intermedios [AGNI], Educación, 1939:28.

attend an Italian school.”<sup>126</sup> The 1938 report to Rome highlighted its patriotic and Fascist mission. “With enthusiasm and energy, not an opportunity is missed by the teacher to make sure that the students are kept abreast of life in the distant *Patria*, and of its ever increasing power in all areas thanks to the enlivening impulse of Fascism.”<sup>127</sup> Daily rituals included the singing of *Giovinetta*, (the Fascist Party anthem) and the Royal March, while important dates on the fascist calendar, such as April 21 (Rome’s Founding), May 9 (the declaration of the Empire in Ethiopia) and May 24 (Italy’s entrance into World War I) were observed with parades and solemn ceremonies.<sup>128</sup> From this brief look at the school’s activities it is quite evident that the fascist agenda ultimately trumped any concern for offending Argentine sensibilities, an emphasis which would not be without consequences by the late 1930s. Argentine Government inspectors would, in fact, later use the very same lesson plans as damning evidence in their crackdown on the fascist schools.

The schools established by the *Fascio* in Mendoza, though small, were of great ideological interest to the regime. The schools in Buenos Aires, however, both in terms of numbers and visibility were a higher priority. By 1928 the schools run by the Pro-Schola committee reached a low point as the originally ten schools were reduced to three and student enrollment dropped to 250. During this period the schools reorganized and came to be dominated by fascists within the community, as the non-fascist associations and contributors withdrew their support. Now under an ideologically more fascist administration, a new Italian subsidy and the arrival of five-teacher agents, armed with

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<sup>126</sup> Avoli, “Relazione finale della Scuola Italiana ‘XXI Aprile in Mendoza,” 1936, ASMAE, D.G.R.C. Archivio Scuole (1936-1945), b.57.

<sup>127</sup> Avoli, to D.I.E.S., June 22, 1938 ASMAE, D.G.R.C. Archivio Scuole (1936-1945) b. 57.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

the new school books, revitalized the three remaining schools: Margherita di Savoia, Principe Umberto, and Gabriele D'Annunzio.<sup>129</sup> In 1934 the Pro-Schola added a new school, La Boca named after the city's colorful Italian neighborhood.<sup>130</sup> Under Parini's close supervision, enrollment rose from 259 in 1931 to 1,017 in 1935, peaking at 1,643 students in 1939.<sup>131</sup>

Along with increased enrollment, the teacher-agents attempted to both promote the Italian regime's national project abroad as well as attain Argentine government recognition. In the annual state exams administered by the Argentine Department of Education, over 95 percent of the Italian schools' students passed their exams and were promoted to the next grade. Pro-Schola school reports also highlighted the much improved Italian instruction, thanks in large part to the teacher-agents assigned to the schools along with the new subsidies and Italian texts<sup>132</sup> Many of the schools students were exposed to fascist propaganda through the Balilla, which had 229 boys enrolled and the Piccole Italiane which counted 164 members. During a typical school day students listened to weekly Italian government radio broadcasts, were given the photographs of fascist 'martyrs' to pray for, and observed Fascist holidays; first among them, October 28 (celebrating the Fascist March of Rome).<sup>133</sup> Although the Argentine school inspectors up until 1938 rated the Pro-Schola's overall performance as "satisfactory," the schools'

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<sup>129</sup> Associazione Italian Pro-Schola, "Cenni riassuntivi sull'origine e sull'andamento delle scuole Italiane in Buenos Aires" 1933, ASMAE Archivio Scuole (1929-1935) b,778.

<sup>130</sup> "Gli sviluppi della Pro-Schola e la sua fusione con la Dante Alighieri" *Il Mattino d'Italia*, Buenos Aires, September 25, 1934; Ambassador in Buenos Aires to Foreign Minister "Istituzioni Scholastiche in Argentina" October 25, 1939, ASMAE D.G.R.C. Archivio Scuole (1936-1945) b. 58.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Association 'Pro-Schola,' "Relazione Finale" December 30, 1933, ASMAE Archivio Scuole (1929-1935) b, 778.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

programmatic emphasis on Fascist Italy and Italian language instruction over Spanish and the history of Argentina did not go without notice.<sup>134</sup>

The Istituto Medio Italiano of Buenos Aires was perhaps the most important school established in the city during this period. Founded in 1934, the much awaited Italian secondary school counted sixty-three students in its inaugural year. Vincenzo Tasco, head of the local *Fascio* enthusiastically recounted that:

The prestige of the School has already been affirmed; the families of the students are faithfully following us; the students are glowing with enthusiasm; the Community is beginning to awaken; one already speaks about the school with satisfaction; there had been many who looked on with indifference, if not hostility, ready perhaps to throw stones, but who have now been won over by the seriousness of our organization. This modest, small school will soon become a great beacon of Italian-ness.<sup>135</sup>

With a less overtly political agenda compared to the elementary school program, the school emphasized the instruction of Italian and Latin language and culture, along with meeting the other secondary school requirements of the Argentine Department of Education. There is no evidence that any of the fascist messages found in the elementary school texts made their way into the secondary schools curriculum. In 1935, the principal of one of the most prestigious Argentine secondary schools, the “Colegio Buenos Aires,” associated with the University of Buenos Aires, asked the school to provide a special series of courses in Latin and Italian for its own students. This request bolstered the school’s quest for prestige, a move which according to the school’s director Professor Zama, “assured our school’s fate,” since the secondary school, “‘Buenos Aires’ is attended by the children of Argentina’s best families, the sympathy and credit that we

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<sup>134</sup> Benito F. Vaccarezza, Argentine Inspector General of Private Schools, , *Inspeccion general de escuelas particulares da cuenta de los programas de enseñanza del idioma italiano que se imparten en las escuelas dependientes de la asociación italiana Pro-Schola* “Expediente 15461-I 139,” AGNI, Educación, 1939:28.

<sup>135</sup> Vincenzo Tasco to Parini, May 17, 1935, ASMAE Archivio Scuole (1929-1935) b, 778.

will attain from this milieu will be of great benefit.”<sup>136</sup> Unlike many of the elementary schools being established and reorganized, the Istituto Medio and its accords with the Argentine school was in Parini’s words “of capital importance” offering the best possibility of influencing the native Argentine community and further expanding Fascism’s cultural mission.<sup>137</sup>

The experiences of the nearby schools within the province of Buenos Aires, which were under the direct supervision of the Italian Consulate in La Plata, are also indicative of the Fascist changes to the school program during the 1930s. Within this jurisdiction the Italian consulate and the local *Fascio* established seven new schools. The Scuola Italiana Vittorio Emanuele III in La Plata, the Istituto Culturale Umberto di Savoia in Bahia Blanca, and the Scuola Italiana in Avellaneda were the largest of these schools, each averaging over 150 students per year. In addition to primary school education these schools offered cultural lectures for adults, *Balilla* and *Dopolavoro* activities, as well as evening classes in Italian run by members of the local *Fascio*. Courses were taught in both Spanish and Italian in an attempt to gain Argentine government recognition of the schools’ degrees, but an emphasis on Italian Fascist culture was readily apparent. As the principal of the school in La Plata explained, “Of nationalist and Fascist propaganda, I can tell you that propaganda is the principle aim of our instruction, which is being slowly, slowly revealed, with tact so as to not irritate the sensibilities of our students not all of whom are children of Italians.”<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Parini to Tasco, June 13, 1935, ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935) b, 778.

<sup>138</sup> G. Rosso to Direzione Generale Scuole Italiane all’Estero, La Plata, December 21, 1934, ASMAE Archivio Scuole (1929-1935) b.779.

Although the extent to which these reports accurately reflect what was going on in the classroom cannot be determined, a look at the Scuola Vittorio Emanuele III 's program of study at the very least reveals how it attempted to propagate a Fascist agenda. Its curricula for Grade I through V included lessons on the regime's accomplishments: "the history of Fascism from its origins to the seizure of power," "the new constitutional organs of the Italian State," "the corporative system and the labor charter;" "the battle of the grain," "the rural movement," "demographic politics and the protection of maternity and infancy;" "the youth movement and the Dopolavoro." Other topics in the curricula were tailored to the experience of the regime abroad, stressing the organization and mission of the Fascist Party abroad and the importance of Italians living around the world.<sup>139</sup>

By 1938 as Argentine government officials began to suspect the school's political mission, topics related to Argentina were carefully mixed into "patriotic education" lesson plans. Within these lessons, however, focus on the Fascist regime remained unapologetically pre-eminent. The third grade curriculum for example began with a discussion of Argentina and its heroes; followed by a discussion of 'our heroes' and the greatness of Rome, and concluded with a discussion of the great 'salvation' of the Italian nation: the Duce. As the teacher explained, "I try by all means possible to complete the mission that I have been assigned: to instill in the children a great love for Italy, and a great love for our DUCE; I teach them to always trust in the DUCE's motto "Persevere to succeed" because He has always trusted in this motto and He has always won."<sup>140</sup> In his

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<sup>139</sup> Vincenzo Cucinetti, "Prima Relazione Scolastica," La Plata, April 21, 1937, ASMAE, D.G.R.C. Archivio Scuole (1936-1945) b. 57.

<sup>140</sup> Irma Traversa, "Programma Particolareggiata della classe terza anno scolastico 1938" La Plata, 1938 ASMAE, D.G.R.C. Archivio Scuole (1936-1945) b. 57.

evaluation of how students responded to such teaching, the Consul of La Plata observed that, “They have demonstrated an exact knowledge of the work of the Regime...in simple and spontaneous remarks they have expressed affectionate admiration of the Patria of their parents .... In the hearts and minds of these children is a vast and disciplined Italy which is making great strides under the guidance of the Duce.”<sup>141</sup> By 1937, the principal of the school in La Plata boasted an enrollment of over 250 students, filling the school to capacity and managing to fully incorporate the schools texts into the curriculum while simultaneously obtaining Argentine governmental recognition of the school’s degrees.<sup>142</sup>

At the southern end of the Province of Buenos Aires in the city of Bahia Blanca, the regime took under its control another new school, Umberto di Savoia, established by the Italo-Argentine Institute of Culture. With a smaller and less affluent Italian population compared to La Plata, the teachers of this school had a much harder time attracting students and implementing the new Fascist curriculum. In 1934, Andrea Di Silvestri, one of the fascist teacher-agents who closely collaborated with the local *Fascio*, increased the schools enrollment from 30 to 141 students by 1937.<sup>143</sup> In its attempt at integrating the texts sent from the DIES into its program, Di Silvestri remarked that he tried his best to instill “a knowledge of the history, the glory, the beauty of our Patria, and of Fascist achievements; to in a word, strengthen [the student’s] conscious of Italian-ness.”<sup>144</sup> The Italian community of Bahia Blanca however was largely indifferent and unsupportive of the schools initiatives. Di Silvestri reported to Rome that pessimism,

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<sup>141</sup> Consul in La Plata to D.I.E.S, December 13, 1939, ASMAE, D.G.R.C. Archivio Scuole (1936-1945) b. 57.

<sup>142</sup> Cucinetti, “Prima Relazione Scolastica,” La Plata, April 21, 1937, ASMAE, D.G.R.C. Archivio Scuole (1936-1945) b. 57.

<sup>143</sup> “Bahia Blanca” 1935, ASMAE, D.G.R.C. Archivio Scuole (1936-1945) b. 58.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

ignorance, fear, and assimilation were to blame for low enrollment.<sup>145</sup> To gain more support Di Silvestri developed programs to reach out into the community and improve the regime's image among the local inhabitants. To this end, he projected monthly newsreel films from Italy as part of an after school program, and offered evening lectures open to the public on topics which included, "the sociological work of Fascism," "the ideals of the Fascist youth," "Mussolini and his victory over time and man," "the spirit of Rome in the new Fascist Empire," and "new generations of Italians."<sup>146</sup> The school also invited guest speakers from Buenos Aires, such as the author Arturo Isnaldi, who lectured on "Italy, the cradle of Latin-ness and creator of modern thought."<sup>147</sup> By 1937 Di Silvestri reported that thanks to the active support of the DIES and the local Fascio, the school had made exceptional progress given the "moral and material difficulties" that the situation in Bahia Blanca presented, imploring the DIES "not to lose faith in the future of this far away little school, where everyone is working in the name of Italy and the Duce."<sup>148</sup>

The Italian regime encountered even more problems attempting to establish a school in the province of Cordoba, north-west of Buenos Aires. As late as 1933 no school had been established, though the prospect of one was much debated. According to a local Italian teacher, with residents who were second or even third generation Argentines, "The establishment of a purely Italian school would be a moral, intellectual, and material fiasco. *Moral* because the students and parents of the students would never renounce their

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<sup>145</sup> Andrea di Silvestro, Istituto Italo-Argentino di Cultura Umberto di Savoia, "Relazione sul funzionamento delle scuole italiane" May 3, 1937, ASMAE, D.G.R.C. Archivio Scuole (1936-1945) b. 57.

<sup>146</sup> Di Silvestro, "Relazione finale sull'Andamento delle Scuole," December 14, 1937, ASMAE, D.G.R.C. Archivio Scuole (1936-1945) b. 57.

<sup>147</sup> "Gotitas," *El Atlantico*, August 16, 1935.

<sup>148</sup> Di Silvestro, May 3, 1937, ASMAE, D.G.R.C. Archivio Scuole (1936-1945) b. 57.

love and patriotic feelings towards Argentina,”<sup>149</sup> An agent sent by the Italian Ambassador in Buenos Aires argued instead that it was in fact *only* through the establishment of an Italian school that, “we could stop the process of spiritual submersion which little by little is subduing the Italians who have long resided here [through the schools] we could correct false impressions and rescue many souls which in a few more years will be irredeemably lost for our cause.”<sup>150</sup> Such words capture perfectly the conviction of many fascists that assimilation was a process that could be reversed almost by mere force of will. The Italian consulate did establish a school in Cordoba, by 1939 counting 180 students. It never, however, enjoyed the success or prestige of the other regions, as reports from the consulate oft-noted its poor organization, lack of funding and sparse community support.<sup>151</sup>

“The dwarf has been transformed into a giant!” commented Rosario’s schools’ director in 1932 on the development of one of the most important Italian Fascist schools in Argentina: the Scuola ‘Dante Alighieri’ of Rosario.<sup>152</sup> The six schools run by the Società Nazionale Dante Alighieri in Rosario de Santa Fé became a model of success. In his report on the schools’ activities the Italian Consul, Bruno Gemelli, boasted impressive results. With a teaching staff that was, “disciplined, concerned with self-improvement, obedient, and always attentive to its mission . . . . The number of students registered, in attendance, and being promoted is clear evidence that the school is in full development and on the rise, thanks to the teachers and the DIES.” Gemelli argued that these schools,

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<sup>149</sup> De Navazquez to Raimondo Carbonelli, September 1, 1933 ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935) b.779.

<sup>150</sup> Ferruccio Agosti to Mario Arlotta, November 13, 1933, ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935) b. 779.

<sup>151</sup> Ambassador in Buenos Aires to Foreign Ministry “Instituzioni scolastichi in Argentina” Buenos Aires, October 21, 1939, op cit.; Cesare Afeltra to Foreign Ministry, Cordoba, December 1, 1937 ASMAE , D.G.R.C. Archivio Scuole (1936-1945)b. 57.

<sup>152</sup> Director “Società ‘Dante Alighieri,’ in Rosario to Bruno Gemelli, July 25, 1932 ASMAE Archivio Scuole (1929-1935) b. 780.

“served their mission well,” citing that it was one of few private foreign schools to have nearly all students in the fourth fifth and sixth grades levels pass the Argentine certification exams and advance on to higher Argentine education. Most importantly, teachers of these schools, “not only teach the specified material, but also organize lectures and conferences to reawaken within the students and their relatives who participate in the gatherings, affection and admiration for our great *Patria*.”<sup>153</sup> With the infusion of a 40,000 Lire government subsidy and the arrival of five teacher-agents, enrollment steadily increased throughout the 1930s peaking at 669 registered students in 1937 with an additional 553 students enrolled in its after school programs.<sup>154</sup>

The ‘Dante Alighieri’ school of Rosario emphasized much of the same fascist propaganda as the other schools: celebrating fascist holidays, coordinating fascist youth sections, as well as showcasing the achievements of the Fascist regime. The teachers in Rosario sought to integrate fascist Italian political propaganda across its curriculum.<sup>155</sup> Fourth grade students read and discussed a passage which focused on the themes of “God, The Patria, the Family, the Italian family in the Patria and abroad in the thoughts and desires of Mussolini.”<sup>156</sup> In religion class, after discussing the Ten Commandments, the teacher moved on to the topic of “A young Fascist’s education. The values of strength and goodness, and the Duce’s love of all Italian children: those near and those far away.” For a recitation course, the students recited the “Ten Commandments of the Balilla” which closed with the command to “Thank God every day that He has made you an

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<sup>153</sup> Bruno Gemelli, “Cattedra di Lingua e Letteratura Italiana, Relazione anno 1930,” ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935) b. 778.

<sup>154</sup> Mario Miglietta to D.I.E.S., December 31, 1937 ASMAE, D.G.R.C. Archivio Scuole (1936-1945) b. 58.

<sup>155</sup> Director of the ‘Dante Alighieri’ of Rosario to the D.I.E.S December 29, 1931, ASMAE, Archivio Scuole (1929-1935) b. 780.

<sup>156</sup> “Programma Didattico della Scuola ‘Dante Alighieri,’ Rosario, 1934,” ASMAE, Archivio Scuole 1929-1935, b. 780.

Italian and a Fascist.”<sup>157</sup> The curricula from Rosario also designed their course of study to emphasize the regime’s importance to Italians living in Argentina. In discussing the Roman Empire, a fourth grade lesson stressed the commonality of “Latin peoples” throughout the world who are the “proud descendents of Rome” while a geography lesson highlighted the “exclusive” role of Italians in the settlement and development of Argentina.<sup>158</sup> Most importantly of all, lessons stressed the regime’s renewed interest for Italians living abroad, “For Italians abroad Rome has returned to its imperial glory, returned with the rumble of Italian motors on land, sea, and air, to bring its light to its distant children, filling their hearts with pride, and profound love for the distant *Patria*.”<sup>159</sup>

The teachers of Rosario also used the students themselves as vehicles of fascist propaganda to the wider community through the publication of a school magazine: *La Scuola Viva*. Poetry and writings supposedly from the students themselves expressed love for the *Patria* and the Fascist regime. Take for example “La Bandiera” written by a fifth grader:

How beautiful the Italian flag is! When I see it I salute it holding my cap in respect because I remember my distant *Patria*. On May 24 the Italian flag along with that of Argentina waved above the school’s balcony. Upon leaving I asked my mother to buy me an Italian flag and she agreed. I came home, ran straight to my room and placed it in the middle of a flower vase. I am happy to be Italian and my Flag will always fly in my house.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> “Programma Didattico della Scuola ‘Dante Alighieri,’” and *The New Italy* (New York, 1939).

<sup>158</sup> Programma Didattico, op. cit..

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Armando Quadrio (3a B.), *La Scuola Viva, Rivista degli Alunni della Scuola “Dante Alighieri” di Rosario*, Anno V, September 1929.

Another student memorialized the death of three Fascist aviators, who had “conquered new triumphs for Italy,” commenting that the news of their deaths “left a painful impression in the distant Patria, and also in Italians who live far from the native soil [...] As an Italian, I follow with love and pride the happy events of my country, while I am also moved emotionally by its misfortunes.”<sup>161</sup>

By the late 1930s as the fascist regime was receiving increasingly bad press in Argentine newspapers for both the Ethiopian War and the Spanish Civil War, the teachers in Rosario instituted class discussions geared toward current events. Students discussed and translated into Italian the articles which were then “clarified” and put in the perspective of “Fascism’s Idea which must give humanity a new direction.” The teacher then instructed students to go home and explain to their families and friends how to interpret the current events issues.<sup>162</sup>

The teachers of each of the schools claimed that they were careful to adapt their programs to the school’s Argentine context in order to ensure enrollment and government recognition. These attempts however were clumsy and disingenuous, and even in the best of cases could not mask entirely the underlying fascist agenda. In just about every case some version of the fascist message was incorporated into the school’s activities. As will be later shown, this fascist-patriotic agenda, however diluted or disguised by its other programs, would eventually be viewed by Argentine school inspectors as a dangerous violation of their national sovereignty.

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<sup>161</sup> Carradori Alfonso, 6a Classe, *La Scuola Viva, Rivista degli Alunni della Scuola “Dante Alighieri” di Rosario*, Anno VII April, 1931.

<sup>162</sup> Mario Miglietta, Scolastic Director in Rosario to D.I.E.S., December 31, 1937, ASMAE, D.G.R.C. Archivio Scuole (1936-1945) b. 58.

## Conclusion

Taken as a whole, fascist propaganda in Argentina sought not only to instill the ideals of fascism and loyalty to the Patria, its goal was nothing short of creating a new identity: a fascist 'new man,' adapted to life outside of the Patria. This Italian abroad was to be strong and courageous, desperately devoted to the Patria, the distant Patria that he longed for, that he hoped to make proud, that he was willing to die for. This agenda was especially pronounced in the textbooks and curricula of the *Scuole italiane all'estero*. These books attempted to shape the next generation of Italian children living abroad, instilling them with the beliefs and values of the regime.

Many members of the Italian community in Argentina would not accept fascism's claims over Italian identity, and challenge the fascist propaganda in so doing revealing their own conceptualization of their identity and their place in Argentine society. The Argentine government similarly would not sit by and allow the regime to continually promote an agenda which threatened to undermine its own national and political identities. It was only a matter of time before Argentine authorities would recognize the subversive nature of this propaganda and have the fascist regime's organizations shut down.

## CHAPTER 5

### Propaganda and Identity in Argentina's Italian Community

*La enorme maggioranza non ha con l'Italia altri legami che quello dell'orgoglio del nome, né altri obblighi che quello dovere imposto dalla voce del sangue. E questo non hanno mai compreso i governi di Roma e dovrebbe comprendere il governo fascista. –Folco Testena<sup>1</sup>*

#### Introduction

These words by Folco Testena, a prominent Italian-Argentine journalist, allude to the divide between much of the fascist propaganda discussed above and the notions of identity emerging within the Italian community in Argentina. In stating that identification with Italy and Italian patriotism was a free choice rather than an obligation, Testena implied that Italian Argentines were something different from the 'Italians living abroad' of the propaganda. Testena's words also intimate that the issue of Italian identity among emigrants was much more complex than the regime appreciated. Fascist Italy's propaganda reached the Italian community in Argentina at a time when Italian immigrants and their children, long excluded from Argentina's national life, were beginning to integrate themselves in their new nation's cultural and political landscape. Many of those sympathetic to fascism used the Italian propaganda to enhance their position in the Argentine nation, serving their own needs rather than those of the fascist regime, while at the same time anti-fascists within the community challenged the regime's claim over Italian identity by offering their own alternative visions of the Italian nation and conceptualization of an Italian identity abroad.

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<sup>1</sup> "The vast majority of us do not have other links with Italy other than that of pride, nor other obligations other than the duties imposed by the voice of our blood. The governments in Rome have never understood this, and the Fascist government must understand this." Folco Testena, *Giornale d'Italia*, December 26, 1931.

Under the fascist regime in Italy it was difficult to openly challenge the propaganda with which the regime bombarded the public on a daily basis. Argentina, however, was far away from the coercive mechanisms of the fascist state. The missionaries of fascism abroad could only proselytize, unable to force the conversion of Italian communities. In contrast to a national project promoted by a government within its borders, the fascists had no way of controlling how their message was received. Furthermore, in Argentina and elsewhere, the fascists had to compete with members an international anti-fascist movement comprised of Italian political exiles known as *fuorusciti*. The *fuorusciti* who arrived in Argentina presented the community with an alternative vision of Italian identity, one based on liberty and justice; an identity replete with its own set of symbols, historical myths, and images. This chapter in part illustrates how fascists and anti-fascists created definitions of Italian identity in opposition to one another. In each case their political opponents were cast as “anti-Italians,” from which “true” Italians were defined against.

Historians who have treated the question of the Italian community’s responses to fascism have not explored in much detail the question of identity formation. For many, the question was one of measuring the extent to which fascism penetrated the community as well as the anti-fascist presence.<sup>2</sup> The question of Italian identity in Argentina during the period is however much more complex than one of two oppositional systems of Italian identity, fascist and anti-fascist. Free to accept or reject the propaganda arriving on

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<sup>2</sup> See for example the previous cited works by Ronald C. Newton, Clara Aldrighi, Ludovico Incisa di Camerana, M.L. Leiva, and Scarzanella. Of these works, Camila Catarulla’s analysis of immigrant responses to Fascism most closely resembles my approach to the question of identity. Her analysis of a sampling of individual responses to a Fascist survey conducted by *Il Mattino d’Italia* does take into account role of emigrant experiences in Argentina and their influence on emigrant interpretations of Fascism. As I explained in Chapter 1, I make use of a wider array of sources, and come to quite different conclusions.

their shores, members of the community responded to both the fascist and anti-fascist message, in the process revealing much about their own notions of identity and their complex relationships to both Italy and Argentina. Beyond identifying who supported and opposed the Italian fascist regime, I demonstrate how the community's various articulations of Italian identity were fundamentally different from the both the fascist and *fuorusciti* models, and were instead informed by the values and beliefs of the Argentine nation in which they lived.

Fernando Devoto in his recently published general history of the Italian immigrant experience in Argentina, *Historia de los italianos en la argentina* (2007) discussed the impact of fascism and anti-fascism in the Italian community concluding that, "Beyond the polemics between fascists and anti-fascists. The interwar years were characterized by other phenomena which had more of an effect on the lives of Italians and their descendents."<sup>3</sup> For Devoto, socio-economic concerns during the 1930s were much more of an immediate issue than the political debates over fascism, as Italians continued to advance themselves socially and integrate themselves politically into their new nation. Rather than treating these aspects of the immigrant experience as two distinct areas of investigation I instead argue that the one influenced the other in the construction of a collective identity. By examining the intricate way in which members of the Italian community formed their own distinct concept of the nation, this chapter confirms Eric Hobsbawm's contention that, "national consciousness cannot be separated from the acquisition of other forms of social of social political consciousness."<sup>4</sup> In this chapter I demonstrate that the Argentine social-cultural context was in fact central to informing the

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<sup>3</sup> Fernando J. Devoto, *Historia de los italianos en la argentina*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 130.

way in which the members of the Italian community formulated their own concepts of identity, which were distinct from both the Italian fascist regime's model as well as the anti-fascist *fuorusciti* alternative.

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson spoke to the centrality of print capitalism and the press in particular to the formation of a national identity. According to Anderson, "The very conception of newspaper implies the refraction of even 'world events' into a specific imagined world of vernacular readers; and also how important that imagined community is an idea of steady, simultaneity through time."<sup>5</sup> Following Anderson's lead, I use each of community's major Italian-language newspapers as a lens from which to view how members of the community imagined their identity as well as the contextual world in which they framed it.<sup>6</sup>

### **Community Supporters of the Fascist Regime**

Many prominent members of the Italian community in Argentina voiced their support for the fascist regime in Italy and identified themselves as fascists, with some more ideologically committed than others. Their understanding of fascism's program was, however, different from that of the regime as was their concept of Italian identity. Fascism, even within Italy, meant different things to different people depending on their political background, ideological commitment, and motivation for supporting the regime. In this instance, these discrepancies also tell us much about the different values and concerns of Italians living as immigrants in Argentina and go a long way towards

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<sup>5</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 1983), 63.

<sup>6</sup> I have chosen not to include a discussion of Vittorio Valdani's *Il Mattino d'Italia*, discussed previously in Chapter 3, since the Italian embassy and Fascist officials sent from Rome had an active hand in the papers editorship, and Valdani, while indeed a prominent member of the Italian Argentine community, held various positions in the Fascist Party Abroad and obeyed directives from Rome.

explaining why Parini and the Italian embassy had trouble establishing their programs in the South American republic.

Rather than simply accepting the regime's constellation of symbolic national imagery, myths, and historic narrative, those sympathetic to fascism instead attached it to their own existing national iconography. The result was a fundamentally different imagined community, based on a distinctive set of values.

Arsenio Guido Buffarini, the president of the *Federazione Generale delle Società Italiane nell'Argentina* and self-appointed spokesman for the Italian community, was among the first prominent members of the community to gravitate towards the regime. Born in 1866, Buffarini was a medical doctor who immigrated to Argentina in 1895. An active member of the Italian community from his arrival, Buffarini was a board member of numerous Italian associations and President of the *Società Nazionale 'Dante Alighieri'* in Buenos Aires from 1917 to 1921. Buffarini's face, sporting his unmistakable gray beard, can be found in just about every photograph of community events. Before the fascist seizure of power, Buffarini long advocated for the defense of Italian culture and the spread of Italian literature as well as supported Italy's First World War effort and Francesco Saverio Nitti's recovery fund after the war. In 1919 Buffarini was named the president of the *Federazione*, an institution founded in 1912 which regulated the activities of 457 Italian community associations in Argentina and included 260,000 members. Continuing as president throughout the fascist period, Buffarini often voiced his support for the regime's initiatives.<sup>7</sup> He returned regularly to Italy, making much of his audiences with the King and the Duce. During his 1926 visit, Buffarini presented

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<sup>7</sup> Buffarini, Arsenio Guido, *Tutta un'esistenza di italianità: Arsenio Guido Buffarini e la sua Opera: Un trentennio vissuto combattendo per la gloria dell'Italia e per la fraternità Italo-Argentina*, Buenos Aires, 1931, 466.

Mussolini with a gold medal from “The Italians of Argentina” in honor of “Fascism’s great work of national regeneration, from which the emigrant workers of our Latin republic have drawn strength and inspiration.”<sup>8</sup> Much to the fascists’ dismay, his support for the regime was in fact mostly in the form of symbolic gestures, like dedicating statues in honor of the regime and praising Mussolini’s work at community banquets, while doing little of substance.

Lured into the fascist camp by the promise of awards, titles, and recognitions, Buffarini often vied with the regime’s representatives for recognition from Rome. Styling himself as an intermediary between the fascist regime and the community, Buffarini saw it as a personal affront when the Italian embassy did not consult with him, while at the same time he tried to promote his own initiatives without the embassy’s support. This shameless self-promoting, along with his inability (or unwillingness) to rally the community around the regime, was a source of constant frustration in Rome. Italian Ambassador Pignatti described Buffarini in a 1930 telegram to Parini as “One of those people who gravitate around the Italian Authorities, but who do not like it when those authorities hinder their penchant for showing off.” Referring to Buffarini as “second rate”, Parini suggested that the Ambassador should not waste time on such individuals.<sup>9</sup> Foreign ministry notes for Dino Grandi summed up these impressions with the following: “Commendatore Buffarini has been described in numerous reports from the Italian

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Pignatti to Parini, August 22, 1930, ASMAE, Le Carte del Gabinetto del Ministro e della Segreteria Generale dal 1923 al 1943, b. 819.

Embassy and Consulate in Buenos Aires as a very vain person, without much following in the community.”<sup>10</sup>

There may be some truth to these fascist characterizations. Proud of his illustrious title of *Cavaliere di Gran Croce della Corona d'Italia*, Buffarini certainly loved the limelight and was often pictured wearing a chest full of honorary medals and awards. He even had a 700 page book published in his honor in 1931 which included all of his speeches as well as laudatory newspaper clippings and praise-filled correspondence.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, as head of the *Federazione*, Buffarini was indeed a very influential member of the community and a look at his speeches and writings suggest that the fascist regime was frustrated by more than just his vanity.

When speaking of Mussolini and the fascist state, Buffarini chose to avoid any discussion of fascist ideology, often simply praising the regime for making Italy a great nation. In 1926 the Argentine daily *La Nación* interviewed Buffarini upon his return from Rome. Reporters asked him if he thought the fascist program was anti-democratic and whether he thought the fascist system could really resolve the problems facing Europe. Avoiding political debate, Buffarini chose instead to simply reply by “expressing his admiration for the resurgence of the Kingdom under Mussolini’s direction.”<sup>12</sup> Maintaining what he described as an “apolitical patriotism,” Buffarini directed his *Federazione* members to follow his lead and put politics aside by supporting whatever government was in power in Italy. He explained, “We must recognize the constituted governments that represent Italy in the presence of other nations, support them and

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<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Pro-Memoria per il Ministro,” November 12, 1930. ASMAE, Inventario della Serie Affari Politici (1919-1930), b. 808.

<sup>11</sup> Op. Cit. Buffarini.

<sup>12</sup> “Impressioni di Viaggiatori sul Fascismo,” excerpted from *La Nación*, 1926 in Buffarini, 498-499.

respect them, because by doing so we are showing our support and respect for Italy.”<sup>13</sup>

This type of support suggests that Buffarini was not an ideologically committed fascist, but instead chose to support the regime only out of what he perceived to be his patriotic duty.

Unlike the fascist regime, whose goal was to aggressively propagandize a fascist Italian identity abroad, Buffarini supported the regime in hopes that this would enhance the image of Italian immigrants in Argentina so that they would be respected and recognized as an integral part of Argentine society. He often stressed the need for Argentine and Italian cooperation and mutual respect, revealing his sense of a dual identity and divided loyalty. “Our organization’s work has always been to show love and great tenderness for the distant Patria as well as affectionate respect for the Patria that hosts us.”<sup>14</sup> After establishing deep roots in Argentina, Buffarini considered it to be as much his home as Italy. In a 1925 interview for *La Razón*, he admitted as much: “I have lived in Argentina for thirty-one years and my affection for this county is so strong that when I am in Italy I am dominated by a strong desire to return.”<sup>15</sup> Argentina had become for Buffarini, a “second Patria,” as valid as his first, “The Government of this hospitable country has always recognized our loyalty and the productivity of our labor.”<sup>16</sup> Never wavering in his profession of loyalty to Argentina, Buffarini was as anxious to visit with the presidents of Argentina as he was to meet with the Duce and he delivered speeches at Argentine patriotic celebrations as well as Italian events. Thus while undoubtedly loyal to the fascist regime, Buffarini identified himself as something other than simply an “Italian

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<sup>13</sup> Buffarini, “I rapporti fra la Federazione Generale delle Società Italiane e il governo fascista,” May 15, 1926, 447.

<sup>14</sup> Buffarini, 702.

<sup>15</sup> “Confraternidad Italo-Argentina” *La Razón* October 1925, in Buffarini, 400.

<sup>16</sup> Buffarini, 703.

Living Abroad.” He similarly envisioned Italy’s relationship with Argentina as one of mutual exchange, rather than of Italian penetration. An episode illustrative of this point came in 1931, when Buffarini arranged for statues of two Argentine patriots, Manuel Belgrano, one of the republic’s founding fathers and Bartolomé Mitre an important liberal statesman, to be sent to Italy. In commenting on this initiative Italian officials voiced their reservations, questioning whether they would want to display democratic foreign patriots in fascist Italy. For Buffarini, it made perfect sense. Since Belgrano was of Italian descent and Mitre was an admirer of Italian culture, the two symbolized Italian influences on the establishment of Argentina’s democratic society. These statues, in Buffarini’s mind, were a perfect representation of the mutual respect and admiration between the two peoples. Such sentiments, undoubtedly shared by many other immigrants within the community, worked at cross-purposes with the regime’s agenda. Buffarini strove to integrate Italians into Argentina at a time when the fascists were attempting to preserve and strengthen an Italian identity abroad apart from the host country’s nationality. Although Buffarini’s support for the regime was undoubtedly welcomed, the nature of that support did very little to advance the regime’s more ambitious program.

Folco Testena, pseudonym of Comunardo Braccialarghe, was another prominent fascist sympathizer within the community who, like Buffarini, often frustrated fascist officials. Born in 1875, the son of a militant member of the First International, Testena grew up an anarchist. He immigrated to Argentina in 1906 and began his journalistic career as an editor for *La Patria degli Italiani*. In 1917 he founded the radical republican paper *L’Italia del Popolo*. He was as well-known in Argentine literary circles as he was

in the Italian language press. A prolific writer, poet, and translator, he is most famous for his Italian translation of *Martin Fierro*.<sup>17</sup> In the early 1920s Testena converted to fascism, leaving *L'Italia del Popolo* to become the editor-in-chief of another major Italian language newspaper, *Giornale d'Italia*. In 1931 he turned what had been a patriotic-monarchist daily into an expressly pro-fascist paper. In his re-inauguration of the newspaper he declared:

We will follow with love and care the grandiose political and economic phenomenon which is renovating our country and placing it once again at the head of all nations. For Italy against wind and storm, in the past, the present, the future and forever, following Benito Mussolini's exhortation to: 'Stay strong: resist, trust, and act.'<sup>18</sup>

Testena also shared the regime's preoccupation with preserving Italian identity in Argentina. He explained, "We want our compatriots to have a greater love and passion for the defense and diffusion of our language and Italian thoughts in this land... We believe that the problem of language, of schools and of acquiring books is of the utmost importance for us Italians in Argentina."<sup>19</sup> On this issue Testena saw eye-to-eye with the regime, on many others he would not.

In a series of open letters to Piero Parini during the latter's visit to Argentina from December 1931 to January 1932, Testena harangued Parini and challenged his characterizations of the Italian community in Argentina, openly questioning the wisdom of his strategies while offering the fascist minister unsolicited advice and criticism. These editorials provide invaluable insights into how an Italo-Argentine responded to the fascist propaganda initiative and asserted his own distinct concept of identity.

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<sup>17</sup> Dionisio Petriella, Sar Sosa Miatello, *Diccionario Biográfico Italo-Argentino* (Buenos Aires: Asociación Dante Alighieri de Buenos Aires, 1976).

<sup>18</sup> Folco Testena, "A viso aperto," *Giornale d'Italia*, December 9, 1931.

<sup>19</sup> Testena, "Difendere e Difondere nel popolo la lingua e il pensiero d'Italia," *Giornale d'Italia*, December 14, 1931.

In the first of these letters, Testena urged Parini to devote more attention to the Italian schools, suggesting that he take better advantage of the existing community organizations in his restructuring of the system. In another, he stressed the need to redirect more energy towards the expansion of Italian influence on high culture, explaining, “Our spiritual and cultural influence on this country is still next to nothing. We must make up for lost time, putting every man on the task of making Argentines aware of Italian culture.”<sup>20</sup> To complete this mission, Testena warned Parini that he had thus far been relying on incapable Italian officials and members of the community,

who can only succeed in causing new damage to our name and the Italian culture we want to defend, creating only more obstacles. We are certain that Fascist government, an expert from past experiences, would not want to entrust such a serious mission with men that the Patria and the collectivity should be ashamed of.<sup>21</sup>

Testena concluded his open letter with the remark, “We have indicated to Grand’Ufficiale Piero Parini the problem of Italian culture in Argentina and we are sure that in all his intelligence he will come to right conclusions.” Given his aforementioned sense of self-importance, Parini was undoubtedly less than thrilled by the condescending tone of Testena’s advice.

Fiercely independent and unwilling to follow Mussolini’s maxim to “obey without questioning,” Testena insisted that Italians were individuals who by their very nature should be free to think for themselves. He responded to Parini’s criticism of the Buenos Aires Fascio for its disunity, declaring: “We Italians are the most tenaciously individualist people on the earth. This can be and sometimes is damaging, however, this Italian pride in oneself and consciousness is also beautiful. Without this ‘I’ we would

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<sup>20</sup> Testena, “Necessità d’espandere la cultura italiana superiore,” *Giornale d’Italia* December 24, 1931.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

have never had that glorious and terrible Renaissance which was only thanks to a miraculous flowering of our individuality.”<sup>22</sup>

Never fully abandoning his anarchist roots, Testena also insisted that fascism must be understood as a revolutionary movement devoted to the working class. He defended fascism from its detractors who claimed that it was a reactionary bourgeois dictatorship while at the same time openly criticized fascist leaders for their increasing abandonment of the corporatist model. Responding to a comment made by Parini that a “level of incomprehension” existed between the fascist regime and the community, Testena retorted that this was only because the regime failed to pay enough attention to the welfare of Italian workers in Argentina. As a result, Testena argued that most Argentines misunderstood the fascist movement. “Ninety percent of Argentines think that Fascism is a regime created by the bourgeoisie out of hatred for the proletariat ... and worst of all even supporters of Fascism here believe this to be true.”<sup>23</sup> By 1931 the fascist regime was anything but revolutionary, and was fast abandoning its early emphasis on corporatism. It seems as though Testena was the one who misunderstood fascism, or better yet, had chosen to interpret fascism to fit his own beliefs.

“How can Parini claim it to be ‘perfectly useless’ for Fascists and Italians to interest themselves in internal Argentine politics?” Testena asked, ‘perplexed’ by Parini’s command for Italians to abstain from local politics.<sup>24</sup> In disagreeing with Parini, Testena highlighted the unique identity of the Italian community in Argentina.

Here in Argentina, no Italian feels like a foreigner. For a German or a Frenchman to interest themselves in Argentine politics could be seen as interfering and would be inopportune, as it would likewise seem for an

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<sup>22</sup> Testena, “Fascismo e Democrazia” *Giornale d’Italia*, December 25, 1931.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Testena, “Gli italiani e la politica argentina,” *Giornale d’Italia* December 26, 1931.

Italian in transit without any connections to this country; but we Italians in Argentina are something different; in our interests, sympathies and identity, we are Italo-Argentine.... Here we have made our hearths, here our children have been born, here everyone has made their fortune or has the hope of making one.<sup>25</sup>

Given their close connection to Argentina, Testena asserted that, “It is unquestionably dangerous for Italy and for the Italians living here to remain completely alienated from this country’s public life.” Especially since “our commercial development and our salaries depend on political decisions made here as does the future of our children.”

Responding to fascist claims that these strong connections to their new homeland weaken Italian emigrants’ loyalty to Italy, Testena insisted that, “Our patriotism is of a superior quality, because it is spontaneous and genuine, 24 karat gold....The governments of Rome have never realized that we Italians in Argentina ... are the model of Italian patriotism, exactly because we have remained loyal in thought and in spirit to the distant patria, of which we ask nothing, always ready to give.”<sup>26</sup> Thus according to Testena, Parini and the regime were wrong in both their directives towards Italians in Argentina as well in their characterizations of the Italian community. They undervalued the Italian patriotism within the community while at the same time failed to appreciate the ways in which the lives of these Italo-Argentines were already fully immersed in Argentine society.

Testena also openly disagreed with Parini when it came to the question of democracy. In one of his speeches in Argentina, Parini spoke of the difficulty in promoting the fascist ideology in a democratic society. To illustrate the point, he quoted a letter from an old World War I comrade-in-arms who wrote: “Dear Parini, I have spent

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

many years in this country after the war and I have followed everything that you have done and I have admired it, but if friendship unites us, democracy divides us.”<sup>27</sup>

According to Parini this letter, “opened up my eyes: that in 1931 an authentic veteran speaks of democracy to contradict an old comrade-in-arms is very strange. From this I can understand why the Italians in South America have not yet supported Fascism.”<sup>28</sup>

Unwilling to accept Parini’s admission that fascism was not compatible with a democratic civil society, Testena responded, “they [Italians in Argentina] have not given their support only because they do not know that democracy is ‘a government by the people and for the people’ and that the fascist experiment does not change this in substance, only in name and in form.”<sup>29</sup> In an odd attempt to reconcile fascism’s authoritarian structure with liberal democracy, Testena went on to explain “the word democracy for the old veteran only means that one should not be obligated to obey someone else who is without qualifications, without ability, without a right to command.”<sup>30</sup> What is interesting here is that Testena is himself openly questioning Parini’s authority. Perhaps he thought that Parini was “without right to command,” or perhaps without acknowledging it, he believed in the open debate afforded by a democracy.

Folco Testena felt it was his right to disagree openly with officials sent by the regime and to reject policies emanating from Rome. He also felt free to interpret fascism in his own way to suit his own values and beliefs. In short, Testena took full advantage of the freedom of expression in a democratic society. His polemical style and challenging of

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<sup>27</sup> Op. Cit. “Fascismo e Democrazia.”

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

fascist authorities would not have been tolerated by the fascist regime within Italy. Even in Argentina, the Italian embassy was less than thrilled with his defiantly independent stance on fascist policy and took steps to discredit it. The embassy-sponsored daily *Il Mattino d'Italia* went so far as to accuse Testena of stealing its subscribers and advised its readers that *Il Mattino* was the only official and truly fascist voice in the community.<sup>31</sup>

Even as a fascist sympathizer, Testena's independent stances on a wide array of issues demonstrated an implicit belief in the free exchange of ideas inherent to a democracy. It is a sign that while many Italo-Argentines were seduced by fascism's apparent accomplishments, pro-fascist members of the community refused, or at the very least, were hard-pressed to deny the democratic freedoms that existed, at least in theory, in Argentina.

This pre-occupation with the loss of individual liberty and the threat fascism posed to democracy would be the overriding theme in one of the most fascinating books produced within the community in favor of fascism: Goffredo Marchetti's *Risposte di Buon Senso alle principali obiezioni che si fanno all'Estero contro il Fascismo* (1940).<sup>32</sup> Marchetti was an industrial engineer from Rome who married into one of the Italian community's most respected families of La Plata. A Nationalist turned fascist in 1921, Marchetti attempted to put to ease many of the fears within the Argentine community brought on by Mussolini's increasingly violent rhetoric and aggressive foreign policies. Each section of the book began with an "objection" made against fascism followed by Marchetti's response. Making fascist ideology palatable to a

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<sup>31</sup> *Mattino d'Italia*, December 18, 1931, for Testena's response see: "Legittima difesa" *Giornale d'Italia* December 19, 1931.

<sup>32</sup> "Common Sense responses to the principal objections made abroad against Fascism," Goffredo Marchetti, *Risposte di Buon Senso alle principali obiezioni che si fanno all'Estero contro il Fascismo* (La Plata: Mandolin and Bonaventura, 1940).

democratic audience abroad was no small task: over half of the objection-responses involved fascism's opposition to democracy and individual liberty. Marchetti went to great lengths to convince his readers that fascist Italy was not a repressive dictatorship based on violence and coercion, but instead a widely popular regime, based on the principles of justice and humanity, with violence only a last resort, not a tactic of choice.

“Fascism is a true, authentic, and crystalline democracy.”<sup>33</sup> Making use of one particular trope in the Italian fascist rhetorical repertoire, Marchetti insisted that the fascist regime was a truer democracy than the so-called liberal parliamentary democracies. Labeling elections, “farces and colossal frauds,” Marchetti insisted that these false demo-liberal democracies were controlled by plutocrats and political interest groups which swindle the masses and did not represent the general will of the people. For that reason, Marchetti asserted that the fascist regime, precisely because of the absence of the selfish and corrupt process of party politics, was a more pure and general representation of the people. Its officials were devoted public servants disinterested in self-promotion and motivated by the good of the nation. “The Duce of Fascism and all of the high *gerarchi* are in constant direct contact with the people through massive public assemblies.” More than simply staged events, these crowds *were* the Italian people and Mussolini was their devoted servant, interpreting and dutifully carrying out what was best for the nation.<sup>34</sup>

What of the opposition? Those few people in Italy opposed to the regime, explained Marchetti, were nothing but a small ostracized minority of “lazy idlers, unemployed, cowering bellyachers and embellishers...unwilling to sacrifice their own

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<sup>33</sup> Marchetti, 18.

<sup>34</sup> Marchetti, 22.

self-interest for the good of the nation.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, Marchetti insisted that Italians within Italy still had individual liberty and the freedom to voice opposition: “In the Fascist regime all opinions can be expressed, and all forms of criticism can be made, but only in an appropriate forum, by a competent body and by qualified persons.”<sup>36</sup> This restricted freedom of expression was the only way ‘to protect’ a democracy from abuse, unlike “those so-called democracies, where everything is permitted to anyone. Where anyone can propagate the most absurd and pernicious theories, deceive the public.”<sup>37</sup> Following this logic, what was seen as repression, was instead simply ensuring that citizens act responsibly and protecting the public from damaging ideas.

And what of the violence that brought Mussolini to power and the violent rhetoric that served as the cornerstone of fascist ideology? It is far off the mark according to Marchetti for the fascists, “never attacked anyone first, only responding in kind when attacked themselves by traitors and enemies of the *Patria*.”<sup>38</sup> Of Mussolini’s violent rhetoric on the international stage? For Marchetti all nations, even the great democracies, have had to rely on force or the threat of force to advance their nations’ interests. In the Italian case, “War is the last weapon, an extreme recourse for the defense or affirmation of a people’s vital interests.”<sup>39</sup>

Beyond simply casting fascist Italy as an idyllic democracy, Marchetti also catered to a readership in the Americas by likening Mussolini and the fascist movement to the fathers of the American republics, who, like Mussolini, were forced to resort to

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<sup>35</sup> Marchetti, 26.

<sup>36</sup> Marchetti, 15.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Marchetti, 29.

<sup>39</sup> Marchetti, 41.

violence and to violate international laws in order to free their nations from oppression.<sup>40</sup>

On more than one occasion Marchetti went so far as to equate Mussolini's actions with those of George Washington, another great father of his own country:

Today in relations among nations, notwithstanding the pretext of a legal order, the moment may arrive in which an act of rebellion is as necessary and as noble in its goals as George Washington's act of rebellion which led to the founding of the United States of America.<sup>41</sup>

Drawing the analogy even further, Marchetti argued that Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia and defiance of the League of Nations was analogous to Washington's revolution: in both cases people were victimized by an imperialistic Great Britain and fought to defend their nation's rightful place in the world.<sup>42</sup>

Fascism, an ideology of "social justice" and democracy; Mussolini, the George Washington of his people; fascist Italy not a dictatorship but a beloved regime in the service of "humanity and progress;" such is Marchetti's fascist Italy. Even though Mussolini did indeed portray Italy as a victim in his speeches prior to Ethiopia's invasion as well as on occasion define fascist Italy in terms of a 'true democracy,' on the whole the emphasis placed by Marchetti on these themes distorted the image of fascist Italy being projected by Mussolini and members of the regime at the time. The difference between Marchetti's pamphlet and the Italian propaganda produced in Rome was therefore more of a question of focus and selection rather than content. It was in fact Marchetti's overriding preoccupation with defining Mussolini's Italy as a free and open democracy in the same tradition of American republics which distorted the image of the

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<sup>40</sup> Marchetti, 37.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Marchetti, 25.

fascist regime. It is an image designed to appeal to a nation such as Argentina based on a set of what were perceived as inviolable individual liberties and democratic principles.

Hailed for its “modest simplicity,” if not entirely accurate characterizations, the Italian Embassy in Buenos Aires sent a copy of the book to the Ministry of Popular Culture in Rome, suggesting that the book could be put to good use as a propaganda piece since, “it can reach the minds of many impatient readers, who would not be able to handle a more elevated work.”<sup>43</sup> The fact that such a work would be recommended for wide circulation is an indication that by 1940 the fascist regime was more pre-occupied with swaying public opinion abroad than ideological consistency.

These three prominent supporters of the fascist regime had much in common. Each took it upon himself to interpret fascism to fit his own ideological sensibilities; each in some form wrote in favor of a democratic civil society and individual liberty; and perhaps most important of all, each was anxious to be accepted into the fabric of Argentine society. This preoccupation demonstrates a sense of an Italian identity abroad distinct from the model advanced in the fascist propaganda, which had encouraged its followers to maintain their own identity apart from the host nation.

Unlike the “official” Italian fascist national narrative disseminated by the regime, these community sympathizers created their own narrative replete with their own symbolic imagery. Mussolini was placed in an unlikely pantheon of iconic figures which included the Manuel Belgrano, Bartolomé Mitre, and even George Washington, each of whom were identified as fathers of their countries who valued democracy and individual

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<sup>43</sup> Italian Embassy, Buenos Aires to Ministero della Cultura Popolare, March 4, 1940, ACS, Minculpop Direzioni Servizi della propaganda, b. 10.

freedom. By placing Mussolini in this context they created a new and distinctively Italian-Argentine narrative of fascism and its place in Italian history.

It is perhaps Buffarini's depiction of Garibaldi, one of the most iconic images of Italian national identity that provides the most telling illustration of how these fascist sympathizers imagined a collective identity which was different from the fascist model. Depicted in a drawing in his collected writings as shaking the Garibaldi's hand, Buffarini identified himself with the Italian patriot and claimed to be following in the his footsteps when he migrated to South America.<sup>44</sup> Garibaldi was the embodiment of his own transnational identity and an iconic figure used along with Christopher Columbus and Manuel Belgrano, to assimilate his Italian identity with Argentina's national narrative. For Buffarini, Garibaldi was not the nationalist forerunner of Mussolini's fascist 'revolution,' which completed the work of the Risorgimento, but instead, "Garibaldi is the representative of the glory Italian emigration."<sup>45</sup> For Buffarini, Garibaldi's value lied in the fact that this great Italian, through his revolutionary struggles for liberty and democracy on the River Plate had contributed to the making of modern Argentina, and in so doing validated the Italian presence in the Argentine nation, as well as embodied a set of ideals which both Italians and Argentines hold in common.<sup>46</sup> Buffarini, in short, made the Garibaldi icon his own, identifying the Risorgimento leader with the Italian emigrant community. It is this narrative use of the Garibaldi mythology which speaks to the disconnect between fascist sympathizers in the community and the Italian regime.

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<sup>44</sup> Buffarini, 191.

<sup>45</sup> Buffarini, 354-355.

<sup>46</sup> Buffarini, 340-341. .

### **Italian *Fuorusciti* in Argentina**

The fascists were not the only ones who spoke to Italian communities abroad and promoted an Italian identity outside of the nation. Italian anti-fascist exiles, known as *fuorusciti*, traveled around the world from country to country speaking out against the brutality of the fascist regime and organizing resistance from abroad. Italian officials abroad monitored their every step, sending meticulous reports to the Italian political police back home, but unable to silence these opponents of fascism while they remained abroad. Pages and pages of these police dossiers now housed in the *Archivio Centrale dello Stato* enable us to retrace the *fuorusciti*'s steps. From Paris and New York to Rio de Janeiro and Montevideo, these *fuorusciti* played a pivotal role in presenting emigrants with an alternative image of Italian national identity.

These *fuorusciti* used their own collection of national iconography and imagery to argue that fascism was a perversion of Italy's true national character, whose origins lay not in the martial authoritarianism of ancient Rome, nor in the fascist new man born in the trenches of the First World War, but in the universal humanism of the Renaissance and the democratic idealism of Mazzini and Garibaldi. To be a true Italian abroad therefore meant to espouse these values in opposition to the fascist model.

The *fuorusciti* were a heterogeneous collection of individuals including monarchists, Catholics, socialists, anarchists, communists, liberals and republicans, they were united mainly in their hatred of the fascist regime and lacked organizational coherence. Although many moved in intellectual circles and had much more influence within academic institutions rather than among the masses, the *fuorusciti* who made their way to the republics of South America tended to be of a more radical bent politically and

made an especially strong effort to appeal to the Italian immigrant masses.<sup>47</sup> While most anti-fascist exiles wrote only of the crimes and injustices perpetrated by the fascist regime, those operating in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil also wrote on the social and political conditions within the Italian communities in which they lived and coordinated their activities with local Italian associations.<sup>48</sup> These *fuorusciti* also collaborated with their South American political counterparts, translating important texts by prominent Italian Socialists and anarchists into Spanish, supporting the local radical press, and speaking directly on the dangers of fascist ideology to the working classes of South America.

Many important anti-fascists passed through South America during their period in exile. The special importance of the Italian community in Argentina was as apparent to the anti-fascists as it was to the fascists. Well-aware of the high number of Italians living in the republic as well as the attention that the Italian regime was giving them, one of these *fuorusciti* wrote, "Fascism now has South America in its sights, with its large Italian communities and vast national territories. Fascism has long had its eyes in particular on Argentina and Brazil."<sup>49</sup> From young firebrands like the violent anarchist Severino Di Giovanni, to elderly statesmen of the fallen liberal regime like the Socialist

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<sup>47</sup> The best general work to date on the *fuorusciti* is Charles Delzell's classic study entitled: *Mussolini's Enemies: The Italian Anti-fascist Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961). See also: Alfonso Bartolini, *Storia della resistenza italiana all'estero*, (Padova: Rebellato, 1965) and Pietro Rinaldo Fanesi, "El anti-fascismo italiano en Argentina (1922-1945), *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos* [Argentina], 1989 4 (12): 319-352.

<sup>48</sup> The works by Clara Aldrighi on Luigi Fabbri's activities in Uruguay are the exception: *Anti-fascismo italiano en Montevideo: El Dialogo politico entre Luigi Fabbri y Carlo Rosselli*, Montevideo: Universidad de la Republica, 1996, and "Luigi Fabbri en Uruguay, 1929-1935," *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos*, Año 12, No. 37, 1997.

<sup>49</sup> Francesco Frola, "La Pugnalata nella schiena," *Risorgimento*, December 29, 1930.

leader Arturo Labriola, Argentina became a meeting place for anti-fascists of all stripes.<sup>50</sup> These *fuorusciti* leaders made up their own distinct group which was interwoven into the political landscape of the wider Italian community in Argentina. Collaborating with and living among the Italians of Argentina, many of the *fuorusciti* became much more of a part of the communities in which they worked than the agents and officials that the Fascist regime was dispatching from Rome.

Domenico Gasperini was one of the first Italian *fuorusciti* leaders to actively organize the anti-fascist movement in Argentina. The Italian police files on his subversive activities date all the way back to 1905. A revolutionary Socialist since that time, Gasperini was an active member of the party operating in Italy and across the border in France right up through the early 1920s. It was during this time that he was reportedly a guest of Angelica Balabanoff in Paris.<sup>51</sup> Balabanoff was an active leader and inspirational figure in the Italian revolutionary Socialist movement since the turn of the century; she had also been one of Mussolini's lovers when he was still a young Socialist agitator.<sup>52</sup> According to Italian police reports Balabanoff's monetary and moral support had strengthened Gasperini's "rigid revolutionary socialist tendencies."<sup>53</sup>

In 1928, the Italian Consulate in Buenos Aires alerted Italian police of Gasperini's presence in Argentina, reporting that he had become the secretary of the *Federazione Socialista Italiana nell'Argentina* as well as the head of the *Alleanza Anti-fascista Italiana*. Actively involved in the revolutionary Socialist movement in Argentina

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<sup>50</sup> For the purposes my discussion here I focus on the work and writings of those *fuorusciti* who either spent most of their time in Argentina, or whose propaganda had an important influence on the region.

<sup>51</sup> "Gasperini, Domenico," ACS, Casellario Politico Centrale [CPC], b. 4956; 2300.

<sup>52</sup> Philip V. Cannistaro and Brian R. Sullivan, *Il Duce's Other Woman* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993) 55-56.

<sup>53</sup> "Gasperini" Op. Cit.

Gasparini was for a time editor of the Socialist daily *La Vanguardia* and was involved in Argentina's Socialist as well as Italian Anti-fascist associations. In the early 1930s he published two of his own papers: the weekly *Italia Libera* devoted to the anti-fascist cause, and the bi-weekly *Italia Proletaria* focused on Italian revolutionary Socialism. After a brief retreat from political activism in the face of virulent criticism from rival Socialist factions, Gasparini continued from 1931 as the leader of the Italian revolutionary Socialist party. As the 1930s progressed he began to work more closely with other anti-fascist parties, shocking Italian police by his overtures towards prominent anarchists. Gasparini also coordinated non-partisan committees to commemorate Giacomo Matteotti, to oppose the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, and to support the Popular Front in Spain. A report from the Italian Consulate in his police file dated September 10, 1939 summed up his activities during these years most succinctly, "Gasparini is still in residence in Argentina, and is as firm as ever both in his Socialist convictions as well as in his aversion to Fascism, which he continues to work against. He still participates in every public anti-fascist demonstration, never failing to deliver his typically venomous words."<sup>54</sup>

Gasparini's organizational work and leadership role made him a key figure among the Italian anti-fascists living in Argentina, but fellow socialist leader Francesco Frola thanks to his speech-writing and prolific publishing, was perhaps the best known of all the *fuorusciti* who made Latin America their base. Frola spent the majority of his years in exile in Brazil and later Mexico, but left his mark on Argentina as well. Chased from the Italian Parliament and assaulted by Black Shirt squads during Mussolini's swift and brutal repression of the opposition in the wake of the Matteotti Crisis, the former

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Socialist deputy first began his anti-fascist activities in Paris in 1925. The following year he relocated to Brazil where he lived precariously, harassed at every turn by fascist agents. In 1926 the Italian government revoked his citizenship and pressured Brazilian officials to arrest Frola for subversive activity and trumped-up murder charges—the pretext of choice by fascist officials who hoped to have their opponents extradited.<sup>55</sup>

Upon his arrival in Argentina on May 20, 1930, Frola went right to work, beginning a whirlwind speaking tour. First in Buenos Aires at various venues in which he commemorated Garibaldi and Matteotti, and lectured on the origins of fascism; then on to Rosario de Santa Fe, where he was heard delivering a speech on “Why we are anti-fascists;” and later to Bahia Blanca, where he spoke on “Democracy and Fascism;” and then in Junin on “Italy in Chains” and in Chacabuco on “The Return of the Middle Ages.” By August, he was back in Buenos Aires, speaking among other places in the city’s Italian neighborhood of La Boca on “Fascism and the Working Class.” In addition to speech making, Frola gave interviews to all of the major Italian and Argentine left-wing periodicals in the country and established contacts with Argentina’s Socialist Party. In August he met with the two most prominent Socialist congressmen in the Argentine government, Adolfo Dickmann and Angel Giménez. General Uriburu’s right-wing *coup d’etat* in September shifted Frola’s activities more squarely to fighting fascism within the Italian community and he was soon reported to be organizing the anti-fascists’ celebration of *XX Settembre* (Liberal Italy’s patriotic holiday honoring the conquest of Rome in 1870).<sup>56</sup> During these months Frola corresponded with Arturo Labriola and arranged his visit to Latin America; he also planned a series of lectures by another former

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<sup>55</sup> “Nemici palesi e occulti boicottano ‘Risorgimento,’” *Risorgimento*, December 5, 1930.

<sup>56</sup> Information on Frola’s activities comes from his Italian police file, ACS, CPC, b. 2188, and his own memoirs, *Recuerdos de un Anti-fascista 1925-1938* (Editorial Mexico Nuevo 1939) pp 145-152.

Socialist deputy, Francesco Ciccotti, who settled in Buenos Aires in 1931. Most importantly, he organized the *Concentrazione Anti-fascista* in 1930 which included delegates from the Italian Republican Party, the Italian Socialist Party, the Argentine Socialist Party, the Italian Human Rights League, and the Italian Anti-fascist Union. Through the *Concentrazione* Frola attempted to unify the anti-fascist movement in Argentina, which although numerically large, was still fractured along party lines.<sup>57</sup>

In December 1930, Frola began his most important Argentine endeavor, launching the first Italian anti-fascist daily in Buenos Aires. He gave the paper the name *Risorgimento* explaining,

We choose this name and place it under the aegis of Mazzini, Garibaldi and Matteotti. The first an apostle of liberty, the second the architect, the third the consecration, with his supreme sacrifice and eternal valor .... *Risorgimento* because it is Italian and so must be anti-fascist. For liberty against violence, for justice against arbitrariness, democracy against dictatorship, republic against the monarchy, freedom of conscience against theocracy.”<sup>58</sup>

Though himself an atheist and internationalist, Frola adeptly played the fascists at their own game by employing patriotic and religious imagery to undermine fascism’s rhetorical grip over Italian identity. Admitting as much, he explained, “We are not patriots according to the way in which the term is used today. But we are not against the Patria as the fascists who call us ‘anti-Italians’ would have you believe.”<sup>59</sup>

A close analysis of how Italian identity was defined within the pages of *Risorgimento* and its use of imagery reveals much about the *fuorusciti* concept of the Patria and its political use of identity. Frola also defined Italy broadly: “Italy is a force, a

<sup>57</sup> Consolato Italiano Bahia Blanca, “Dispaccio n. 2081/72 Avv. Francesco Frola-Anti-fascista” ACS, CPC busta. 2188.

<sup>58</sup> Francisco Frola, *Requerdos de un Anti-fascista 1925-1938*, (Editorial ‘Mexico Nuevo,’ 1939), 149.

<sup>59</sup> “Il concetto di Patria ed i fascisti,” *Risorgimento*, December 17, 1930.

reality of labor and spirit.” More than a territory it was a set of ideas, a spiritual creation, the work of great Italian minds:

Italy is the law of Beccaria, Romagnosi, Carrara; the thoughts of Bruno, Ardigó, and Croce; the science of Galileo, Volta, Pacinotti; the art of Michelangelo, Leonardo, Rossini; the poetry of Dante, Foscolo, and Carducci, the politics of Machiavelli, Gioberti, Cavour; the vision of Mazzini, the heroism of Garibaldi’s, the martyrdom of the students of 1821, and the conscious sacrifice of Giacomo Matteotti.<sup>60</sup>

For Frola Italy was also the labor of its millions of anonymous farmers, workers, miners and artisans “who worked to build the edifice of a new society in which poverty, illiteracy, prejudice were abolished.” In short, “Italy signifies thought, liberty, justice, and labor.”<sup>61</sup>

According to Frola, fascism in contrast “is darkness, violence, arbitrariness, and parasitism.” It is an ‘Anti-Italy’ where the truncheon has replaced thought and where the rule of law is high-jacked by rapacious criminals who use the state as an instrument of repression, turning Italy into “a horrible prison” and “throwing the Italian people into the darkness of ignorance, misery, and slavery.”<sup>62</sup> Fascist Italy, labeled by Frola as the anti-Patria, was referred to in the articles as “Mussolandia,” and Mussolini and his followers as members of the “Dynasty of Predappio,” both obvious attempts at separating Mussolini and his regime from Italy and the Italian people.

Lest the message not be clear in the text, the newspaper’s political cartoons hammered home the point that the fascists were nothing more than villainous thugs who high-jacked and exploited the Italian nation. One such cartoon showed a group of Black Shirts sticking-up “Italia” personified by a beautiful woman, another shows a grotesque

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<sup>60</sup> “Italia ed Anti-Italia,” *Risorgimento*, December 1, 1930.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

female personification of “Mussolandia” with its foot over an enchained Italia with the text reading, “Mussolandia has enslaved Italy, has beaten her down by treachery and now has her on the ground with a foot on her chest ready to suffocate her.”<sup>63</sup> Yet another depicted a group of Black Shirts with pistols and knives in hand triumphantly parading Italia down the street in chains. Animals were also the image of choice for *Risorgimento* cartoonists, with fascists depicted as everything from donkeys, sharks, rats, and wolves, to hyenas, gorillas and rabbits. The animal of choice was the pig, and the front page of one issue showed ‘fascist’ pigs greedily feeding on the Italian peninsula turning it into a trough with the headline, “The Fascist Concept of the Patria.”<sup>64</sup>

The brand of Italian identity advanced by Frola’s *Risorgimento* was both anti-clerical and anti-monarchic, but neither anti-religious nor anti-patriotic. Frola accused both the king and the pope of enabling Mussolini’s rise to power and in so doing betraying both their country and their God. It was an argument similar to the one made by Gaetano Salvemini, the famed *fuoruscito* who was delivering his Harvard lecture series on the origins of Italian fascism around the same time. The *Risorgimento* depicted King Victor Emmanuel III, called “the Useless Citizen,” as kneeling and giving the Fascist salute to an enthroned Mussolini in one issue, while Pope Pius XI, “The Other Accomplice,” is shown embracing a black shirted fascist beneath a shocked Jesus Christ looking on. To drive home the message another image showed clergymen and Fascists dancing around Christ on the cross and a December issue boldly declared “The Fascists

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<sup>63</sup> “La collettività italiana: prima e dopo il fascismo” *Risorgimento*, December 12, 1930.

<sup>64</sup> “Il concetto di Patria ed i fascisti,” *Risorgimento*, December 17, 1930.

Killed Christmas.” Most graphic of all, another cartoons depicted a brutish Mussolini murdering “Italia” with the pope and king behind him.<sup>65</sup>

“Enemies of Italian liberty and of the Argentine nation,” ran the heading of a daily column which listed members of *Fasci All’Estero* in Argentina. According to Frola, the fascists were not just the enemies of Italy but also a threat to Argentina and its democratic ideals: “Our battle is a battle for democracy and here we are close to one another. Our goal is to strengthen the bonds between Italians and Argentines in a common program of work, peace and progress.”<sup>66</sup> Playing off Argentine notions of identity, Frola warned that fascist Italy’s representatives were two-faced: despite their friendly overtures, they were attempting to export their fascist terror to South America. One cartoon depicted the Fascist abroad as a handsome suitor bearing flowers masking his true persona as a bloodthirsty brute; while another showed a ship named “Mussolandia” steaming towards Argentina with a cargo of spies, thieves, and murderers. To play off the vanity of Argentines, Frola also claimed that Argentina was a nation too civilized to allow Italo Balbo’s squadron to make a stop over there on his trans-Atlantic flight. Other articles quoted or perhaps fabricated disparaging remarks made by Margherita Sarfatti, then Mussolini’s mistress, about Argentina and democracy. In a full page article, Frola declared in no uncertain terms that: “The Fascists are Argentina’s enemies. They are enemies in theory and in practice. In theory: because fascism is dictatorship and violence while Argentina is democracy and liberty. In practice: because fascism is imperialistic and thinks that they can send their adventurers

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<sup>65</sup> All of the cartoons discussed above can be found in the December 1930 and January 1931 issues of *Risorgimento*.

<sup>66</sup> *Risorgimento*, December 1, 1930

into this land to do as they like.” To Frola, Argentina was a nation defined and united by its people’s belief in liberty and democracy:

Argentina is the spiritual daughter of that wonderful [nineteenth] century that Mussolini has defined as ‘stupid.’ Argentina’s political constitution is based on liberty, which Mussolini called a putrefying corpse...there is no more violent ideological contrast than the one between democracy and fascism and therefore between Argentina and Mussolandia.<sup>67</sup>

With its identity defined by its faith in liberty and democracy, Frola concluded that, “Argentina is on balance anti-fascist.”<sup>68</sup>

Frola’s definition of Argentine identity, like his definition of Italian identity, was based on a set of values and beliefs rather than defined by blood or cultural heritage. It was an ideational concept of national identity that would have been familiar to New World audiences. Just as the fascists had advanced a concept of Italian-ness which required Italians to believe in their ideological tenets in order to be Italian, Frola, like other anti-fascists around the world, countered with an alternative vision of Italian identity which was anchored by a belief in liberty and democracy.

The last surviving copies of *Risorgimento* contain affixed to them the address label of one Luigi Fabbri; Casilla Correo 141; R. O. del U., Montevideo. Fabbri was none other than the most influential anarchist *fuoruscito* living in South America. While fellow anarchist Severino di Giovanni stole the headlines of the day with his 1928 bombing of the Italian Embassy in Buenos Aires and his 1930 capture and execution, in the long run it was the writings and tireless efforts of Luigi Fabbri and his daughter Luce which rallied the anarchists of Latin America around the anti-fascist cause. Fabbri had been a long time associate of the famed anarchist intellectual Errico Malatesta. He spent

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

his first period in exile in Paris from 1926 to 1929 where he contributed articles to many different anarchist publications and emerged as a leading anarchist voice in the anti-fascist movement. He relocated with his daughter and fellow activist Luce to South America in 1930. With their home base in Montevideo, Italian police files reported that the father and daughter pair moved freely back and forth across the river, and “were as active in Argentina as they were in Montevideo.”<sup>69</sup> On March 16, 1930, Luigi Fabbri started his own anarchist anti-fascist journal in Buenos Aires, *Studi Sociali*, which placed Italian anti-fascism in the context of anarchism’s international struggle. In a clear attempt to influence Argentine as well as Italian public opinion and reach out to the working classes in Latin America, Luigi Fabbri translated works on Italian anarchism by Errico Malatesta into Spanish and wrote a Spanish-language biography and interpretive essay on Malatesta. Fabbri was also regular contributor to the local anarchist bi-weekly, *La Protesta*, for which he wrote an Italian-language page.<sup>70</sup>

Fabbri, unlike Frola, stuck to his internationalist roots most often writing about Fascism in universal rather than national terms: “Anarchism holds high the principle of liberty in the face of fascism which exalts the principle of authority. As its irreconcilable antithesis, the anarchists are its most hostile, intransigent and permanent enemies.”<sup>71</sup> Liberty for Fabbri was not conjured as a symbol of the Italian nation but instead used as the defining idea of the international anarchist cause. Fascism was likewise not just an Italian phenomenon but an international system which threatened to envelop the entire

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<sup>69</sup> “Fabbri, Luigi,” ACS, CPC b. 1906.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Luigi Fabbri. “La lotta anarchista contro il fascismo,” *La Lotta Umana*, February 23, 1928, included in the collection of Fabbri’s writings compiled by Gaetano Manfredonia in his work, *La Lutte Humaine: Luigi Fabbri, le mouvement anarchiste italien et la lutte contre le fascisme*. (Paris: Editions du Monde Libertaire, 1994)

world. It was seen by Fabbri as one of the worst manifestations of the forces of reaction and the state's abuse of power.<sup>72</sup> According to Fabbri, the situation was indeed bleak, with the complicity of capitalist plutocrats and the Church, the fascist movement was posed to destroy democracy: "If the revolution does not come soon to stop the current reactionary offensive against liberty and against the proletariat, then fascism, in its worst form, will win and an era of fear and barbarity will rule over all of mankind."<sup>73</sup>

Favoring internationalist over nationalist rhetoric, Fabbri in his works described Mazzini not as an Italian patriot but rather as a hero to humanity, "whose great love was for the people and for the downtrodden." Similarly, Fabbri often referred to the Risorgimento and its heroes, not in their Italian context but in the context of 1848 and the European-wide revolutions for the liberty of all peoples oppressed by the mechanisms of the state.<sup>74</sup> Even though Fabbri did not associate his brand of anti-fascism with Italian identity, he was quick to deny the fascists their claims over it. In one of his very first anti-fascist tracts, he declared that "fascism, with its violence, has done little to improve the declining fortunes of the patria, nor can it be said that fascism has revived or validated any patriotic ideals."<sup>75</sup> In fact, according to Fabbri, "fascism is much further away than international socialism from the Italian spirit, from its long tradition of idealism and humanism." Thanks to the fascists' brutal and vicious crimes, "in the name of the patria they have vilified Italy abroad, while internally making its name synonymous with high-

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<sup>72</sup> Fabbri, "La impotencia de la democracia capitalista," *La Revista Blanca*, June 1, 1931, in Manfredonia, 317-318.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Fabbri, "Las dictadoras contra la libertad de los pueblos," *La Protesta*, May 2 and May 18, 1927, included in Manfredonia, 279.

<sup>75</sup> Fabbri, *La Contro-Rivoluzione Preventiva (riflessioni sul Fascismo)*, (Bologna: Licinio Capellu, 1922) 66.

handedness, the abuse of power, and servitude.”<sup>76</sup> That even a life-long devotee of anarchism was moved to challenge fascism’s grip over Italy’s national image speaks to the importance of the theme of Italian identity in the debates over fascism.

Luigi Fabbri passed way in June 1934, but his work would be continued by his daughter, Luce. Luce took over as the editor of *Studi Sociali* and wrote her own history of the fascist regime in Spanish entitled *Camisas Negras*.<sup>77</sup> Beyond a history of the Fascist seizure of power in Italy, Luce Fabbri’s book detailed the mechanisms of Fascist state control along with the ways in which Mussolini silenced and intimidated the opposition, while using his control over the schools, the radio waves, and the press to indoctrinate the masses. The results of all of this were intellectual atrophy, spiritual alienation, and mechanical obedience:

It is difficult to quit smoking or drinking. But it is all too easy to stop reading and thinking. In this fascism has achieved what it wanted. It has made the minds of the masses fall asleep and has made it enormously difficult for the minority of self-educated people who refuse to allow their intellect to die.<sup>78</sup>

Framing her work in universal terms, Fabbri described a world swaying between two opposite spiritual and moral systems: one of liberty and one of dictatorship, with Fascist Italy serving as the model for the latter. Fellow anarchist and school teacher, Jose Lunazzi used Fabbri’s disturbing analysis of the Italian dictatorship to warn readers of the threat Fascism posed to Argentina and the need for the Argentine people to defend and protect their freedom before the forces of reaction at work in Argentina could implement

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid

<sup>77</sup> The works by Clara Aldrighi on Luigi Fabbri’s activities in Uruguay are the exception: *Anti-fascismo italiano en Montevideo: El Dialogo politico entre Luigi Fabbri y Carlo Rosselli*, Montevideo: Universidad de la Republica, 1996, and “Luigi Fabbri en Uruguay, 1929-1935,” *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos*, Año 12, No. 37, 1997.

<sup>78</sup> Luce Fabbri, *Camisas Negras* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nervio, 1935), 195.

the Fascist system.<sup>79</sup> The fact that an Argentine of Italian descent collaborated with Luce was a sign that Luce, as her father had before her, made also her appeals to the wider Argentine community.<sup>80</sup>

Just as Buffarini's treatment of Garibaldi was suggestive of how fascist sympathizers defined their identity, the ways in which anti-fascist *fuorusciti* articulated the values of the Risorgimento and its iconic figures is also illustrative of their particular way of envisioning Italian identity. Taken together the *fuorusciti* examined here all characterized the Risorgimento and its heroes in universal rather than national terms. The Risorgimento was a movement for liberty and justice, and Garibaldi and Mazzini in their fight for freedom and democracy belonged as much to humanity in general as to Italy in particular. This treatment of the Risorgimento placed Italian identity in a much broader international context than either that of fascists or their sympathizers in Argentina. It also would differ from the notions of identity formulated by anti-fascist members of the local Italian community.

The *fuorusciti* in fact occupied an ambiguous position in Argentina, especially within the Italian community. On the one hand, Argentina had become for them a safe-haven if not a new home. Many brought their families with them and raised their children in their new land and took an interest in the community. As Frola movingly explained, "Many of us have found a second Patria here, with Argentine wives, and children. Many have identified ourselves with this people who have opened their borders to men from all over the world."<sup>81</sup> On the other hand, unlike the majority of Italian immigrants and their

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<sup>79</sup> Jose M Lunazzi, "Nota Final" in *Camisas Negras* 259-273.

<sup>80</sup> The following chapter will explore Fascist propaganda in the context of Argentina's political environment.

<sup>81</sup> *Risorgimento*, December 1, 1930.

children who had left Italy for socio-economic reasons years and even decades before the fascist seizure of power, these *fuorusciti* were recent political exiles whose overriding priority was the liberation of their homeland from fascist tyranny. Therefore, while certainly not in the same category as the fascist propagandists sent by the regime to indoctrinate the Italian community, these anti-fascists were not always able to understand or relate to the often conflicted notions of identity within the immigrant community. In other words, although the *fuorusciti* and Italian immigrant anti-fascists shared much in common, they were not one and the same.

### **The Anti-Fascists from the Italian Argentine Community**

The local anti-fascist movement was also strong in Argentina thanks in large part to the involvement of a number of prominent members of the community and the support of long-standing community institutions. Identified by the fascist regime as Freemasons, demo-liberals, and republicans, many though not all of these anti-fascist leaders were far away politically from the socialist and anarchist *fuorusciti* discussed above. They identified most with the Italy of the liberal era, along with the democratic values of the Risorgimento. They gathered support for their cause among the mass of Italian immigrants and their children whose families had arrived in Argentina at the end of the previous century. Traditional values and old regional loyalties rather than social justice were the rallying cries for most.

These anti-fascists worked through a more politically moderate circle of long standing community associations which turned anti-fascist. All of these associations were formed in the nineteenth century and relied upon their strong Risorgimento-era traditions

to respond to the fascist regime's manipulation of Italian identity. Among the oldest, the *Società Italia Unita* had been founded fifty years prior to the fascist seizure of power in Italy. Designed as a mutual aid society, the *Società Italia Unita's* Italian elementary schools rivaled those run by the Fascist *Direzione Italiani all'Estero*. Many regional associations, the *Circolo Venezia Giulia* first among them, also closed ranks in the face of Fascist propaganda and rallied their members around the anti-fascist banner. Other organizations like the *Società Italiana di M.S. Belgrano*, with the majority of its members Argentines of Italian descent, resisted the Fascists' attempted co-optation of Italian identity, while choosing to avoid the politically-charged 'anti-fascist' label.<sup>82</sup>

*La Nuova Società Dante Alighieri* was one of the only community associations formed expressly to combat fascism. When the original Dante Alighieri society became co-opted by the fascist regime in 1934, many of its members in Argentina left to form their own "new" Dante Alighieri, which would become in a few short years the central rallying point for prominent anti-fascists within the community. Its founding charter declared "The Dante Alighieri has as its mission the promotion of the Italian language and Italian culture, it does not have a political agenda. . . . The 'Nuova Dante' believes that Italy is something much more than any government which may temporarily exert its control over our peninsula, and Italian culture is much more important than any political party."<sup>83</sup> Accused of being traitors to the Italian cause and saboteurs of Italian identity, Luigi Delfino, the first president of the *Nuova Dante*, responded by insisting that their opposition to Mussolini's vision of an imperialistic and violent Italy did not make them

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<sup>82</sup> Italian Embassy in Buenos Aires to Foreign Ministry, May 4, 1937, ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 7.

<sup>83</sup> Letter of Torquato di Tela, April 23, 1937, ASMAE, Inventario degli Archivi Microfilmati delle associazioni italiane in Argentina, Ruolo 89.

traitors, since the *Nuova Dante* promoted Italy's true identity, an identity based on civil virtue and humanism.<sup>84</sup> Delfino was a highly-regarded surgeon and upstanding member of the community who immigrated to Argentina in 1906 and was an implacable foe of the fascists. Unlike the many of the *fuorusciti*, no hint of prior subversive activity could be found on Delfino. Italian police investigated him after he was made the president of the anti-fascist association. Much to their dismay, they found no evidence of his involvement in any "subversive party." When questioned by police, members of his hometown of Zuccarello in Liguria reported that Delfino "was a person worthy of respect, who had always harbored patriotic sentiments." He was also remembered as "an active and intelligent person," who without financial means had managed to earn his degrees in medicine and surgery by earning a prestigious scholarship. He had also served with distinction in the Italian military with the rank of medical lieutenant, certainly not the figure of a 'subversive anti-Italian' as the regime would have wanted people believe.<sup>85</sup> He was instead exactly the type of man that the Italian Consulate had a hard time discrediting. With Delfino at the helm, the *Nuova Dante* competed against and often undermined the activities of the official society. When, in February 1936, an automobile accident led to Delfino's untimely death, the society's work was taken over by another well-respected member of the community, Torcuato Di Tella.<sup>86</sup>

Torcuato Di Tella, a wealthy industrialist from one of the most prominent Italo-Argentine families, was the most important anti-fascist leader to emerge from within the community. The primary shareholder and president of the *Societ d Industrial Americana*

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<sup>84</sup> Luigi Delfino, Letter, Buenos Aires, 1935 ASMAE, Inventario degli Archivi Microfilmati delle associazioni italiane in Argentina, Ruolo 89.

<sup>85</sup> "Delfino, Luigi," ACS, CPC, b. 1675.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

*Maquinarias*, Di Tella used his resources and influence to promote the anti-fascist cause.

He corresponded often with the cream of the international anti-fascist movement:

Francesco Saverio Nitti, the former Liberal prime minister; Filippo Turati, the founder of the Italian Socialist party; Carlo Sforza, the aristocratic head of the Mazzini Society in New York; and Gaetano Salvemini, the maverick journalist and anti-fascist intellectual.

In addition to his new role as the president of the *Nuova Dante*, Di Tella also established and subsidized one of the main wartime anti-fascist newspapers in Argentina.<sup>87</sup> It was in fact through the Italian language press, funded by individuals like Di Tella, that many of these local anti-fascists articulated their own sense of Italian identity as well as their community's relationship to Argentina.

### **The Anti-Fascism of the Italian-Language Press**

The *fuorscito* Francesco Frola had few kind words for the Italian community's local anti-fascist newspapers and their brand of anti-fascism. He wrote that *La Patria degli Italiani*, the long established mouthpiece of the Italian community, "supports anti-fascism but not our anti-fascism. It is the traditional newspaper of the community: it is old and wears slippers. It can no longer keep pace. We understand it but we cannot identify with it."<sup>88</sup>

These flippant lines, perhaps merely a device to justify the need for his own newspaper, do nevertheless indicate a certain level of frustration and lack of sympathy on the part of some of the *fuorusciti* towards anti-fascists within the community. It is not unlike the way in which Italian Fascists had expressed frustration with their own sympathizers in the

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<sup>87</sup> Regia Ambasciata d'Italia Buenos Aires, "Torquato di Tella ingegnere ed Anti-fascista" ASC, CPC busta 1822; see also Newton ,64.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

community. Both instances highlight the different sense of Italian politics and identity on the part of immigrants in an Argentine environment.

*La Patria degli Italiani*, as the oldest and most widely circulated Italian-language daily, expressed a distinct brand of anti-fascism which articulated many of the values shared by non-fascist members of the community. Self-described as, “more than a just an organ of information [this newspaper] is a symbol, a flag, perhaps among the last in the struggle to defend the rights of free Italians, their liberal traditions, and Italian-ness.”<sup>89</sup> Founded in 1876, *La Patria* was steeped in nineteenth-century Italian liberalism. By the time the Fascist regime came to power *La Patria* was a well-established community institution. It had long-served as a pillar of support to the community, a mouthpiece to voice its concerns, and a link to the distant patria of its readership. Each issue covered the major news stories from Italy as well as the events and happenings within the Italian communities in Argentina. Its pages also celebrated both Argentine and well as Italian patriots. Christopher Columbus, Manuel Belgrano, and Giuseppe Garibaldi figured prominently within its pages, each described as a key Italian contributor to the Argentine nation-state. Its expressed mission was to instill in its readers a patriotic love for Italy, their distant homeland, while at the same time, to assist their integration into the fabric of their new Argentine homeland.<sup>90</sup>

Identifying itself as a product of the Risorgimento and its liberal and democratic ideals, the editorship asserted that *La Patria* was, “the only Italian newspaper made for all Italians. It is the longstanding newspaper of the emigrants. It inspires a patriotism which is not monopolized by parties or governments, but motivated by feeling and

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<sup>89</sup> “Ai lettori,” *La Patria degli Italiani*, September 3, 1931.

<sup>90</sup> These observations are drawn from issues of *La Patria degli Italiani* during the last decade of its existence: 1921-1931.

practicality rather than presumptuous and empty chatter.” Although claiming to remain above political squabbling, “it has never betrayed and will never betray its liberalism which has always been its flag, the flag of Italy itself.”<sup>91</sup> Liberalism was in fact for the editorship of *La Patria* the cornerstone of Italy’s identity as a nation. Crediting the Liberal regime with all of Italy’s greatest accomplishments the paper declared, “The history of Italy is nothing if not the history of liberalism.”<sup>92</sup>

“We want to provide our compatriots with a free and truly independent newspaper, which is not associated with any sect or faction,” insisted one editorial in 1929, while another clarified its stance even further: “‘Neither slave nor rebel’ this is the motto of every Italian who lives abroad to work and does not play politics.”<sup>93</sup> Strictly speaking, *La Patria* never defined itself as anti-fascist, as the editorship explained, “Anti-fascism is a negation, while liberalism and democracy are affirmations and have their own existence. *La Patria* can only exist as a newspaper based on permanent, rather than contingent, principles and those principles are liberal and democratic.”<sup>94</sup> By refusing to submit to the Fascist regime’s pressure and holding true to its liberal and democratic principles, *La Patria*’s defiant stand did, however, place the paper squarely in the anti-fascist camp. Its editorship’s refusal to explicitly associate itself with the anti-fascist cause did however exasperate many other anti-fascists, Froila first among them.

It was during its last days, while in the midst of its confrontation with the Italian Embassy and *Il Mattino d’Italia*, that *La Patria* countered fascism’s propaganda with its own definition of patriotism and its own conceptualization of an Italian identity abroad.

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<sup>91</sup> “A tutti gli Italiani” *La Patria degli Italiani*, September 4, 1931.

<sup>92</sup> “Per fissare le posizione,” *La Patria degli Italiani*, December 30, 1929.

<sup>93</sup> “Ai connazionali,” *La Patria degli Italiani*, November 4, 1929.

Op.cit. “Per fissare le posizione.”

<sup>94</sup> “Né fascisti né antifascisti,” *La Patria degli Italiani*, November 28, 1929.

Challenging the regime's claim that a true Italian abroad must become a fascist, *La Patria* insisted that politics held no place in an emigrant's sense of identity. According to the paper, emigrants left Italy in search of work and a better life for their families, not to participate in political movements. This emigrant identity, unlike that of the fascist propaganda, was not contingent upon any ideology, "his is not a hollow nationalism...the emigrant feels that he cannot be anything other than an Italian and if he is not an Italian than he is nothing."<sup>95</sup> Fascism, with its strong-arm tactics, perverted this almost innate sense of national identity into something else entirely. "Patriotism which had been a spontaneous expression has become extraneously imposed. An individual is no longer measured by the merits of his actions and accomplishments, but by the weakness of his spine and by his ability to genuflect."<sup>96</sup> What no doubt also frustrated anti-fascist *fuorusciti*, this innate sense of Italian identity also did not hinge on espousing the anti-fascist principles of justice and liberty.

"*La Patria*, the flag of the emigrants, has suffered and will suffer with them to the last breath"; with the end in sight *La Patria* made common cause with its emigrant readership.<sup>97</sup> As its confrontation with the fascists reached its climax late in 1931, *La Patria* styled itself as a center of resistance and champion of the Italian community in the face of fascist aggression. "We share the pain and protests of our compatriots. We have become the organ of the indignant and the displaced who, in spite of their bitterness, continue to maintain the patriotic faith in the hope of a return to the traditions and the

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<sup>95</sup> Op. cit. "Per fissare le posizione."

<sup>96</sup> "La Bandiera" *La Patria degli Italiani*, August 15, 1931.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

unity of purpose for Italy and for Argentina.”<sup>98</sup> If their struggle was the community’s struggle than their enemies were likewise enemies of the community:

The enemies of the *La Patria* are false friends of the community launching their depraved intentions against Italians, against Italian institutions, and against newspapers. The ambassador, the consuls, and the authorities’ lackeys are trying to destroy *La Patria*, and at the same time destroy all the Italian institutions around it.<sup>99</sup>

*La Patria*’s stand against fascism was by extension a defense of the community and the community’s own shared values, which for *La Patria* signified a liberal and patriotic version of Italian identity based on traditions and mutual Italian Argentine cooperation, an Italian identity far away from that of the fascists.

For the editors of *La Patria degli Italiani*, “the Patria” signified more than just their Italian homeland, the Patria was the community: a community of Italian emigrants in Argentina, a community with a shared set of beliefs, values, and traditions. In many ways, it was this identity the product of over fifty years of Italian life in Argentina rather than any abstract notions of “Italy,” which the newspaper fought so fervently to defend.

As one of the paper last editorials declared,

Now more than ever we have the feeling that this defense is being enthusiastically supported, now more than ever we have felt the anxiety of our compatriots who do not want to fall victim to adventurers, and who need a free voice, which beyond freely expressing the community’s sentiments will also prevent them from becoming the easy prey to extremist ideas.<sup>100</sup>

Defiant to the end, *La Patria*, after its offices shut down, became a martyr in the community’s defense of its identity from fascist intrusions.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> “Dissolvimento e rinnovazione,” *La Patria degli Italiani* September 12, 1931.

<sup>100</sup> “Mai come ora...,” *La Patria degli Italiani*, September 24, 1931.

After the *La Patria* ceased publication in 1931, *L'Italia del Popolo* emerged as the most widely circulated Italian language daily in the community. The paper had been founded in 1917 by Folco Testena, but was taken over by Vittorio Mosca in the 1920s. Born in Turin in 1896, Mosca came from a family of journalists. His father had been the editor of *La Stampa* and his brother, Alfredo, collaborated with him on *L'Italia del Popolo*. Unlike *La Patria*, which resisted the anti-fascist label, *L'Italia del Popolo* under Mosca's direction embraced it, boldly declaring, "You cannot be a good Italian, if you are not an anti-fascist."<sup>101</sup> Based on radical republican and socialist principles, *L'Italia del Popolo* declared itself against the fascist regime as early as 1922.

Throughout the fascist period right up to the war years *L'Italia del Popolo* responded directly to the fascist regime's propaganda initiatives and tactics in the republic. In commenting on Piero Parini's call for a more active and aggressive promotion of Italian identity in Argentina, *L'Italia del Popolo* warned that, "All these new initiatives with the Fasci stamped on them will not garner any sympathy from the Italians here, nor from the Argentines," going on to declare, "If the fascists truly loved Italian-ness, they would slow down and stop their new initiatives instead they are taking their cues from Parini and adding fuel to the fire worsening what is already a delicate situation."<sup>102</sup> *L'Italia del Popolo* was also well aware of the threat posed by fascism's control over the *Scuole Italiane all'Estero*, frequently warning its readers of the "poisonous imperialistic propaganda" being inculcated in the fascist-run schools, while actively promoting the anti-fascist Italian schools like "Italia Unita" and "Edmundo de

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<sup>101</sup> "Non può essere buon italiano chi non é antifascista," *L'Italia del Popolo*, December 10, 1931.

<sup>102</sup> "Parliamo Italiano, ma ...parliamo con franchezza," *L'Italia del Popolo*, January 21, 1932.

Amicis,” which preserved a “true sense of Italian-ness, based on Italy’s noble democratic traditions.”<sup>103</sup>

Scoffing at Parini’s exalted title of ‘Director of Italians Abroad,’ Mosca responded, “Our supreme pride has always been to have never had directors near or far away...in a free country we behave like a free people and do not tolerate directors and condottieri.”<sup>104</sup> It was in fact, the fascist regime’s high-handed and aggressive tactics in Argentina which alarmed Mosca the most:

The fascist government in Rome controls local fascist organizations in the same way they control regional ones [within Italy]. It does not matter to them at all that Argentina is a sovereign and independent nation. In Mussolini’s imperialist operations Argentina is a province of the regime. The ambassador acts like a prefect, and the consul like a police chief. Other *gerarchi* do not even feel the need to change their titles. What we have here is absurd: inhabitants of the Argentine nation ... who obey the authorities and laws of a foreign government.<sup>105</sup>

For *L’Italia del Popolo*, the fascist regime was therefore a threat to Argentina’s national sovereignty, a point hammered home repeatedly in articles alerting Argentines that:

“Fascism is against Argentina” and that “in all of his speeches the Duce shows himself to be a proud, implacable and ferocious enemy of the democratic ideology which inspired the glorious and sublime constitution of Argentina.”<sup>106</sup> The newspaper was ever vigilant of the activities of fascist agents and their attempts to manipulate the community, well aware of the freedom to contest the regime afforded them by living outside of fascist Italy.

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<sup>103</sup> Engenio Alfa, “Le scuole Italiane ed il loro sviluppo,” *L’Italia del Popolo*, March 14, 1935.

<sup>104</sup> “L’abisso fra la vecchia immigrazione italiana e l’imperialismo della nuova,” *L’Italia del Popolo*, April 27, 1938.

<sup>105</sup> “Non bastano i Nazis, bidogna mettere sotto inchiesta anche le organizzazioni fasciste italiane,” *L’Italia del Popolo*, April 8, 1938

<sup>106</sup> *L’Italia del Popolo* February 5, 1933; Orsini di Saint-Just, “La fratellanza italo-argentina nelle sue ragioni storiche e morali,” *L’Italia del Popolo*, April 10, 1933.

*L'Italia del Popolo*, above all else, challenged the fascist regime's attempted monopoly over Italian identity, as one article declared "fascism wants to impose its identity on our nationality through force, and brutal violence. As men, as citizens and as Italians, we must rebel."<sup>107</sup> Responding to Parini's assertion that "the fascist membership card must become the symbol of Italian identity," *L'Italia del Popolo* declared that this was "fascism's fundamental error here and elsewhere. The membership card is the symbol of a party, and the word 'party' derives from the word 'part' because it is just that a part and not all of a people."<sup>108</sup> Attacking the fascist tactic of labeling their political opponents abroad "anti-Italians" the paper retorted: "Just because we do not follow their orders the Fascists call us 'renouncers, scoundrels, traitors of the Patria.' It does not matter to them that we defend the interests of Italian workers, and the Italian language, and literature and Italian history....we are considered anti-Italians because, like all the peoples of the Americas, we love liberty."<sup>109</sup> Fascism's claims over identity prompted *L'Italia del Popolo* to provide its own definition of what constitutes an Italian living in Argentina.

A 1931 article posed the questions: "Who is a good Italian? What does it mean to be a good Italian?" The article went on to respond, that it was not enough to simply be born Italian or to speak Italian, asserting that someone is only a good Italian if he is "conscious of his Italian-ness, if his internal and external life is inspired by the Italian tradition....whose glory derives from its search for liberty."<sup>110</sup> The article explained that, "Throughout the ages, the Italian people have searched for and have wanted liberty, and

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<sup>107</sup> "Commentando il discorso di Piero Parini," *L'Italia del Popolo*, December 26, 1931.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> "L'abisso fra la vecchia immigrazione italiana e l'imperialismo della nuova," *L'Italia del Popolo*, April 27, 1938.

<sup>110</sup> "Non può essere buon italiano chi non é antifascista," *L'Italia del Popolo*, December 10, 1931.

have always hated tyranny.” Citing famous Italians of different periods from Dante and Machiavelli, to Galileo and Giordano Bruno, to Mazzini and Garibaldi, the editorial went on to insist that Italians have always fought for the cause of liberty and rebelled against ignorance and oppression. When Italian identity was seen as synonymous with liberty, fascism could only be seen as incompatible with Italian identity since “fascism is in every way the negation of liberty.” Therefore, “fascism is not Italy it is the anti-Italy, and as it has been said whoever wants to be a good Italian must be anti-fascist.”<sup>111</sup>

“Italy without liberty would no longer be Italy; Liberty without Italy would no longer be liberty”, so ran a headline quoting Risorgimento-era British poet Charles Syinburne.<sup>112</sup> In addition to liberty, *L'Italia del Popolo* linked Italian identity with the values of the Risorgimento: “Our job is to be Italian, which means remaining faithful to the Garibaldian and Mazzinian traditions of our Risorgimento.”<sup>113</sup> In contrast, “among the many crimes committed by the Fascists certainly not least among them was to have renounced the traditions of the Risorgimento, the traditions of *XX Settembre*.”<sup>114</sup> Here again the fascist regime failed to live up to their Italian identity by abandoning the values which defined it. For *L'Italia del Popolo*, without these values: “Today what many Italians living abroad think is their Patria no longer exists. It has become an encampment of adventurers, usurpers, and murderers. Our Patria is one of liberty and justice. In Italy it has disappeared, disappeared for all those who want to live their lives honestly and from their own labor.”<sup>115</sup> More than a geographical space or even a shared language and

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> “L’Italia senza libertà non sarebbe piú l’Italia; e la libertà senza l’Italia non sarebbe piú la libertà!” *L’Italia del Popolo*, September 22, 1936.

<sup>113</sup> “Il XX settembre é ancora progamma degli italiani...” *L’Italia del Popolo* September 20, 1938.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> “Gli italiani all’estero, la Patria, il fascismo e la Guerra d’Africa,” *L’Italia del Popolo*, February 4, 1936.

culture, *L'Italia del Popolo*, like the other anti-fascist newspapers, advanced an ideational national identity based on a set of values and beliefs, those values being above all else liberty and justice.

With an identity based on the principles of liberty and justice the conceptualization of Italian identity espoused by *L'Italia del Popolo* had more in common with the Argentine nation rather than the fascist state in Italy. “Free Italians identify perfectly with the Argentine nation and would be ready tomorrow if necessary to spill their blood for the Republic’s liberty and independence,” one article declared while another explained, “Italy and America are linked in our hearts by tight bonds. Our national revolution was so similar to the revolutions that established the American nations.”<sup>116</sup> Not to confuse Italy with the fascist state another declared, “The federal republic of Argentina is the antithesis of the fascist state; it rejects violence and the suspension of individual liberty.”<sup>117</sup> By using a shared set of values as the basis for establishing a national identity, anti-fascists were able to identify themselves more closely with the Argentine state, without sacrificing their sense of Italian-ness.

Italian emigrant’s links to Argentina went much deeper than just a shared set of beliefs. “The Italians who work here and who made their homes here identify completely with the host nation to the extent that they no longer feel like they are foreigners.”<sup>118</sup> In fact, according to *L'Italia del Popolo*, Argentina was their “Second Patria,” and Italians living in the Republic had a duty to contribute to its wealth and prosperity, in addition to

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<sup>116</sup> “Organizzazione militare fascista italiana in Buenos Aires,” *L'Italia del Popolo*, April 5, 1938; “L’abisso fra la vecchia immigrazione italiana e l’imperialismo della nuova,” *L'Italia del Popolo*, April 27, 1938.

<sup>117</sup> Orsini di Saint-Just, “La fratellanza italo-argentina nelle sue ragioni storiche e morali,” *L'Italia del Popolo*, April 10, 1933.

<sup>118</sup> “Argentinfobia fascista” *L'Italia del Popolo*, January 30, 1930.

supporting their Italian homeland.<sup>119</sup> In stark contrast to the fascist program, this meant toning-down “excessive Italian nationalist” rhetoric in the interest of creating a stronger sense of unity with the wider Argentine population.<sup>120</sup> This close identification with Argentina is also a significant departure from *fuorusciti* writings, such as those of Frola and Fabbri, which spoke of identity in the abstract, detached from the Italian community in Argentina’s own sense of itself in relation to the Argentine nation.

Article after article in *L'Italia del Popolo* separated Italian immigrants from the fascist activists within Argentina. Unlike the Italian immigrants who had become an integral part of Argentine society, “the fascists are ‘foreigners’ here and act like foreigners.”<sup>121</sup> Accordingly, Argentines “cannot confuse the fascists with the Italians who have come here to build roads, make cities grow, populate the countryside, and give children to the Argentine Patria. The fascists have done none of this. They only spread trouble and hatred, by introducing a savage system of political struggle.”<sup>122</sup> *L'Italia del Popolo*’s understanding of emigration and emigrant identity was fundamentally different from that of the fascist propaganda. Its emigrants were honest and hard-working laborers in search of a better life and anxious to prove their loyalty to their new nations, not battalions of militant pioneers spreading Italy abroad. It was also unlike the image of the Italian abroad described by the *fuorusciti*. The emigrants according to *L'Italia del Popolo* were more anxious to make their new homes in Argentina rather than fight Italian political battles abroad.

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<sup>119</sup> “Difendere la produzione argentina,” *L'Italia del Popolo*, January 12, 1932.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> “Organizzazione militare fascista italiana in Buenos Aires,” *L'Italia del Popolo*, April 5, 1938.

<sup>122</sup> “Gli italiani non hanno niente da temere dai decreti contro i partiti totalitari stranieri,” *L'Italia del Popolo*, May 15, 1939.

During the late 1930s *L'Italia del Popolo* also framed its opposition to Mussolini's aggressive foreign policies in terms of Italian identity. When Mussolini invaded Ethiopia, its headline declared, "The enemies of Italy are not the Africans, but the Fascists."<sup>123</sup> Similarly, Mussolini's alliance with Hitler was, "deeply anti-Italian, unpatriotic, and anti-national."<sup>124</sup> In the name of Italian patriotism, the paper also urged all free Italians to support the Spanish Republic in order to "demonstrate that our people is worthy of liberty,"<sup>125</sup> At the start of the Second World War, a new anti-fascist newspaper, *Italia Libre*, would overshadow *L'Italia del Popolo*. It would build off of many of the same tropes of Italian identity as well as elaborate on its own brand of Italian identity in Argentina.

"Mussolini has said: 'In Argentina there are 1,797,000 Italians....Those 1,797,000 say back: leave us alone!'" So began the circular announcing the inauguration of a new anti-fascist newspaper in Argentina.<sup>126</sup> Funded by Torcuato Di Tella and edited by Nicolas Cilla, *Italia Libre* was the main anti-fascist periodical during the war years. Unlike the more radical *L'Italia del Popolo*, it cultivated a traditional liberal version of Italian identity which nevertheless espoused a similar faith in individual liberty and democracy. In a departure from the other Italian anti-fascist newspapers, the majority of this paper was written in Spanish, targeting especially second and third generation Italians living in Argentina. Much like the others, however, one of its expressed goals was to counter fascism's pretensions over Italian identity by offering an anti-fascist

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<sup>123</sup> Ettore Brazini, "Abbasso la Guerra, imperialista! Viva l'Italia libera!" *L'Italia del Popolo*, January 17, 1935.

<sup>124</sup> Op. Cit, *L'Italia del Popolo* September 20, 1938.

<sup>125</sup> Mario Nicoletti, "I volontari italiani dimostrano che il nostro popolo e degno della libert ," *L'Italia del Popolo*, November 8, 1936.

<sup>126</sup> "La Circular-programa de nuestro peri dico," dated August 1, 1940 reproduced in *Italia Libre*, August 21, 1940.

alternative. It also similarly favored the incorporation of Italians into Argentina's political life.<sup>127</sup> To this end, articles on Argentina's constitution and the life and times of Domingo F. Sarmiento went side-by-side with those on Garibaldi and Mazzini.

Its opening circular expressed alarm at the fascist regime's aggressive attempt to win over the Italians in Argentina. Its editorial staff condemned the regime's exploitation of Italy's good name, its efforts to indoctrinate the youth, and its expressed goal of preventing immigrant assimilation in Argentine society. Responding directly to the fascist propaganda *Italia Libre* declared,

The great majority of the Italians [here] are already participating in Argentina's national life; their children are Argentines; they have already contributed to this nation's progress with their labor and as model citizens. Their savings are HERE; their aspirations are HERE; their daily problems are Argentine problems.

Thus while Italians in Argentina continued to nurture affection for their homeland, they were now living in Argentina, and their first duties and responsibilities were to their new home, rather than the distant Patria of the families.

*Italia Libre's* brand of Italian identity was also expressly pro-British and American and played off anti-German sentiments. It declared, "Garibaldi fought to liberate Italy from Germanic tyranny. What would the great patriot say today seeing Italy at the service of Hitler's tyranny?" Going on it explained, "In its long history Italy has accumulated much glory and prestige, which in just a few short years Mussolini has totally destroyed, putting our country under the vassalage of Germany our eternal enemy."<sup>128</sup> This message was reinforced by daily front page political cartoons showing Mussolini as a puppet to Hitler and a slave to Nazi Germany. The message throughout

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> *Italia Libre*, December 21, 1940. *Italia Libre* 1940-1942.

was that Mussolini and the fascist regime had betrayed the Italian nation by draining Italy's resources and sacrificing its people on the Nazi altar. The newspaper also reminded its readers of Italy's traditional friendship with Great Britain, dating back to the Risorgimento era, while articles of glowing praise for Fiorello La Guardia and Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke to the value and success of the United States of America's democratic system.<sup>129</sup>

As was also true of *Italia del Popolo*, the Risorgimento and Mussolini's betrayal of its ideals were a theme of choice, highlighted throughout. A particular telling cartoon depicted a stern Garibaldi striking down the fascist emblem in front of a cowering Mussolini. In Garibaldi's hand was a banner with Italy's royal emblem and the phrase "Italian Unity," with Mazzini's and Cavour's names on the banner's staff.<sup>130</sup> *Italia Libre* also spoke of a "second Risorgimento," not the 'Risorgimento' brought on by Mussolini in the fascist literature but instead the coming Risorgimento which would liberate Italy from its fascist captors. "One must not confuse the Government with Italy: Fascism is an enemy camped on the soil of the Patria."<sup>131</sup> Just like the other anti-fascist newspapers before them, *Italia Libre* sought to wrest Italian national identity from fascism's grip by insisting that true Italian patriots could not be anything but anti-fascist. As one article explained, "If the Italian people truly had the freedom to express their opinion, they would be the first to support Britain and France," while another called on all Italians to fight against Italy's enemies, clarifying that, "The enemy of the Patria is not in Paris or London: The only true enemy of Italy is in Rome!"<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> *Italia Libre* 1940-1942, see also the Fascist regime's files on *Italia Libre* in ACS, CPC, 2300.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> *Italia Libre*, "El llamado del 10 de Julio," August 21, 1940.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

Hector Cozzolino, in an *Italia Libre* article entitled “Italianidad,” directly responded to the assertion in fascist propaganda that to be an anti-fascist signified being an anti-Italian. According to Cozzolino, it was the fascists who had betrayed their Italian identity. “Italian-ness is a feeling inspired by the common good of the Italian Patria, and respect for its traditions and civic development...but is this the Italian-ness of the Dopolavoro and of the cowardly pro-fascist publications? No, it is a strange Italian-ness which dictates and imposes the will of an irresponsible minority.”<sup>133</sup> Defending the Italian identity of his fellow Italo-Argentines, Cozzolino went on to declare, “The free Italians who live with dignity in this great and generous country...will never reject their Italian-ness, even far away from their venerated Patria, they will make any sacrifice for the resurgence of a free and bountiful Italy.”<sup>134</sup> Thus, according to Cozzolino, Italian identity was alive and well within Argentina. The very fact that so many members of the community did not support Fascism was in and of itself an assertion of that identity.

In one of his *Italia Libre* editorials, Nicolas Cilla argued that the fascist regime and its propaganda blitz in Argentina had the opposite of its intended effect. According to Cilla, many Italians in Argentina only began to lose their sense of communion with the Patria after the advent of fascism. Inverting the fascist claims that they had renewed Italian identity abroad, Cilla argued that Italians in Argentina prior to fascism had always remained loyal to Italy, “It was natural that the Italians living in America, even if they were influenced by the customs of their new countries, to maintain an affectionate memory of their distant Patria and remained interested in its economic and civil progress.” All this, however, changed after 1922: “Fascism’s propaganda, its parades and

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<sup>133</sup> Hector Cozzolino, “Italianidad” *Italia Libre* March 1, 1941.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

ceremonies left little impression on the Italians of America...as the [fascist] movement progressed the Italian immigrants of America felt more and more morally separated from an Italy that they no longer understood.”<sup>135</sup> The Italy these immigrants knew and loved had been the Italy of the Risorgimento which valued individual freedom. After the rise of fascism, Italian immigrants shared more in common ideologically with Argentina, a nation with a liberal political system and constitutional guarantees “based more or less on the same principles of the Risorgimento.” In terms of values and beliefs, Argentina for the Italian immigrant had become more “Italian” than the regime in power in Italy. As a result, Cilla concluded, “the Italians of America in general, and particularly in Argentina, felt less solidarity with their country of origin and identified more with their adopted countries.”<sup>136</sup> In another article, Cilla spoke of the fascist regime’s “militant penetration” into Argentina, which while gaining a few fanatical recruits, “demonstrated how unpopular the regime has become to the vast majority Italians who have assimilated to, and respect the ideals of the New World and its democratic system of government.”<sup>137</sup> In other words, by being good Italians, immigrants found it easy to assimilate into an Argentine nation which valued the same ideals.

Italian identity in the pages of most of the community’s anti-fascist periodicals centered on the democratic values and beliefs which derived from the French Revolution and were the cornerstones of the republics in the Americas. Interestingly, the fascists, by insisting in their propaganda that to be a good Italian meant to be a good fascist, had played into the anti-fascists’ hands by enabling them to separate their own definition of

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<sup>135</sup> Nicolas Cilla, “Nuestra Tarea: Preparar Espiritualmente a los Italianos el segundo y definitivo ‘Risorgimento,’ *Italia Libre*, January 25, 1941.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Italia Libre* “Italia y America Latina,” September 20, 1940.

an Italian identity from simple links of culture and blood. These anti-fascist periodicals, unlike those of the *fuorusciti*, also do much more than simply advance an ideational sense of identity. They called Argentina their new home, and were well aware that they had carved out new lives in the South American republic and now shared a common destiny with other Argentines. In short, assimilation into Argentina's society, rather than the liberation of Italy was their main priority, a fact which both the Fascists abroad and the *fuorusciti* exiles never fully appreciated.

A look at how the images of Garibaldi and the Risorgimento are employed in these community newspapers is suggestive of the underlying differences between local and international anti-fascist movements. These newspapers, like those of the *fuorusciti*, similarly linked Garibaldi with the ideals of liberty and justice. However, they additionally associated him specifically with Italian unity and the values of the liberal Italy. They identified him with the Italy of their past, the Italy that they had to leave to seek out a new life in Argentina. To these writers, Garibaldi embodied the particular values and aspirations of the Italian community in Argentina. Unlike the more universal image of the *fuorusciti*, the Risorgimento and its heroes were intimately associated with the collective identity of the community.

## **Conclusion**

Craig Calhoun in a recent study on national identity explained the central importance of understanding, "the contemporary conditions that make [nationalism] effective in people's lives and that affect both their attempts to orient themselves in the world and

their actions”<sup>138</sup> This chapter demonstrates that it was in large part the fascist regime’s inability to appreciate the political and social realities of the Italian community in Argentina which explains the lack of understanding between the Italian community and the regime, and also explains why anti-fascist *fuorusciti* had difficulty relating to members of the local anti-fascist movement. The fascists as well as the anti-fascist *fuorusciti* had formulated their concepts of an identity abroad based on their own needs without taking into account the particular conditions which affected the lives of Italians in Argentina. What they failed to comprehend was that the priorities and concerns of the community were not the same as those of the regime or the international anti-fascist movement.

Whether supporting or opposing the fascist regime, members of the Italian community used the propaganda to serve their own ends, at once challenging fascism’s claims over Italian identity while at the same time using its propaganda as a way to further integrate themselves into the Argentine nation. In many, though not all cases, the Italian community, including those sympathetic to fascism moved in the opposite direction from what the regime had intended. Members of the Italian community in Argentina demonstrated an ideational sense of a national identity which countered that of the fascists. These ideals, even among the supporters of fascism, were liberty, democracy, and a commitment to the values of the Risorgimento, ideals which had more in common with those of their new nation in opposition to those of the fascist political ideology. That the fascist regime had no way of silencing their opponents or controlling the way in

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<sup>138</sup> Craig Calhoun, “Nationalism Matters,” in Don H. Doyle and Marco Antonio Pamplona eds., *Nationalism in the New World* (University of Georgia Press, Athens: 2006) 32.

which their messages were received and debated demonstrates the weaknesses and limitations inherent in promoting a national identity outside of the nation-state.

In the end, the writings of these individuals suggest that the Italian community in Argentina rejected fascist Italy's definition of an Italian identity abroad. With deep roots in Argentina and a shared set of beliefs the Italians in Argentina demonstrated that they had become more than just 'Italians living abroad.' After over fifty years of migration they had carved out their own niche in Argentine society and created their own sense of an Italian identity outside of the patria, an identity which they fiercely defended in the face of the fascist propaganda blitz.

## CHAPTER 6

### Propaganda and Argentina's National Debate

*Hemos llegado a un punto en nuestra evolución política y social en que las influencias de factores externos nos obliga a un esfuerzo para recobrar los atributos esenciales de la argentinidad. – Agustín Rodríguez Araya<sup>1</sup>*

#### Introduction

Italian fascist propaganda arrived in Argentina during one of the most tumultuous periods in the nation's history: the so-called *década infame*, a key moment in the creation of Argentina's modern political identity in which nothing less than its democracy hung in the balance. As the Argentine congressman Rodríguez Araya implied in his remarks before the Chamber of Deputies, foreign political ideologies and propaganda efforts in Argentina inspired Argentines of different political persuasions to reaffirm their own national projects. Italian fascism attracted some and repelled others, all the while challenging Argentines to define their own political and national identities in the face of the foreign propaganda barrage.

The dynamics of identity formation in Argentina, as well as in other new world nations, were in many ways distinct from the models proposed by Benedict Anderson, Anthony D. Smith, and Eric Hobsbawm in that they did not rely primarily on the creation of a set of cultural, ethnic, or historical attributes to imagine a collective identity. As the authors in Don H. Doyle and Marco Antonio Pamplona's edited volume *Nationalism in the New World* (2006) demonstrate, these nationalisms instead rely on a unifying set of

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<sup>1</sup> "We have arrived at a point in our political and social evolution in which external factors and influences are forcing us make an effort to recover the essential attributes of Argentine identity." Rodríguez Araya, Speech before the Argentine Chamber of Deputies, *Diario de Sesiones de la Camara de Diputados*, (Buenos Aires: Imprenta del Congreso Nacional) June 5, 1940.

values and beliefs from which to construct a more inclusive and multiethnic national identity based on shared ideas.<sup>2</sup>

The recent works of Jorge Myers and Jeane H. Delaney illustrate how Argentine intellectuals negotiated their own new world identity in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Both authors highlight the role played by Argentina's founding ideals of democracy and individual liberty, arguing that most national discourses defined Argentina as a nation of the future, and rather than creating a constellation of cultural myths and historic natives to unify the people, they strove to create an inclusive collective identity based on a shared set of values. Both authors, however, also trace the emergence of a more ethnic-based national discourse which was attached onto the core of Argentina's ideational national identity. Myers identifies the rise of a cultural nationalism in the writings of mid-nineteenth century elites who defined the national discourse in terms of civilization (liberal, cosmopolitan, and European) in contrast to the countryside (savage, wild, and barbarous). Delaney highlights the rise of ethnic as well as cultural definitions of the nation which emerged out of the writings of Ricardo Rojas, who wrote on the mystical pull of the Argentine soil and idealized the rural life of the pampas.<sup>3</sup>

David Rock in his work, *Authoritarian Argentina: The Nationalist Movement, its History and its Impact* (1993) and Sandra Deutsch and Ronald H. Dolkart, in *The Argentine Right: Its History Intellectual Origins, 1910 to the Present* (1993) each identify

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<sup>2</sup> Don H. Doyle and Marco Antonio Pamplona eds., *Nationalism in the New World* (University of Georgia Press, Athens: 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Jeane H. Delaney, "Imagining *El Ser Argentino*: Cultural Nationalism and Romantic Concepts of Nationhood in Early Twentieth Century Argentina," in *Journal of Latin American Studies* (2002), 265-658; Jorge Myers, "Language, History, and Politics in Argentine Identity, 1840-1880," in *Nationalism in the New World*.

the 1920s and 1930s as the height of right-wing nationalist intellectual discourses which stemmed from the earlier writings of Rojas and the intellectuals described by Delaney. Unlike Rojas, these nationalists directly challenged the ideational model of Argentina's national identity, by creating a xenophobic ethnic-cultural identity which highlighted Argentina's Spanish and Catholic roots as well as advanced an exclusionary model of identity. This movement also openly criticized Argentina's democratic institutions and ideals, suggesting in their place authoritarian solutions and rocking the foundation of Argentina's identity as a nation.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter contributes to our understanding of Argentina's national debate during this tumultuous period in its history, by analyzing the ways in which the Italian fascist propaganda influenced how nationalists, their political opponents, and ultimately the Argentine government defined their competing visions of the Argentine nation. Using the debate inspired by the fascist propaganda as evidence, I argue that Argentina's ideational national discourse ultimately was able to withstand, at least for the moment, the ethno-cultural model advanced by the nationalists.

### **Argentina: Between Democracy and Dictatorship**

Throughout Argentina's history as a nation democracy was as much of a collective fiction as a political reality. As one of the new American republics that gained its independence in the wake of the French Revolution, it was a nation defined by its democratic identity. Due to its vast expanses, problematic relationship with Spain's cultural heritage, and lack of a rich Creole or indigenous cultural heritage from which to

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<sup>4</sup> David Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina: The Nationalist Movement, Its History and Impact* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Deutsch, Sandra McGee and Ronald H. Dolkart, eds. *The Argentine Right: Its History Intellectual Origins, 1910 to the Present* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1993).

construct a cultural identity, Argentina intellectuals since independence based their conceptualization of the nation on a set of democratic principles: that of a people united and defined by their shared commitment to a republican civil society based on individual rights and freedom. This conceptualization of the nation would however be tested over the course of Argentina's history as a nation.

After independence Argentina underwent a period of civil war and dictatorship plagued by conflicts between the Unitarians, who favored a stronger centralized government and the interests of the urban commercial elite, and the Federalists, who fought for greater provincial autonomy and favored the rural interests of the cattle ranchers. Federalist *Caudillos*, or rural strong men, with their own militias dominated the period relying on a web of patronage and clientalism to maintain power. In 1829 the most successful of these caudillo chieftains, Juan Manuel de Rosas, took control over Buenos Aires and ruled by decree as his opponents fled into exile. In 1852 these political exiles, known as *La generación de 1837*, defeated Rosas and returned to build a new Argentine nation.<sup>5</sup>

Once in power the new political elite, led by Bartolomé Mitre, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and Juan Bautista Alberdi, strengthened the power of the state, stabilized the economy, and strove to create a new stronger Argentine nation, based on the principles of liberalism and progress. They cultivated an Argentine identity based on a United States inspired civil society. They looked to Europe culturally and strove to create a cosmopolitan Creole (native Argentine) identity, which was distinct from Spain, but also in contrast to the perceived barbarity of the countryside. The two pillars of their

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<sup>5</sup> David Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987: From Spanish Colonization to Alfonsín* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 102-117.

nationalization project included: public education in order to create a patriotic civil society, and European immigration which it was thought would create a new Argentine population which could tame the wilderness.<sup>6</sup>

During the late-nineteenth century Argentina saw unprecedented economic growth based on the export of cattle and wheat. Politically, Argentina was ruled by a small oligarchic elite with very limited popular participation. Immigration, urbanization, and industrialization during the turn of the century, however, led to the rise of mass party politics and election reforms spearheaded by the charismatic Radical Party leader Hipólito Yrigoyen. From 1912 to 1930 Argentina enjoyed its first taste of free mass elections and popular participation in government. Its democratic experiment was short-lived. Political instability, labor unrest, and ultimately the economic crash of 1929, hit Argentina especially hard, discrediting the Radical Party and opening the way for a military coup on September 6, 1930 led by General José F. Uriburu.<sup>7</sup>

The new government was the result of a temporary alliance between conservatives and nationalists. The conservatives favored preserving Argentina's political institutions and democratic traditions, as well as the social status-quo but hoped to rule Argentina in the manner of the traditional oligarchic elite. In contrast, the nationalists wanted to radically change the structure of society by creating a personalist dictatorship and establishing an all-powerful authoritarian corporatist state. Uriburu was himself a nationalist and in his year in power he attempted to implement this agenda. An open admirer of the Duce, Uriburu used the structure of Mussolini's Italy as his model and even created his own *squadristi* inspired paramilitary organization: the *Legión Cívica*

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<sup>6</sup> Myers, 121.

<sup>7</sup> Rock, 199-213.

*Argentina*. The conservatives, alarmed by his extremist policies, forced Uriburu to call new presidential elections in 1931 which they then fixed to ensure that their candidate, Agustín P. Justo would win. Justo as well as his successor, Roberto M. Ortiz, ruled over what has become known as the *década infame* which lasted until another military coup in 1943. Once president, Justo relied on a coalition of conservative parties to consolidate his hold over power and was careful to restore the façade of democracy to the Argentine political process, avoiding openly repressive measures. He allowed the existence of opposition parties, both on the right and left, and allowed them seats in Congress, while at the same time ensured through rigged elections that they remained outside of halls of presidential power. This period was one of intense national debate and civil unrest as Socialist and Radical Party members pressed for a return to true democracy, while right-wing nationalists took to the streets promoting more authoritarian solutions.<sup>8</sup>

With Argentina's political destiny swaying between democracy and dictatorship, Italian fascist propaganda had a direct and immediate relevance to the political discussions of the day. Right-wing nationalists were especially influenced by fascist Italy's political program. They were seduced by its authoritarian anti-democratic program, but rejected outright the regime's definition of an Italian identity abroad. In contrast, left-wing politicians in Argentina were alarmed by the fascists' ideological threat to Argentina's fragile democracy and made common cause with the Italian anti-fascist movement. Both sides projected their concerns about Argentina's national identity and political destiny onto their discussion of Italian fascism. It was therefore used as a vehicle to promote their own national agendas as well as a way of indirectly challenging the conservative government in power.

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<sup>8</sup> Rock, 214-220.

### **Argentine Nationalists Look to Italian Fascism**

Argentine nationalism as it developed in the early twentieth century was primarily a right-wing political movement. Its leaders were disaffected members of the Argentine elite who rejected the liberal and positivist ideologies which predominated in their day and were instead drawn to idealist philosophy and Catholic spiritualism. Nationalist intellectuals such as Leopoldo Lugones, and Manuel Gálvez exalted Argentina's Spanish-Creole cultural heritage, and favored the moral purity of rural life over the decadent culture of cosmopolitan Buenos Aires. They resented Britain's historic dominance over the economy, but were far more troubled by the menacing anarchistic and radical tendencies of the immigrant working classes. They attacked immigrants for their materialistic self-interests, loose morals, and lack of culture, saving their most vehement diatribes for the Jews who they accused of conspiring at all times to destroy the Argentine nation and enslave its people.<sup>9</sup> The nationalists associated Argentine national identity with idyllic representations of the Gaucho and the Pampas: Juan Manuel Rosas, the caudillo who ruled Argentina with an iron fist in the early nineteenth century, became a symbol of Argentine cultural independence, and a mischievous fictional gaucho created by José Hernandez named Martín Fierro became an iconic national figure.

Historians of Argentine nationalism have agreed that the 1930s were a crucial moment in the development of authoritarian nationalist thought. Never before had so many different right wing groups challenged the democratic foundations of the Argentine nation. These disparate groups came together in support of Uriburu who had attempted to

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<sup>9</sup> For more information of Argentine nationalist thought see the aforementioned works by Rock and Dolkart and Deutsch as well as Deutsch, *Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Chile and Brazil, 1890-1939* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

create a fascist-style government before his forced resignation in 1931. Uriburu would die a few months later in Paris but his movement, along with other nationalist factions, continued to flourish throughout the 1930s. These ‘patriotic’ leagues competed with each other for national attention staging rallies and marches, and battling their Radical and Socialist foes on the streets and in the presses.<sup>10</sup>

After the death of Uriburu, there was no single individual or party who could unify these disparate nationalist groups. Many flocked around personalities and newspapers, but no one emerged as a leader and no one newspaper or party dominated the nationalist discourse. While many of the earlier nationalist thinkers retreated from public life or shied away from the more extremist turn the movement was taking, Manuel Gálvez remained at the center of nationalist thought. A novelist and biographer, who began his career at the turn of the century, Gálvez’s articles and tracts had a great influence on the movement, while a fellow nationalist, Martínez Zuviría, turned heads with his virulently anti-Semitic tomes. Senator Matías Sánchez-Sorondo, the Argentine Minister of the Interior under Uriburu, along with his son Marcelo, also emerged as prominent figures in the nationalist camp, the father as a senator and later the president of the Argentine Commission on Culture, and the son as Spanish Civil War correspondent for *La Nación*, a mainstream daily newspaper.<sup>11</sup> As for the press, *La Fronda*, the long standing conservative-nationalist voice in the community continued on, while a new wave of nationalist papers emerged, the first of which was the short-lived *La Nueva República* soon followed by *Crisol*, a Catholic-nationalist newspaper edited by Enrique

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<sup>10</sup> Rock, 87-124; Deutsch and Dolkert, 65-98.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Oses, and *Bandera Argentina*, edited by Juan E. Carulla, former head of Uriburu's *Legión Cívica*.

Taken as a whole, these nationalists shared much in common. Most of their leaders had come from upper middle-class or elite Creole backgrounds; they followed carefully the events in Europe; and suggested radical solutions to Argentina's problems, such as dismantling democratic institutions and creating a hierarchal corporatist regime. Their anti-Semitism and xenophobia also reached fever pitch as nationalist papers warned that: "The Jewish invasion is a grave national threat" and that "Argentina [is] The Zion the of the Semite's dreams."<sup>12</sup> Others warned that, "The International Jewry controls the communist movement throughout the world," while at the same time, "The Jewish-Yankee infiltration into South America is militant, ideological and financial."<sup>13</sup> Another simply cautioned its readers to "Beware of Jewish doctors!"<sup>14</sup> In a departure from the past, these nationalists also began to openly criticize Argentina's democratic system, which remained the foundation of Argentina's national identity. Inspired by the apparent success of Mussolini's fascist state in Italy, the nationalists' rhetoric became increasingly anti-democratic and authoritarian as many soaked up the Italian regime's propaganda.

Nationalist newspapers throughout the 1930s reported regularly on Mussolini's accomplishments in Italy, relying on information provided by the Italian Embassy and the *Roma Press* news service. The articles which made use of the *Roma Press* focused especially on fascist accomplishments such as the famed battle of the births and the battle

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<sup>12</sup> *Crisol*, September 8, 1932; *Bandera Argentina*, February 10, 1934.

<sup>13</sup> *Crisol* January 4, 1939; "La Infiltracion judeo yanqui en sud America es military, ideological y economico-financiera" *Crisol* February 24, 1939.

<sup>14</sup> *Bandera Argentina*, February 2, 1934.

for the grain, as well as the success of the corporatist state.<sup>15</sup> *La Fronda* reproduced photos and propaganda materials requested from the Ministry of Popular Culture, while other nationalist newspapers reprinted full-length speeches and articles by Mussolini which had been published in the Italian daily *Il Popolo d'Italia*, everything from Mussolini's condemnation of socialism to excerpts from his *Enciclopedia Italiana* definition of fascism.<sup>16</sup> A *Bandera Argentina* headline proclaimed, "Mussolini's political and social doctrines continue to excite the world."<sup>17</sup> *Bandera Argentina* in fact made the fullest use of the Italian propaganda, devoting a regular column to *Roma Press* pieces. Entitled, "Summary of Fascism's International Activities," the section included news information as well as full length propaganda articles which celebrated fascist Italy and provided the regime's perspective on international affairs. The majority of these articles recounted the success of corporatism, the political genius of Mussolini, and the tremendous architectural and cultural accomplishments of the regime. Another regular column in the newspaper entitled "Fascism on the March" detailed the international spread of the fascist movement world-wide from Spain and Romania to Great Britain and Japan. Identifying with fascism, its success abroad was used as a way of legitimating the paper's own fascist-style platform.<sup>18</sup>

The nationalists did much more than simply reproduce Italian propaganda. They looked towards fascist Italy as a model, and fascism more generally as a possible solution to Argentina's social-political problems of the day, which included foreign economic

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<sup>15</sup> See for example Carlos M. Quinodoz "Natalidad en Crisis: El Ejemplo de Italia" *Crisol*, June 25, 1939 and Emilio Rosso, "el corporativismo y sus criticos" *Crisol*, August 27, 1937.

<sup>16</sup> *La Fronda*, October 28, 1934, request for materials in ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare Direzione Servizi della Propaganda, b. 4.

<sup>17</sup> See for example transcribed speeches by Mussolini before the Italian senate in *Bandera Argentina*, February 18, 1934 and Mussolini on the decadence of Bolshevism in *Crisol*, July 11, 1937; "Las doctrinas políticas y sociales del Duce continúan apasionando al mundo," *Bandera Argentina*, August 5, 1932..

<sup>18</sup> *Bandera Argentina* issues from January –March 1934.

dominance of the economy, severe depression, and a corrupt conservative government. In 1932 Manuel Gálvez wrote on the very subject in an article entitled, “Fascism in Argentina.” After recounting a nationalist meeting in which Juan E. Carulla spoke of Italian fascist doctrine as the solution to world’s problems, he explained:

The most interesting [part of the evening] was not the words or views of Carulla but the fact that for the first time these views were expressed in front of an exclusively Argentine audience, which enthusiastically applauded him. It is a significant event that demonstrates how fascism is becoming known and admired by us more and more each day.<sup>19</sup>

For Gálvez it was a sign that Argentines, with Mussolini’s Italy in mind, began to question their own nation’s faith in democracy, for: “Mussolini was the first statesman to condemn democratic liberalism. Since then peoples have begun to open their eyes and see clearly. Everyone realized that equality was a lie and parliamentarianism a gigantic farce. Slowly the truths that this great statesman proclaimed are penetrating our environment.”<sup>20</sup> Even though Argentina was far from a perfect democracy, other than Uriburu, few had ever openly challenged democracy as the ideological foundation of the nation. All this seemed to be changing, “In the past ‘democracy’ had been a sacred idea, now Argentines are aware that democracy is fractured throughout the world.” For Gálvez, fascism was nothing less than: “the salvation of western culture in the face of the Asiatic barbarity of Moscow” and the establishment of a new world order. It remained for Argentines to accept “the constructive work of fascism” and adapt it to the Argentine environment.

“Is Fascism necessary in our country? I believe it is.” These were the words of Gálvez two years later in his tract, *Este Pueblo Necesita*, one of the most open appeals by

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<sup>19</sup> Manuel Gálvez, “El fascismo en la Argentina” published in *Il Mattino d’Italia*, re-printed in *Bandera Argentina*, August 31, 1932.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

any nationalist for a fascist regime in Argentina.<sup>21</sup> According to Gálvez, Argentines needed all of the fascist ‘values’ being extolled in the Italian regime’s propaganda: a culture of youth, patriotism, a “heroic sense of life,” austerity, a new political order, discipline, hierarchy, authority, and idealism. He referenced Mussolini’s fascist state throughout, for fascism was more than simple a right-wing authoritarian movement:

Fascism is only a right wing doctrine in its opposition to democracy and socialism, but it is a doctrine of the left in terms of its socio-economic policies which are in favor of national state socialism. It is right-wing in terms of its respect for religion and hierarchy, but left-wing in its reduction of capitalist power. Mussolini has accomplished much more socially than the Socialist Party in our country could hope to accomplish.<sup>22</sup>

For Gálvez, Argentina’s decadent and corrupt democracy could not save the nation from what he described as its, “spiritual impoverishment” and “materialistic sense of life.” No, only “a fascist regime or something like it could produce results.” Fascism was “not only social, political, and economic, but also spiritual and moral.” It was a transcendental solution to modern society’s problems.<sup>23</sup>

For all of his talk of fascism’s creative social and spiritual qualities, Gálvez was most attracted to its authoritarian and reactionary qualities. “What we are missing is an iron fist like that of Mussolini, Hitler or Dollfuss, which will not only save the country from destructive and barbarous communism but will also save it for the Christian family and morality.” For Gálvez the choice was simple: Rome or Moscow: “No one believes anymore that democracy will last, the social war will begin sooner or later. In order to prevent the communist horror, its crimes, its satanic power of destruction, its militant

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<sup>21</sup> Gálvez, *Este Pueblo Necesita...*, Buenos Aires: Librería de A. García Santos, 1934), 129.

<sup>22</sup> Gálvez, 119.

<sup>23</sup> Gálvez, 132.

atheism, the violent, just, and saving iron fist of fascism is needed.”<sup>24</sup> In the end, what mattered most was the upholding of traditional establishment in the face of a perceived communist threat.

Other nationalists echoed Gálvez’s admiration for Italian fascism, first among them Senator Matías Sánchez-Sorondo. A champion for the Italian regime against its opponents within Argentina, he opposed the League of Nation’s sanctions against Italy after Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia. Sánchez-Sorondo also looked to introduce programs in Argentina which emulated the Italian fascist state. During a 1937 visit to Rome, he expressed his desire to “see how one applies Fascist principles in all areas including jurisprudence” and declared that he “was captivated by Mussolini’s personality and was anxious to meet with him personally.”<sup>25</sup> Upon his return to Buenos Aires the Italian Embassy reported that Sánchez-Sorondo, “expressed his complete satisfaction with his trip to Italy and openly admired the extraordinary accomplishments [of the regime] in all fields, adding that, ‘my meetings with the Duce were unforgettable.’”<sup>26</sup>

Following the rise of fascist movements throughout Europe, articles in the nationalist press also discussed its universal application. “The Fascist Revolution will conquer the entire world” declared one issue of *Bandera Argentina*, while another proclaimed that “Fascism is marching across all of the world’s roads, it will not be long before it takes control of the seats of government in all nations with solid cultural and historical traditions.”<sup>27</sup> An article *Crisol* honoring Mussolini’s March on Rome announced that “Today’s celebration is not only important for Italians and the children of

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<sup>24</sup> Gálvez, 132-133.

<sup>25</sup> “La Visita in Italia del Dr. Sanchez Sorondo,” *La Nación*, April, 12, 1937.

<sup>26</sup> Italian Embassy Buenos Aires to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 8, 1937, ASMAE Inventario della Serie Politici 1931-1945, Argentina b. 18.

<sup>27</sup> “El Fascismo Marcha,” *Bandera Argentina*, February 10, 1934.

Italians, but also of special interest and significance for all of mankind.”<sup>28</sup> Describing the accomplishments of Mussolini’s regime the article went to declare that “The powerful achievements of Fascism within the state are so numerous it is almost impossible to list them all, but most of them are known throughout the world due to their transcendent and fundamental importance.”<sup>29</sup> For Argentina’s nationalists, what began as an Italian phenomenon now reached across the ocean garnering universal recognition.

Sharing Mussolini’s critique of liberal democracy, an article in *Bandera Argentina* declared that “We believe along with Benito Mussolini that out of an entire political parliament 50 percent are stupid and 40 percent are scoundrels,” while another proclaimed that like the Duce, “We do not put off today’s solutions for tomorrow, nor do we waste time with useless parliamentary debate.”<sup>30</sup> Quoting freely from Mussolini’s speeches, nationalists warned their Radical and Socialist opponents in Congress, who they labeled “demagogues,” to take notice. Unlike in Italy, however, all this remained talk; the nationalists were quick to criticize but slow to act. There was no Argentine Mussolini, and no one dared to openly attack the conservative regime headed by President Justo. Nevertheless it is significant that the Argentine nationalists admired Mussolini’s anti-democratic authoritarian model. This is in stark contrast to many fascist sympathizers within the Italian community who had tried so hard to reconcile the two ideological systems.<sup>31</sup>

Different nationalist writers emphasized different aspects of the Italian fascist program and much of the Italian propaganda was not accepted at face value within the

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<sup>28</sup> “A 15 año de la marcha sobre Roma”, *Crisol*, October 28, 1937.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> “Que es nuestro nacionalismo,” *Bandera Argentina*, August 4, 1932; “Una leccion de democrcia nueva ha dictado al mundo Benito Mussolini,” *Bandera Argentina*, August 11, 1932.

<sup>31</sup> Discussed in Chapter 5.

nationalist camp. As was true of the Italians living in Argentina, Argentine nationalists were not only free to accept or reject whatever they chose from the fascist propaganda, they also took it upon themselves to interpret fascism to suit their own ideological beliefs. Unable to directly control or influence how its propaganda was being used, Italian officials could only stand by and watch as the nationalists created their own images of the Italian regime to suit their own political agendas.

“Corporatism, arising from the creative mind of the Duce is the magnificent realization of a new human organization.”<sup>32</sup> For Carulla’s *Bandera Argentina*, the essence of fascist doctrine lied in its corporatist structure. In the pages of *Bandera Argentina*, corporatism was nothing less than “a new political civilization that consists essentially in the living bond between the individual and the State.”<sup>33</sup> It was the system that promised to solve all of Argentina’s socio-economic woes caused by depression and British and American economic influence:

The Italian corporatist system has made Italy a new nation, whose economic and material advancements are undeniable. Without advocating for the full application of the Italian system, we believe that it is time for us to think about this style of organization for our country, adapting it to our necessities, since only a State fortified by a system which allows it to control and command all productive activities could save us from an economic disaster.<sup>34</sup>

Of all of the nationalists, the writers of *Bandera Argentina* were most attracted to this ‘revolutionary’ aspect of the fascist system, following in the path of their late-hero General Uriburu who had attempted to establish a corporatist system during his dictatorship.

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<sup>32</sup> *Bandera Argentina* April 1, 1934.

<sup>33</sup> “Estado Fascista y Estado Liberal,” *Bandera Argentina*, October 15, 1932.

<sup>34</sup> “A lo que podríamos llegar en material del régimen corporativo,” *Bandera Argentina*, August 12, 1932.

Other nationalist voices remained socially conservative and shied away from any hint of revolutionary change. For example, Enrique Osés' *Crisol*, while not rejecting corporatism, interpreted fascism as above all else a reactionary nationalist movement, an instrument to save the world from the red menace. Responding directly to Mussolini's *Enciclopedia Italiana* definition of fascism, Osés confidently declared, "It is great to have recourse to its creator in order to have a faithful version of the fascist system. Unfortunately, however, the creators of a philosophy or a system of government are not the ones to best express it."<sup>35</sup> Not short on vanity, Osés took it upon himself to provide his own, more 'accurate' definition of fascism. Accordingly, fascism was not revolutionary, nor even totalitarian, "Fascism is in essence a nationalist sentiment. It is therefore against socialism, free-masonry, and abject capitalist and democratic regimes."<sup>36</sup> It was synonymous with order and authority, and its true value rested precisely on its anti-liberalism and its anti-Communism. As Osés declared, "[fascism] is a force of order in the face of the chaos being promoted by the aligned forces of disorder. And this is its undeniable merit."<sup>37</sup> But, if Osés embraced fascism as a form of authoritarian nationalism, he rejected outright its totalitarian thesis. Calling it "simply monstrous" that the "the State is everything," Osés countered by declaring that "Mussolini, like his philosophers claim to be creating a religion of the State, which is a philosophical impossibility incapable of withstanding the least bit of rational analysis," since the deeply spiritual and moral discipline for such a system to work could only be "founded upon the Revealed Truth."<sup>38</sup> Unwilling to accept a political thesis which

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Osés, "El fascismo según Mussolini," *Crisol*, June 12, 1932.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

contradicted Catholic doctrine, Osés chose instead to define fascism by its actions rather than its words, even if this meant challenging the Duce's own definition of the ideology.<sup>39</sup>

Argentine nationalist papers, while openly admiring the fascist system, denied that their movements were themselves fascist. For example, *La Fronda* clarified that, "It might well be said that *La Fronda* is not fascist but nationalist, that is to say before and above all an Argentine newspaper in the defense of Argentine interests."<sup>40</sup>

*Crisol* likewise explained: "While all similar movements could be denominated as fascist ... it would be a gross misrepresentation to equate these movements with the Italian Duce's movement, just as it would be to denominate our nationalism as fascist."<sup>41</sup>

If nationalism drew these Argentines to the fascist cause, it would also be nationalism which would keep them apart. Outspokenly xenophobic and nativist, they could not but find the Italian regime's national project abroad objectionable.

Although Argentine nationalists admired Mussolini's political doctrine and its potentially universal applications, they were less than thrilled with his nationalist rhetoric abroad. As early as the 1920s, Argentine nationalists were already wary of the fascist regime's overtures towards Italian emigrant communities as well as its militaristic portrayal of Italian emigrants abroad. A 1924 work by a nationalist novelist Carlos

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<sup>39</sup> Seven years later, Osés reconciled totalitarianism with Catholic doctrine, by resurrecting the concept of divine right rule: "The totalitarian political thesis ... institutes an authority that cannot have any true or real foundation if it is not [emanating] from God" and "the totalitarian thesis walks by His side in obedience with the goals and destinies that He has assigned for a man's life." And what of the contradictions between the two that he himself pointed to in the past? Apparently these 'supposed' contradictions were: "nothing more than one of the most miserable and despicable lies disseminated around the world by Judaic propagandists to create demonic and malevolent confusion." When all else fails, the nationalists could always fall back on the Jews, their scapegoats of choice to save them from ideological inconsistency. "La autoridad, la iglesia, el totalitarismo" *Crisol*, March, 4, 1939.

<sup>40</sup> *La Fronda* February 17, 1932, quotation found in Ronald H. Dolkart, *The Argentine Right*, pg. 79.

<sup>41</sup> Osés, "Nuestro nacionalismo," *Crisol*, October 16, 1932.

Néstor Maciel entitled *La italianización de la Argentina* articulated many of these concerns. He argued that the Italian exhortation to preserve “Italian identity Abroad” was irrefutable evidence that, “Italian immigrants do not come to become Argentines, to incorporate themselves into our nationality...they instead organize within their own associations controlled by fanatics of *italianidad*.”<sup>42</sup> Alarmed by Mussolini’s interpretation of emigration as expansion, Maciel characterized the Italian government’s initiatives as “imperialism through immigration” declaring that, “the activities of the Italian government towards its emigrants reveal its poorly veiled tendency toward a transoceanic imperialism, based on Italian colonies without the flag... This work, based on supposed cultural and racial antecedents, is aimed at intensifying who knows what unconfessable action by those [immigrants] destined for our country.”<sup>43</sup> This xenophobic current in Argentine nationalism would ultimately prevent the Italian regime from having any hope of a substantial alliance.

Maciel’s views towards immigrants, Italian or otherwise, was shared by many members of the nationalist press. An article in *La Fronda*, entitled “Welcome to Work”, made its stance on immigration un-mistakably clear: “We want ‘gringos’ on the docks, in the factory, in the field and in the shops. But we do not want them in the Casa Rosada, nor in the Congress, nor in the courts, nor in the university, nor in the school. They are welcome to work but not to govern.”<sup>44</sup> *Bandera Argentina* articles echoed these sentiments, demanding: “By what right do foreign communities ask to participate in the

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<sup>42</sup> Carlos Néstor Maciel, *La italianización de la Argentina: Tras huella de nuestros antepasados* (Buenos Aires: J. Menedez y Hijo, 1924), 119-120.

<sup>43</sup> Maciel, 197.

<sup>44</sup> “Bienvenidos para trabajar” *La Fronda* November 21, 1938.

political and administrative life of our country?”<sup>45</sup> To this nationalist, immigrants “should only live among us on the condition that they make themselves Argentine, and renounce their original nationality, language, and sense of independence from our Nation.”<sup>46</sup> Such conditions were the exact antithesis of the fascist regime’s mission to preserve Italian identity abroad.

The nationalists found nothing at all appealing in the Italian regime’s efforts to preserve the Italian language and identity in their nation since, “Nothing keeps a foreigner more foreign in our country than his inability or unwillingness to learn our language.” They were disgusted by the fact that foreign governments actually controlled and operated schools in Argentina which inculcated foreign patriotism, and disapproved of the foreign language press, whose “very existence and circulation is proof of that our transoceanic guests...wish to maintain their racial and sentimental independence, and to preserve their customs and their language.”<sup>47</sup> A 1932 *Bandera Argentina* article directly challenged the Italian regime’s program abroad. Its author commented on an unnamed foreign newspaper which had posed the question whether or not their compatriots should participate in Argentine political life. This paper could have easily been any of the Italian language dailies which were all debating Parini’s comments on this issue at the time. The author of the piece called their discussion “absurd,” explaining that foreign participation in politics “could only be done when the foreign communities give up their identity as “colonies,” and when their level of culture guarantees their social security.”<sup>48</sup> As it was, “Argentina has been a land of dangerous experimentation allowing foreign communities

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<sup>45</sup> “Los extranjeros en la vida política y administrativa del país” *Bandera Argentina*, August 12, 1932.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> “Actualidad de las ideas de Sarmiento sobre los extranjeros,” *Bandera Argentina*, August 14, 1932.

to implant themselves here without making sure that they adapt and assimilate into our nationality.”<sup>49</sup> These sentiments, which the Italian Embassy labeled not only as anti-foreign but also anti-Italian, demonstrated that the regime’s nationalist agenda abroad could never be reconciled with Argentina’s own nationalist agenda.<sup>50</sup>

The conservative and elitist nature of many of these movements disappointed the Italian Embassy as much as their xenophobic brand of nationalism hindered its efforts. A 1937 report by the Italian Embassy in Buenos Aires on the activities of pro-fascist groups in Argentina concluded: “none of them has succeeded in finding the right path.”<sup>51</sup> Ambassador Guariglia explained, “It is most difficult for them to understand Mussolini’s maxim to ‘live dangerously.’ When they encounter their first difficulty, exactly the moment when it would be necessary show energy and strength, they instead give up.” Of another group of nationalists he complained that “Many of its leadership include the names of Argentina’s high society and this is perhaps its major defect: too many “señoritos” as they call them here.”<sup>52</sup> Guariglia similarly thought little of the ideological content of the *Legión Cívica Argentina* which while claiming to be pro-fascist “has only a poorly defined program.” In describing the movement’s official newspaper, Guariglia expressed his frustration:

Its biweekly newspaper entitled “Combat” is a truly pitiful thing. One does not even understand what they really want to “combat,” what is instead clear is that they want to preserve and defend the interests of the conservative capitalist bourgeoisie. Far from revolutionary, the members of the legion are reactionaries and their movement is at its core generically conservative and nationalist.

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<sup>49</sup> “Los extranjeros en la vida política y administrativa del país” *Bandera Argentina*, August 12, 1932.

<sup>50</sup> The Italian Embassy cited the aforementioned *La Fronda* article, “Bienvenidos para trabajar,” as an example of Anti-Italian sentiment, ASMAE, Inventario della Serie Politici 1931-1945, Argentina b. 20.

<sup>51</sup> Guariglia to Ciano, August 4, 1937, ASMAE Inventario della Serie Politici 1931-1945, Argentina b. 20.

<sup>52</sup> Guariglia to Ciano, August 4, 1937, ASMAE Inventario della Serie Politici 1931-1945, Argentina b. 20.

With all the trappings of fascism: uniforms, salutes, insignia and the like, Guariglia lamented that these movements, while attracted to fascism, did not share enough of its ideological content or the will act on its ideas. In the end, Italian officials were disillusioned by the right-wing movements which had seemed to show much promise.

By the time that the Italian Embassy filed its report, Argentine nationalists were also losing interest in the Italian regime. Nazi Germany stole the spotlight, as the nationalist papers shifted their news services to German agencies and articles admiring Hitler's Germany began to get front page attention. The Argentine nationalists were especially united with the Nazis in their hatred of Jews, an important feature of Argentine nationalism that the Italian propaganda was never able to take advantage of.

Enrique Oses would become the editor of *El Pampero*, a nationalist daily funded by the German Embassy. In the end, the Nazi conception of Aryan supremacy, its biological racism, and paganistic rituals disturbed many members of the nationalist camp who remained Catholic-conservative traditionalists. The ideology that fit these nationalists best was that of Franco's Spain. During the Civil War Franco's *hispanidad* campaign was quick to gain supporters within Argentina. *Hispanidad* aimed at promoting traditional Spanish customs and ideals with the goal of creating greater political and cultural unity among the Hispanic nations of the world.<sup>53</sup> Less interested in re-forming actual links to Spain, Argentine nationalists incorporated this *franquista* ideology into their own political platform, stressing its Catholic and anti-liberal elements along with the need to defend Argentina's traditional Hispanic political culture in the face of foreign

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<sup>53</sup> Bristol, William B., *Hispanidad in South America*, [Dissertation], (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1947.), 1.

intrusions.<sup>54</sup> Thus, while many nationalists had flirted with Italian fascism and German Nazism, they were most comfortable with Franco's movement. Beyond the cultural identification most nationalists made with Spain, Franco's Catholic and conservative rhetoric was far more reassuring to them compared to the more extreme and modernist ideologies of the two fascist regimes.

In the end it had been Italy's nationalist project of spreading Italian influence abroad more than anything else which doomed the fascist Italian regime's potential to collaborate with these nationalist movements. However appealing the fascist political program may have been, it could not be reconciled with the threat that its nationalist program posed to the native Argentine own nationalist agenda.

### **The Opponents of Fascism Speak Out**

"Fascism is advancing. This is a reality that we cannot close our eyes to" warned a 1933 issue of *La Vanguardia*, the official organ of the Argentine Socialist Party. The nationalists were not the only ones watching the fascist regimes in Europe. If Italian fascism was an inspiration to nationalists, it was a cautionary tale to their left-wing anarchist, Communist, and especially Socialist opponents. Far from a model to be emulated, the Italian fascist regime was instead a dark reminder of what could happen one day in Argentina should the nationalists get their way. Just as the nationalists had done, these left-wing activists applied Italian fascism to the Argentine context, but depicted the regime's ideology as a threat to its democracy rather a solution to its problems.

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The nationalist forces unleashed in Argentina after Uriburu's dictatorship alarmed its opponents on the left, many of whom identified these groups as 'fascist.' Even though Argentine nationalists never wholly associated themselves with the movement, their political opponents seized the opportunity to use their flirtations with fascism against them. Left-wing activists in Argentina linked the Italian regime's fascist propaganda with its nationalist admirers, using the example of the Italian fascist state and later Nazi Germany to warn their followers of the dangers posed by both home-grown and foreign fascisms. An anti-fascist writing in the anarchist daily, *La Protesta*, explained this connection best: "I refer here especially to Italian fascism. But in what follows it could be said *pais a donde vas, fascismo que encuentras* – since each country has in its bosom a politically degenerative phenomenon that more or less resembles fascism. Uriburu was painful proof of this for the Republic of Argentina."<sup>55</sup> These sentiments were echoed in a Communist-run periodical, *Contra-Fascismo*, which cautioned its readers that "fascism cannot be reduced to just those satellites of Mussolini and Hitler. Fascism is a vast phenomenon...it is everyone."<sup>56</sup> Alluding to nationalist groups in Argentina another issue explained that "It is not necessary for the reaction to wear a colored shirt or to punctuate its speeches with Alalà! in order for it to carry out a concrete and systematic fascistization plan."<sup>57</sup>

Fascism in the left-wing presses was nothing but the worst form of a reactionary dictatorship. "The suppression of liberty and the defense of a regime established through the use of all the available resources of the military, police and judicial apparatus," according to *La Protesta*; and "a primitive movement that attempts to perpetuate, through

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<sup>55</sup> El Antifascista, "Solidaridad contra el Fascismo," *La Protesta*, March 30, 1932

<sup>56</sup> "Fascismo y fenomeno fascista universal," *Contra-Fascismo*, April 25, 1936.

<sup>57</sup> *Contra-Fascismo*, August-September, 1936.

an absolutist regime, the privileges of the oligarchic and elite classes,” whose “danger does not reside in the strength of its ideas but in the material support that the powerful classes of the country have given it,” according to *La Vanguardia*.<sup>58</sup> A cartoon in *La Batalla*, the Communist newspaper of Rosario, illustrated this connection personifying “reaction” as the grim reaper “clearing the way for fascism.”<sup>59</sup> Its caption read, “Slashing away day after day more precious democratic and popular liberties, reaction is clearing an open path towards fascist barbarity.”<sup>60</sup> *La Batalla* went on to call on Argentines to unite and stop reaction from reaching its ultimate goal of establishing a fascist regime in their country. These passages are a clear illustration of how the left skillfully took advantage of public fears of fascism to rally support against their nationalist opponents.

Argentine Socialists were especially unconvinced by Italian fascism’s modernist pretensions and far from impressed by its supposed transcendental solution to the world’s economic and political problems. As *La Vanguardia* explained,

Fascism is negative in all of its aspects. In politics, in culture... it is incapable of even concealing its tactic of exhuming archaic economic formulas and polishing them to pass them off as new. No one is fooled: its enough to scratch the surface of fascism a little to see under its false varnish of modernity the same stagnant policies of oppression that have characterized the tyrannies of the past.<sup>61</sup>

In the end what mattered most was the results of the fascist system, and not its ideological subtleties, as another newspaper explained: “We all know that fascism, whatever its political or social ideology may be, if it even has one, is a system of force that attempts to sweep away rights converting the dominated masses into a herd of sheep. In this way Italian fascism, and that of Germany and all the others which imitate it, are all

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<sup>58</sup> *La Protesta*, February 4, 1932; *La Vanguardia*, September 21, 1933.

<sup>59</sup> *La Batalla*, August 31, 1935.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *La Vanguardia*, September 24, 1933.

the same.”<sup>62</sup> It was exactly this system of oppression and dictatorship that mobilized left-wing radicals to the anti-fascist banner.

In a stirring speech on October 14, 1933 commemorating the death of a former comrade at the hands of a nationalist gunman, Socialist deputy Buyan declared, “We must not forget what happened in Italy and Germany. In these countries the success of fascism has meant the abolition of all liberties and all rights, the destruction of unions and cooperatives, and the consolidation of industrialist and capitalist power in the fascist regime.”<sup>63</sup> Left-wing papers reminded their readers after every violent nationalist act that this was how fascism had taken hold in Italy. Linking the nationalist agitation in their country with the *squadristo* violence of the 1920s, a *La Vanguardia* article explained that “fascism implanted itself in Italy through blood and fire, its opponents, among them Matteotti, were cowardly murdered with impunity, local socialist headquarters were looted and burned. This regime, imposed through violence and terror, was sustained by the fascist militias created for that purpose.”<sup>64</sup> Argentines must therefore in the words of *La Protesta*, “prepare themselves for the fight at the first signs of fascist barbarity” perpetrated by “the praetorians of Argentine fascism.”<sup>65</sup> For as another article cautioned, if Argentines did not take action soon, “fascism will plunge our people into a miserable despotic oppression –as it has done in Italy and is doing it now in Germany.”<sup>66</sup>

The front page of a 1933 issue of *La Vanguardia* announced: “Rally Sunday Against Fascism,” proclaiming that “The Argentine people do not want fascism and will

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<sup>62</sup> *El Despertar*, reprinted in *La Vanguardia*, October 19, 1933.

<sup>63</sup> “Manifestaciones de Buyan,” *La Vanguardia*, October 15, 1933.

<sup>64</sup> “El Agente del Duce,” *La Vanguardia*, October 15, 1933.

<sup>65</sup> *La Protesta*, April 20, 1932.

<sup>66</sup> “El Mitín del Domingo Contra Fascismo,” *La Vanguardia*, September 21, 1933.

fight against it with all of the energy, decisiveness, and tenacity it can muster.”<sup>67</sup> The rally was held at the height of nationalist agitation, while Gálvez was telling his followers that the Argentine people needed the order and discipline of a fascist regime and the nationalist leagues were wrecking havoc in the streets. The purpose of the rally was “to stir public opinion, to mobilize the people of the capital, to awaken the consciences of all Argentines and to enlist them in the fight without quarter of the democratic forces against the fascist, liberticidal, and antinational reaction, which threatens to return the country to barbarity and violence.”<sup>68</sup> One of the featured speakers, Socialist Deputy Miguel B. Navello compared the current political situation in Argentina to the Italian case. He asserted that the nationalists in Argentina were emulating their Italian counterparts, “who for them are a source of inspiration.” According to Navello, as the Italian fascist had done before them, the nationalists were a small minority who were attempting to deceive the people into believing that democracy in their nation was fractured and in need of being supplanted by a new system. It was a strategy that “We have already seen through the barbarous experiments of Mussolini and Hitler.”<sup>69</sup> Navello therefore urged his listeners to defend their democracy and popular sovereignty by opposing fascism and dictatorship.<sup>70</sup>

Socialist Deputy Nicolás Repetto and Senator Alfredo L. Palacios, were two of the event’s other key-note speakers. They were the most influential Argentine Socialist leaders to take up the anti-fascist cause. Born in Buenos Aires in 1871, Nicolás Repetto was the son of Italian immigrants who attended an Italian primary school run by the *Unione e Benevolenza* mutual aid society. A surgeon as well as a politician, Repetto

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<sup>67</sup> “El Mítin de Hoy,” *La Vanguardia*, September 24, 1933.

<sup>68</sup> “El Mítin del Domingo Contra Fascismo,” *La Vanguardia*, September 21, 1933.

<sup>69</sup> “Discurso del Deputado Miguel B. Navello,” *La Vanguardia*, September 25, 1933.

<sup>70</sup> “Discurso del Deputado Miguel B. Navello,” *La Vanguardia*, September 25, 1933.

emerged as one of the most important Socialist party leaders in Argentina. He served eight terms representing the federal capital in the Argentine Chamber of Deputies from 1913 to 1943, and was the editor-in-chief of *La Vanguardia* during the 1930s. Alfredo Palacios was another leading member of the Socialist Party in Argentina. Born in 1880 in Buenos Aires he was law professor and president of the University of La Plata. He was the first Socialist Deputy elected in Argentina in 1904 and was a member of the Senate throughout the 1930s, during which time he championed social causes including prison and education reform as well as rights for women and children. Both Repetto and Palacios spearheaded the Argentine anti-fascist movement throughout the 1930s, collaborating with the Italian anti-fascist press and speaking out against the fascism before the Argentine Congress.

Repetto often made reference to Mussolini's seizure of power in order to explain the dangers of Argentine nationalism. According to Repetto, Mussolini and later Hitler deceived their peoples into believing that they could change society. "They validated themselves by calling for deep economic and social transformations, but implanted instead cruel dictatorships that are on balance bourgeois."<sup>71</sup> Focusing on the Italian case, Repetto had more than a superficial knowledge of the fascist movement. He cited at length the first fascist manifesto of Piazza San Sepolcro in 1919, which had called for among other things universal suffrage, worker's rights, international solidarity, and social justice, in order to show the duplicity of the fascist movement.

This magnificent program must have seduced more than a few people, above all else, those who hoped for or believed in total solutions, which could be achieved instantly. But this was how Mussolini deceived everyone to become an absolute dictator . . . He used an extremely leftist program of social revolution to work a thousand miracles and implant a

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<sup>71</sup> Nicolás Repetto, *La Vanguardia*, October 7, 1933.

rigid dictatorship controlled exclusively by himself. This cruel surprise could not have occurred in other environments with less credulous masses.<sup>72</sup>

The message was clear: do not be seduced by Argentine nationalists who promise to solve all of the nation's problems, lest Argentina fall into the fascist trap.

Aware that many of his nationalist adversaries were especially influenced by Mussolini's corporatist program, Repetto went to great lengths to demonstrate that the so-called "Corporatist" state was nothing more than an illusion. He explained: "The council of corporations is in practice only a farce. In Italy and in Germany the legislative assembly is just a gross fiction. The only authority that exists there is that of the dictator above all else."<sup>73</sup> For Repetto it was all for show, one more example of how Mussolini had deceived his people and the world. "In actuality what goes on in the council of corporations is nothing more than a vulgar proceeding more or less out of protocol. It is a farce like everything else related to this decorative fascist organization." Turning back to the Argentine case, Repetto went on to declare: "And this is what some deluded individuals dream of implanting in Argentina."<sup>74</sup>

Repetto made common cause with the Italian anti-fascist movement advising members of the Italian community to not only fight against fascism in Italy but also against fascism in Argentina: "Italian workers in residence here share with us the work of moving this new nation forward, and collaborating with us in the urgent and serious task of defending the liberties and democratic institutions of our country."<sup>75</sup> He described the founding of the anti-fascist paper, *Italia Libre*, as "a work of propaganda supporting

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<sup>72</sup> Nicolás Repetto, *La Vanguardia*, October 7, 1933.

<sup>73</sup> "La Farsa del Regimen Corporativo," *La Vanguardia*, October 7, 1933.

<sup>74</sup> "La Farsa del Regimen Corporativo," *La Vanguardia*, October 7, 1933.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

liberty, democratic institutions, and the preservation of human culture, [values] which are so dear to the Italian people, who began the Renaissance, and made important contributions in the development of the arts and sciences.”<sup>76</sup>

Palacios also spoke out against the Italian fascist dictatorship separating it from his conceptualization of Italian identity. He declared: “I want to make it clear that I am not raising my voice against Italy...Argentines hate dictatorship, but we love Italy.”<sup>77</sup> Palacios depicted Argentines and Italians as kindred peoples, sharing a common Latin heritage as well as a love for liberty. These shared ideals were for Palacios embodied by Garibaldi who, “fought for the liberty of his people, wearing the legendary poncho of the Argentine gaucho, noble and chivalrous like himself.” Just as members of the Italian community in Argentina attached their own symbolism to the iconic figure of Garibaldi, Palacios attaches a distinctly American quality to the Risorgimento hero. For according to Palacios, “it is true what has been said that the Garibaldian legend is full of America. It was American lead in the shots of the Thousand in the Homeric campaign of the Sicilies.”<sup>78</sup> Throughout Argentina’s young history Palacios declared that, “Argentines have admired Italian heroism in its times of liberty and tragedy. Italy’s pain during the last war pierced our hearts as if it was our pain.”<sup>79</sup> All this, however, changed after the fascist government in Italy betrayed its nation’s values and principles and embarked on a path of destruction and conquest. “But now, Italians, my dear senators, who used to defend the sacred soil of their patria ... are sending forth conquering armies to destroy

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<sup>76</sup> Repetto, *Italia Libre*, August 21, 1940.

<sup>77</sup> Alfredo L. Palacios, Speech Before the Argentine Senate, May 1936, published *Diario de Sesiones*, reprinted in *L’Italia del Popolo*, May 16, 1936. A revised and updated version of the speech published in *Italia Libre* January 4, 1941.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

and dominate distant and harmless peoples .... We are therefore protesting, as Argentines, against the right of conquest.”<sup>80</sup> According to Palacios, opposing the fascist dictatorship re-affirmed Argentina’s own tenuous sense of identity based on the principles of liberty and democracy. For Palacios Argentina cease to be Argentina were it to reject its faith in democracy, just as Italian identity is no longer the same after the fascists rejected Italy’s liberal democratic traditions. For both Repetto and Palacios, fascist tyranny was destroying the Italian nation and threatening to destroy Argentina. Free Argentines and Italians therefore had to join together to fight the fascist menace at home and abroad.

This call for solidarity in the international fight against fascism was echoed by others in the radical press. A 1932 article in *La Protesta* called on all anti-fascists to act: “we must find a way to express in concrete international acts our solidarity against fascism...especially in these American nations, nations of immigrants where it is not hard to find together with refugees from fascist nations, also the hate-filled champions of fascism...agents abroad sent by the fascist governments of their nations.”<sup>81</sup> Most articles in the radical press used the example of fascist Italy to speak of the danger of Argentine nationalism. This writer however alerted his readers to the actual work of the Italian regime within Argentina. Aware of the dangers posed by the programs the Italian regime was enacting, he warned that, “Italian fascists are intent on infiltrating and implanting their specifically fascist and sectarian *Fasci di Combattimento*, along with their very own party schools, recreational and after-work programs, and sports organizations which are

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> El Antifascista, “Solidaridad contra el Fascismo,” *La Protesta*, March 30, 1932.

nothing more than military training camps.”<sup>82</sup> He went on to call for “more solidarity, solidarity in the struggle against Italian fascist maneuvers abroad and not just solidarity in the form of assistance and the red cross. Do not leave this work to the small anti-fascist groups of their respective countries. Transform their small isolated activism into an international activism.”<sup>83</sup>

*La Vanguardia* echoed this anti-fascist’s concern. A 1934 front page article warned of Italian fascism’s “dangerous infiltration” into the nation. “There is no locality of importance in the interior which does not have a local “Fascio Italiano,” controlled by a “fiduciario” who is usually an Italian Consul or Vice-Consul. These “fascios” are actually foreign propaganda agencies.”<sup>84</sup> The article went on to list all of the Italian regime’s activities on Argentine soil, from its schools and cultural institutes to the *dopolavoro* and *balilla* concluding that these fascist programs, “are contrary to our nation’s institutions because they are operated openly by foreign diplomats and are indoctrinating Argentine children with a love for the patria of their parents over their own and a love for traditions that are not our own.”<sup>85</sup> *La Vanguardia* implored the government to take action, attacking its “inexcusable tolerance” for the fascist propaganda arriving on its shores.

During the 1930s, a number of anti-fascist organizations and fronts did in fact acknowledge the danger posed by the foreign fascist propaganda and answered the call for greater solidarity. There were, for example, the *Frente Único Popular Argentino Antifascista y Antigüerrero*; *La Defensa Popular por las Víctimas de la Reacción*, and *El*

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> *La Vanguardia*, “Infiltración peligrosa, January 9, 1934.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

*Comité de Ayuda Antifascista*. For the most part these groups attracted members from left-wing political parties, published only sporadically, and were unable to create widespread public awareness to what they perceived to be the fascist threat.<sup>86</sup> The organ of one of these associations lamented that the Argentine general public “appears to have been lulled to sleep in a suicidal false sense of security. They assume that fascism is too exotic a plant for South America and that they are far away from its danger.”<sup>87</sup> It would take a lot more than a few strong words from the radical left-wing presses to mobilize the public against the fascist threat and force Argentine authorities to act. It was not until the end of the 1930s when the wider Argentine public finally became aware of the fascist threat and would stir its government to action.

### **Public Attention Turns to the Italian Fascist Activities**

Throughout much of the 1920s and 1930s serious debate over the Italian fascist regime and its propaganda in Argentina remained confined to extreme right- and left-wing activists. Front page coverage of the Italian regime in mainstream newspapers focused on its international policies with but an occasional mention of a fascist program, commemoration, or dignitary’s visit. Whether these pieces depicted the regime in a favorable or unfavorable light, they tended to view it as relatively benign, and kept their commentary brief.<sup>88</sup> Very little mention was made of the Italian regime’s actions within

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<sup>86</sup> This information is based on the fragmented publications of the aforementioned groups, collected and microfilmed by the University of Texas at Austin, *Publicaciones de Organizaciones Antifascistas (1930-1945)* Roll 6.

<sup>87</sup> Aristibulo Echegaray, “La Lucha Antifascista y Nuestro Comité,” *Contra-Fascismo* August-September 1936.

<sup>88</sup> In general, the right of center mainstream newspapers such as *La Nación* and *La Razón* looked favorably upon the regime, with *La Prensa* a mainstream conservative daily the exception, while the left of center papers, *Crítica*, *Noticias Graficas*, and *La Tribuna Libre* often criticized Mussolini and his international policies. For a detailed evaluation of the Argentine Press by the Italian Ambassador discussing the political

Argentina, often these activities were simply reported upon as social events within the Italian community, without much discussion. This would begin to change in 1937.

On the evening of July 15, 1937, Luigi Federzoni, President of the Italian Senate and member of the fascist Grand Council concluded his tour of the South American republic as the guest of honor at a banquet held in La Plata. It was the last stop on what had been up to that point a successful tour which included visits to Brazil and Uruguay. 2,500 people attended the event hosted by the newly formed association *Amigos de Italia*, whose members were Argentine elites sympathetic to fascist Italy. Special guests included Dr. Fresco, the governor of the Province of Buenos Aires, and Dr. Amoedo the vice-governor, among other dignitaries and national politicians. It was supposed to be a warm and celebratory send-off but turned into something else entirely. Newspaper accounts of Federzoni's speech varied greatly, but what is clear is that two of his comments in particular did not sit well with his Argentine audience. One newspaper observed that, "From its very beginning the tone of Sr. Federzoni's speech was unusually aggressive, turning scandalous after he referred to Italians who obtained Argentine citizenship."<sup>89</sup> According to most reports, Federzoni told his audience that Italians who had become naturalized citizens "should not be loved at all, since no one can expect anything from those who renounce their nationality."<sup>90</sup> At this point the guests began to grow restless as Federzoni went on to discuss Mussolini's Italy, lamenting the fact that Argentines did not seem to appreciate fascism's great accomplishments. He declared, "Argentina, they say, is Calle Florida and walking down that street I did not see one

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leanings and disposition towards Fascism, see "Rapporto-Stampa n. 28," in ACS, Minculpop, Reports 1922-1945, b. 18.

<sup>89</sup> *El Orden*, July 16, 1937.

<sup>90</sup> "Federzoni Agravio a nuestro pais anoche," *La Voz del Interior*, July 16, 1937.

Italian book,” and then added something to the effect that “Argentines do not have the sophistication to appreciate the greatness of Italian culture.”<sup>91</sup> At this point Vice-Governor Amoedo, “visibly disturbed by the aggressive words he heard against our country,” left with his wife, followed shortly thereafter by Governor Fresco who departed before giving his own scheduled remarks.<sup>92</sup>

“Federzoni Attacked Argentine Culture,” “An Insulting Farewell,” and “Federzoni spoke Disparagingly of Our Country,” ran the following day’s headlines.<sup>93</sup> *La Tribuna Libre* questioned if Federzoni thought he was in Ethiopia given his disrespectful tone, “in alphabetical order we may be listed under ‘A’ like Abyssinia, but to the international community we are considered a great country on the South American continent.” The article went on to ask if Federzoni actually believed that, “he would find everyone here wearing black shirts and speaking Italian,” adding that instead, “before leaving the illustrious visitor has just learned that the Republic of Argentina is thoroughly democratic and Argentine citizens are as Argentine as Italians are Italian.”<sup>94</sup> *Crítica* reported that, “Federzoni violated the most basic rules of discretion and of hospitality...his speech crossed the line,” adding that “The grandiloquent Italian senator’s outrageous act was typical of fascist functionaries.” Witnesses and members of the press corps were especially disturbed by Federzoni’s comments about naturalized Argentines. Still a young nation with all of its citizens the children or descendants of immigrants, Argentina’s identity as a nation depended upon assimilation and naturalization. Perhaps

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<sup>91</sup> “En terminos despectivos para nuestro país, habló anoche el Dr. Federzoni,” *El Día de la Plata* July 16, 1937.

<sup>92</sup> *El Orden*, July 16, 1937.

<sup>93</sup> *El Día de la Plata*, *Crítica*, *Buenos Aires Herald*, July 16, 1937.

<sup>94</sup> “Desde el Balcón,” *Tribuna Libre* July 17, 1937.

without even realizing it, Federzoni had directly challenged the very basis of Argentina's own national project.

If Argentines were bothered by his allusion to their immigrant citizens, they were absolutely appalled by his slight of Argentine culture. As *Crítica* scoffed:

The picturesque senator claimed that we do not know the peninsula's culture. When he said: 'on Calle Florida I did not see one Italian book' certainly the orator did not mean Francesco Nitti, nor Mazzini, nor Benedetto Croce, the great liberal mind. He must have been referring the impoverished fascist literature that in the last fifteen years has not produced anything worth mentioning and to those little writers who shamelessly pile on praise for the 'duce' and for fascist 'culture.'"

Not everyone in the press attacked the fascist dignitary. *La Nación* chose to await an explanation from Federzoni before condemning his remarks adding that, "Our correspondent only perceived his comments to be pleasant...and at no point [did he] speak injurious words against the Argentine Republic."<sup>95</sup> *El Argentino* went even further categorically denying that Federzoni spoke poorly of Argentina's culture. It interviewed witnesses from the event to support its claim. One of these witnesses did however admit: "The one thing that he did say which could have been misunderstood was that Argentina in terms of its culture should make fascism and the New Italy more well-known. And he complained that there were not any great bookstores which popularized fascist ideas, while there were an abundance of such stores for leftist doctrines."<sup>96</sup> Even from this sympathetic witness, it is clear that Federzoni's was at least somewhat critical of Argentina's cultural milieu. Given the flurry of accounts throughout the press, it is difficult to determine the veracity of any one account of what transpired that July night, but it is undeniable that the incident attracted a great deal of public attention.

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<sup>95</sup> *La Nación*, July 17, 1937.

<sup>96</sup> *El Argentino* July 17, 1937.

Perhaps it was the English language daily the *Buenos Aires Herald* which hit on the fundamental problem with the speech, commenting that “Federzoni appeared to have forgotten that he was speaking before Argentines, even if fascist Argentines.”<sup>97</sup> The truth is that Federzoni’s comments were no different from those uttered by Parini and other Italian fascist officials, both within Italy as well as in Argentina in front of the Italian community. Members of the regime spoke long and often about the need for Italians to preserve their identity abroad, and resist assimilation -- well in line with Federzoni’s attack on naturalized Italo-Argentines. Furthermore, Federzoni’s evaluation of Argentine culture bore more than a casual resemblance to the articles Franco Ciarlantini had been writing on the subject since 1927. The only difference was, as the *Herald* pointed out, Federzoni forgot that he was speaking to an Argentine rather than Italian audience.

Argentina had since the days of Sarmiento relied on assimilation to solidify its own unity as a nation. For obvious reasons, Argentines *wanted* their immigrants to ‘renounce’ their foreign nationalities, a fact lost on Federzoni who failed to look beyond Italy’s own interests in speaking to a foreign audience. Federzoni should have also known to steer clear of any possible slight of Argentine culture. What would have been an inopportune remark anywhere else was absolutely scandalous in front of an Argentine audience always anxious to demonstrate its cultural sophistication.

In his report on the fall-out from Federzoni’s speech the Italian Ambassador in Buenos Aires reassured the Foreign Ministry that there was nothing wrong with Federzoni’s remarks and they should not have been perceived as insulting. This is in fact a telling sign of what was fundamentally wrong with fascist Italy’s propaganda strategy in the republic. For years Italian agents had been demanding that their emigrants remain

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<sup>97</sup> *Buenos Aires Herald*, July 17, 1937.

loyal to Italy, preserve their culture and language, and devote themselves to the Duce in complete disregard for the effect such tactics would have on Argentine sensibilities. It was only a matter of time before Argentines would become aware of the regime's programs in Argentina and the threat they posed to their own identity as a nation. The Federzoni fiasco was a step in that direction, turning the public's eyes towards Italian fascist activities. It was an indication of what was to come.

The following year this increased public awareness of fascist activities in their nation turned into panic when the press discovered that Italy's Axis partner was also operating within the republic. In April 1938 German associations in Buenos Aires held a plebiscite to voice their support for Hitler's annexation of Austria.<sup>98</sup> Not legally recognized, the plebiscite was nothing more than a symbolic gesture of support for Hitler orchestrated by the German Embassy. This public display by the German community in support of Nazism, however, shocked many Argentines who had been unaware of foreign propaganda efforts in their nation. With tensions running high more disturbing news came later in the month when an Argentine education inspector uncovered subversive Nazi propaganda in the German schools in La Plata. Rumors in the press spread quickly of Nazi-Fascist plots, vast underground spy networks, and conspiracies to overthrow the government.<sup>99</sup> Every meeting within the German community was looked on with suspicion. The newspaper accounts gave the impression that all German immigrants within Argentina were Nazi agents sent by the Reich. The most outrageous story of Nazi subversion broke in June 1939, when Argentine newspapers exposed a supposed Nazi

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<sup>98</sup> Ambassador of Buenos Aires to Foreign Ministry, "Allarmi per propaganda straniera in Argentina" April 16, 1938, ASMAE Inventario della Serie Politici 1931-1945, Argentina b. 20.

<sup>99</sup> See for examples articles in the Argentine dailies, *La Razón*, *La Prensa* and especially *Noticias Graficas* during the months of April and May of 1938.

plot to annex Patagonia to Germany. According to the rumor, the Nazis had long coveted Patagonia's wealth in minerals and livestock. Berlin secretly coordinated migration into the region, sending settlers and tourists there to survey the land and lay the groundwork for its 'nazification.'<sup>100</sup> Using these lurid tales in the press as evidence, the Argentine police investigated, finding that while many of the press accounts were grossly exaggerated there was indeed an alarming amount of Nazi propaganda and German associations in the country.<sup>101</sup>

The attention Nazi propaganda had attracted made the public more aware of fascist Italy's own initiatives. Argentines quickly realized that the Italian regime was also trying to spread a fascist totalitarian ideology and a foreign national project in their country. While lacking the caché of the Nazi propaganda, the Argentine press found Italian fascism to be equally subversive. For example, one local paper alerted its readers to the "Dangerous fascist invasion of Paraná." It described the work of Italian consular officials and members of the Italian community who were organizing a local Fasci, creating fascist schools and youth programs as well as after-work centers.<sup>102</sup> The article questioned, "Why is it necessary for these groups which are so different from our democratic principles to form themselves in Paraná." It went on to ask,

Would Mr. Benito Mussolini let Argentine democratic organizations form within the Italian Empire? We frankly do not think so. And in this we agree with Mussolini's way of thinking. Every government acts in their territorial jurisdiction as lord and master. With that being said we think that it is bad, very bad that Fascism is establishing itself here and what is more this meddling tramples over our sovereignty.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> "Como trabnáj el nazismo para anexar la patagonia al Reich," *Critica*, June 2, 1939; It was later proven that this so called Patagonia Plot was a hoax. For more information on Nazi espionage activities and press reactions see Ronald C. Newton's detailed study, *The Nazi Menace in Argentina, 1931-1947*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

<sup>101</sup> For the full investigation of Nazi espionage see the "Reservados..." collection in the AGNI.

<sup>102</sup> "Peligrosa invasion Fascista en Paraná," *Libre Palabra*, October 16, 1938.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

This challenge to Argentina's sovereignty as a nation was a theme echoed by members of the Argentine government who would identify Italian fascism, along with German Nazism as foreign doctrines contrary to the Argentine nation.

### **The Argentine Government Takes Action**

In 1938, taking advantage of the opportunity created by the public outcry against the Nazi menace, Socialist Deputy Enrique Dickmann and Radical Deputy Raúl Damonte Taborda launched a highly publicized campaign in the Chamber of Deputies to suppress Nazi-fascist propaganda within Argentina. Dickmann, a Russian-born Jew, had long been an outspoken opponent of Nazis, and had followed carefully their rise to power in Germany. He repeatedly warned the Chamber of Deputies of “the infiltration of foreign ideologies” into Argentine politics and society. According to Dickmann, these Nazi-fascist activities, “are not recent or sporadic; they are not isolated or localized: they are linked together by a serious and extraordinary premeditated plan.”<sup>104</sup>

Damonte Taborda, the leading anti-fascist within the Radical Party shared Dickmann's concerns. “Organized foreign groups have for the first time in Argentina's history dared to come to our Patria to attack our liberty, our democracy and our very own sovereignty.”<sup>105</sup> Damante Taborda called for action in the face of this “foreign imperialism,” declaring that “We must demonstrate to the powerful nations of the world that we constitute a sovereign nationality that knows how to confront danger with

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<sup>104</sup> Enrique Dickmann's speeches to the chamber of deputies are found in the official minutes of the chamber, *Diario de Sesiones* for those dates and were also compiled in the single volume: *La Infiltracion Nazi-Fascista en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Sociales Argentinas, 1939); Dickmann, 7-8.

<sup>105</sup> Raúl Damonte Taborda, Speech before the Chamber of Deputies, *Diario de Sesiones*, June 15, 1939.

resolve, speed, and energy.”<sup>106</sup> According to Damonte Taborda Nazism and fascism were foreign systems of thought which had no place in an Argentine nation founded on liberal democratic principles. In fact their brand of totalitarian authoritarianism was something different entirely from anything found within Argentina’s national past, not even the Manuel Rosas the famed Caudillo strong-man who ruled Argentina as a brutal dictator could be compared with these “Anti-Argentine vermin,” for as Damonte Taborda declared, “The representatives of this foreign imperialism are not acting in spirit of the Gaucho tyrant Rosas, who was popularly chosen and animated by nationalist sentiments.”<sup>107</sup> Even Argentina’s most tyrannical dictators were careful not to openly attack the democratic foundations of Argentine identity. In Argentina democracy in practice could be suspended or ‘safeguarded’ by a dictatorial regime, but never rejected outright; it was simply too much a part of Argentina’s national fabric. This argument against the Nazi-fascist propaganda made explicit the importance of Argentina’s collective set of democratic values and principles which served as the cornerstones of its ideational national identity. Promoting a project which challenged those ideals was therefore tantamount to challenging the very basis of Argentina’s identity as a nation. For both Dickmann and Damante Taborda, the totalitarian regimes therefore endangered Argentina in theory as well as in practice. In theory, by espousing totalitarian ideologies contrary to Argentina’s democratic principles, and in practice, by attempting to spread those ideologies onto Argentine soil.

Damonte Taborda along with Dickmann, equated fascist Italy’s activities in Argentina with those of Nazi Germany, characterizing both as dangerous violations of

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<sup>106</sup> Damonte Taborda, *Diario de Sesiones*, June 5, 1940.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

Argentina's national sovereignty.<sup>108</sup> Much of the Nazi German propaganda campaign, as described by Dickmann and Damonte Taborda, was in fact strikingly similar to the Italian model. Beginning in 1934, the Nazis coordinated their activities abroad with their ministry of propaganda, and made similar use of the German diplomatic corps to organize their efforts within Argentina. Just like the Italians had before them, they established their own news services and radio broadcasts, and established their own community newspaper to propagandize the regime. The Nazis also took advantage of the local network of German organizations co-opting existing ones for the regime and establishing new Nazi associations. They similarly took control over German schools supervised by the embassy, in which classes were conducted in German, celebrated German holidays, made use of German history and geography texts, and instructed students to be loyal and devoted to the Führer.<sup>109</sup> It was, in short, a program of study similar to the curriculum of the Italian schools. In fact, most of the Nazi propaganda sent to Argentina, with the important exceptions of Aryan racial theories and anti-Semitism, was a carbon copy of the Italian fascist program.

In spite of the similarity between the two totalitarian regime's initiatives, neither Dickmann, nor Damonte Taborda was as alarmed by fascist Italy's efforts as they were of Nazi Germany's. Dickmann declared: "I consider German National Socialism more dangerous because of its organizational ability, its methodology, intelligence, vigor, tenacity and objectives," explaining that

The Italian fascist effort is almost innocuous for two reasons: the Italian immigrant in this country is in general an individualist and a liberal; and it is difficult to control him, he is undisciplined like all Latins. Moreover, the children of Italians who are born in Argentina are Argentines one hundred

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<sup>108</sup> Dickmann, 11-12.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

percent without reservation. These considerations sterilize in large part the work of Italian Fascism in our country.”<sup>110</sup>

Dickmann supported his observations with statistics. He highlighted the fact that even though both the Nazis and Italian fascists recruited the same number of people into their respective organizations, because of their community’s smaller size, the Nazi membership within the German community was proportionally much larger. According to Dickmann, Italian community leaders’ independent stances, liberal backgrounds, and desire to assimilate into Argentine culture conspired against fascist Italy’s efforts. In making his case, Dickmann fell back on well established stereotypes: the Germans were typically efficient, organized and in lock step with directives from Berlin, while the Italians were typically Latin in their inefficiency and contempt for authority.

The Italian Ambassador relayed Dickmann’s comments to the Foreign Ministry in Rome and the Italian Ambassador in Berlin.<sup>111</sup> One wonders what went through their minds as they read the translation of his speeches. Dickmann’s dismissive evaluation of over ten years of work must have been a tough pill to swallow. It would seem as though the Nazis had overshadowed the Italian fascists, beating them at their own game as they had done in so many other policy areas. And yet Italian officials no doubt took some pleasure in the fact that the Italian propaganda had managed to slip under the radar and infiltrate Argentina without attracting the same amount of fear as the Nazis. This fact suggests that perhaps the Italian fascists had done something right. They were able to implement a program similar to the Nazi’s over a longer period of time, influencing in some form or another members of the Italian community as well as Argentine

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Italian Ambassador Buenos Aires to Foreign Ministry, May 30, 1938, ASMAE, Serie Affari Politici, 1931-1945, B. Argentina, 20.

nationalists, without alarming the general public or the government. In fact, the Italian propaganda initiative would be cut short not because of its own failures but because of its association with Nazi Germany.

Before long Italian fascist propaganda and especially its school program came under investigation, as the Argentine Congress debated the passage of new legislation restricting the activities of foreign associations, regulating foreign instruction in schools, and establishing a commission to investigate propaganda which was deemed a threat to Argentina's national sovereignty.

The Italian schools, which somehow despite their many years of disseminating fascist propaganda had managed to escape scrutiny, were the first to be labeled along with those of the Nazis, as threats to Argentine sovereignty.<sup>112</sup> In 1938, the Argentine government restricted the activities of these schools. Prohibiting foreign anthems, salutes, and commemorations, it instructed all schools to instead sing the Argentine national anthem at the start of the day, required that Argentine national holidays be observed, and that only pictures of Argentine patriots and national symbols adorn classroom walls. It further required that all lessons with the exception of foreign language classes be conducted in Spanish by teachers who were Argentine citizens certified by the Argentine Board of Education. History and geography classes were to emphasize the people and history of Argentina, rather than foreign subjects. Most importantly, foreign schools were forbidden to teach "political and racial ideologies contrary to the principles of the Constitution and laws of the country," and were obligated to instead "formulate a program of lectures on the Preamble and the Rights and Guarantees of the National

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<sup>112</sup> Italian Ambassador in Buenos Aires to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, August 8, 1938, ASMAE Inventario della Serie Politici 1931-1945, Argentina b. 20.

Constitution”<sup>113</sup> On December 21, 1939, the Argentine Department of Education took further measures. It banned the use of foreign published textbooks and required all classes, even those teaching foreign languages, to adopt “texts which are written exclusively for Argentine children.” The language readings were prohibited from including “themes related to current events in foreign countries.” In their place readings were to include the Argentine National Anthem, and Constitution, events in Argentine history, Argentine legends and traditions, as well as “Moral lectures, readings and anecdotes, which cultivate the great spiritual values that sustain our democracy.”<sup>114</sup> The new rules in effect made the schools, as the Italian Ambassador quipped, “Argentine public schools funded by the Italian Government.” Every effort was therefore made to resist or delay implementing these new changes, as Argentine school inspectors soon found out.<sup>115</sup>

The fascist run school in Mendoza was one of the first to be targeted by the Argentine government in their crackdown on foreign schools, for as the Italian Consul in Mendoza explained, “they look upon us with disfavor because we promote a political agenda which is extremely Fascist, and because we have too many portraits of the King and the Duce on display.”<sup>116</sup> An Argentine inspector to the schools in La Plata also expressed concern over the schools’ fascist political agenda, adding, “We grant foreigners the right to teach their citizens in their mother tongue, but we can not allow them to propagate their political and national ideologies. Even the children of foreigners

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<sup>113</sup> Consejo Nacional de Educacion (Argentina), disposición exp. 17815/M/937, September 28, 1938, ASMAE Inventario della Serie Politici 1931-1945, Argentina b. 20.

<sup>114</sup> El Consejo Nacional de Educación (Argentina), “Resolución,” December 21, 1939, *Archivo del Congreso de la Nación* (ACN), Comisión Investigadora de Actividades Anti-Argentinas, caja 23.3-23.6.

<sup>115</sup> Italian Ambassador Buenos Aires to Minister of Foreign Affairs, June 24, 1938, ASMAE, Affari Politici, Argentina, b. 21.

<sup>116</sup> Romizi, Consul in Mendoza to D.I.E.S January 29, 1937, ASMAE, D.G.R.C. *Archivo Scuole* (1936-1945) b. 57.

born in their own Patria, but today residents of this Country, must educate themselves in an Argentine manner.”<sup>117</sup> Two years later another Argentine inspector to La Plata was alarmed by the fact that “The children are educated under the fascist system, and they are not taught anything about Argentina’s programs.” To make matters worse, “The principal in the Italian school is a Fascist sent directly by the Italian government to spread partisan propaganda.”<sup>118</sup>

Argentine inspectors soon turned their eyes to the fascist Italian schools run by the *Pro-Schola* and *Dante Alighieri*. They determined that, “These schools do not comply with the new government guidelines.”<sup>119</sup> With only passing references in the curriculum to “the History of Argentina and Civic Instruction,” inspectors found most lessons filled instead with the history of Italy, Imperial Rome and the fascist state. “In all of the Geography lessons they have directly substituted ours for foreign instruction. For example fourth graders are only taught the ‘physical and political geography of Italy’... while Argentine instruction is excluded.”<sup>120</sup> Inspectors were also shocked by the apparent lack of commitment to the instruction of the Spanish language and outraged by the fact that the Italian textbooks did not make any reference at all to Argentina and its civic traditions, instead claiming Italy as the true *Patria* of its students. Not surprisingly, the inspectors concluded that too little effort had been made to inspire Argentine national identity and patriotism: “In terms of sentiments of nationality and love of the patria, I do not believe that they dedicate preferential attention to Argentine patriotism...I do not

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<sup>117</sup> G. Baroni, Consul in La Plata, April 21, 1938, ASMAE, D.G.R.C. Archivio Scuole (1936-1945) b. 58.

<sup>118</sup> “La Plata, lugares de reunion de elementos fascista,” ACN Comisión Investigadora de Actividades Anti-Argentinas, caja 1.3-1.4.

<sup>119</sup> Benito F. Vaccarezza, Argentine Inspector General of Private Schools, *Inspeccion general de escuelas particulares da cuenta de los programas de enseñanza del idioma italiano que se imparten en las escuelas dependientes de la asociación italiana Pro-Schola*, July, 7, 1939 “Expediente 15461-I 139,” AGNI, Educación, 1939:28.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

observe in the students a noble and profound love for their true [Argentine] *Patria*.”<sup>121</sup> Labeling these schools, “Completely Anti-Argentine in their agenda and activities,” the government revoked the certification of many of the schools’ degrees although they allowed them to continue to function into the early years of the war when they would come under the scrutiny of the Congressional Commission on Anti-Argentine Activities.<sup>122</sup>

The Argentine government was also alarmed by the presence of foreign associations that operated under the direct supervision of foreign governments. Many of the Italian associations such as the *Società Dante Alighieri*, the *Fasci all’Estero*, and the *Ballila* and *Dopolavoro* fell under this category. On May 15, 1939, the Argentine government passed a law restricting the activities of these associations. The law banned the use of emblems, anthems, uniforms, or symbols pertaining to foreign political parties. It required that all of the associations’ regulations and statutes be written in Spanish and sent to government authorities, and most importantly prohibited them organizing any event which involved their members in foreign political propaganda.<sup>123</sup> Even though the associations themselves were not shut down they could no longer spread the Fascist message with legal impunity, cutting off one of the Italian regime’s major propaganda arms.

Since 1938 Damonte Taborda and Dickmann had been calling for the formation of a special commission to investigate and suppress all Nazi and fascist activities within the nation. They would have to wait nearly three years for the commission to take action.

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> El Consejo Nacional de Educación (Argentina), “Desaprovando programas y libros de escuela particular” December 13, 1939, (AGNI, Educación, 1939:28).

<sup>123</sup> Decree May 15, 1939, in *Diario de Sesiones*, June 9, 1939.

In 1941 world events forced the reluctant hand of the Argentine conservatives in power at the time. The Argentine government under the administrations of Roberto M. Ortiz and Ramón S. Castillo had been on notoriously friendly terms with the Axis powers. This position became more difficult to uphold after the outbreak of World War II, which arrived quite literally on South American shores in December 1939. During that month, the German pocket battleship the Graf Spee slugged it out with three British cruisers off the South American coastline, retreating into the mouth of the River Plate where the ship was scuttled in full view of onlookers in Montevideo, and its crew was interned in Argentina. Even before they entered the war, the United States State Department officials were mindful of Nazi-fascist fifth columnists and saboteurs operating in their own backyard and applied political and economic pressure on all of the nations of Latin America to root out these cells. The 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor followed by the United States entry into the war would later put even more pressure on the Argentine government to act. Although Argentina remained adamantly neutral until the very end of the war, the government did agree to implement the investigatory commission. In the end, the immediacy of the world war and United States pressure moved the government to act on Damonte Taborda's and Dickmann's persistent recommendations.

In 1941, the Argentine government opened up its Congressional Investigatory Commission on Anti-Argentine Activities. The evidence collected by the commission now fills thirty-five boxes in Argentina's congressional archive. The investigators collected newspapers and printed propaganda, received and filed private denouncements, and recorded the testimony of witnesses. They also gathered fiscal records and membership rosters from the various foreign associations within their country. The vast

majority of this evidence focused on the Nazi regime's operations. There was however also a substantial amount of reports on Italian fascism. Investigators compiled the names and addresses of Italians enrolled in the Fascist Party abroad and as well as the regime's financial backers. Among the many collaborators listed, Arsenio Guido Buffarini's name appeared often. He was described as a "militant fascist," who "enjoys great sympathy within the Italian community, even among non-fascists due to his open personality," but lost most of his influence, "the day he turned into a fascist propagandist."<sup>124</sup> Valdani also figured prominently, identified as the most important financial supporter of the regime within the community as well as one of the regime's most faithful subordinates who, unlike Buffarini, was "hated by a great majority of the community, including fascists."<sup>125</sup>

Argentine investigators also closely examined the Italian language press, providing extensive clippings and summaries of Italian fascist periodicals including *Il Mattino d'Italia* and *Il Giornale d'Italia* as well as *La Rivista Mensile della Federazione Italiana*. Investigators labeled *Il Mattino d'Italia*, "the principle organ of Fascist propaganda in Argentina," directed by Michele Intaglietta, "an ultra-Fascist *squadrista*," sent directly from Rome and directly answerable to the fascist regime.<sup>126</sup> Some of the propaganda works sent by the regime also found their way into the files of the commission, as did *Stefani* and *Roma Press* news wires. Everything from Parini's instructions to Italians living abroad, to works celebrating the great accomplishments of the Duce and accounts of Italy's heroic efforts in the Second World War.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> "Fascismo Italiano," Comisión Investigadora de Actividades Anti-Argentinas, ACN, caja 22.3-23.2.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

The investigation also followed closely the activities of the fascist and pro-fascist Italian organizations in Argentina, highlighting their direct contact with Rome in violation of Argentine law. Of the *Pro-Schola* investigators wrote, “The president is the militant fascist Giuseppe Fiocchi who runs Italian fascist schools,” and “is controlled by the Embassy.” The report also called the *Società Dante Alighieri*, “A Fascist institution with its central office in Italy, with twenty branches in all of Argentina’s major cities. Italian Schools and the Italo-Argentine Studies Institute depend on it. It is controlled by the Government in Rome.”<sup>128</sup> Over a dozen other associations were listed categorized as “in the orbit of fascism,” having “fascist tendencies” or “including many fascist sympathizers in its ranks.”<sup>129</sup> In sum, Argentine officials had finally recognized the highly subversive nature of the Italian fascist activities that had been developing for over a decade without censure.

Despite the substantial amount of evidence on Italian fascist activities collected by the Commission, four out of the five published *informes* reporting on its findings focused exclusively on Nazi activities. The textbooks of the Italian schools abroad were in fact the only pieces of evidence discussed substantially within the reports. These texts figured prominently in *Informe no. 4*, which reproduced illustrations from the Italian fascist first and second grade primers. Citing passages and illustrations from the fascist texts which exhorted loyalty to the Duce, the King, and the ideals of fascist Italy as damning evidence, the Commission concluded that, while the Italian schools were less militant than the parallel Nazi programs, both “Shared the same political goal of orienting

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

and educating children in Totalitarianism.”<sup>130</sup> Given this political agenda “contrary to the Constitution and laws of the country,” along with the promotion of a foreign national project in expressed violation of Argentine law, these schools were condemned as “anti-Argentine organizations,” and it was recommended that their activities be suspended.<sup>131</sup> It is particularly telling that in their condemnation of the schools that they conflated national identity with political ideology. The schools were deemed “anti-Argentine” because of their totalitarian program which is antithetical to Argentina’s ideational conceptualization of its identity and therefore by definition foreign and un-Argentine.

Schools were one of the most basic tools of nation-building. It was in the classroom where governments shaped young minds by inculcating patriotic loyalty to the Patria and infusing them with a sense of a national identity. The Italian fascists had understood all this making the schools the center-piece of their efforts. Nor was it a point lost on the Argentine inspectors, who took time away from their fixation with the Nazi propaganda to warn their compatriots of the Italian fascist threat to Argentina’s identity through its schools abroad. That out of all of the evidence they collected the investigators chose to only report on the activities of the Italian schools abroad demonstrates the importance that they placed on primary education. In targeting Italian-Argentine children, the Italian regime was competing directly with the Argentine government for the hearts and minds of its youth. The regime had blatantly interfered with Argentina’s own national project. It was an affront to its national sovereignty that the government no longer tolerated.

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<sup>130</sup> Comisión Investigadora de Actividades Anti-Argentinas, “informe no. 4, Buenos Aires, September 30 1941.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

## **Conclusion**

By attempting to promote an Italian identity abroad while at the same time spreading a fascist ideological program, the Italian fascist regime failed at both. In the end the nationalist agenda of spreading an Italian identity abroad undermined its universalist agenda by alienating otherwise receptive Argentine nationalist movements. At the same time, the universalist mission to promote the totalitarian political system abroad alarmed Argentines the most, enabling left-wing radicals to use it to discredit their nationalist adversaries, by associating them with a political ideology which attacked the values upon which the Argentine nation was founded. Ultimately, both its nationalist and universalist agendas ran afoul of the Argentine government once public attention turned to the propaganda activities of foreign nations. The government could not allow totalitarian ideologies to threaten Argentine democracy, nor could it permit foreign regimes to advance their nationalist projects within its sovereign territory.

The debates inspired in Argentina by the foreign propaganda arriving on its shores did more than simply attest to the ultimate failure of the fascist propaganda. They also provide a clear articulation of how Argentines strove to define their identity as nation. Just as Italian fascist writers were grappling with the question of an emigrant identity outside of the nation, Argentine writers were questioning their own identity as a nation of immigrants. At the very same moment that Italy attempted to promote its programs in Argentina, Argentines were anxiously reaffirming their own identity in face of internal and external threats. Argentina's ideational identity based on the principles of liberty and democracy, proved to be quite durable as it won out over foreign ideological threats to that identity. In the end, the Argentine government interpreted fascism's attack on these

democratic ideals as a direct challenge to the nation. It was a confrontation that the Italian fascists could not win. With the mechanisms of the state firmly in the hands of the Argentine government, it was only a matter of time before it would suppress the fascist regime's activities inside its borders. Powerless to stop them, the Italian Embassy could only watch as Argentine officials uncovered and dismantled the propaganda machine it had worked so hard to implement.

Of course the Italian Embassy had other things to worry about. By the time the Commission on Anti-Argentine Activities concluded its work Italian fascism's days were already numbered. The champions of the anti-fascist cause in the Argentine Congress would, however, have little time to celebrate. In 1943, another military coup dissolved Congress and by 1946 all of the politicians who fought so hard to defend Argentine democracy in the face of the fascist menace, from Repetto and Palacios, to Dickmann and Damonte Taborda, found themselves either in prison or in exile after Juan Domingo Perón, an admirer of Mussolini, came to power.

Over the next forty years Argentine politics would continue to sway between democracy and dictatorship. Argentina weathered the tumultuous *década infame* and the government of the time had rejected outright the foreign propaganda arriving on its shores, reaffirming its faith in the democratic ideal. During the same period, Argentine nationalists, influenced by the Italian fascist propaganda, had however developed a new style of right-wing national identity, which laid the ideological foundation for the authoritarian regimes to come, casting a dark shadow over Argentina's political landscape to this day.

## CONCLUSION

On December 27, 2001, right as thousands of Argentines were lining up to apply for Italian citizenship, Italian Parliament ratified a law recognizing the right to vote for Italians living abroad as well as granted Italians abroad the right to elect their own deputies to Italian Parliament. Mirko Tremaglia a member of Gianfranco Fini's *Alleanza Nazionale* the right-wing successor to the Fascist Party, was the architect of the new law.<sup>1</sup> Tremaglia no doubt assumed (and members of the left undoubtedly feared) that this inclusion of Italians abroad with its appeal to Italian nationalist sentiments would deliver more votes to the right.

Counting 496, 000 Italian citizens, Argentina had the second largest number of Italians living abroad behind only Germany.<sup>2</sup> On the eve of the 2006 election Silvio Berlusconi's center-right coalition anticipated a boost from the vote abroad. The election in April produced the exact opposite result. Italians abroad, especially those in Argentina, voted overwhelmingly for Romano Prodi's center-left coalition. It was a devastating blow to right since these votes from abroad were what tipped the balance in one of the closest elections in Italian history. The *Alleanza Nazionale* had made the same mistake that its predecessor had made seventy years early: conflating Italian national identity with a political affiliation.

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<sup>1</sup> Legge 27 dicembre 2001, n. 459 "Norme per l'esercizio del diritto di voto dei cittadini italiani residenti all'estero," published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* n. 4, January 5, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> *La Repubblica*, December 20, 2001.

The case of Italian Argentine participation in Italy's recent elections is in fact evidence that Italian identity has persisted in Argentina into the twenty-first century. But the question of these Italian Argentines' national identity is still more complex. While I was in Buenos Aires just after the election of 2006 I had the opportunity to speak with an American news correspondent who had followed the Italian vote in Argentina. He suggested that one of the reasons why Prodi had won so many votes in Argentina was thanks to Néstor Kirchner, Argentina's left-wing president, who used his own political machine to support Prodi's campaign and mobilize the vote. This suggests that the Italians in Argentina in deciding how to vote were influenced as much by Argentina's national politics as by Italian politics and indicates a much more intricate relationship between these individuals and the two nations that they have chosen to identify with.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Italian fascists had assumed that by promoting Italian identity in Argentina they would be able to garner support abroad for the fascist regime and its political agenda. In this endeavor they failed abjectly. But, contrary to their assumptions, they did not fail because the Italian emigrants in Argentina had abandoned their cultural heritage. They failed instead because the majority of Italians abroad rejected the regime's appropriation of that identity. The anti-fascists within Argentina re-affirmed their sense of Italian-ness by opposing fascism, while those members of the community sympathetic to the fascist regime articulated their own understanding of Italian identity which often contradicted the regime's model.

Once the regime introduced its ideology in Argentina it had no control over the discourse. Italians as well as Argentines were free to interpret the propaganda any way that they saw fit. Unlike a national project with the borders of the nation-state, Italian

fascists had no way of controlling their national discourse once it crossed the ocean. Relying on the tools of persuasion rather than the weapons of coercion, they had no means of forcefully indoctrinating their compatriots abroad. Supporting the Italian fascist regime and adopting its brand of Italian identity was a voluntary act and despite the regime's efforts fascism meant very different things to different people. Italian Argentines used it as leverage to help them to incorporate themselves into Argentine society, while Argentine nationalists latched onto its authoritarian agenda. Even those who rejected outright the regime's efforts did in the process articulate their own sense of Italian identity. Native Argentines, confronted with a foreign nationalist project and political ideology within their country, were also prompted to rethink and re-articulate their own sense of identity. In short, though it failed in its political objectives the regime's propaganda did succeed in provoking no small amount of debate and discussion over the question of national identity within Argentina.

The Italian fascists had also failed to appreciate the Argentine context in formulating their propaganda strategies. Argentina was a nation of immigrants united by an ideational sense of identity founded on a faith in democracy. By trying to convince Italian immigrants living in Argentina to remain loyal to Italy, with an identity separate from the rest of society, they were pulling at the very fabric of Argentina's national model. They also had fantastically underestimated the natural pull towards assimilation felt by many Italian immigrants. Even those sympathetic to the regime were preoccupied with integrating themselves into Argentine society. With all of their material interests and livelihoods as well as the lives of their children now dependent on the fortunes of their new nation, they could not but have identified with Argentina, even if they chose to also

maintain their identity as Italians. Furthermore, while the regime's universalist message may have been appealing to Argentine nationalists, the Italian fascists' national project in Argentina most definitely was not. Ultimately, the Italian regime's only thinly disguised promotion of a nationalist and totalitarian identity within another sovereign state doomed its efforts to failure as soon as the Argentine government recognized the threat that it posed to their own national project.

The example of Il Duce's national project in Argentina demonstrates the complex way in which identity is formed. National identities are much more elastic and fluid than they at first appear, and as this project demonstrates, the act of imaging the nation is not the exclusive patrimony of nation-states or political parties. Instead these identities are negotiated, contested, and re-imagined by members of the community who are actively engaged in the discourse. Even those Italians in Argentina who had left the nation many years earlier, continued to feel the pull towards their homeland and were in dialogue with the Italian state in shaping their own multi-national identity as Italian emigrants in Argentina.

The intricate way in which Italian community in Argentina has integrated itself in Argentina's national life while at the same time maintaining and re-establishing connections with the Italian nation of its origin is but one striking example of the how identities are constantly redefined and negotiated across time and across borders.

In an increasingly globalized world the very concept of a national identity is itself in the process of being redefined. With the ease in which people are able to travel and communicate with one another throughout the world, multiple identities and dual citizenships have become more common than ever. This process of global

interconnectedness has progressed so rapidly in the past few years that many are beginning to question the relevance of national models. The European Union, NAFTA, MERCOSUR and other international trading regions, multi-national corporate affiliations, and virtual communities over the internet are all fast creating new collective forms of identity filling a role traditionally associated with the nation-state.

These recent phenomena highlight the dynamic and ever-changing way in which personal and collective identities are defined and re-defined. They challenge us to adjust our own preconceptions about identity formation and develop new paradigms for understanding our place in the world today.

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