

'ROMAN' NATION: RACIALIZING ITALIANS (1903-1912)

by

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Abstract

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The existing literature on Italian racism has failed to analyze the thought of the right-wing intellectuals who gave life to the nationalist movement in the early 20th century. Current research provides only a fragmentary and episodic narration of the nationalist racial thought, and fails to insert its contradictions and complexities into the development of the nationalist ideology. The reluctance to apply a discursive methodology has been the primary cause of the failure of the existing historiography to recognize the nationalist racial discourse. This dissertation intends to fill that void by analyzing the writings of Enrico Corradini, Mario Morasso, Giuseppe Prezzolini, Giovanni Papini and other prominent nationalists.

In this study, I argue that there is an important racial component in the early 20th century nationalist thought, and that this component emerges through the analysis of racial language, tropes, stereotypes, and metaphors. My thesis is that the nationalist imperialistic agenda determined their racial discourse. The nationalists considered the possession of a colonial empire as a necessary and unmistakable mark of the superiority of a nation on an international scale. The goal of establishing an Italian Empire was justified discursively with racial imagery and recurrent themes, above all that of “romanita”. In the nationalist imperialistic narrative, the Italians possessed certain qualities that were quintessential to the Italian race, and these qualities both enabled and entitled them to conquer and maintain a colonial empire.

The discursive construction of the Italian race had to take into account the array of racial theories and beliefs that argued the inferiority of the Italian vis-à-vis the Nordic race. Against the theories that postulated the superiority of the Nordic man, the Italian nationalists tapped into an imagined Roman past, not so much negating the existing stereotypes but reinventing existing narratives. The colonial war absolved, in the nationalist narrative, the crucial function of being a catalyst for a surge in patriotism and racial pride, which would awaken the dormant racial qualities of the Italian population and clarify who was a member of the national community and who was excluded.

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To my family

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‘ROMAN’ NATION: RACIALIZING ITALIANS (1903-1912)

Introduction

During the second week of January 2010 the small town of Rosarno in the Calabria region of Southern Italy was the scene of what the New York Times called: “the worst immigrant rioting ever seen in Italy — shocking here not only because of the anger of migrants, some of whom clashed with local residents, but also for the attacks on them by townspeople”.¹ The shock over the acts of violence perpetrated by the inhabitants of Rosarno against the immigrants prompted an avalanche of commentaries and hypotheses that questioned the immediate reasons of the attacks. A large part of the Italian press and political parties – with the exclusion of the Northern League and Silvio Berlusconi’s party Forza Italia – wondered whether the events could be interpreted as a symptom of widespread racism in Italian society.²

The commentaries related to the episodes of Rosarno are symptomatic of the uneasiness and superficiality that characterize the approach to the subject of racism in

¹ Rachel Donadio, “Looking Past the Facade of Italian City After Riots”, *New York Times*, January 12, 2010.

² The most widely read Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* questioned whether the attacks on the African immigrants were motivated by racism, or if they were a reaction of the common citizens to the “forced integration” and the “disparaging of Italian cultural traditions” promoted by the left-wing intellectuals. The left-wing *La Repubblica*, the second most read Italian newspaper, compared the situation in Rosarno with the Ku Klux Klan violence in the United States in the 1960s, but ultimately blamed Mafia for creating a system of exploitation targeting immigrants and locals alike, and the ineptitude of the government in tackling both the issue of immigration and criminality. The Vatican’s official paper *L’Osservatore Romano* denounced the “persistence” of racism in Italian society and condemned “all forms of racism”. However, it must be noted that the Vatican is not immune from controversies. Only a few months prior to the events of Rosarno, the Vatican initiated the path of elevation to sainthood of Pope Pius XII, in spite of the existing controversy over his failure to forcefully denounce the Holocaust. The events of Rosarno easily became the object of a political squabble between the Government and the Opposition parties, with a predictable exchange of accusations: the Left accusing the Prime Minister and the Northern League of promoting a “climate of hate”, the Government retorting that the excessive number of immigrants was to blame. Angelo Panebianco, “La fermezza e l’ ipocrisia”, *Il Corriere della Sera*, on line edition, 8 January 2010; Eugenio Scalfari, “L’ inferno di Rosarno e i suoi responsabili” *La Repubblica*, on line edition, 10 January 2010; Giulia Galeotti, “Tammuriata nera”, *L’ Osservatore Romano*, on line edition, 11-12 January 2010.

Italy, and of the failure to analyze the roots of the present events in the national past. David Bidussa brilliantly captured this uneasiness with the formula “the myth of the good Italian”. In very simple terms, Bidussa referred to the widespread notion that the racist policies of the Fascist regime – exemplified in the acts of discrimination and persecution perpetrated against the Italian Jews and the indigenous peoples of Libya and Ethiopia – were contrary to the sentiments and wishes of the majority of the Italians.³ The “good Italian” narrative not only absolved the majority of the Italian population from the sins of the Fascist Regime, but perpetuated the idea that Italian culture was fundamentally immune from racism, particularly from the most virulent form of racism expressed by Nazi Germany.⁴ The prominent philosopher Benedetto Croce was one of the first and most authoritative observers who described the Fascist Regime as the only significant – and thus culturally isolated - example of racism in Italian history.⁵ Historian Renzo De Felice in his seminal work on the Italian Jewry and the Fascist regime argued that the Racial Laws of 1938 were opposed by the majority of Italians – with the exception of a few fascist fanatics.⁶

Historians have begun to dismantle the postwar “myths” only in the mid 1990s, focusing their research predominantly on the Fascist regime and the Racial Laws.⁷ The

³ David Bidussa, *Il mito del bravo italiano* (Milano: Il saggiatore, 1994).

⁴ An interesting debate on the myths of Italian historiography can be found in “History as it really wasn’t: the myths of Italian Historiography. A roundtable with Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Luciano Cafagna, Ernesto Galli della Loggia, Carl Ipsen and David I. Kertzer”, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 6(3) (2001): 402–419. See also Filippo Focardi, “La memoria della guerra e il mito del ‘bravo italiano’ . Origine e affermazione di un autoritratto collettivo”, *Italia contemporanea* (September-December 2000): 393-99; “L’ombra del passato. I tedeschi e il nazismo nel giudizio italiano dal 1945 a oggi”, *Novecento* (July- December 2000): 67-81; and “Bravo italiano e cattivo tedesco: riflessioni sulla genesi di due immagini incrociate”, *Storia e memoria*, 1 (1996): 55-83.

⁵ Benedetto Croce, “Il Fascismo come parentesi” in *Il Fascismo. Antologia di scritti critici*, edited by Costanzo Casucci (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1961).

⁶ Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il Fascismo* (Milano: Mondadori, 1961).

⁷ The establishment of the “Seminar for the history of Italian racism” at the University of Bologna in 1994 was the expression of a new trend in Italian historiography aimed at the revision of a series of self-

outcome has been a number of studies documenting the origins and development of the fascist racial discourse, particularly in the scientific field, but leaving much of the discourse of the Liberal period unexplored.⁸ The existing literature has failed in particular to analyze the racial thought of the right-wing intellectuals who gave life to the nationalist movement in the early 20th century. Currently, this literature provides only a fragmentary and episodic narration of the nationalist racial thought, and fails to insert its contradictions and complexities into the development of the nationalist ideology. The reluctance to apply a discursive methodology has been the primary cause of the failure of the existing historiography to recognize the nationalist racial discourse. This dissertation intends to fill that void by analyzing the writings of Enrico Corradini, Mario Morasso, Giuseppe Prezzolini, Giovanni Papini and other prominent nationalists.

In this study, I argue that there is an important racial component in the early 20th century nationalist thought, and that this component emerges through the analysis of racial language, tropes, stereotypes, and metaphors. My thesis is that the nationalist imperialistic agenda determined their racial discourse. The nationalists considered the possession of a colonial empire as a necessary and unmistakable mark of the superiority of a nation on an international scale. The goal of establishing an Italian Empire was justified discursively with racial imagery and recurrent themes, above all that of

absolutory clichés and stereotyped interpretations of Italian racism. One of the outcomes of the seminar was the publication of the collection of essays *Nel nome della razza: il razzismo nella storia d'Italia, 1870-1945*, edited by Alberto Burgio (Bologna: Il mulino, 1999). For a discussion of the historiography on Italian racism see below.

⁸ See for instance: Giorgio Israel and Pietro Nastasi, *Scienza e razza nell' Italia fascista* (Bologna: Il mulino, 1998); Aaron Gillette, *Racial theories in fascist Italy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); Enzo Collotti, *Il fascismo e gli ebrei: le leggi razziali in Italia* (Roma, Bari: Laterza, 2003). The only notable exception is Michele Nani, *Ai confini della nazione: stampa e razzismo nell' Italia di fine Ottocento* (Roma: Carocci, 2006).

“romanita’”. In the nationalist imperialistic narrative, the Italians possessed certain qualities that were quintessential to the Italian race, and these qualities both enabled and entitled them to conquer and maintain a colonial empire.

The discursive construction of the Italian race had to take into account the array of racial theories and beliefs that argued the inferiority of the Italian vis-à-vis the Nordic race. Against the theories that postulated the superiority of the Nordic man, the Italian nationalists tapped into an imagined Roman past, not so much negating the existing stereotypes but reinventing existing narratives. For instance, they accepted the description of the inhabitants of the South of Italy as violent, irrational, and individualistic. However, they also claimed that the Italian Southerners were exceptional soldiers and conquerors who had inherited from their “Roman” ancestors the qualities that defined the perfect settler: fecundity and innate aptitude for farming.

The colonial war absolved, in the nationalist narrative, the crucial function of being a catalyst for a surge in patriotism and racial pride, which would awaken the dormant racial qualities of the Italian population and clarify who was a member of the national community and who was excluded.

This dissertation attempts primarily to clarify certain aspects of the nationalist ideology through the prism of racial constructions. For instance the hostile attitude towards Judaism and Jews in general - a hostility testified by the pressure for the assimilation of the Italian Jews masked as (and often mistaken for) acceptance. More broadly, I attempt to enrich the study of racism in Italy, and in particular to deepen the understanding of the formation of a pre-fascist racial discourse. Even though it is beyond the scope of this work to demonstrate that the fascist racial discourse derived motives and

themes directly from the nationalists, it is nonetheless important to highlight the fact that that Mussolini's elaboration of racial ideas had to take into account the racial discourse proposed by nationalist intellectuals. In this sense, discussing racism in the nationalist movement also demonstrates that the birth of the fascist ideology was not immune from racial considerations.

Terminology

In the text the term “**race**” appears as a translation of the Italian term “*razza*”, which was used by the nationalists to define a large group of people sharing the same inherited characteristics (a combination of physical and behavioral traits). I also use the term “race” to translate the Italian term “*stirpe*” which was often used by the nationalists interchangeably with “*razza*”: at times it indicated a subsection of a larger racial group, other times it had the specific meaning of a large group of individuals who were blood-related –however distantly – to one another. In the course of the work I specify, where appropriate, which of the two terms – “*razza*” or “*stirpe*” - was used in the original Italian text.

By “**racism**” I intend an ideology, a theory or simply a belief asserting that one race is superior to another. Racism maintains that racial characteristics are hereditary and uses them to justify discriminatory or persecutory practices targeting groups and individuals. This dissertation does not discuss the practical effects of racism, but analyzes racism as a discursive construction, namely as a set of themes, clichés, stereotypes and arguments proposed by a group of intellectuals in their magazines, political speeches, novels, literary and political essays.

Between the 19th and early 20th centuries various European theorists produced texts aimed at classifying human races and justifying a hierarchy among them. The two main trends within this production were “**biological**” – or “scientific”- racism and “**cultural**” -or “spiritual”- racism. Biological racism claimed to be based on the scientific observation of human phenomena (from the measurement and classification of human skulls, to the compilation of statistics of the rates of crime and certain diseases in particular regions), relying on anthropology - particularly physical anthropology, anthropometry, craniometry, and other disciplines to classify humans into distinct biological races.

In *Types of Mankind* (1854) The anthropologists Josiah C. Nott and George Gliddon claimed to have demonstrated the principle of polygenism, according to which humanity originates from different lineages. Charles Darwin opposed Nott and Gliddon's polygenist arguments in his 1871 *The Descent of Man*, arguing for a monogenism of the species – according to which all human races had a common ancestor. One of the first and most influential typologies used to classify various human races was devised by French anthropologist Georges Vacher de Lapouge , a theoretician of eugenics and author of *The Aryan and his social role* (1899), who classified humanity according to a hierarchy among various races, spanning from the “Aryan” and “dolichocephalic” race, to the “brachycephalic” race, best represented by the “Jew”. Between these, Vacher de Lapouge identified the “*Homo europaeus*”, the “*Homo alpinus*”, and finally the “*Homo Mediterraneus*”. The “cephalic index” – the ratio between the length and with of the human skull- was defined by Swedish professor of anatomy Anders Retzius and first used in physical anthropology to classify ancient human remains found in Europe. The theory

became closely associated with the development of racial anthropology in the 19th and early 20th centuries, when human populations were classified by anthropologists such as Lapouge as either “dolichocephalic” (long headed), “mesocephalic” (moderate headed), or “brachycephalic” (broad headed). In Italy the field of physical anthropology was pioneered by Paolo Mantegazza and Giuseppe Sergi, and expanded particularly in the field of Criminal Anthropology by Cesare Lombroso and his followers.⁹

Cultural racism gave primacy to behavioral over physical traits and claimed to be based on intuition, historical analysis and irrationalist philosophies. According to George Mosse, one of the main sources of spiritual racism in Europe was the “romantic revival of history” which took place in the 18th century. The German philosopher George Gottfried Herder, in contrast to the Enlightenment philosophy, believed that different peoples had dissimilar innate psychological qualities, which determined their culture and their social and political institutions. He equated the nation with the *Volk* - the German word for “people”, which he considered an organism that expressed itself in the national language, poetry and literature. The organic *Volk* was supreme over the state, and the individual existed only as part of the Volk. Herder did not believe one nation or *Volk* to be superior to others, but others particularly the philosopher Johan Gottlieb Fichte began to postulate Germanic claims to supremacy. Such ideas inspired the development of the *Volkish* movement in the nineteenth-century Germany, combining sentimental patriotic interest in German folklore, local history and a “back-to-the-land” anti-urban populism. In addition the *Volkisch* movement, as it evolved, sometimes combined the arcane and esoteric

⁹ A subsequent section of this introduction discusses the Italian anthropological school more in detail. For an overview, see Aaron Gillette, *Racial Theories*, cit. Introduction and chapters 1 and 2.

aspects of folkloric occultism alongside “racial adoration” and, in some circles, a type of anti-Semitism linked to ethnic nationalism.¹⁰

Biological and cultural racism were often intertwined in the thought of the most well-known and influential racial theorists, such as De Gobineau and Chamberlain. Arthur de Gobineau, the author of *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1853–1855) and Houston Stewart Chamberlain *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899) were the two main theorists of the supremacy of the “Aryan race” over all other races. Originally meant simply as a technical term used in 18th-century comparative philology – derived from the Sanskrit and meaning “(Speaker of) North-Indian languages”, the term “Aryan” was extended from the realm of linguistics to that of anthropology in the course of the 19th century and came to indicate a pre-historic Indo-European culture. Racial theorists such as De Gobineau and Chamberlain considered the “Aryan” as the bearer of a superior civilization and believed that the mixing (miscegenation) of different races led inevitably to decadence.

The development of racial theories in the late 19th century was deeply influenced by **Social Darwinist** principles - which can be traced to Darwin's theory of evolution only in part- according to which the evolution proceeds through the triumph of the “strong” over the “weak”.¹¹ The Italian nationalists were enthusiastic followers of Social

¹⁰ See George Mosse, *The culture of Western Europe: the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Boulder: London, 1988), 85-99, and by the same author *The crisis of the German ideology: intellectual origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap), 1964, chapter 1; and Aaron Gillette, *Racial Theories*, cit., 10-15.

¹¹ The British philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) actually coined the expression “survival of the fittest” in his book *Principles of Biology* (1864). For a nationalist reading of Spencer see for instance: Giovanni Papini, “Herbert Spencer”, *Il Regno*, I, 3, 1903; Anonim., “Il Realismo Politico di Herbert Spencer” *Il Regno*, I, 10, 1903; Anonim., “I fatti del mondo, la sorpresa della guerra”, *Il Regno*, I, 13, 1903; Ugo Magini “Fatti Storici”, *Il Regno*, III,7, 1906.

Darwinism, inspired by their reading of the works of Herbert Spencer, and interpreted history as a racial struggle, which awarded the right to survive only to the fittest races.¹²

Enrico Corradini – considered by friends and enemies alike as the “father” of the nationalist movement¹³ - and his closest followers associated the “**Italian race**” with predominantly behavioral characteristics: fertility, aptitude for war and domination, ability to transform and control nature, and aptitude towards agricultural labor. The nationalists developed their racial thought in reaction and in opposition to racial theorists such as De Gobineau and Chamberlain - who argued for the superiority of the “Aryan” race and who considered modern-day Italians as a product of the mixing of different races and as such inferior to Germans. The Italian nationalists, -while maintaining the principle of the hierarchy among races- developed their thought highlighting the “spiritual” racial qualities of the Italian race that made it “fit” not only to survive but to dominate. To this end they argued for a racial continuity with Ancient Rome based on behavioral/cultural characteristics. In the conclusion of his work *L'imperialismo nel secolo XX: la conquista del mondo* (1905) Mario Morasso wrote:

“The variety of races and civilization is not only due to a difference of development, but to a difference in substance” and added further “Civilization is nothing but the domination of a selected race or of a small group of selected races, of a center of human forces superior to all others”.¹⁴

¹² See Giovanni Landucci, *Darwinismo a Firenze: tra scienza e ideologia: 1860-1900* (Firenze: L. S. Olschki, 1977), and especially by the same author “Darwinismo e nazionalismo”, in *La cultura italiana tra '800 e '900 e le origini del nazionalismo*, (Firenze: L. S. Olschki, 1981), 103-187.

¹³ See for instance Giuseppe Prezzolini, “Nel VII anniversario della nascita del ‘Regno’”, *La voce*, II, 51, 1910. Prezzolini, who was never shy of criticizing Corradini, vindicated a place for himself and Giovanni Papini along with Corradini as the fathers of the nationalist movement.

¹⁴ Mario Morasso, *L'imperialismo nel secolo XX: la conquista del mondo* (Milano: Treves, 1905), 410.

The Italian nationalists for the most part adopted spiritual instead of scientific racism. For instance in a 1904 article reviewing Chamberlain's *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, Giuseppe Prezzolini argued:

“Race is the result of psychic characteristics, of the type of intelligence and above all from the general view of the world, the type of philosophy or religion, in short, the [...] *weltanschauung* of each individual [within that race]”.¹⁵

Specifically the nationalists argued: (1) That modern-day Italians shared the same characteristics that had enabled the ancient Romans to establish an Empire, (2) that Italians had indeed mixed with other races but the mixing had not diluted their qualities, (3) that the qualities of Italian race needed the action of the State to be displayed in modern-day Italians. For instance Morasso wrote:

“Truly there must be in us [Italians] , in the innermost , and most untouchable essence of our centenarian lineage, permanent and hidden energies, wondrous and hidden wealth given to us by the most noble supremacy of the elected race [the Roman] expert in domination”.¹⁶

Alfredo Oriani saw the formation of the Italian race in the mixing of the Romans and the barbarian invaders, but argued that the Roman element remained predominant, in spite of further invasions and attempts of assimilation:

“[The resulting] race, that will be called Italian, the most mixed, the most rich, even more resistant than the Roman, more original than the Greek and model for all future Europe. And the latter [Europe] even in the tireless effort of many

¹⁵ Giuseppe Prezzolini, “Imperialismo tedesco”, *Il Regno*, I, 6, 1904.

¹⁶ Morasso, *L'imperialismo nel secolo XX*, cit., 253.

centuries will not be able to conquer it, to merge it into any of its many peoples”.¹⁷

The adoption of a “spiritual” approach allowed the nationalists to argue that the racial characteristics of modern-day Italians were inherited, but at the same time that the State had the ability to influence the qualities of its people. In this respect, the Italian nationalists freely interpreted the Lamarckian theory according to which species – and in this case human races- display characteristics that can be acquired by individuals through their behavior and, over time, become genetically transmissible.¹⁸

The word “**Rome**” and the adjective “**Roman**” as they appear in this dissertation describe the imperialistic ideal the nationalists considered as the highest form of civilization. The nationalists did not like to use the term “**Latin**” to define races other than the Italian, and considered the French in particular as usurpers of the title.¹⁹ I often use the terms “**West**” and “**Western**” to describe the nationalist construction of the Italian race and its qualities. The nationalist definition of “West” was based primarily on their imperialistic ideology, and involved the use of force, the aptitude for conquest, and the ability to exert control over the natural environment. Geographically by “West” the nationalists referred to Western Europe, frequently drawing parallels between the Roman

¹⁷ Alfredo Oriani, *Fuochi di Bivacco* (Bari; Laterza, 1913), 374. On this issue the group of writers who contributed to Prezzolini’s magazine *La voce* initially differed from the followers of Enrico Corradini and the revolutionary syndacalists, such as Paolo Orano. While the *vocianti* claimed to seek the improvement of the Italians through internal reform (through the solution of the Southern Question and administrative reform), the Corradinians claimed that the pursuit of an aggressive foreign policy on the part of the State, in particular through the establishment of Colonies in Africa, would make the virtues of the race come to the surface. This issue is discussed in Chapters 2 and 4 in particular.

¹⁸ Benito Mussolini would also adopt this particular idea of the State being able to fashion the racial qualities of its people. See Gillette, *Racial Theories*, cit., Chapter 3.

¹⁹ See for instance Enrico Corradini, “Dall’italianismo al latinismo”, *Il Regno*, I, 23, 1904. In the piece he argued that Italy should strive to take back the leadership of “Latinity” from the French, which translated in practical terms in his rejection of any political alliance between Italy and a nation which he considered “exhausted” and “corrupted”.

empire and the British empire.²⁰ Borrowing Edward Said's interpretative category of "Orientalism," I argue that the nationalists constructed the Italian race and the idea of ancient Rome in contrast with races that they considered "oriental", such as the Libyans (see chapter 4) and the Jews (see chapters 4 and 5); with regards to the Italian South, the nationalists were torn between the acceptance of the existing orientalist stereotypes and the attempt to include the Southerners in the Italian race (see chapters 1 and 2).²¹

"**Organic**" was an expression used by Enrico Corradini and his followers to describe the nation. In 1905 he wrote "The nation is the agreement of generation after generation to complete a mission over the centuries[...] it is the law of continuity of life [...] one must think of a marvelous *organism* alive and growing from one age to another".²² According to the nationalists, the primary function of the members of the national "organism" is the loyalty and obedience towards their leaders, and the complete subordination of the needs and wishes of the individual to the interest of the nation. The highest form of duty for the members of the nation was war, to which both sexes participated in different ways: the women's duty was to produce many children who could be employed as soldiers, the men's duty was to fight (see chapter 3).

Sources and methodological observations

The sources used in this dissertation consist predominantly of articles from the main nationalist magazines: *Il Regno*, *La Voce*, *L' Idea Nazionale*, *La grande Italia* and *La lupa*. I also rely on a wide range of essays and literary works written by the protagonists of the movement, as well as their speeches at the nationalist conferences.

²⁰ See for instance Mario Morasso, "La visita del re a Londra", *Il Regno*, I,1, 1903.

²¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

²² Corradini, "La virtu' Nazionale", *Il Regno* II, 6, 1905.

The first and main problem I encountered with these sources is that none of them is primarily dedicated to the subject of race, so that in reconstructing the nationalist arguments I could not count on a coherent and consistent narrative. The second issue was the relative scarcity of articles dedicated to certain subjects –such as anti-Semitism, compared to the abundance of material on other topics – such as the tens of articles dedicated to the Southern Question by the *vocianti*. The third problem was the multiplicity of views among the nationalists, who –as previously noted- were a composite movement comprising of different trends.

I attempted to address the first two issues by providing the reader with a detailed description of the specific cultural context in which the nationalist discourse took shape, by discussing both national and foreign ideas. Thus the nationalist views on the Southern Question are contrasted with the main tropes of Southern difference circulating in Italy from Unification to the beginning of the 20th century; the imperialistic discourse of Part II is discussed in relation to the demographic discourse in Italy and abroad, particularly France; and finally the discourse of anti-Semitism in Part III is analyzed in relation to the anti-Semitism of the clerical press and of the French nationalists.

The issue of the multiplicity of nationalist trends is addressed by highlighting, when appropriate, the similarities and differences among different viewpoints, while at the same time giving prominence to the key themes and features that emerged from the analysis of the sources. Overall the sources point towards an essential agreement among the nationalists on the narrative of war as a nation-building experience, and the primacy given to the “nation” over the interest of the individual, a class, or a group, which allows for the usage of the expression “nationalist culture”. However, since the Corradinian

nationalists tended to be the most consistent and the most coherent in their racial views, they also feature more prominently throughout the work.

My study combines history of ideas and discursive analysis, without falling neatly into either methodology. I focus on ideas and arguments made by the nationalists as well as recurring themes - such as the use of the “Roman” past - that appear in the nationalist literature. Additionally, where possible, I have used visual images that represented and reinforced certain categories of thought. The reluctance to apply a discursive methodology has been one of the main limitations of the existing historiography. Even though the recent studies on race have dismantled the “myth of the good Italian” they have relied for the most part on the traditional analytical tools of the history of ideas. Given the nature of the nationalist sources a traditional approach fails to recognize a significant racial component.

The discursive analysis focusing on recurring tropes and images helped me to discern the patterns of thought and racial categories that, given the many contradictions and inconsistencies of the nationalist racial thought, could not have been explained through the use of traditional history of ideas.²³ A traditional approach tends to highlight the fragmentary nature and the many contradictions of the nationalist sources, without explaining that the appeal of certain ideas resided precisely in their vagueness and their repetition, rather than in their intrinsic meaning. For instance, in Chapter 4, where the nationalist repetitive use of racial clichés featured prominently, I found the works of

²³ The works that helped me in understanding the tools of discursive analysis are Joan Scott’s seminal work *Gender and the politics of history* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press 1999), and Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins Univ Press., 1978). While my work does not reflect the belief that language itself “speaks” through the historical actors, I found the concept that language imposes certain structures of thought useful for my analysis.

“orientalist” historians particularly useful, for their ability to show the process of construction of the European identity in opposition to the colonial “other”.²⁴

The methodology used in this dissertation has shown that rather than being a coherent complex of ideas, the nationalist racial thought consisted in a series of clichés that were elevated to the level of Truths that could be grasped intuitively rather than rationally. As discussed above, the Italian nationalists were cultural racists, and as such they relied on intuition and used racial language as a rhetorical instrument to reinforce their imperialist agenda. The self-sacrificing ethos of the “organic nation” required precisely this kind of irrationalistic approach and the propensity to use stereotyped images to communicate with the nationalist audience. Even if the nationalist racial discourse emerges from this analysis as a purely a rhetorical device, it does not follow that this rhetoric does not deserve to be studied. On the contrary, it is important that the nationalist considered certain linguistic choices necessary, because it shows that in early 20th century Europe imperialism was framed in racist terms.

Historiography

The names of Giuseppe Prezzolini, Giovanni Papini, and Enrico Corradini are rarely mentioned - particularly in the Anglophone historical literature – without reference

²⁴ Aside from E. Said, *Orientalism*, cit. and Tzvetan Todorov, *The conquest of America: the question of the other* (New York : Harper & Row, 1984); I looked at specific works on the European orientalist construction of Turks and Arabs, such as Asl Crakman, *From the "Terror of the World" to the "Sick Man of Europe": European Images of Ottoman Empire and Society from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002); and *Interrogating Orientalism: contextual approaches and pedagogical practices*, edited by Diane Long Hoeveler and Jeffrey Cass (Columbus : Ohio State University Press, 2006).

to their adhesion to the Fascist movement.²⁵ The study of early twentieth century nationalism was influenced by the rise of Fascism and the merging of the Nationalist Party and the *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* of Benito Mussolini in 1923. Thus, from Luigi Salvatorelli's *Nazionalfascismo* (Turin, 1923) onward, early twentieth century nationalism has been seen as an ideological precursor of Italian Fascism, and consequently the focus has been on the aspects of the nationalist ideology that anticipated the fascist – authoritarianism, imperialism, the cult of the nation, the cult of war, etc.

The main points of reference for Italian nationalism are the works by Marxist historian Franco Gaeta, and Emilio Gentile. Gaeta interprets the nationalist movement as the expression of the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie and dismisses its ideology as a mere rhetorical device to gain the support of the petty bourgeoisie to the agenda of “industrial capitalism”.²⁶ Gentile describes the nationalists predominantly as conservatives, contrasting them to the revolutionary nature of the Fascist movement prior to the Fascist seizure of power.²⁷ Neither Gaeta nor Gentile offer an analysis of the racial component of the nationalist ideology, even though they both acknowledge the existence of a racial discourse.²⁸ Even recent contributions to the history of nationalism tend to

²⁵ That is certainly the case for the two best-known works in English dedicated to the Italian nationalists: Alexander De Grand, *The Italian Nationalist Association and the rise of Fascism in Italy* (Lincoln and London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1978) and Walter Adamson, *Avant-garde Florence: from Modernism to Fascism* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1993).

²⁶ Franco Gaeta, *Il nazionalismo italiano* (Napoli: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1965), Chapters 1 and 2.

²⁷ Emilio Gentile, *Le origini dell' ideologia fascista* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1977); and also more recently *La Grande Italia: ascesa e declino del mito della nazione nel ventesimo secolo* (Milano: Mondadori, 1997).

²⁸ The first dismisses the racial discourse as a sign of the superficiality of the nationalist ideology and its lack of contact with the socio-economic realities of the country. Gaeta, cit, 83. Gentile argues that the nationalist racial discourse was one of the aspects that set the nationalists apart from the liberal and republican tradition of patriotism. Gentile, *La grande Italia*, cit. 91 and following.

focus on the history of ideas and the political evolution of the nationalist movement, and neglect the importance of discursive constructions such as race.²⁹

Historians like Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, and Benedict Anderson have defined the nation as a cultural construction of the nationalist movements that developed from the late 18th century onwards.³⁰ These historians maintain that nationalism – and thus the idea of nation itself- is an essential component of modernization, of the transition between an agrarian into an industrial society.³¹

For the purpose of this dissertation, it is important to see when and where the definition of nation assumed a racial component. For Hobsbawm, during the period 1880-1914 the ethnic criterion became the fundamental defining feature of the nation. In this respect, the “new nationalism” of the turn of the century represented a significant break from the romantic definition of nation – expressed by thinkers like Giuseppe Mazzini,

²⁹ See for instance Adriano Roccucci, *Roma capitale del nazionalismo (1908-23)* (Roma: Archivio Guido Izzi, 2001); *Da Oriani a Corradini: bilancio critico del primo nazionalismo italiano*, edited by Romain H. Rainero (Milano: F. Angeli, 2003); Saverio Battente, *Alfredo Rocco : dal nazionalismo al fascismo, 1907-1935* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2005) and Elena Papadia, *Nel nome della nazione : l'Associazione nazionalista italiana in età giolittiana* (Roma: Archivio Guido Izzi, 2006).

³⁰ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and nationalism* (Oxford, England: Blackwell, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge, England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Gellner's famous claim that nationalism “invents nations where they do not exist” and Anderson's famous definition of the nation as an “imagined community” capture the arbitrary nature of the definition of nation and the lack of a reality corresponding to the national narrative.

³¹ For an overview of the different historiographical approaches to nationalism see Umut Ozkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (London : MacMillan: New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) who analyzes the “modernist” approach (Gellner, Hobsbawm, and Anderson) as well as more recent trends developed after 1989-91, which he labels as “ethno-symbolist”, and essentially focus on an anthropological approach to nation and cultural analysis. The term was coined by Anthony D. Smith in his work *Ethno-symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2009), in which he argued (p.49): “From an ethno-symbolic perspective , nations may be regarded as named and self-defining communities whose members cultivate shared symbols, myths memories , values and traditions, inhabit and are attached to a historic territory or homeland , create and disseminate a distinctive public culture , and observe shared customs and standard laws” .

which was based on cultural rather than ethnic characteristics.³² Conversely, Mosse, who focuses on the intellectual origins of racism, argues that the German romantic idea of nation, as conceived by Gottfried Herder, contained the potential to be interpreted in ethnic terms: Herder, according to Mosse, “gave nationality an aesthetic, historical, and linguistic dimension which made it an organism separate from any temporary form of political organization”.³³ The Herderian concept of the nation as an “organism” influenced thinkers like Johan Fichte, and gave rise to the development of the *volkish* movement.³⁴

Many historians have found useful to conceptualize the different definitions of nation by using two fundamental models: “French” and “German”. The French model, based on the Enlightenment and French revolutionary thought, defined the nation as based on shared cultural traditions rather than ethnicity. According to this view the nation is, as the French philosopher Renan said, an ‘everyday plebiscite’, which implied that along with a common language, traditions and religion, the fundamental component of the nation is the willingness of its members to embrace their collective national identity. Conversely the “German” idea – from the *volkish* movement to Chamberlain- defined the nation as a community united by a bond of blood among its members, which allowed it to function as a single organism, outside of which individuals had no purpose or meaning. Italian historian Federico Chabod, argued that the Italian definition of nation throughout the 19th century resembled the French – stressing the primacy of cultural over

³² Some historians have viewed the failure of the 1848 revolutions as the turning point in the transition between romantic nationalism and racial nationalism. See for instance Ernesto Sestan, *La costituente di Francoforte (1848-49)* (Firenze, G.C. Sansoni, 1946).

³³ Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe*, cit., 86.

³⁴ Mosse, *The crisis of the German ideology*, cit. and *Toward the Final Solution: a History of European Racism* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

biological ties- rather than the German model.³⁵ Conversely, Alberto Banti has argued that the Italian nation was defined in ethnic as well as cultural terms since the Risorgimento, in other words that it was a combination of the French and German models.³⁶ Even though the nationalist sources, which are the object of this dissertation, differed in important ways from the patriotic literature of the Risorgimento, they confirm that the concept of nation in Italy was neither strictly biological, nor exclusively cultural, but rather that it transferred the cultural criterion onto the concept of race.

Among the historiographical approaches to the concepts of nation and racism I found the work of Michele Nani particularly useful.³⁷ Following the formulation of the concept first expressed by 19th-century sociologists like Gaetano Mosca and Max Weber, Nani argues that the nation was constructed “by contrast” through the exclusion of members who were deemed “other” from the national community.³⁸ This interpretation combined with the cultural approach to nationalism leads to the study of imagined “frontiers” inside and outside the nation, and thus allows the analysis the issue of racial constructions of “otherness” as a form of affirmation of national identity.

Overall, I found the concept of “Orientalism” the most useful in clarifying the nationalist construction of the Roman/Western racial identity.³⁹ Among the categories

³⁵ Chabod, *L'idea di nazione* (Bari: Laterza, 1962).

³⁶ Banti, *La nazione del risorgimento* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000), passim.

³⁷ Michele Nani, *Ai confini della nazione*, cit.

³⁸ For an overview of the theory of “nationalization by contrast” see Nani “La nazione e i suoi altri”, *Storica* 30 (2004): 95-119.

³⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, cit. Following Foucault, Said argues that Foucault notion of discourse, described in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and in *Discipline and punish*, allows the historian to interpret the orientalist categories through which European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a “sort of surrogate and even underground self”, Said, Cit, 3. For a critique of Orientalism see David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: how the British saw their Empire* (London; Allen Lane; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Cannadine contends that rank and status were more important

opposing the West and the Orient the most recurrent in the nationalist discourse were the binary oppositions ability/ incapacity to evolve, ability/incapacity to manipulate the environment , but also other binary categories that were peculiar to the nationalist ideology such as “civilized” violence/ “savage” violence, and ability/inability to conquer and colonize. On these categories the nationalists constructed the superiority of the Italian race in response to racial theories that postulated its inferiority.

I have chosen to downplay certain interpretative avenues in favor of my own, for instance by not tracing back to Carducci or D’Annunzio the idea of *romanita’*, which has already been studied from the point of view of literary discourse.⁴⁰ In the same vein, I have not followed the interpretation of historians like Mark Choate, whose work aimed to demonstrate how emigration shaped Italian identity.⁴¹ Choate does not look at race, but talks about *italianita’* in terms of cultural tradition - from cooking, to language, rather than in terms of qualities.

My research attempts to contribute to the existing historiography by following the evolution of a largely dismissed aspect of the Italian nationalist thought, in the period of its early formation. This dissertation aims to demonstrate that Italian nationalism was closer to the “German” model than previously thought. There were, however, significant

to the British Empire than race, a category given undue prominence, he believes, by post-modern literary scholars. See also G. Prakash, “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World,” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32 (1990): 383-408; R. O’Hanlon and D. Washbrook, “After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in The Third World,” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34 (1992): 141-67; and Prakash, “Can the ‘Subaltern’ Ride? A Reply to O’Hanlon and Washbrook,” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34 (1992): 168-84.

⁴⁰ See for instance Paul Arpaia, “Constructing a national identity from a created literary past: Giosue’ Carducci and the development of a national literature”, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 7 (August 2002): 192-214.

⁴¹ Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation: the Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

differences between the German and Italian approach: Italian nationality was racialized, but race was defined by the nationalists in a way that differed considerably from the biological approach. The most striking difference between the Italian nationalist discourse and the “German” resided in the fact that, while the Germans were focused on the preservation of racial purity, the Italian nationalists were more interested in creating the conditions for the racial qualities of the Italians to emerge. My dissertation follows the parable of the nationalist discourse from a point of low national consciousness to a heightened national conscience by the experience of war, which made the nationalist discourse shift towards the search for elements that could disrupt the process of nation-building.

The Italian Nationalists and their cultural influences

The fascist historian Gioacchino Volpe coined the expression “vario nazionalismo italiano” to describe the composite cultural movement that developed between the end of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th. In this dissertation, I use the expression “the nationalist culture” and “Italian nationalism” to refer broadly to the nationalists, however, when necessary, I point out the differences between the different currents. The earliest expression of twentieth-century Italian nationalism was the group of intellectuals that contributed to Enrico Corradini’s paper *Il Regno* (1903-06), which included the young journalists Giovanni Papini and Giuseppe Prezzolini – who, barely in their twenties, had already founded the philosophical magazine *Leonardo*. During the lifespan of the magazine a significant rift opened between Corradini and his followers on one

side, and Prezzolini and Papini, on the other, which led to the dissolution of *Il Regno* in 1906.

Prezzolini went on to found the magazine *La voce* in 1908, which would become “the main and most influential journal of the Italian avant-garde”, and attracted the collaboration of some of the most renowned and influential intellectuals of the time, expressing various political and philosophical orientations – from Benedetto Croce to Gaetano Salvemini and Giustino Fortunato.⁴² Prezzolini, who became one of Corradini’s fiercest critics, argued that *La voce* represented the more realistic and practical version of Italian nationalism, while Corradini represented the most rhetorical and ultimately ineffective expression. Prezzolini was especially critical of Corradini’s interest in the pursuit of an aggressive foreign policy over the solution of internal problems -such as the Southern Question, which to Prezzolini demonstrated lack of contact with reality and vacuity of thought.⁴³ In fact, the differences between Corradini and the *vocianti* were not as deep as Prezzolini claimed them to be: both supported the Libyan war and the Italian intervention in the First World War.

Corradini became one of the leading figures of the Italian nationalist movement, which gained momentum after the Austrian annexation of Bosnia in 1908. The annexation was interpreted by many Italian observers as a signal of the intention of the Austrian Empire to extend its sphere of influence in the Balkans, which, in the long term, would damage the Italian interests in the Mediterranean. The months following the Bosnian crisis a number of new magazines was founded, which claimed the primacy of

⁴² Emilio Gentile, “The Struggle for Modernity: Echoes of the Dreyfus Affair in Italian Political Culture, 1898- 1912”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 33 (4) (Oct., 1998): 497-511.

⁴³ G. Papini and G. Prezzolini, *Vecchio e nuovo nazionalismo* (Milano: Studio editoriale lombardo, 1914), i- xiii.

foreign policy: among them were the Milanese *La grande Italia*, the Roman *Il Carroccio*, the *Tricolore* in Turin, and many others. Corradini was the main inspiration of the First Nationalist Congress of 1910 - which gathered various strands of nationalism: authoritarian, liberal and democratic, colonial and irredentist.⁴⁴ The main outcome of the Congress was the birth of the Italian Nationalist Association – ANI, which would become the Nationalist Party and present its first candidates in the political elections of 1913 (see chapter 5). During those years, Corradini also promoted a dialogue with the Revolutionary Syndacalists, a group consisting of former members of the Italian Socialist Party, who had detached themselves in 1907 and followed the ideas of the French philosopher Georges Sorel. Like Corradini, the syndacalists were in favor of the establishment of Italian colonies, and supported the Libyan war and the Italian entry in WWI, however they remained a movement that whose primary goal was social Revolution. After WWI some of the syndacalists, particularly Paolo Orano, Angelo Oliviero Olivetti and Michele Bianchi would become members of the Fascist movement.⁴⁵

The most read and well known of the nationalist magazines was *L'idea Nazionale*, which was founded in 1911 by Corradini, Francesco Coppola, Roberto Forges-Davanzati, Luigi Federzoni and Maurizio Maraviglia. The magazine expressed the position of the Corradinian current in the ANI, which dominated in the Congresses of

⁴⁴ See Alexander De Grand, *The Italian Nationalist Association and the rise of fascism in Italy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), chapter 1. And Zeev Sternhell, *The birth of the Fascist ideology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989) 163 and following.

⁴⁵ The syndacalists, led by Arturo Labriola and Enrico Leone, “insisted that the socialist revolution would come about only through the organization of the entire working class into fighting syndicates that, when the time came, would take over the process of production from the bourgeoisie” Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of the Fascist Ideology*, cit., 131. The syndacalists opposed party politics and parliamentarism and gradually came to view “the concepts of ‘nation’ and ‘war’ as not necessarily antithetical to those of ‘syndacalism’ and ‘socialism’”. Ibid., 138. For the merging of nationalists and syndacalists see Ibid., 163 and following.

1912 and 1914. The *Idea Nazionale* was often the object of attacks by the *vocianti* and responded with equal venom to Prezzolini's attacks. Polemics aside, the conflict between the two strands of nationalism determined a reciprocal influence: if *La voce*, as Prezzolini claimed, pushed the Corradinian group to "clarify" its ideas, the *Idea Nazionale*'s success in promoting the intervention in Libya put Prezzolini in the uncomfortable position of having to backtrack on its previous anti-interventionist stance, while still maintaining its separation from the nationalist movement.⁴⁶ The complex of ideas expressed by the *vocianti*, the Corradinians, the ANI and the revolutionary syndacalists represented the "various" and complementary tendencies of Italian nationalism.⁴⁷

From a social point of view the nationalists were a relatively homogenous group. The most recognizable names such as Corradini, Prezzolini and Papini, came from the petty middle class, however the Nationalist Association attracted a number of aristocrats – notably those who were presented as candidates in the elections of 1913 (see chapter 5). *La voce* received major financial support from the Milanese aristocrat Alessandro Casati, whose correspondence with Prezzolini is half philosophical discussion, half book-keeping.⁴⁸ The *Idea Nazionale* during the early years published the list of their financial sponsors, which came predominantly from the petty nobility and middle-class.⁴⁹

According to historian Franco Gaeta, until June 1912 the magazine was financially

⁴⁶ See Papini and Prezzolini, *Vecchio e Nuovo*, cit.

⁴⁷ For biographic details on the protagonists of the nationalist movement see: Mario Isneghi, *Giovanni Papini* (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1972); Anna Ossani, *Mario Morasso* (Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1983); Roberto Salek, (Firenze : Le lettere, 2002); Riccardo Gatteschi, *Un uomo contro: Enrico Corradini, letterato e politico* (Firenze: Lcd, 2003).

⁴⁸ *Carteggio Alessandro Casati, Giuseppe Prezzolini* edited by Dolores Continati (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura ; Lugano: Dipartimento della pubblica educazione del Cantone Ticino, 1990)

⁴⁹ "Sottoscrizione per la propaganda", *L' Idea Nazionale*, I, 8, 1911; ____, *Ibid.*, I, 10, 1911; ____, *Ibid.*, I, 12, 1911; ____, *Ibid.*, I, 14, 1911; ____, *Ibid.*, I, 15, 1911; ____, *Ibid.*, I, 16, 1911; ____, *Ibid.*, I, 17, 1911; ____, *Ibid.*, I, 18, 1911; ____, *Ibid.*, I, 22, 1911; ____, *Ibid.*, I, 25, 1911; ____, *Ibid.*, I, 31, 1911; ____, *Ibid.*, I, 32, 1911; ____, *Ibid.*, I, 33, 1911; ____, *Ibid.*, I, 35, 1911.

unstable and constantly seeking for permanent sponsors. However, towards the end of 1914 the *Idea Nazionale* formed a company called “L’ Italiana” that had a market value of 700,000 Lire, based on 5000 Lire per share. This determined an important transition, because the magazine was now sponsored primarily by northern iron and steel industries and arms manufacturers.⁵⁰

Culturally, the writers who contributed to the nationalist magazines came from various backgrounds. Prezzolini and Papini did not hold University degrees, and most of their knowledge was self-taught.⁵¹ Prezzolini’s interests were eclectic: during the first decade of the century he wrote on topics ranging from Catholicism to philosophy, and syndicalism in addition to directing *La voce*.⁵² Papini’s interests were predominantly philosophical, for a brief period he adhered to the Futurist movement and with Ardengo Soffici directed the magazine *Lacerba* (1913-15).⁵³ Corradini had a degree in Literature and, in addition to his political production, wrote various novels and plays.⁵⁴ Morasso was a lawyer by training, and a journalist and a sociologist by vocation. After having contributed to the *Gazzetta di Venezia*, he began his long collaboration on *Il Marzocco*; he also collaborated to *Il Regno* and *Lacerba*. Morasso published several studies on a number of subjects: sociology, race, art, law, war and machines.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Gaeta, *Il nazionalismo*, cit., 164-69.

⁵¹ Walter Adamson has interesting biographical sketches of Papini and Prezzolini during their youth. Adamson, *Avantgarde*, cit., Chapter 1.

⁵² Prezzolini, *Novalis* (Milano : Libreria editrice lombarda, stampa 1905); Ibid., *Il cattolicismo rosso : studio sul presente movimento di riforma nel cattolicismo* (Napoli : R. Ricciardi, 1908); Ibid., *La teoria sindacalista* (Napoli : Perrella, 1909).

⁵³ Papini, *Le memorie d'Iddio* (Firenze : La rinascita del libro, 1911); Ibid., *Un uomo finito* (Firenze: Vallecchi 1912); Ibid., *Crepuscolo dei filosofi* (Firenze : Edizioni di Lacerba, 1914).

⁵⁴ Corradini’s literary production include the novels *La patria lontana* (Milano: Treves, 1910) and Ibid., *La Guerra lontana* (Milano: Treves 1911); and the plays Carlotta Corday (1908) and Maria Silvestri (1907).

⁵⁵ His articles on *Il Marzocco* were published as *Scritti sul Marzocco 1897-1914*, edited by Piero Pieri (Bologna: Printer, 1990). In the 1890s, Morasso was mainly interested in sociology. See for instance his works Mario Morasso, *Il problema sociologico e la risoluzione del Gumpłowicz* (Firenze: Tip. M. Ricci, 1893); Mario Morasso, *L'origine delle razze europee* (Firenze : Tip. Di S. Landi, 1895); Mario Morasso,

The original nationalist group that produced *Il Regno* was from Florence, and many of the contributors of *La voce* participated in the lively Florentine cultural scene. However both *La voce* and *L'Idea Nazionale*, which was based in Rome, aimed at being truly national magazines. Prezzolini and Papini remained friends throughout their lives, even though Papini participated to the Futurist movement, which Prezzolini opposed to the point of getting involved in a famous fistfight between *vocianti* and Futurists at the train station in Florence in June 1911.⁵⁶ Corradini held a special place in the nationalist association, and was considered by many an unreachable “moral and intellectual example”.⁵⁷

The nationalist movement attracted a significant number of women after 1910.⁵⁸ For the most part, the women participating in the nationalist movement were ladies of the upper-class who gave generous donations and organized fundraising events and conferences. The Dante Alighieri Society - an association founded in 1889 for the

Uomini e idee del domani: l'egoarchia (Torino : Fratelli Bocca, 1898, and 1899). In the beginning of the century and during his early collaboration for *Il Regno* he was interested in the connection between art and politics, and art and the modern machine reflected in his works Mario Morasso, *L'imperialismo artistico* (Torino: Bocca, 1903) and Mario Morasso, *La vita moderna nell'arte* (Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1903 and 1904) but machines became increasingly the center of his interest, Mario Morasso, *La nuova arma: la macchina* (Torino : F.lli Bocca, 1905); Mario Morasso, *Il nuovo aspetto meccanico del mondo* (Milano: U. Hoepli, 1907); and finally Mario Morasso, *La nuova guerra: armi, combattenti, battaglie* (Milano: Treves, 1914). He has been often been credited as a precursor of Futurism due to his passion for machines and modern life. To Morasso machines not only marked a new age in economic production, but engendered the birth of a new set of values, inspired by a Darwinian view of existence as a struggle for life. In 1905 he wrote on *La nuova arma*: “I have the irremovable conviction that the machine will be the main molder of the future consciences, the deepest and effective educator of the human society, than it will be the emblem, the hinge of the form of civilization that will replace our own”.

⁵⁶ Adamson, *Avant-garde*, cit., 148-150. Papini and Prezzolini's correspondence was first published by Prezzolini himself *Storia di un'amicizia* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1966).

⁵⁷ See for instance the letter written by Alberto Musatti to Paolo Arcari on August, 13, 1913, in which he boasted of being one of Corradini's “most devoted disciples”. In Paola Arcari, *Le elaborazioni della dottrina politica nazionale fra l'Unità e l'intervent : 1870-1914* (Firenze : Marzocco, 1934-1939), 137.

⁵⁸ See Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism ruled women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: univ of California Press, 1992), Chapter 2. See also Annarita Buttafuoco, “Condizione delle donne e movimento di emancipazione femminile”, in *Storia della societa' italiana*, vol. 20, edited by .Cherubini (Milano: Teti, 1981) 154-85; and Katja Gerhartz, *Le madri della Patria. Movimento femminile borghese, nazionalismo e guerra in Italia (1900-1922)*, unpublished PhD. Dissertarion (Heinrich Hein University, Dusseldorf), 2003.

defence and promotion of the Italian culture and language around the world -was a prime example of this kind of activity, even though it was not until the First World War that the society adopted an openly nationalistic stance.⁵⁹

The ideological development of Italian nationalism stemmed from the trends that dominated the nationalist and racial thought in Germany and France. The nationalist thought differed from the patriotism of the Risorgimento primarily because it rejected the liberal values, which had been a crucial component of the project of national Unification.⁶⁰ At different times the nationalists strove to define the difference between patriotism and nationalism. For instance, Corradini argued that nationalism was the “opposite” of patriotism: “Can’t you feel the difference between the two words ‘fatherland’ and ‘nation’? When we want to express our love for Italy we say ‘fatherland’, when we want to express the *power* of Italy we say ‘nation’”.⁶¹ Nationalism constructed the nation in terms of power politics and grandeur, instead of viewing it as

⁵⁹ Beatrice Pisa has shown how in spite of a relatively large women’s participation (every chapter of the Society in Italy and abroad had a women’s committee), women’s contribution was considered subordinate and was limited to practical and local aspects of organization rather than management or discursive production. Pisa, *Nazione e politica nella Società “Dante Alighieri”* (Roma: Bonacci editore, 1995). This kind of participation was exemplified by the committee that organized the conferences held by the main collaborators in Florence in April 1904. This committee was composed of “dames”, who were listed on the magazine and whose patronage was implicitly acknowledged. Nonetheless, when *Il Regno* published the Statuto of its association – a sort of fan club- later in the same year, one of the bylaws stated clearly that the women who owned property were allowed to join the association but could not participate in meetings. Similarly during the fundraising campaign of the *Idea Nazionale* between 1911 and 1912, the names of many middle-and upper class ladies appeared as contributors to the cause and as attendees and patrons of conferences, but the Nationalist Association never allowed women the vote or any position of leadership even at a local level.

⁶⁰ Emilio Gentile has argued that while in the romantic-patriotic synthesis of the Risorgimento the nation was the form of human association that provided the best framework for the development of personal freedom and civil liberties, thereby guaranteeing basic principles of Liberalism. By contrast, the idea of nation proposed by the nationalists was essentially anti-liberal, and based on the “greatness of the fatherland” –understood in terms of industrial, military and colonial power- above any other ideal. Emilio Gentile, *La grande Italia*, cit., 37 and following. This issue is also discussed in Chapter 1.

⁶¹ Corradini, *La nazione proletaria e il nazionalismo* (Roma: Casa Editrice Nazionale, 1911), 9. See also Sighele, *Nazionalismo e Partiti Politici* (Milano: Treves, 1911), Chapter II “Patriottismo e Nazionalismo”, 34 and following.

the horizon for the development of the individual. While patriotic thinkers like Mazzini valued the contribution that each nation could give towards the development of mankind, the nationalists viewed the relationship among nations as one of conflict, which could only result in the supremacy of the stronger nations over the weaker nations.

As Alfredo Oriani argued in *La lotta politica in Italia* (1892):

“A painful original sin perturbed the royal [the House of Savoy] conquest [of Italy] even in the glory of the unexpected victories”.

Italian Unification had been accomplished primarily thanks to the military help of the French Second Empire and had placed the Italian Kingdom in a position of subservience. The Italian State was founded on a “victory without victories” which deprived the country of the right to be considered a “great power”⁶². Following the “original sin” of the establishment of the Italian Kingdom, the succession of liberal governments had consistently failed, in the eyes of the nationalists, to establish Italy as a power.⁶³ Thus, the key ideas of the nationalist movement developed as a reaction to the perceived dysfunction of the parliamentary system, the decadence of the state institutions through widespread corruption, and the hesitancy and timidity that characterized the liberal political elites. Finally, nationalism was a response to the rise of socialism, which threatened to overturn the traditional values and the relationship among social classes.⁶⁴

⁶² Oriani, *La lotta politica in Italia: origini della lotta attuale (467-1887)* (Torino ; Roma : L. Roux, 1892), 97-98.

⁶³ The only exception resided in Francesco Crispi, who had attempted to change Italy’s standing in the international community by pursuing an aggressive foreign policy. But the Italian defeat at Adwa in 1896 against the Ethiopian forces of Emperor Menelik, and the subsequent abandonment of the pursuit of colonial conquest marked in the eyes of Corradini and Oriani the low point of the history of unified Italy. The importance of Adwa is discussed at length in chapter 4.

⁶⁴ Franco Gaeta, *Il nazionalismo italiano*, cit., 93-95. Also Walter Admson, *Avantgarde Florence*. cit. (Cambridge, Ma., Harvard Univ. Press, 1993), 18-27.

Recent research has shown that Risorgimento patriotism, contrary to previous interpretations, was not immune from constructing the idea of nation on ethnic bases.⁶⁵ However, the nationalist discourse of the late 19th century arose primarily as a reaction to the political, social and cultural situation of Italy at the end of the 19th century *and* as a reaction to theories that postulated the superiority of the “Aryan” race over the Italian race, such as the pan-Germanic doctrine of Houston Chamberlain.⁶⁶

The Pan-Germanic League was founded in 1891 with the aim of promoting imperialistic and *Volkish* ideas.⁶⁷ The adoption of Gobineau’s theories in 1894 was followed by the even more enthusiastic propagation of Chamberlains’ ideas. Unlike Gobineau who predicted the unavoidable decline of civilization through racial mixing, Chamberlain prophesized the construction of “a more beautiful racial future” through the preservation of racial purity and the exclusion of unwanted elements. The Pan-Germanic League became the center of diffusion of scientific theories of Aryan superiority, expressed by anthropologists like Hermann Poesche, Karl Penka, Otto Ammon and Ludwig Wilser, who was also a member of the directorate of the League. Pan-Germanism was thus a combination of *Volkish* rhetoric, Social Darwinism and the spiritual/racial synthesis expressed in Chamberlain thought.

⁶⁵ In this respect, the work of Alberto Banti has been fundamental. See for instance Alberto Banti and Paul Ginsborg “Per una nuova storia del Risorgimento”, in “Il Risorgimento”, in *Storia d’ Italia, Annali 22*, edited by A. Banti and P. Ginsborg (Torino: Einaudi, 2007), and Banti’s other books *La nazione del Risorgimento*, cit.; *Immagini della nazione* (Rome: Carocci, 2002). From Banti’s work it emerges that the nation was constructed by the Risorgimento patriots as an ethnic community, held together by *both* natural and cultural elements.

⁶⁶ This opinion informed Claudio Cesa’s “Tardo positivismo, antipositivismo, Nazionalismo” *La cultura italiana tra '800 e '900 e le origini del nazionalismo* (Firenze: L. S. Olschki, 1981), 69-101. Cesa argued that the nationalist concepts of nation and race did not originate from the thought of writers such as Vinzenzo Gioberti and Vincenzo Cuoco, but from Social Darwinism. My analysis of the racial aspects of the nationalist ideology however supports a much deeper influence of German racism, which Cesa does not take into consideration. .

⁶⁷ Mosse, *The crisis of the German ideology*, cit., chapter 5.

During the early years of *Il Regno*, the nationalists claimed that the intellectual backbone of their political ideas was Vilfredo Pareto's theory of the elites.⁶⁸ However, *Il Regno's* strongest cultural influences were arguably Chamberlain's theory of Aryan racial supremacy and the French nationalist thought - particularly Maurice Barres's lyrical nationalism of "the earth and the dead", even though Prezzolini had declared them as "foreign to our race".⁶⁹ The nationalist racial thought did not rely on the Italian Anthropological school of Cesare Lombroso, Giuseppe Sergi, Enrico Ferri and Guglielmo Ferrero for its ideas. This rejection was motivated in large part by the fact that many of the Italian anthropologists were socialist sympathizers, which made them political adversaries of the nationalists. Additionally, the anthropological school (see chapter 1) theorized the decadence of Italy instead of providing a scientific foundation for its superiority – as the German, French and Austrian anthropologists had done for the "Aryan" theory. Conversely, Chamberlain's influence was easily detectable in the nationalist magazines, but also in the literary production of the main ideologues of the movement.

The nationalists in very basic terms wanted to "be" the Italian version of Chamberlain. The influence of his thought is evident throughout Corradini and Mario Morasso's production, as well as in authors like Scipio Sighele, and essentially consists in the attempt to maintain the principle of "struggle for survival" among races, replacing

⁶⁸ The sociologist and economist Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), a renowned scholar and a professor at the University of Lausanne, was arguably the most distinguished and widely known of the collaborators of the magazine. Pareto's first mention in the magazine was in an article by Prezzolini that outlined both Pareto and Gaetano Mosca's theory of the Elites. Prezzolini proudly announced that *Il Regno's* own ideology and agenda was based on such theory, and that it could not have been otherwise, because the absorption of culturally and "racially" foreign concepts would have been unacceptable. Prezzolini, "L' aristocrazia dei briganti", *Il Regno*, I, 3, 1903.

⁶⁹ Prezzolini, "L' aristocrazia dei briganti", cit. See chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of the influence of French nationalism on the Italian nationalists.

Aryan superiority with claims of Italian superiority.⁷⁰ Chamberlain had sought to demonstrate his argument with a narrative of racial continuity between the ancient Aryans, and modern-day Germans, using a mix of “historical” examples and anthropological theory. The nationalists sought to demonstrate their claims of superiority of the Italian race, by proposing a discourse of racial unity of the Italians based on the permanence of behavioral traits from the Roman past. To the German myth of the purity of the Aryan blood in modern-day Germans, the Italian nationalists countered the permanence of ancient Roman cultural and behavioral characteristics in modern-day Italians. To the claim that racial purity was essential for the “organic” cohesiveness of the nation, the Italian nationalists opposed the idea that the devotion to the nation could be *both* inherited and constructed through a victorious war.⁷¹

Outline of the Chapters

My dissertation follows the development of the nationalist racial discourse as closely intertwined with the nationalist imperialistic agenda, highlighting the function of the Libyan war as the climax of the racial discourse – as reflected in the periodization (from the foundation of the magazine *Il Regno* in 1903 to the Libyan campaign of 1911-12). In order to highlight the salient points of the national discourse, as well as its evolution, my chapters are organized thematically. Each theme – the Southern Question,

⁷⁰ While director of *Il Regno* Corradini constantly referred to Chamberlain as an example for the kind of thought that he would have liked to see prevail in Italian culture. Mario Morasso sang the praises of Chamberlain throughout his book *L' imperialismo nel XX secolo*, cit. Sighele's works *Pagine Nazionaliste* (Milano: Treves, 1910) and *Nazionalismo e Partiti Politici*, cit. both contained references to Chamberlain.

⁷¹ Alfredo Oriani and Enrico Corradini were the first writers to express these key ideas. While Oriani's works were largely ignored during his lifetime and re-discovered around the time of his death, Corradini's thought was more widely known, thanks to his collaboration to influential magazines such as *Nuova Antologia* and *Il Marzocco* – which he founded in 1896 in his native Florence. Oriani's thought proved influential particularly because of his claim that a victorious war could forge a sense of national identity. See in particular *La rivolta ideale* (Napoli : R. Ricciardi, 1908).

the demographic and imperialistic discourse, and anti-Semitism – marks a stage in the development of the nationalist reflection on race. In each part I place the nationalist discourse into a broader cultural context, explaining which were the themes and tropes that exerted an influence on the nationalist construction of race.

In **Part I** I aim to demonstrate the importance of the Southern Question in the nationalist thought, and the creation of a nationalist counter-narrative to the existing negative stereotypes and tropes related to the Italian South. To this end I separate the analysis between the *causes* and *remedies* to the Southern Question.

In **Chapter 1** (dedicated to the *causes*) I argue that the nationalists aimed primarily at opposing the discourse of the “two Italies” by constructing certain southern characteristics as qualities. At first I discuss the main tropes on the South that were developed in Italy from Unification until the early 20th century, placing emphasis on the anthropological discourse which described the Italian southerners as racially inferior to the northern Italians. I then proceed to describe the nationalist definition of “civilization” -and the emphasis placed on the “qualities” of aggressiveness and identification with the nation. This definition was central to the nationalist narrative against the anthropological discourse of the “two Italies”. The nationalist described the Southerners, focusing on the tropes of individualism and violence, but constructed them as racial qualities, thus subverting the argument that had pointed to racial inferiority as the cause of the socio-economic situation of the South.

In **Chapter 2** (dedicated to the *remedies*) I argue that while the nationalists embraced the program of “technical” improvement of the South proposed by Francesco Saverio Nitti, they ultimately considered the solution to the Southern Question to reside

in the creation of a national colony, which would boost the sense of identification with the Fatherland and enhance the qualities of both northern and southern Italians.

Prezzolini's paper *La voce* provided the stage for a discussion on the Southern Question, and opened the floor to several positions ranging from advocates of racial mixing to the "technical" approach proposed by Nitti, and focusing on the creation of infrastructures and interventions aimed at boosting the economic growth of the South. The nationalist response was to accept Nitti's program, but, at the same time, to declare it insufficient to the completion of the task of elevating the condition of the South. The Corradinian nationalists proposed a discourse centered on the colonization of Libya, which would provide not only a solution to socio-economic problems, but test the racial qualities of the Southerners and Northerners alike and forge a stronger national conscience.

Part II is the pivotal section of the dissertation, and is devoted to the issues of emigration and colonialism, and shows in particular the definition of Italian identity through the appropriation of an imagined 'Roman' past *and*, during the Libyan campaign, through the 'otherization' of the local populations.

In **Chapter 3**, I analyze the aspects of Italian identity that the nationalist rhetoric constructed in racial terms: *Romanita'* -intended both as the ability to conquer and to farm, and fertility. The first part of the chapter is dedicated to the issue of emigration, and the development of the "proletarian nation" discourse by Corradini. By looking closely at the nationalist language, I emphasize the use of *Romanita'* as a tool for the nationalist agenda of diverting emigration towards colonies. In the second part of the chapter, I place the nationalist discourse on demography into the broader context of the demographic debates between the 19th and 20th centuries. The use of biological and Social Darwinist

language and constructs was fundamental to the nationalist understanding of demographic issues. The nationalists did not propose a rhetoric of preservation of “racial purity”, but rather interpreted a high level of fertility as a guarantee for both the quantity and the quality of the race.

In **Chapter 4**, I argue that the nationalist discourse during the Libyan campaign presented the Colonial “other”, and constructed the qualities of the Italians by contrast. During the initial phase -going roughly from the establishment of *L’ Idea Nazionale* in March 1911 to the military invasion of Libya in the end of September- the portrayal of the local populations as “uncivilized”, “idle”, “incapable to farm” and unable to develop highlighted by contrast the continuity between the Italians and the ancient Romans who had been the first and only civilizing agent in Libya. During this stage the nationalists were not universally in agreement regarding the best way to manage the Libyan population in the long-term: the “associative” mode of administration was discussed, but some nationalists also considered completely replacing the native population with Italian settlers. The second stage – going from the fall of 1911 to the aftermath of the war- was prompted by a military reverse suffered by the Italian forces at Sciara Sciat on October 23rd 1911.

The discourse centered on the peaceful “idleness” of the Libyans was quickly dropped when the local populations, contrary to Italian expectations, joined forces with the Ottomans. The second stage was marked by the predominance of the discourse about over-masculine “savagery”, emphasizing mindless violence and brutality in the Libyans, which in turn “demanded” a violent response by the Italians. With “savagery” as the central theme of their discourse the nationalists proposed direct military occupation as the

mode of administration rather than “association”. The anxieties related to the conquest reflected above all the concern over the possible failure of the war to produce the effect of constructing a stronger national conscience that the nationalist had attached to its outcome.

In **Part III** I analyze the two components of the nationalist attitude towards the Jews – anti-Semitism(chapter 5) and assimilation(chapter 6)- separately. This allows for a deeper understanding of the peculiarities of the Italian nationalist discourse.

In **Chapter 5**, I analyze the ideological and political roots of the nationalist anti-Semitic discourse: the catholic anti-Semitic literature of the end of the 19th century, the contemporary anti-Semitic literature in Europe, particularly in France (specifically Charles Maurras for the Corradinians and Georges Sorel for the revolutionary syndacalists), and Orano and Corradini’s construction of Judaism in “orientalist” terms. The Jews were described as essentially “passive” and therefore their economic and cultural achievements were dismissed as “parasitical”, and associated with ideologies such as democracy, socialism and pacifism that were the means of weakening the nations of Europe, and facilitate their downfall. By contrast the nationalists constructed their ideology as “Roman”, and thus quintessentially western and based on the domination of man over nature – in economics, the arts, and science- on conquest of inferior civilizations, and on the subordination of the individual needs to the needs of the community. In the light of the previous points I argue that the nationalist attack on the “international Jewish conspiracy” against Italy during the Libyan war was not an isolated expression of anti-Semitism, but was perfectly consonant with the ideology of the nationalist movement, which had constructed the Jews as antagonistic to their

western/Roman ideology. The Libyan to the nationalists was the expression of the revival of Roman values in modern-day Italy and the proof that Italy had regained its place among the Western powers: “cosmopolitan Jewry” was constructed as the enemy of that revival.

Chapter 6 (2) fills a void in the existing historiography by arguing that the pressure towards Assimilation was key to understanding the Jewish presence in the nationalist movement: only Jews who “westernized” by rejecting Talmudic Judaism in favor of Liberal Judaism, Jews who rejected Zionism, and especially Jews who declared –or implicitly acknowledged- their extraneity from the “cosmopolitan Jewish conspiracy” were acceptable members of the nationalist movement. Even though Italian nationalism was not centered on the permanent exclusion of the Italian Jews from the nation, the question of the Italian Jews’ place in the national community remained ambiguous in the eyes of many nationalists: on one hand there were Jews in the Italian Nationalist Association, among the *vocianti* and the Revolutionary syndacalists; on the other hand the nationalist culture adopted anti-Semitic tropes and stereotypes, and questioned in particular whether the Italian Jews felt a stronger sense of allegiance toward Judaism than towards the Italian nation. In this chapter I demonstrate that the pressure towards assimilation was based on the fact that the nationalists viewed the Italian and Jewish identities as incompatible, and specifically viewed traditional Talmudic Judaism as inferior to the western cultural tradition. Thus the Jews who participated and were willing to sacrifice part or all of their Jewish identity were instrumental in legitimizing the nationalist discourse of assimilation. Finally, the analysis of the patterns of assimilation confirms that the nationalist construction of national identity was predominantly cultural

rather than biological: the pressure on the part of the nationalist to subordinate Jewishness to Italian identity demonstrated that they considered the possibility that Jews could be full members of the Italian nation.

PART I: The Southern Question

The centrality of the Southern Question in the nationalist thought

Historians have largely dismissed the relevance of the Southern Question in the Italian nationalist thought, because the racial unity of the Italian nation has often been seen as an obvious prerequisite for the nationalist discourse.⁷² The reason for this predominant view is twofold. Firstly, the nationalist thought indeed appears aimed at minimizing the racial difference between North and South and promoting national unity – especially when compared to a large part of the contemporary literature on the Southern Question. Secondly, the lack of a common approach among nationalists and the inherent contradictions of their discourse on the South have been seen as a demonstration of the superficiality of their interest in the subject.

Even though the nationalist discourse about the South may appear to be secondary, particularly in the ANI –Italian Nationalist Association-, compared to their much publicized colonial agenda and interventionist campaign, the complexities and contradictions of that discourse deserve closer scrutiny. The ways in which the nationalists chose to discuss the South should not be interpreted as a sign of disinterest or intellectual charlatanism, but rather as a testament to the difficulty of negotiating the existing discourse about the Mezzogiorno into the nationalist ideology. The widely shared notion of a cultural, social and racial difference between the Northern and Southern Italians posed a fundamental challenge to the nationalist discourse of national unity and homogeneity, and to their program of national modernization. This chapter

⁷² For instance, the relationship between nationalism and the Southern Question does not feature in Franco Gaeta, *Il nazionalismo italiano*, cit.; Emilio Gentile, *La grande Italia*, cit. ; and in the volume *Da Oriani a Corradini: bilancio critico del primo nazionalismo italiano*, edited by Romain H. Rainero (Milano: F. Angeli, 2003).

argues that the South was central to the nationalistic discourse because the unresolved Southern Question threatened not only the economic development of the whole peninsula but the cultural development which the nationalists found essential to their program.

According to the romantic-patriotic synthesis of the Risorgimento the nation was the form of human association that provided the best framework for the development of personal freedom and civil liberties, thereby guaranteeing basic principles of Liberalism. By contrast, the idea of nation proposed by the Corradinian nationalists was essentially anti-liberal, and based on the “greatness of the fatherland” –understood in terms of industrial, military and colonial power- above any other ideal. Both the romantic-patriotic and the Corradinian national ideologies centered on the identification of the individual with the nation, and both valued the self-sacrifice of the individual in the name of the nation. However the Corradinian idea of the nation did not incorporate liberal values, but was based on ideological conformity – which led Corradini to call the nation an “organism” – by which individuals shared the same expansionistic and imperialistic ideals. Thus what set the Corradinian idea of “organic” national community apart was its willingness to sacrifice the individual in the name of absolute identification with the nation *and* with a specific political project of national aggrandizement and modernization.⁷³

The nationalist political project rendered problematic the discussion of the significant tradition of anti-southern prejudice. On one hand, it was impossible not to address what was perceived as the main failure of Liberal Italy: the unbroken flow of emigrants during the first decade of the century, and the humanitarian disaster following

⁷³ Emilio Gentile, *La grande Italia*, cit., 37 and following; and also by the same author, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1996), Introduction.

the earthquake of Messina and Reggio in 1908 were painful reminders of the harsh socio-economic conditions in the South. At the same time, acknowledging the existence of “two Italies”, and worse still of an anthropological difference between the northern and southern Italians would have jeopardized the very foundations of the ideologically homogeneous national community that the Italian nationalists envisioned.

The Southern intellectual Gaetano Salvemini aptly summarized the dilemma of the nationalists and the reason why the South was central to their national program:

“If Italy consisted only of Northern and Central Italy [...] the Italians would immediately feel that they were part of a small Power, they would immediately have to halve their expenses, starting with the military; the nationalistic ideals of victorious war and colonial expansion would appear a dream of literati and fainéants out of touch from the real world [...] But it is precisely this Southern Italy, with its many square kilometers of unfertile mountains and woods, with its malaria, with its silly and dishonest petty bourgeoisie, with its mistreated and unsettled peasants, *it is precisely the South that gives our nationalists the illusion of belonging to a large and strong nation, and encourages them to ape countries which are truly large and strong.*”⁷⁴[Italics mine]

Albeit rather cynical, Salvemini’s analysis was painfully correct. To the nationalist agenda size and numbers mattered. With Houston Chamberlain as their inspiration and the British colonial empire as their model, they could not conceive of Italy being downsized. If Italy could not yet compete with the Western Powers in terms of industrial output and colonial possessions it should at least be comparable for its geographical extension and number of inhabitants. The South, in spite of all its

⁷⁴ Salvemini, “La polveretta”, *La voce*, III, 36, 1911.

problems, was central to the nationalist project of national aggrandizement, because only when the South was included (both geographically and in terms of population) Italy was in a scale that justified the ambition to compete with countries of comparable size and population. As we will see, along with its square miles and its growing population, and its negative baggage - ranging from crime and disease, to illiteracy, and corruption – the Mezzogiorno posed a threat that, from a nationalistic standpoint, was even more daunting: the issue of whether the Southerners innately lacked the ability to identify with the national community.

Chapter 1: Subverting categories of ‘otherness’

This chapter argues that the nationalists opposed to the existing discourse of “otherization” and “orientalization” of the Italian South a counter-narrative based on a different definition of civilization. The existing narratives on the South – proposed by the anthropologists, the socialists and the *meridionalisti* – argued that the North and the South expressed two different civilizations, and described the southerners as “other” from the inhabitants of northern Italy both racially and culturally. The nationalists rejected the discourse of the “two Italies” by denying the validity of the anthropological approach and by subverting the negative connotations attached to the southern characteristics. “Individualism” and “Violence” were constructed as assets that enabled the incorporation of the Southerners into the national community.

The nationalists often relied on the existing literature on the Southern Question in presenting their arguments, but at the same time they refused some of the implications of the discourse of the “two Italies”, because that would mean relinquishing their grandiose national aspirations. Salvemini, not without irony, considered the nationalists as citizens of the “Great Italy” who would never fully accept the reality of living in the petty “little Italy” of economic, social and cultural misery that the South exemplified.⁷⁵

In order to make sense of the concerns and the arguments proposed by the nationalists it is important to situate them in the context of the discussion about the South from Unification throughout the Giolittian era. The following pages provide an overview of the main issues of contention regarding the South, highlighting the aspects of the Southern Questions which threatened the foundations of the nationalist program and

⁷⁵ Emilio Gentile, *La grande Italia*, cit., 84.

forced the nationalists to define the boundaries of their concept of civilization. The subsequent section will discuss how the nationalists, particularly during their collaboration on *Il Regno* attempted to subvert certain categories of “southernness” and propose a positive perception of widespread negative stereotypes.

1. *The ‘Two Italies’*

Ever since unification, the first and most pressing of the national problems had been the “Southern Question”. The economic, social and cultural backwardness of the South of the peninsula vis-à-vis the North had been one of the paramount issues that the Liberal leadership had been perceived as unable to solve since when the Piedmontese ruling elite came face to face with the economic and social realities of the former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. The cultural and eventually military clash with the populations of the South of Italy deeply affected the elaboration of the parameters for Italian citizenry during the first few decades after Unification.⁷⁶

⁷⁶The discursive construction of the southern image of backwardness and its role of “otherness” in the building of the Italian national identity in the post unification period has been the object of several studies both in Italy and elsewhere. A new phase in the study of the Southern Question begun with the creation of the magazine *Meridiana* in 1987 under the auspices of the Istituto meridionale di storia e scienze sociali (IMES), under the direction of Piero Bevilacqua. The Southern Question has hence been seen as a discursive construction and analyzed as such often within the interpretative framework and tools of cultural anthropology, rather than as a reality, despite much resistance in many areas of the academic community. Among the most interesting conclusions of these researches was John Dickie’s analysis of the stereotypical representations of the *Mezzogiorno* in the post-Unification period. John Dickie, *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860-1900* (New York: St. Martins press, 1999). He argued that these stereotypes, rather than being a symptom of the failings of national identity in Italy, were actually integral to the way Italy’s bourgeoisie imagined themselves as Italian and saw the *Mezzogiorno* as a metaphor for the state of the country as a whole, and the index of Italy’s modernity. Other influential works deconstructing the Southern Question as a “discursive formation” are the collections *The New History of the Italian South. The Mezzogiorno revisited*, edited by R. Lumley and J. Morris (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1997), *Italy’s ‘Southern Question’: Orientalism in One Country*, edited by Jane Schneider (Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 1998), *Making and Remaking Italy: the Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento*, edited by Albert R Ascoli and Krystyna Von Henneberg (New York, 2001); and Nelson Moe, *The view from Vesuvius: Italian culture and the southern question* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2002); Pasquale Saraceno, *Il nuovo meridionalismo* (Napoli: Istituto italiano per gli studi filosofici, 2005).

The initial contact between northern politicians and bureaucrats with the South had been traumatic and influenced by a long history of prejudice.⁷⁷ Nonetheless in 1861 when the South became officially part of the Italian Kingdom on the wave of enthusiasm for the victories that brought about the national unification, the Piedmontese expected to find a fertile and pleasant land and a people eager to be redeemed from the Bourbonic regime. They soon discovered that the local populations ill tolerated the transition, resisted the increase in taxation, and did not identify themselves with the newly formed Italian state. During the years of rule of the Historic Right the entire Southern part of the peninsula became very rapidly fixed into a “type”: the *Mezzogiorno* became a paradise inhabited by devils, what John Dickie has called “the place of illiteracy, superstition, and magic; of corruption, brigandage, and cannibalism; of pastoral beauty and tranquility admixed with dirt and disease; a cradle of Italian and European civilization that is vaguely, dangerously alluringly African or Oriental”.⁷⁸

The South of Italy thus became irrevocably the “Other” of the North in a process that according to some historians was integral to the creation of Italian identity.⁷⁹ Nelson Moe has argued that in a century in which the superiority of the “North” was virtually beyond dispute, it was necessary for a newly formed nation committed to participating in

⁷⁷ According to Marta Petrusiewicz the events of 1848 caused the political exiles from the failed revolutions in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies to propagate the South's image of hopeless backwardness, thereby creating the Southern Question before the process of National Unification was accomplished and the Piedmontese came into contact with the South. Marta Petrusiewicz, *Come il Meridione divenne una questione: rappresentazione del Sud prima e dopo il Quarantotto* (Soveria Mannelli, Catanzaro: Rubbettino, 1998). However for decades since the late 18th century images of the Italian South as Other from the rest of Europe had been spread by travelers and observers such as Creuze' de Lesser, who in 1806 had written “Europe ends at Naples and ends badly. Calabria, Sicily and all the rest belong to Africa.” See Gribaudi “Images of the South: The *Mezzogiorno* as seen by Insiders and Outsiders”, in *The New History of the Italian South: The Mezzogiorno Revisited*, edited by R. Lumley and J. Morris (Exeter; UK: Exeter university Press, 1997), 87.

⁷⁸ John Dickie, *Darkest Italy*, cit., 1.

⁷⁹ See both John Dickie, *Darkest Italy*, cit., 14 and following. and Michele Nani, *Ai confini della nazione*, cit., 97 and following.

the civilization of Western Europe to identify the South as different. The cultural clash between the Piedmontese and the Mezzogiorno is captured in the often cited passage of a letter written by a northern general stationed in the South reporting to the Italian Prime Minister Count Cavour in 1860: “This is not Italy, this is Africa!”.⁸⁰ The movement of resistance to the Italian State known as *Brigantaggio* (1861-66) added to the Southern Question’s urgency.⁸¹ During the repression, photographs of brigands in prison, hanging from scaffolds or posing with their weapons, along with tales of their actual or alleged misdeeds circulated around the country contributing to the construction of the image of the Southern population as savage and barbaric.⁸²

In Latin the term “civilization” - “*civilitas*” derived from the word “*civis*”, citizen - indicated the qualities and characteristics of the inhabitants of a city, and as such it was sometimes opposed to “*rusticitas*”, to highlight the difference between the refined manners of the city-dwellers compared to the people living in the countryside. Its current modern definition –in English, French and Italian- refers to the complex of social, economic and cultural activities of a community. During the 19th century the meaning of civilization also expressed a judgment of value, opposing the “civilized” societies - societies that had attained a high level of civilization- to past or present “barbaric” societies -whose socio-economic and cultural activities were not as complex. The term

⁸⁰ Nelson Moe, *The view from Vesuvius: Italian culture and the southern question* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2002), 2.

⁸¹ See Roberto Martucci, *Emergenza e tutela dell'ordine pubblico nell'Italia liberale: regime eccezionale e leggi per la repressione dei reati di brigantaggio, 1861-1865* (Bologna: Il mulino, 1980).

⁸² John Dickie, *Darkest Italy*, cit., chapter 1. John Davis argues that the treats to law and order, real or imagined, increasingly provided an important means for justifying the expansion of the State’s authority and the adoption of arbitrary and emergency measures. John Davis, *Conflict and control: law and order in nineteenth-century Italy* (Houndmills, Basingstoke; England: Macmillan Education, 1988), 90.

civilization also came to mean “culture” in the sense of ideas, values and traditions pertaining to a people in a specific moment of its history.⁸³

The debate over the Southern Question from its early stages, was framed in the sense of a profound inferiority of the Southern civilization vis-a-vis the North. The cause of the “otherness” of the South varied according to the observers, depending on whether they focused on economic, cultural, or social aspects. To some authors the remnants of feudalism were the main plague of Southern society, the obsolete management of the land, the absence of an entrepreneurial spirit and of an entrepreneurial class; to others it was the peculiarity of social networks based exclusively on family loyalty and the strong sense of individualism that stood in the way of the formation of a collective sense of belonging to a community.

Throughout the 1870s and the following decades the economic and social difficulties of the *Mezzogiorno* were exposed in sociological studies by Pasquale Villari, Leopoldo Franchetti, Sydney Sonnino, and Giustino Fortunato. These intellectuals known as *meridionalisti* devoted their energies and research to understanding the South, and accumulated a wealth of empirical and sociological information upon which they based their proposed solutions to the Southern Question.⁸⁴ The *meridionalisti*, who believed southern society incapable of evolution and self-government, were ardent

⁸³ In German the meaning of the term civilization – “*Zivilisation*” – was opposed by thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Oswald Spengler to the term Culture – “*Kultur*”. While Civilization referred to the complex of codified rules, behaviors, and technical abilities, “Culture” referred to the natural and instinctive values of the human being. Culture, according to Spengler, had a “soul”, while Civilization was “the most external and artificial state of which humanity is capable”. According to George Mosse the rejection of Civilization and the embracing of Culture were at the bases of the *Volkish* - and the National Socialist - ideology. Geroge Mosse, *The crisis of the German Ideology*, cit., 6-8.

⁸⁴ Pasquale Villari, *Lettere meridionali*, second edition (Firenze: La Monnier, 1878); Leopoldo Franchetti, *Condizioni economiche ed amministrative delle province napoletane: Abruzzi e Molise-Calabrie e Basilicata. Appunti di viaggi* (Firenze: Tip. della Gazzetta d'Italia, 1875); Leopoldo Franchetti, *La Sicilia nel 1876: Condizioni politiche e amministrative della Sicilia*, vol.I (Firenze: Barbèra, 1877); Sidney Sonnino, *La Sicilia nel 1876: I contadini in Sicilia*, vol. II (Firenze: Barbèra, 1877); Giustino Fortunato, *Il Mezzogiorno e lo Stato italiano* (Bari:Laterza,1911).

supporters of the unified state and of centralized administration. They lobbied for government intervention in the South and believed that only the State could be the agent for the solution of the economic and social problems that plagued the Mezzogiorno.⁸⁵

During the 1890s the issue of the *Mezzogiorno* became even more pressing, as the increasing numbers of emigrants from the South of Italy were interpreted by many as the unmistakable signal of the malaise of the South.⁸⁶ During those years liberal and socialist intellectuals - and even the well-intentioned *meridionalisti* – proposed a discourse about two distinct “psychologies” for the North and the South, understood in both a biological and the cultural sense. It was however in the field of anthropology that the “racialization” of the South assumed the pretense of scientificity.

⁸⁵ The preference of the *meridionalisti* for the centralist model of administration developed in the context of the entrance the southern elites into the national political life after the victory of the Historical Left -the Left wing of the Liberal party- in 1876. The rule of the Historical Left corresponded to an explosion of local politics, in which a generation of politicians with strong municipalist aspirations and interests used local factions to support one party or another at the national level. In response to this development, the *meridionalisti* criticized the government for failing to tackle the most serious problems of the South- as well as criticizing the immobility of Southern society itself Gribaudi, “Images”, cit., 90 and following.

⁸⁶ During the Giolittian era the interest for the problem of emigration peaked, particularly in the period following the earthquakes of Messina and Reggio Calabria of 1908. A small sample of the literature of the Giolittian era: Antonio Franceschini, *L' emigrazione italiana nell'America del Sud: studi sulla espansione coloniale transatlantica* (Roma: Forzani e C., 1908); Graziani, Augusto, *Sulla politica italiana di emigrazione* (Pesaro: Stab. Tipografico G. Terenzi, 1908); Carlo Francesco Ferraris, *Il movimento generale dell'emigrazione italiana: suoi caratteri ed effetti* (Roma: Cooperativa tipografica Manuzio, 1909); Lamberto Paoletti, *L' emigrazione italiana negli ultimi trent'anni: saggio di esposizione statistica* (Roma: E. Mantegazza, 1908); Giovanni Preziosi, *Il problema dell'Italia d'oggi*, (Milano: R. Sandron, 1907); Marcello Arduino, *Emigrazione ed immigrazione* (Milano: U. Hoepli, 1910); Romolo Murri, *L' emigrazione italiana e il dovere nazionale* (Roma: Tip. dell'Unione, 1914); Riccardo F. Schnabl, *L' emigrazione italiana nell'Argentina: considerazioni d'un nazionalista* (Perugia: G. Donnini, 1911); Luigi Villari, *Gli Stati Uniti d'America e l'emigrazione italiana* (Milano: Treves, 1912). And some of the studies promoted by the Italian Geographic Association, the Foreign Ministry, and the Ministry of Agriculture: *Indagini sulla emigrazione italiana all'estero fatte per cura della Societa geografica italiana: 1888-1889* (Roma: Societa' geografica italiana, 1890); *Italia : Commissariato dell'emigrazione Avvertenze popolari intorno alla legge sull'emigrazione* (Roma: G. Lertero, 1902); *Commissariato generale dell' emigrazione Relazione sui servizi dell'emigrazione per l'anno 1909-1910 presentata al Ministro degli Affari Esteri dal Commissario generale Luigi Rossi* (Roma: G. Bertero, 1910); *Italia : Direzione generale della statistica Statistica della emigrazione italiana per l' estero negli anni 1908 e 190 : con una appendice di confronti internazionali* (Roma: Tip. naz. G. Bertero, 1910).

The father of Criminial Antropology Cesare Lombroso in the 1860s observed that the differences in climate and race between the northern and southern Italians were expressions of a healthy diversity and did not diminish the overall unity of the nation nor it's potential.⁸⁷ However, over the course of the following years his analysis of the difference between the Italian North and South changed profoundly. As the condition of the South did not appear to improve after National Unification he individuated the causes for the failure of the South to “develop” in the “primitive” nature of its inhabitants. Lombroso elaborated the concept of “atavism”, a condition by which the collective psychological development of a race is arrested. He argued that a race affected by atavism is genetically inferior to evolved races, rendering assimilation impossible. One of the primary proofs for his argument was the observation of the type of crimes committed in different regions. Lombroso found that the atavism of the southerners led them more often than their northern compatriots to commit violent crimes. Innate barbarism, now labeled as a hereditary disease, was characterized by brutish violence for which there was no possibility of redemption. From his observations Lombroso concluded that applying the same law and the same political system throughout Italy was a mistake. In fact he argued that Italy's present state of chaos was due to a poor decision to administer the country as if it was inhabited by one people at the same stage of civilization. He thus proposed administrative decentralization as the only way in which the most advanced part of the county could be preserved from becoming barbaric like the rest.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Cesare Lombroso, “Tre Mesi in Calabria”, *Rivista Contemporanea* 35 (Dec. 1863): 424. Quoted in Petraccone, *Le due civiltà: settentrionali e meridionali nella storia d'Italia dal 1860 al 1914* (Roma: Laterza, 2000).

⁸⁸ Petraccone, *Le due civiltà*, cit., 155 and following. See also Delia Frigessi, “La scienza della devianza” in *Delitto, genio, follia. Scritti scelti*, edited by Delia Frigessi, Ferruccio Giacanelli, Luisa Mangoni (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1995).

The link between barbarism and pathological predisposition for violence in the South received the seal of approval of the scientific community, particularly in the anthropological field in which Lombroso's findings were quickly accepted. Inspired by Lombroso's studies Enrico Ferri argued that a combination of environmental factors and genetic predisposition had determined the arrested development in the southern Italians. Alfredo Niceforo, combined Lombroso and Giuseppe Sergi's imaginative anthropological theories, re-proposing the difference between the North and the South in his study on Sardinia. He argued that the northern part of Italy was inhabited by the "Celtic" or "European" race and the South by the "Mediterranean" race, characterized by being "blood-thirsty" and prone to violent crimes.⁸⁹ Niceforo envisioned a bleak future for the race that inhabited the south of the peninsula: the Mediterranean race would gradually disappear like the races of the African and Australian continent and would be replaced by more civilized races. In his next book, *Italia barbara contemporanea* (1898), he re-proposed this thesis arguing that the differences in the skulls of the inhabitants of the North and the South were a further scientific proof of the different temperaments and psychologies of the two races.

Giuseppe Sergi, in *La decadenza delle nazioni latine* (1900), explained that the southern psyche was more individualistic whereas the northern was more sociable. This difference determined different aptitudes towards social organization, which was the decisive factor in determining the level of civilization attainable by a race. This bleak picture quickly became mainstream in the anthropological field. Lombroso, Niceforo and

⁸⁹ Petraccone, *Le due civiltà*, cit., 160. Alfredo Niceforo, *La delinquenza in Sardegna* (Palermo: R. Sandron, 1897)

Guglielmo Ferrero blamed the state of decadence of Italy on the parliamentary system and proposed that the North should have a separate administration from the South.⁹⁰

The anthropological arguments were embraced by the leadership of the Socialist Party. The Lombard leader of the party Filippo Turati saw the dichotomy between North and South as a struggle between middle-ages and modernity, between “civilization” and “barbarism”. Civilization coincided for Turati with the northern, capitalist bourgeoisie, barbarism with the southern parasitic ruling elites. The mixing of the capitalistic northern elites with the corrupted southern politicians posed a threat to Italy’s capitalistic development, thus delaying the emergence of socialism.

In 1895 he wrote in the socialist magazine *Critica Sociale* that Italy was divided by a war between civilization and barbarism:

“[In Italy]there is a war between feudal middle ages , which dominates in the South [...]and the beginning of the modern age, the industrial phase that dawns in the most civil and cultured places, especially in the North. The war is declared between these two civilizations -or rather between this civilization in its early stages and the putrid barbarism – they are two nations within the nation, two Italies in Italy that compete for victory”⁹¹

The elections of 1905, which gave much better results for the Socialist Party in the North than in the South, convinced Turati that the limited appeal of socialism depended on the congenital inability on the part of the Southerners to accept the

⁹⁰ Luisa Mangoni, *Una crisi fine secolo: la cultura italiana e la Francia fra Otto e Novecento* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1985), 161. Whereas Niceforo argued in favor of Federalism and ultimately gradual replacement of the inferior race with the superior, Sergi suggested mixing the northern element with the southern in order to improve the quality of the Mediterranean race.

⁹¹ Filippo Turati, “Tattica elettorale”, in *Critica sociale*, edited by Spinella, Caracciolo, Amaduzzi, Petronio (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1959) vol 1, 79. Quoted in Petraccone, *Le due civiltà*, cit., 183.

discipline and the broader ethical aims of a political organization. The Southern inhabitants had an innate propensity for anarchic individualism, which made them disorderly and prone to spontaneous rioting, but unable to plan and prepare a revolution.⁹²

Politically the expression of the South was the Sicilian politician Francesco Crispi, prime minister from 1887 to 1896, save for a two year interruption. During his premiership, Crispi was the leader of the Historical Left and to Turati he embodied southern amorality and corruption. Authoritarian and charismatic, Crispi was famous for his ambitious foreign policy, which led to the disaster of Adwa, his ruthless repression of popular opposition and his nonchalant embezzlement of public funds.⁹³ In Turati's eyes, Crispi was the main representative of the power-hungry southern adventurers, which had invaded governmental positions and attempted to replace the "civilized bourgeoisie". Overall, the socialist field was one of the main proponents of the discourse of the "two Italies": to Turati and the majority of the socialist leadership the South as a whole was secondary and subordinate to the North, a condition which de facto excluded the South from being an equal participant in the socialist movement.⁹⁴

⁹² Petraccone, *Le due civiltà*, cit., 184-5.

⁹³ Some historians such as Christopherr Duggan have seen Crispi's blend of patriotism and authoritarianism as a precursor of Fascism. *The force of destiny: a history of Italy since 1796* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin company, 2008).

⁹⁴ There were important voices against this discourse. Gaetano Salvemini and Napoleone Colajanni - a socialist and a republican with socialist tendencies respectively- were two of the most vocal critics of the anti-Southern prejudice. They rejected the discourse describing the South as hopelessly "barbaric" and believed that the elevation of the conditions of the *Mezzogiorno* could only come from the South itself. They criticized the centralist model, which rested on the assumption that the South was not capable of self-government, and proposed administrative and fiscal decentralization. Unlike the first generation of *meridionalisti* they believed in the capacity of the South to self-govern and argued that the current fiscal system penalized and dampened the development of the South. Salvemini, who eventually left the Socialist Party, fought a long campaign in favor of universal suffrage, which he believed to be an essential precondition for the emancipation of the Southern populations. See also Gaetano Salvemini, *La questione meridionale e il federalismo*, (Milano: Uffici della Critica sociale, 1900); *Scritti sulla questione meridionale* (Torino: Einaudi, 1955). See also Petraccone, *Le due civiltà*, cit., 205-07. Colajanni

The nationalists rejected the anthropological discourse of the ‘two Italies’ on political, philosophical and tactical grounds. The closeness of the anthropological school to the Italian socialist party rendered them political enemies of the nationalists. The nationalists could never accept that the study of the human races that owed so much to the Darwin-inspired principle of the survival of the fittest had led the most prominent Italian anthropologists -Lombroso, Sergi, Ferri- to embrace humanitarian and even socialistic principles instead of aristocratic doctrines such as Pareto’s theory of the elites. Anthropology had aligned itself as a science with the cause of socialism, lending its racial theories to a culture that promoted class struggle instead of national cohesion, and as such it was politically opposite to the aims of Italian nationalism.⁹⁵

The anthropological discourse of “atavism” and “degeneration” destroyed the foundations of the nationalist historical narrative, according to which the Italian nation had maintained a racial continuity from Roman times to the present. The nationalists maintained that the southerners were of good racial stock, descendants of the ancient peoples that inhabited the Italian peninsula prior to the Roman times, and subsequently mixed with the Romans, forming the racial blend that had remained unchanged throughout the centuries. For instance Morasso wrote: “Truly there must be in us

attempted to debunk the arguments of the anthropologists, which had so much influence on the Socialist field, by arguing that the anthropologists used thoroughly unscientific methods, elevating mere conjectures to the rank of scientific truths. Colajanni, *Settentrionali e Meridionali* (Milano; Palermo: Sandron; Roma: Rivista popolare, 1898) and *Latini e Anglosassoni* (Roma: La Rivista Popolare Illustrata, 1903).

⁹⁵ G.Papini, “Piccola scienza di un gran demagogo” *Il Regno*, I, 1, 1903; Anon., “La liberta’ di pensiero, delle bastonate, e delle sciocchezze”, *Il Regno*, I, 17, 1904, and Corradini “Il positivista spassoso”, *Il Regno*, I, 22, 1904 in which Corradini ridicules Giuseppe Sergi’s “infatuation” for pacifism. Additionally, Papini and Prezzolini waged a war against Positivism and the anthropological school in the name of the Pragmatist philosophy of William James on the pages of *Leonardo*- a polemic that often spilled into the Corradinian *Il Regno*. Papini and Prezzolini rejected Italian anthropology on the grounds that it belittled the human mind by reducing its intellectual achievements to events that could be scientifically explained and measured, and because the methods – crime statistics, measuring of skull, etc- were ultimately arbitrary and unscientific. Gian Falco (G. Papini), “Socialisti borghesi”, *Leonardo*, I, 5, 1903; Ibidem., “Chi sono i socialisti?”, *Leonardo*, I, 6, 1903.

[Italians] , in the innermost , and most untouchable essence of our centenarian lineage, permanent and hidden energies, wondrous and hidden wealth given to us by the most noble supremacy of the elected race [the Roman] expert in domination”.⁹⁶ Alfredo Oriani saw the formation of the Italian race in the mixing of the Romans and the barbarian invaders, but argued that the Roman element remained predominant, in spite of further invasions and attempts of assimilation:

“[The resulting] race, that will be called Italian, the most mixed, the most rich, even more resistant than the Roman, more original than the Greek and model for all future Europe. And the latter [Europe] even in the tireless effort of many centuries will not be able to conquer it, to merge it into any of its many peoples.”⁹⁷

Papini opposed the theory of “atavism” on the grounds that it expressed a “historically narrow” idea of crime: morality, he argued, changed depending on historical circumstances and location, and thus the “universal principles” according to which the Italian criminologists condemned the Southerners were in fact arbitrary.⁹⁸ Papini was not a proponent of moral relativism: the meaning of his objection to the principle of atavism was that criminologists had claimed for themselves the right to define what constituted “barbarism” but in fact there were “other” principles according to which a “crime” might actually be considered a quality. Additionally he questioned the science of craniology on the grounds that the anthropologists had drawn their conclusions on the South based on “a few hundred skulls”, only “half of which” aligned with their parameters.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Mario Morasso, *L'imperialismo nel secolo XX*, cit., 253.

⁹⁷ Alfredo Oriani, *Fuochi di Bivacco*, cit., 374.

⁹⁸ Papini, “I delitti di un criminalista”, *Il Regno*, I, 6, 1904.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*.

Finally, the nationalists blamed the anthropologists for contributing with their theories about the degeneration of Italy to the defeatist climate following the disaster of Adwa, and the lack of interest in colonial ventures under the post-Crispine political administrations. The claim that the Latin race was “degenerate” – expressed particular by Sergi, Ferrero and Niceforo - applied to Italy as a whole, and to the nationalists that discourse about “degeneration” had all but sapped the thirst for glory and the interest in an aggressive foreign policy throughout Italy. The anthropological science instead of providing the ideological means for the completion of the Risorgimento had been the cause of the current state of political decadence through its erroneous diagnosis of the racial make-up and potential of the country.¹⁰⁰

2. *The “civilization” of the nationalists: Crispismo and the virtues of the race*

The nationalist discourse on the South was dramatically different from the “Two Italies” proposed by Lombroso and Turati. The Corradinians in particular were able to express a different judgment on the South because they defined civilization differently from how the liberals and the socialists viewed it: they agreed that economic and technological development were defining characteristics of civilization, but they refused to classify violent tendencies and individualism as symptoms of “barbarism”.

“The various forms of civilization”, Mario Morasso wrote in 1903, “are the expression of the strongest forms of domination [...]. Human civilization always tends, as shown by Penka, Lapouge and others to reveal itself as the domination

¹⁰⁰ The Corradinians of the *Idea Nazionale* argued that the nation had become “inebriated by its own demise” thanks to the “indecent rhetoric of a false science” that announced the “inevitable decadence of the Latin peoples” – referring to Giuseppe Sergi’s *La decadenza della nazioni latine*. “Il dovere di ricordare”, *L’idea Nazionale*, I,1, 1911.

of the world accomplished by a fierce domineering race that gathers the greatest sum of human energy”¹⁰¹

In short, the nationalists viewed civilization as the ability of one race to conquest and impose its culture upon others.¹⁰² In contrast to the definition of civilization in terms of material, social and cultural progress, the nationalists viewed civilization as essentially violent and domineering. They coupled economic and technological modernization with a set of cultural values which differed from the values that the liberal, democratic and socialist culture commonly associated with civilization.¹⁰³ Commenting on the Russo-Japanese war of 1904, Corradini argued:

“The reality of business and human cruelty [...] is the sign of unprincipled modernity; a modernity that is sincere and practical, and *free from civil hypocrisy*”.¹⁰⁴

He valued war and conquest to the point of enthusiastically cheering the Japanese victory against a European power, which had enabled Japan to enter the rank of “civilized” nations: in Corradini’s view Japan had demonstrated to no longer possess “Asian hordes” but an efficient “national army”.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Mario Morasso, “Dal Radium all’ Impero”, *Il Regno*, I, 8, 1903.

¹⁰² Morasso’s definition of civilization was the leitmotif of his production – see for instance Mario Morasso, *L’imperialismo nel secolo XX: la conquista del mondo*, cit.- but it was also one of the main themes of *Il Regno*. For instance Giuseppe Prezzolini in “Come fare l’ espansionismo”, *Il Regno*, I, 30, 1904 argued that the Italians should bring their own “traditions, language, race and religion” to fight other people’s. On the same concept see also Enrico Corradini “La politica degli occhi aperti e della mani in mano”, *Il Regno*, I, 26, 1904.

¹⁰³ The letters that the socialist philosopher Alessandro Chiappelli addressed to *Il Regno* were often published as representative of ideas that the nationalists opposed. On the subject of civilization, Chiappelli wrote: “The most advanced peoples in the field of civilization, such as the Anglo-Saxons, know that the people with a higher moral conscience are today’s real dominators.” According to Chiappelli, true civilization was not aggressive, but peaceful and rational. Chiappelli, “Energia politica e imperialismo”, *Il Regno* II, 20, 1905.

¹⁰⁴ Corradini, “Le conferenze del Regno”, *Il Regno*, I, 14, 1904.

¹⁰⁵ Corradini, “Susume!”, *Il Regno*, I, 28, 1904; “La virtu’ nazionale,” *Il Regno*, II, 6, 1905; “Oyster Bay” *Il Regno*, II, 17, 1905. Aldemiro Campodonico, who assumed the direction of *Il Regno* in March 1905,

To the nationalists, the ability to wage war and to conquest - thus demonstrating one's superior "civilization"- meant the ability to identify with the fatherland. They considered a widespread sense of identification with the national community - exemplified by qualities of discipline and self-sacrifice, as a fundamental prerequisite for a country to achieve a high rank among the civilized nations, and associated the development of past and present civilizations with the "moral" qualities that enabled a nation to have an efficient and loyal military in case of war:

"The soldiers in a war" Corradini wrote "no longer have their own life, they no longer are organisms, but minimal components of a larger, monstrous organism, elevated to the highest energy and at the same time no longer aware of themselves, anymore than the little finger is self-aware [...] in the human body".¹⁰⁶

This was the definition of the "organic nation" which the Italians derived directly from the French nationalist Maurice Barres.¹⁰⁷ Barres' organicist definition of the nation was much closer to the German philosopher Johan Fichte than to the French Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Ernest Renan: instead of being based on the will of the inhabitants, the

responded to Corradini arguing that the war for the supremacy in Asia was not over, even though he acknowledged that the "yellow race" had finally gained the title of "civilized". "Sosta", *Il Regno* II, 18, 1905. See also Richard Drake, "The Theory and Practice of Italian Nationalism, 1900-1906" in *The Journal of Modern History* 53 (2) (Jun., 1981): 213-241.

¹⁰⁶ Corradini, "Che cos'è una nazione", *Idea Liberale*, June 26, 1904; also mentioned in Anonim. "Che cos'è la nazione?", *Il Regno*, I, 32, 1904.

¹⁰⁷ Maurice Barres (1862 –1923) in his youth a Boulangist deputy, progressively developed a theory close to Romantic nationalism and shifted to the traditionalist right during the Dreyfus Affair, leading the Anti-Dreyfusards alongside Charles Maurras.

nation found its origins in the earth (“*La terre*”), history, traditions, and cultural inheritance (“*les morts*”).¹⁰⁸

Corradini explained the “organic nation” as the passage from “individual” to “collective” identity: “in peace time people are disunited” however the cult of “traditions and national heroes allowed the nation to “come together” and “become an organism” during war. Interestingly for the discourse on the South, Corradini also maintained that “the highest degree of national unity can coexist perfectly with the highest form of individualism”, as long as the people are ready to pass from the individual to the collective state every time they are called to duty, only then a people deserves the name of “nation”.¹⁰⁹

There were no significant differences in the way the Corradinians and Prezzolini - and his closest collaborators – defined civilization. Even though *La voce* proposed itself as an alternative to the Corradinian nationalists and mockingly dismissed their ideology as “a mix of Barres and Julius Ceasar”¹¹⁰, there were vociani – specifically Prezzolini, Papini, Scipio Slataper and others- who ultimately shared the discourse of civilization based on the use of force.¹¹¹

Given the centrality of the concept of organic nation, namely the capacity of individuals to completely annihilate their individual identity at the time of war, the

¹⁰⁸ See Michel Winock, *Le Siècle des intellectuel*, (Paris: Seuil, 1997); and Zeev Sternhell, *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français*, (Bruxelles: Complexe, 1985). Barres appeared frequently in the nationalist magazines. Corradini, Prezzolini, Morasso, and Papini were all estimators of his thought. See for instance Prezzolini, “Una lezione d’energia”, *Il Regno*, I,1, 1903; Charles Dubois, “Maurice Barres e lo sviluppo delle sue idee” *Il Regno*, I, 27, 1904; and Prezzolini, “Maurice Barres”, *Leonardo*, I, 9, 1903.

¹⁰⁹ Corradini, “Che cos’è una nazione”, cit.

¹¹⁰ G. Papini, “Nazionalismo”, *La voce*, I, 19, 1908.

¹¹¹ For instance in 1912 Scipio Slataper - the Triestine writer of *Il mio carso* (1912)- when discussing the relationship between Italians and Slovenes in Trieste adopted the idea that nations were in competition with each other, and that that the ability to wage war was a sign of civilization. Slataper, was very close to Prezzolini and was left in charge of directing *La voce* during Prezzolini’s absence. Slataper, “L’ avvenire di Trieste”, Part II, *La voce*, IV, 23, 1912.

nationalists were concerned with addressing one particular aspect of the Southern Question known as the “moral question”. The nationalistic culture’s focus on the “moral” aspect of the Southern Question was not exclusive,¹¹² but it certainly appeared to be the most important and problematic issue, because it called into question the potential for development of the Southern populations as well as their capacity to be part of the nation.

The term “moral question” in Liberal Italy referred loosely to a vast array of behaviors affecting all social classes – excess of the religious sentiment to the point of superstition, excessively changeable and passionate behavior, violence, widespread criminal networks such as the *mafia* and criminal behavior such as the *brigantaggio*. There was also an association of certain behaviors with social class: the violence, criminality, and rejection of the authority of the State on the part of the lower classes found its counterpart in the petty corruption and clientelar networks in the middle and upper classes, in place of modern capitalistic relationships. As we have seen, the literature on the Southern Question, particularly in the anthropological field, tended to highlight the lack of civilized behavior in the southerners exemplified by their inability to understand and accept the ethical bond of belonging to a community larger than their family. At the turn of the 19th century, when the anthropological discourse on

¹¹² The economic and infrastructural problems were always cited alongside the moral issues. From an economic standpoint, the nationalists did not promote the idea of industrialization for the South. Rather they believed that even remaining a predominantly agricultural society the South could benefit from “technical improvements” such as a modernization of the existing infrastructures, advanced agricultural techniques, etc. However, in spite of the proclaimed importance of the “technical” question, the only time in which *La voce* addressed technical problems such as the management of finance, land reform, and management of the environment was in the special number dedicated to the Southern Question in 1910, which was also cited in the *Idea Nazionale*. The Italian nationalist culture did nothing to promote the much discussed technical interventions, other than herald their urgency. Overall their action in favor of the South had little to do with planting more trees and controlling the flow of rivers -or even with the management of finances and schools, and everything to do with building a national conscience.

“degeneration” peaked, the literature on the “moral question” doubted, first and foremost, the southerners’ capacity to evolve, and the worried about the spreading of “southern” characteristics to the rest of the peninsula – as Niceforo, above all others, had warned that anthropological inferiority could be both congenital and acquired.¹¹³

The nationalistic culture’s perception of the boundaries and characteristics of the moral question corresponded with the South, even though a passage from an editorial of *La voce* reveals the preoccupation that the clientelar system and corruption were not limited to the southern regions:

“In reality ‘mezzogiorno’ should be interpreted in a broader sense to define all the *backward and abandoned regions*, in which electoral clienteles and the familial networks can be formed with the help of the parliamentary and bureaucratic system headed by Rome. So that often times one can hear about astonishing cases of typically ‘southern’ conditions in northern and central Italy.” [Italics and quotes in the original article].¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Giuseppe Sergi had argued in *La decadenza delle nazioni latine* (Torino: Bocca, 1900) that the southerners’ excessive individualism had rendered them essentially antisocial and incapable of development, going as far as extending his prediction of doom to the whole of the Italian nation. Above all Niceforo’s book *Italia barabara contemporanea. Studi e appunti* (Sandron: Palermo, 1898) offered a scientific definition of the idea that there were “two Italies”: one was modern and civilized, the other was “primitive” and “arrested” in its social development. See also John Davis, *Conflict and Control, Law and Order in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988). See also Michele Nani, *Ai Confini della Nazione*, cit., 146. The young historian Guglielmo Ferrero in his book *Guglielmo Ferrero, L’ Europa Giovane* (Milano: Treves, 1897), *-Young Europe* – argued that the bourgeois- capitalistic civilization of northern Europe was unattainable by the Latin countries of Southern Europe. A thesis which was echoed on the pages of the Torinese daily *La Stampa* by Niceforo, who made a dire prediction: the Italian nation as a whole was affected by the “degeneration” of the South, the popular classes all over Italy were beginning to show the signs of “moral” malaise affecting the South, a prediction which expressed the fear that Italy as a whole might be part of an imagined “Mezzogiorno” of Europe (including Spain, Greece and the south of France) which was doomed to underdevelopment and barbarism. Quoted in Nani, *Ai Confini*, cit, 146.

¹¹⁴ Giuseppe Prezzolini , “Nel regno di sua eccellenza Calissano”, *La voce*, III, 19, 1911. In the article, Prezzolini repeatedly pointed out the “southern” aspects of the Calissano family: the love for titles, such as “cavaliere”, the complete domination of the family over the town council and all aspects of public administration, and the “absolute and dictatorial” power they held over the local population.

Prezzolini's definition of "Mezzogiorno" identified the moral question as a condition affecting both the North and the South. The "backwardness" – indicating not only mere economic backwardness- was seen as directly connected to the abandonment and the misconduct of the administration. Even though there were pockets of "Mezzogiorno" in the North, the moral question remained a quintessentially Southern issue. While rejecting an outright absorption of the anthropological discourse of the "two civilizations", the nationalist culture associated unbridled individualism, corruption, and clientelism predominantly with the South. From this point of view the nationalist perception of the Southern Question was not dissimilar from that of many liberals.

The originality of the nationalist stance on the "moral question" vis-a-vis the liberals resides in the interpretation and redefinition of certain aspects of the Southern Question that were adapted to their ideology. The process of "otherization" of the South by the liberal elites of the first post-Unitarian decades had been fundamental to the definition of the Italian nation as part of the northern European civilization.¹¹⁵ But the operation by which the liberals defined the national community through the exclusion of the uncivilized internal "other" was unacceptable to the nationalists. Thus they chose to approach the discourse on the South by upturning the existing negative stereotypes and presenting them as assets.

The *vocianti* and the *corradiniani* embraced and admired the "southernness" of Francesco Crispi. Neither the *corradiniani* nor the *vocianti* perceived the authoritarian tendencies and the corrupted practices of the Crispi administration -the embodiments of his "southern temper" - in a negative light. On the contrary, Crispi, with his ambitious

¹¹⁵ See Michele Nani, *Ai confini della nazione*, cit., particularly the chapter "Il mezzogiorno di una nazione meridionale", 154 and following. See also Mario Isneghi, "Dall' Alpi al Lilibeo Il 'noi' difficile degli italiani", *Meridiana*, 16 (1993).

foreign policy and his disregard for the rules of parliamentary democracy appealed to the nationalist culture, so much so that he became the paradigm for the ideal statesman.

From the early days of *Il Regno* to *La voce* and *L' Idea Nazionale*, the nationalist culture was decidedly pro-Crispi.¹¹⁶ His “southernness” made him more suited to the kind of leadership the nationalists considered necessary for Italy. His bold political decisions and his personal charisma were intended for the promotion of the prestige for the country and the identification of the population with their nation and their leader. Papini sketched an interesting portrait of Crispi on *Il Regno*, arguing that compared to the politicians of the Giolittian era he was a “tragic hero”, because even in his corruption and his scandals Crispi, like all “great men”, had been exceptional:

“Crispi is still the *great man* who embezzles the State money because he believes he *embodies*, if not all, the most part of the State. He is not a Prime Minister only to make money, but to rule, to propose a religious and a colonial agenda.” [Italics mine].¹¹⁷

Crispi had identified with the State and had acted both ruthlessly and grandiosely due to his “southern” individualism. The result had been to rally the nation around the cause of Colonial ventures, awakening the desire to build the “Great Italy”, which had been forgotten since the days of the Risorgimento. Crispi’s “southernness”, his personal

¹¹⁶ Corradini, “Dall’ Italianismo al latinismo”, *Il Regno*, I, 23, 1904; Papini, “Lo scandalo della miseria”, *Il Regno*, I, 25, 1904; Ibidem, “Risposta ad una lettera di Palamenghi-Crispi”, *Il Regno*, I, 27, 1904; Ibidem, “Il dovere di ricordare”, *L' Idea Nazionale*, I, 1, 1911; Ibidem, “La nazione torna a Crispi”, *L' Idea Nazionale*, I, 29, 1911; During the Libyan campaign, *L' Idea Nazionale* published several letters that Crispi wrote advocating the creation of an Italian colonial empire in Africa: “Il Profeta”, *L' Idea Nazionale*, I, 30, 1911; “La fede e la morale di Crispi, Dal carteggio”, Ibidem, II, 27, 1912; “Il silenzio di Crispi”, Ibidem, II, 29, 1912; Giovanni Amendola, then a young liberal philosopher, who would turn into a prominent anti-Fascist activist in the 1920s, reflected on the importance of Crispi’s colonial ventures in the creation of a national identity in *La voce*: “Francesco Crispi”, *La voce* III, 4, 1911, and “Crispi ministro”, Ibidem, IV, 9, 1912.

¹¹⁷ G Papini, “Lo scandalo della miseria”, *Il Regno*, I, 25, 1904.

ambition and individualism has served the cause of the “Great Italy” through his colonial policy intended to increase Italian prestige abroad, and pride and identification with the motherland internally. By contrast, the Piedmontese Giolitti -and his administration- did not identify with the State, and considered his mandate as a tool for petty ambitions, and petty crimes. With his policy of compromise towards the democratic forces, his enlargement of the franchise, his lackluster foreign policy, Giolitti was the antithetical figure to Crispi. The nationalist culture lamented the lack of statesmen of the caliber of Crispi following his downfall after the disaster of Adwa, and never blamed Crispi for the debacle, but rather the politicians who controlled Italy after Crispi’s withdrawal from politics.

If “southernness” – with its baggage of individualism, ruthless use of power, and corruption- could be an asset in a man of state, the other side of the “moral question”, namely the attributes of “southernness” in the masses remained more problematic, because individualism was a major obstacle to the development the sense of national identification and absolute abnegation, which, as we have seen, they considered the necessary prerequisite for the development of civilization. Part of the originality of the nationalist culture was the attempt to adapt the discourse about the southern “nature” to its ideological aims, rather than proclaiming the necessity to change that nature, as the Liberals and Socialists proposed to do. Just like the southerner Crispi had been the most inspirational political figure of the post-Unification period - not in spite of his “southernness” but because of it - the southern population’s traits of violence and individualism could be turned into assets by the nationalist propaganda if properly channeled by the State towards conquest and to serve the aims of the nation.

During his collaboration with *Il Regno* Mario Morasso exemplified the nationalist thinking in reference to the South, arguing that both the industrial North and the “economically traditional” South had the ability to produce “imperialistic aristocracies”.¹¹⁸ Morasso attacked the “pseudo-scientific” doctrines of Lombroso and his followers, accusing them, and the socialists more in general, to deliberately detect every possible degeneration and “atavism” in the southern men, to justify the poor reception of democratic and socialistic ideas among the southern peasantry. Like the majority of the nationalists, Morasso did not deny the racial differences between North and South, but rejected the conclusions of the socialists and the anthropologists:

“First of all there is no doubt that the actual diversity of race, civilization and wealth between the North and the South , a difference that any statistic can reveal, has been interpreted erroneously in the sense of an inferiority and barbarism of the South vis-a-vis the North because of the democratic sentimentalism and the biased and rushed conclusions of certain Lombrosian sociologists [sic].”

He proceeded in arguing that neither the democratic sentiment nor the level of industrialization should be used as a parameter to gauge the level of civilization of a population, but rather that its willingness to dominate. And according to the latter parameter, the man of the South was “superior” to that of the North.

Morasso claimed that while the northern men were “materialistic”, petty” and incapable of the grand gesture, the men of the South were more likely to be imperialistic. His description of the southerners highlighted the qualities that were more likely to translate in aptitude towards imperialistic ventures:

“[...] endowed with proud and sparkling eyes, haughty posture, generous passions,

¹¹⁸ Mario Morasso, “Nord e Sud”, *Il Regno*, I, 4, 1903.

sudden and violent impulses, intense sensations and quick intuition, serene contemplation and playful blunders, loyal devotion and instinct to dominate”

The violence and irrationality of the Southerners could be tamed by appealing to their naturally loyal nature if the State could somehow channel that passion into love of the fatherland. The Southern man appeared to Morasso a natural “conqueror”, forming the ideal counterpart of the Northern man who provided the economic and industrial means of conquest. United together in service of the Italian cause, both the North and the South could be a formidable weapon of imperialistic ventures. Morasso never fully clarified the exact role of the Southerners in the imperialistic ventures, but it can be inferred from his works and the overall position of the Corradinian paper that he envisioned the southerners as soldiers/settlers in the future Italian colonies. The violent and domineering southern instincts would serve a dual purpose: they would make the southerners better soldiers in battle, and more aggressive settlers when dealing with the indigenous populations once the conquest was completed.

To the nationalists the differences in culture, wealth, civilization and race between North and South did not matter as much as unity of purpose. The difference between North and South was neither denied, nor seen as an obstacle, in fact the southern violent tendencies were constructed as an asset. “Violence” was a recurring theme in both *Il Regno* and the *Idea Nazionale* and maintained a positive connotation both in regard to the South and when applied in the colonial context.¹¹⁹ *Il Regno* provocatively denied the difference between Northern and Southern Italians by arguing that certain violent crimes – such as murdering an unfaithful wife- were as prevalent in the North as they were in the South and that such displays of violence should be regarded as a source of “racial pride”

¹¹⁹ See chapter 4.

(*orgoglio di razza*).¹²⁰ Such crimes, which had been constructed by the anthropologists as one of the proofs of the inferiority of the Southerners, were viewed as virtues and extended to the North. Aside from the obvious provocation, the argument subverted the Lombrosian methodology and interpretation of crime statistics, concluding that Italians of all classes and all regions were racially “united” in crime. The very characteristics that the socialist-Lombrosian school had considered signs of arrested development and barbarism were instead provocatively embraced by the nationalistic culture.

The extent to which violence became an emblem of the nationalistic culture -and of the fascist culture later- for the purpose of opposing Socialism should not obscure the fact that, in the nationalist culture, the glorification of violence and irrationality had served the ideological function of co-opting the South into the nationalistic ideal of racial unity.

Conclusion

The nationalist culture expressed a tension between the rejection of narratives that excluded the South from the national fabric and the acceptance of existing stereotypes. The result was a discourse that aimed at recasting the Italian identity in racial terms that *included* the South – a discourse that has often been faulted for its lack of coherence and ideological charlatanism. The ideological process of inclusion of the South was by no means simple and required both a discursive transformation of certain aspects of southernness into assets, and the pursuit of the only single event capable of propelling the South quickly and thoroughly into civilization by awakening their patriotic feelings, which the Corradinian nationalists individuated in war.

¹²⁰ Luigi Amoroso, “La virtù’ della stripe nelle passioni micidiali”, *Il Regno*, II, 11, 1905.

During the lifespan of *Il Regno* the nationalists had not yet formed a political association and the victorious war that would become the essential myth around which Corradini would build his national ideology still seemed indistinct and far away in the future. All that would of course change a mere four years later at the time of the Libyan campaign. With the goal of imperialistic conquest within reach, the nationalists view of the South also developed, abandoning the hyperboles of Morasso's prose, but maintaining nonetheless the same underlying aim to devise a narrative that would upturn the bleak perspective of the "two Italies". The next chapter addresses the methods through which the nationalists addressed the existing tropes on the responsiveness of the southerners to the stimulus of civilization and the issue of internal colonization.

Chapter 2: Nationalizing the South

As seen in the previous chapter, the nationalists opposed the discourse of the “two Italies”, which investigated the *causes* of the Southern Question, and proposed a counter-narrative that allowed the South to be part of the nation. This chapter looks at the different *solutions* proposed on *La voce* and the response of the Corradinian nationalists.

1. *Civilizing through contact and the technical approach*

In 1908 Prezzolini proposed to his readers a series of articles dedicated to Italian provinces and regions in which the authors were invited to describe the local cultural and social activities, as well as propose improvements.¹²¹ Prezzolini – who prided himself in welcoming contributions from writers who did not share his political views and beliefs – intended to make his magazine a place of encounter for an open discussion on the Italian regional problems, particularly in the South. Most of the articles followed the narrative of the “two Italies” and proposed the idea of civilizing the South by placing it in contact with the North through the construction of infrastructures. The discussion culminated with the publication of a special issue on the Southern Question in 1911¹²² in which some of the most renowned experts on the Mezzogiorno expressed their views on how to solve the situation in the South. While maintaining the centrality of the Southern Question as the main national problem, Prezzolini for the most part preferred to leave the floor to others, as testified by the fact that the special issue on the Southern Question appeared without an editorial or contribution on the part of the director of the magazine.

¹²¹ The series of articles was announced in the editorial article in *La voce*, I, 42, 1908.

¹²² “La Questione Meridionale”, *La Voce*, III, 11, 1911.

The Southerners were pictured at times as varying from region to region, and at times as a single mass possessing the same characteristics. There was a spectrum of different positions regarding the racial make up of the southerners, but most writers seemed to agree that the peninsular southerners were racially closer to the northerners than the inhabitants of Sicily and Sardinia. The difference between the peninsular Mezzogiorno and the islands resided in the belief that the peninsulars were racially closer to the northern Italians. However, the ultimate perception of the capacity to evolve throughout the Mezzogiorno was not affected by this perceived racial difference between peninsular and insular southerners, but was framed predominantly in cultural terms.

According to the writer Giuseppe Gallico, who inaugurated the regional articles on *La voce* with a piece entitled simply “The Sicilian”, the inhabitants of the island took pride in their diversity. The Sicilians had in common with the rest of the Italians a “vivacious spirit”, but had other distinguishing traits due to the mixing of “Greek, Carthagenean, Roman, Arab, Norman and Spanish” elements in their ancestry. While the inhabitants of the coasts of Sicily presented an array of many foreign elements, the inhabitants of the interior were argued to be “truly Sicilian”, namely a mix of Arab and Spanish. Of the non-Italian elements, the “Arab” was displayed in the gravity of the Sicilians’ acts, the sadness, the sweet monotony of their songs, and the “Spaniard” in their pride, love of titles, etiquette and appearances rather than substance. Gallico was one of the authors who did not advocate racial mixing between the northern and southern Italians but simply contact between the two: a more thorough intervention of the State and investment in infrastructures would free the southern populations from their state of barbarism and end the disparity in the level of civilization.

The peninsular South of Italy tended to be viewed as having similar characteristics throughout. The following passage – which appeared on *La voce* in 1910- from the Apulian writer Riccardo Zagaria (1879-1937) expresses all the disappointment for the present conditions of the Mezzogiorno:

“The material and moral conditions of all of Italy’s Mezzogiorno are very similar: the most part of Abruzzo, Principato -the southern part of Campania, Terra di Lavoro – the northern part of Campania, Capitanata –northern part of Apulia, Molise, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria have no difference other than the configuration and the nature of the soil, and the specific temperament of the people. The painful and shameful history, the present misery, the lazy populations and the despicable politicians, the disgust for one’s own condition but the ineptitude to improve it, the plethora of graduates accompanied by widespread ignorance and the low sense of morality [the above] are all characteristics by which none of these regions can feel ashamed of being compared to the other”¹²³.

Aside from minimal differences in the “temperament” of the inhabitants, the Mezzogiorno was perceived as sharing the same flaws: lack of morality, ignorance, laziness, incapacity to improve. The author blamed “inherited individualism” and “segregation from the rest of Italy and the world” as the reasons for the present state of the South. And once again pinned all his hopes on the intervention of the government to bring the southern populations in contact with modern civilization.

Paolo Orano’s syndacalists paper *La Lupa* (1910-11) also hosted a series of articles on the South, particularly on Sardinia. In 1895 Orano had visited the island with

¹²³ Riccardo Zagaria, “La provincia di Andria”, *La voce*, II, 6,1910. The article mentions both regions and provinces according to the administrative subdivision of the time. Some of the provinces such as the Terra di Lavoro, were later partitioned among different regions.

his friend and colleague Alfredo Niceforo sponsored by the Società romana di Antropologia (Roman Society of Anthropology) founded by Giuseppe Sergi in 1893.¹²⁴ Although less famous than Niceforo, Orano's work received largely positive reviews as one of the products of the "Lombrosian school"¹²⁵, and was praised even by the Sardinians themselves, such as the Nobel laureate Grazia Deledda, who wrote about Orano in *La Roma Letteraria*.¹²⁶ In *Psicologia della Sardegna*, Orano echoed Niceforo's bleak view of the Sardinians as a "degenerate" race, arguing that there were places on the island where "the race grows and teems like a rotten purulent gangrene".¹²⁷ It was a hopeless view of the racial potential of the island, which left virtually no room for self-improvement.

Over ten years after the publication of *Psicologia della Sardegna*, as director of *La Lupa*, Orano's interest in the island remained undiminished, but he noticeably shied away from the racial language of his previous work, and, while acknowledging Niceforo's contribution to the study of Sardinia, he preferred to concentrate his efforts on promoting a debate about the ways in which the inhabitants of the island could be brought into the fold of civilization. In the editorial opening the discussion, he invited young Sardinian scholars to discuss the present situation without fear of exceeding in their critique, and arguing that displaying the many shortcomings of Sardinian society

¹²⁴ The result had been the publication of *La psicologia della sardegna* (Roma: Tipografia della casa editrice italiana, 1896) by Orano. On Niceforo's part: *La delinquenza in Sardegna: note di sociologia criminale* (Palermo: Sandron, 1897), and the most famous of Niceforo's works *Italia Barbara contemporanea* (Milano; Palermo: R. Sandron, 1898).

¹²⁵ "Lombrosian school" does not indicate an actual academic institution, but rather the work of a generation of students of Anthropology and other social sciences that were influenced by Lombroso's methods and main findings. Along with Niceforo and Orano, Enrico Ferri and Guglielmo Ferrero are considered among the "Lombrosian" scholars.

¹²⁶ See Margherita Heyer Caput, *Grazia Deledda 's Dance of Modernity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

¹²⁷ See Alessandro Portelli, "The problem of the color-blind. Notes on the Discourse on Race in Italy" in *Race and the nation*, edited by Paul Spickard (New York: Routledge, 2004).

was the first step towards their solution. An open discussion would invite the State to act and impose the *discipline* that Sardinia needed: Sardinians, Orano argued, were “men who know how to work, once inserted in the discipline of production”.¹²⁸ This marked a definite change in Orano’s view of the capacity of the Sardinian people to respond positively to discipline. He now blamed poverty along with the “ferocity” of the Sardinian race for the current conditions of the island. The discussion that ensued on *La lupa* saw positions ranging from advocates of racial mixing to the argument that simple contact with civilization would be sufficient to bring about the development of the Sardinians.¹²⁹ However, much like Prezzolini, Orano ultimately chose to support the Libyan war. In fact he devoted the last editorial of his short-lived magazine to the enthusiastic endorsement of the Libyan war, and mirrored the position of the Corradinian nationalists in viewing the war as an experience that would produce a heightened sense of national identity, among Northerners and Southerners alike.¹³⁰

The philosopher Enrico Ruta published in *La voce* a very long piece about the subject of the diversity of the Southerners and their susceptibility to the stimulus of civilization. Ruta was an academic and a friend of Benedetto Croce and Gaetano Salvemini, albeit much less famous than either one. Prezzolini did not comment on Ruta’s essay, as he sometimes did when he was in profound disagreement with his collaborators, and allowed the essay to appear in five parts over the course of 1913.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Paolo Orano, “Sardegna bandita”, *La lupa*, I, 1, 1910.

¹²⁹ See for instance: P.C. Stangoni, “Divagazioni sarde”, *La lupa*, II,13, 1911; Arturo Somazzi, “Problemi regionali. Sardegna”, *Ibid.*, II, 15, 1911; Arturo Filippi “Sardegna. I problemi del passato”, *Ibid.*, II, 16, 1911; Attilio Deffenu, “Il nodo della questione Sardegna”, *Ibid.*, I,18, 1911; and P.C. Stangoni, “Per la rigenerazione sarda”, *Ibid.*, II, 25, 1911.

¹³⁰ “Tripoli insegna”, *La lupa*, II, 52, 1911.

¹³¹ Enrico Ruta, “Il problema del Mezzogiorno”, Parts I-V appeared in *La voce*, V, 11,1913; V, 12, 1913; V, 14, 1913; V, 16, 1913; V, 22, 1913. Ruta (1869-1939) was born in the province of Frosinone in Latium, but lived most of his life in Naples where and taught Philosophy at the University. He was a close friend of

Ruta left no hope for the self-redemption of the South: he argued that the Southerners possessed neither the understanding of their own inferiority nor the desire for self-improvement. Ruta's argument resembled the nationalists' in that he equated civilization with a strong sense of national identity. He quoted both the Roman -“*civis romanus sum*” - and the British - “I am a subject of Her Britannic Majesty”- statements of allegiance as the quintessential examples of how successful civilizations and national identity went hand in hand. Where Ruta diverged from the nationalists was in his belief that the Southerners were incapable of identifying with the nation because they tended to follow “the obscure sense of a lord-god or a talisman-saint or of a rabble rouser, the sense of hopeful subordination to a powerful man or to a bully”. Ruta was one of the proponents of direct colonization, which should be promoted by the State through a policy of tax incentives. The Northerners should teach the Southerners “how to work” through direct contact, but, most importantly, the settlement of northerners in the South would bring a “rejuvenation of the blood and the intelligence” produced by the mixing of the two races. Clearly at odds with the nationalist narrative of racial unity, Ruta's essay reflected the deep-seated doubts about the capacity of the Southerners to elevate themselves.

By contrast, Margherita Sarfatti exposed on the pages of *La voce* the quintessentially nationalist belief that the potential for evolution towards a superior form of civilization in the Southerners resided in their racial roots. Sarfatti's contribution to *La Voce* came from a very different perspective than Ruta's. While writing for Prezzolini's paper she was also the director of the art section of the socialist paper *Avanti!*.

Benedetto Croce and a translator of Nietzsche and Treitschke. He wrote on various subjects as well as collaborating to the Neapolitan daily *Il Mattino*. He later embraced and wrote in support of Fascism. *Il gusto d'amare: romanzo* (Milano : Baldini, Castoldi e C., 1898); *Insaniapoli* (Napoli : R. Ricciardi, 1911); *La psiche sociale: unita di origine e di fine* (Milano: Sandron, 1909).

Throughout the Giolittian age she remained a socialist, even though the experience of war and Mussolini's personal influence would lead her to abandon her socialist stance.¹³² Sarfatti described, with a mix of paternalism and bourgeois distaste, the appalling conditions of the peasants living in the Roman countryside - from their family meals, to their living quarters and sleeping habits. Even though the language of "savagery" is absent, the description is suggestive of a complete alienation of the Southern peasants from the most basic habits and norms of civilized behavior. The observation inspired in Sarfatti a bitter reflection over the utter failure of the Risorgimento to elevate the conditions of large portions of Italy. However, she argued that the elevation of the population was possible thanks to its racial potential. The peasants were described as an "italic plebe" producing "healthy and magnificent" children through a process of natural selection operating over the centuries. This plebe would be very responsive to the stimulus of civilization, if the State was willing to intervene. While still a "plebe" – uneducated, a-moral, unconscious of the national identity- not dissimilar from the one described by Ruta, the peasants were also seen by Sarfatti as "italic", thus potentially "Italian". Their good racial stock, selected through the ages, contained the seeds for the future as well as a connection to the glorious – if distant- past. The "italic" plebe would easily be transformed into part of the "Italian people" just by being put in contact with

¹³² Between 1910 and 1912 Sarfatti (1880-1961) contributed three articles to *La Voce*: "Quel che pensa dell' istruzione sessuale una mamma", *La Voce*, II, 9, 1910; "Le suffragiste inglesi", *La Voce*, V, 40, 1912; and "Le scuole nell Agro di Roma", *La Voce*, V, 34, 1912. In 1912 she met Mussolini and later became his mistress, contributing through her activity to the public image of the Fascist regime, particularly through her biography *The life of Benito Mussolini* – first published in English in 1925 and published in Italian as *Dux* in the following year- and through her activity as a patron of artists. After Mussolini's pact with Hitler, she became increasingly isolated and left the country, avoiding the effects of the Racial Laws. Cannistraro, Philip, and Brian R. Sullivan. *Il Duce's Other Woman: The Untold Story of Margherita Sarfatti, Mussolini's Jewish Mistress* (New York : Morrow, 1993) and more recently Urso, Simona. *Margherita Sarfatti. Dal mito del Dux al mito americano* (Venezia : Marsilio, 2003).

civilization – schools, roads, and services- and freeing it from its millenarian isolation. This point was echoed in several other articles by various contributors discussing the regional problems of the Mezzogiorno- from Sicily, to Calabria, Molise and even Sardinia.¹³³

The most famous discussion on the Southern Question during that period was held in the issue of *La voce* entirely dedicated to the Southern Question in 1911.¹³⁴ This issue was supposed to be the expression of the “technical” approach to the Southern Question, exemplified by the activity of the member of the Radica Party Francesco Saverio Nitti.

At the turn of the century, Nitti had proposed an analysis of the conditions of the South that proved to be one of the most influential, and in fact was regarded by many contemporaries as the most appropriate response to the Southern Question. Nitti’s originality laid in his technical approach to the problems of the South. As a young technocrat, he gathered a group of “specialists” – engineers, agronomists, financial experts- many of whom were Southerners of radical or Socialist inspiration, to devise projects of exploitation of the natural resources of the South. In essence, Nitti proposed that the State should intervene to favor the industrialization of the South itself. According to Nitti, the State should aim at correcting the imbalance created after Unification when the financial resources of the South had been absorbed and redeployed to favor the industrial development of the North, while the South had been relegated to a rural economy.¹³⁵ Like the *meridionalisti* of the 1870s, he shared a deep distrust for the local

¹³³ See for instance Guglielmo Zagari, “La Calabria”, *La voce*, II, 14, 1909; Amedeo Tosti, “Vecchio Sannio”, *La voce*, IV, 18, 1912 and IV, 21, 1912.

¹³⁴ “La Questione Meridionale”, *La Voce*, III, 11, 1911. The special issue was reprinted in 1912 as a booklet of the collection “Quaderni della Voce”.

¹³⁵ Francesco Saverio Nitti, *La conquista della forza* (Roma-Torino: Casa Edit. Nazionale Roux e Viarengo, 1905) According to Giuseppe Barone Nitti was the best expression of the trend that developed at the end of the first decade of the 20th century, according to which the Southern Question could be solved

ruling classes, and viewed the general population as unable to create the means for their own redemption. Unlike his predecessors, however, Nitti and his group had a direct influence on policies aimed at the South, such as the special legislation for Naples (1904) and Basilicata (1906-7) that led to the creation of hydroelectric plants.

The opening article of the special issue of *La voce* on the South was by one of the eminent fathers of the Southern Question Giustino Fortunato, and was significantly titled “The two Italies”. Fortunato had been among the first *meridionalisti* and throughout his life he made a considerable effort in understanding the “natural” disadvantages of the South – particularly those deriving from its climate and soil- and he was a mentor and an inspiration to Nitti. He was a founder, with Leopoldo Franchetti and Benedetto Croce, of the Society for the Study of Malaria in 1898, and, again in collaboration with Franchetti, of the Association for the interests of the *Mezzogiorno* in 1910. He believed that the improvement of the situation in the South could only come from the centralist model, however, like Salvemini and Benedetto Croce, was in favor of universal suffrage. Like Croce, he followed Prezzolini’s paper during the first few years with a paternal and benevolent sympathy – as well as a watchful eye. It was undoubtedly an honor and a distinction for Prezzolini to have him open the discussion about the South.

“Le due Italie” opened with the statement that “a profound diversity” existed among the “habits, traditions, and the *intellectual* and *moral* world” of the North and the South. The Southern Question was not just a question of economic disparity, but a complex issue arising from the co-existence of “two civilizations in the same nation”.

primarily through the control of water –irrigation, management of rivers, etc. Nitti proposed since 1907 that this issue could only be addressed by an alliance between industrial interests, technocrats, and radical politicians. Giuseppe Barone, *Mezzogiorno e modernizzazione: Eletticità, irrigazione e bonifica nell'Italia contemporanea* (Torino: Einaudi, 1986).

The campaign for technical – economic, political, practical- issues pertaining to the South launched on *La voce* opened with an article by a well-respected expert on the field proclaiming that the Southern Question was first and foremost a problem of culture. Fortunato essentially gave as much importance to racial factors as he did to the “technical” aspects to which he had devoted such a large part of his efforts and studies in determining the degree of civilization of a population. He proposed a strong statist model and a policy of colonization of the more civilized North over the less civilized South. Fortunato’s proposed solution included the racial mixing that Sergi had proposed, as well as the direct contact with the civilized North.

After Fortunato’s opening piece, there were a series of essays devoted to technical issues, although these were not always discussed by “experts”. In fact the special issue was a hodge-podge of different tendencies, and the articles varied significantly in both originality and quality. Overall they did not express a consensus: in Prezzolini’s view the discussion was simply supposed to increase awareness in the public of the current debates regarding the South. If the botanist Giuseppe Cuboni discussed the problems of southern agriculture in detail -such as lack of water and the quality of the soil, the topic of malaria was discussed by Guglielmo Zagari, who was by no means an authority in the field, and relied heavily on the work of Nitti.¹³⁶ The young economist Alfredo Caroncini competently discussed the advantages of economic liberalism for the southern economy, but technical issues such as the management of rivers and the State-owned lands –known as *demanio*, were discussed respectively by revolutionary syndicalist Agostino Lanzillo and historian Roberto Palmarocchi. Two Catholic intellectuals, Giuseppe Donati and

¹³⁶ Cuboni had published in collaboration with the renowned Italian physician Ettore Marchiafava, *Nuovi Studi sulla natura della Malaria* (Roma: Salviucci, 1881); Cuboni he had also published *I Problemi dell’ Agricoltura Meridionale* (Roma: Manunzio, 1909).

Gennaro Avolio discussed the problem of illiteracy and the conditions of the clergy, and finally historian Ettore Ciccotti and economist -and future president of the Italia Republic - Luigi Einaudi discussed the pros and cons of the massive emigration from the South. This composite picture was completed by the essays of two eminent *meridionalisti* – Salvemini and Nitti. Salvemini’s essay proposed a subject which was very familiar in the socialist discussion of the South, namely the issue of the unproductive petty middle-class.¹³⁷ Nitti’s essay about the management of public finance in Southern Italy relied on his previous work on the fiscal policy of the Italian kingdom, and proposed his well known thesis of the need to increase production while keeping taxes low and invest in the technical improvements of soil, river management, and reforestation.

2.The Libyan war as a catalyst for development

Among the different approaches proposed in *La voce*, the Corradinians officially endorsed the “technical” discourse, because both the analysis of the causes and the proposed solutions were not based on the idea that the South was culturally “other” from the rest of Italy. However, even though the nationalists advocated the Nittian approach they proposed colonial war as the most efficient way to “solve” the Southern Question.

¹³⁷ Prezzolini’s paper often provided a stage for Salvemini to express his distaste for the southern middle and upper classes, which he considered responsible for the economic, social and cultural conditions of the peasantry. See for instance the article “Coco’ all’ Universita’ di Napoli”, *La voce*, I, 3, 1908. Many left – wing *meridionalisti*, had associated the “moral question” predominantly with the parasitic and corrupted southern petty bourgeoisie which sought employment in the local public administration. Prezzolini appeared for a time to share Salvemini’s sentiment towards the Southern middle and upper classes, and even agreed on the enlargement of the franchise to include the Southern peasants. However Prezzolini was more concerned about the overall aim of building an ethos based on a strong sense of national identification- a goal that, in his view, superseded that of improving the moral and material condition of the Southern peasants.

Only war would nationalize both the Northern and the Southern masses and awake the dormant qualities of the southerners.

From the first issue of the *Idea Nazionale* the Corradinians adopted Nitti's "technical" approach as their own. In discussing various "initiatives of propaganda" promoted by the Nationalist Association, they announced a conference that would be held in Rome by Nitti on the subject of "The problem of the *Mezzogiorno*".¹³⁸ Nitti's title stood out among the other conferences devoted to topics like "The nationalist program" – to be held by Corradini- and "Nationalism" – to be held by Parodi - and testifies to the intention of the nationalists to present the *Mezzogiorno* as a quintessentially "nationalist" concern.

Nitti's approach was discussed directly in a 1911 editorial devoted to the South in the *idea Nazionale*.¹³⁹ The position of the Corradinians was that even though the South was "the most important national problem", the majority of the Italian public opinion was only acquainted with the clichés and prejudices. The most recurrent among the clichés, the article lamented, was that the South was "Paradise inhabited by an inferior race", while the reality was "quite the opposite". The *Idea Nazionale* inherited the counter-narrative exposed by *Il Regno*, which subverted the discourse of the "Two Italies". However the counter-narrative was now framed more firmly into the discourse connecting emigration and colonization which was the centerpiece of the Corradinian ideology of the "Proletarian nation" during the years preceding the Libyan war. During

¹³⁸ "Movimento Nazionalista. Associazione Nazionalista", *L' Idea Nazionale*, I,1, 1911.

¹³⁹ "Per il mezzogiorno, il problema economico", *L' Idea Nazionale*, I,4, 1911. As it often happened with the majority of articles on the *Idea Nazionale*, this editorial was not signed.

the First Congress of the Nationalist Association in 1910, Corradini had proclaimed the Southern Question to be, “for half”, a “problem of emigration”.¹⁴⁰

The Corradinian argument was that Southerners had been confined for centuries to an unfertile land that stifled economic growth and caused the South to be unable to provide for its burgeoning population. The liberal politicians that had led Italy since unification- with the exception of Crispi- had failed to provide a national colony as an outlet for the Southerners, who had to resort to emigration in order to survive. This discourse had important ramifications and will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter. For the purpose of the discussion of the South, suffice to say that to the Corradinians Nitti had successfully analyzed the “economic half” of the Southern Question. “We will integrate”, the *Idea Nazionale* wrote “the economic and technical problem addressed by Nitti with the *political* one”.¹⁴¹ However, the paper warned, if Nitti wanted to truly solve the Southern Question he had to relinquish his radical ideology- Nitti was a member of the Radical Party- and become a nationalist.

The Corradinians claimed for their ideology the ability to solve the Southern Question, de facto placing the “political” solution above the “technical”: it was impossible, they argued, to solve the problems in the South with “democracy and words”.¹⁴² A series of venomous exchanges between the *vocianti* and the *Idea Nazionale* followed. Corradini’s discourse for the solution of Italy’s problems, including the Southern Question, through the creation of an Italian colony in North Africa was much publicized by the Nationalist Association – which was led by a directorate largely

¹⁴⁰ Corradini, “Classi proletarie , socialismo. Nazioni proletarie, nazioanlismo”, *Il nazionalismo italiano. Atti del Congresso di Firenze, e relazioni* (Firenze: Quattrini, 1911), 22-35.

¹⁴¹ “Per il mezzogiorno”, Cit.

¹⁴² Ibid.

composed of Corradininas- through conferences and articles.¹⁴³ In June 1911 a delegation of nationalists led by Luigi Federzoni presented their argument at the Congress of Italians living abroad – Congresso degli Italiani all’ Estero, criticizing the Italian Colonial institute for not doing “enough” for the problem of the South:

“The problem of the Mezzogiorno is not just a problem of internal politics but also of external politics, because the best way to help the southern populations [...] is to give Italian lands to Italian workers”.¹⁴⁴

The nationalist delegation proposed and obtained that the Colonial Institute create a separate section dedicated to the scientific and economic study of potential colonies of settlement.

Prezzolini, who during this period was collaborating closely with Salvemini, responded to the Corradinian program by arguing that the Southern Question had to be solved before any Colonial enterprise could be attempted. With the Libyan campaign in full swing throughout the spring of 1911 there was a series of angry exchanges in which Prezzolini tenaciously defended the technical approach against the imperialistic rhetoric of the Corradinian nationalists. Alberto Caroncini, whose Liberal creed would eventually place him at odds with the official stance of the nationalists, was close to the position of the *Idea Nazionale* during this period. He invited Prezzolini to set his “technical program” aside and join the ranks of the nationalist movement, arguing that the aim of nationalism was to inspire in the general population a sense of belonging, such that the needs of the collectivity would be perceived as superior to those of the individual: the

¹⁴³ Every issue of the *Idea Nazionale* throughout 1911 reported on conferences held by Corradini in various Italian towns and his followers on the connected issues of emigration and colonization. Many of Corradini’s papers were later published in *Il volere d’ Italia* (Napoli: Perrella, 1911).

¹⁴⁴ Goffredo Bellonci, “L’ Opera dell’ Istituto coloniale”, *L’ Idea Nazionale*, I, 17, 1911. The nationalist propaganda at the Congress will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter.

means through which such conscience would be built did not matter as much as unity of purpose.¹⁴⁵ Prezzolini, eager to dissociate himself from his former mentor, maintained his distance from the Corradinian nationalists. But it was form rather than substance. In spite of distancing himself from the rhetoric of Corradini, in reality Prezzolini's discourse about the South was largely about conscience and character, rather than material conditions and technical means. And in that respect was closer to the rhetoric of Corradini than to the grounded, moderately socialist agenda of Salvemini.

A year after the publication of the Special issue of *La voce*, and in the mist of the campaign for the invasion of Libya, the riots of Verbicaro occasioned the peak of the discussion about the South among the nationalists, forcing them to clarify their position. During the summer of the year of national Jubilee of 1911 – celebrating fifty years of Italian Unification- the peasant inhabitants of small village of Verbicaro in Calabria erupted in a spontaneous riot against the mayor and the local administration, leaving three dead. The riot was a popular reaction to an epidemic of cholera believed to be caused by a contaminated well. The villagers believed the town notables – the *galantuomini* - and the local administration had purposely infected the well through a powder –*polverella* - with the deliberate intent to kill members of the lower classes. After having attacked the local authorities and set fire to the town hall, the enraged villagers dispersed through the countryside, where they remained in hiding for fear of reprisals and contagion.

The events of Verbicaro – which were eerily similar to another episode of popular violence occurred in 1855 in the same village- were a rude awakening during the year marking the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of the nation-state. The fact that the villagers withdrew in the countryside and lived in hiding, resurrected the ghost of

¹⁴⁵ Alberto Caroncini, "Mezzogiorno e Tripolitania", *L'idea Nazionale*, I, 30, 1911.

Brigantaggio. The irrationality and the violence of the riot seemed a cruel reminder of a reality of ignorance, superstition, and most importantly rejection of the State, which dramatically brought back images that the celebrations of the Jubilee had portrayed as belonging to the past.

The nationalist culture's reaction was deeply influenced by the fact that at the time of the events –August 1911- the nationalist campaign in favor of the invasion of Libya was about to come to fruition¹⁴⁶. The Southern Question had been the key objection proposed by the socialist press and by the broad spectrum of political forces against the Libyan invasion. *La voce* had assumed the Salvemini position, centered on the argument that the financial resources that would be invested in the conquest and *mise en valeur* of Libya would be better spent in the construction of schools and infrastructures in the Italian South. Prezzolini felt in some way vindicated by the events of Verbicaro, which in his opinion demonstrated that he had been correct in arguing that the South was the most urgent and important national problem. The small Calabrian village of Verbicaro was in Prezzolini's words "typical" and expressed "in itself all the Mezzogiorno": four hours away from a train station, endowed with roads unsuitable for motor vehicles, without access to clean water, and ruled by a "dynastic" – rather than a democratically elected - mayor.¹⁴⁷

Prezzolini wrote a brief editorial about Verbicaro, leaving, as he often did, the floor to Salvemini for a more thorough analysis. Salvemini's target was the *Corriere della Sera* – the most widely read Italian daily, which expressed a liberal, pro-Giolittian position and was the voice of the Lombard industry. The stance of the *Corriere* was that

¹⁴⁶ Italy would attack Tripoli at the end of September of the same year.

¹⁴⁷ *La voce*, III, 35 "Verbicaro".

Verbicaro proved that the Southern masses were not ready to receive the right to vote. Salvemini's response was a blend of paternalism, socialism and genuine conviction that the extension of the franchise was the only means through which the economic, social and moral condition of the southern peasants could be improved. He argued that the southern inhabitants expressed their grievances in ways that were "superstitious and barbaric", because the ignorance and poverty in which they were kept by the arrogance and greed of the local notables and the indifference of the government prevented them from understanding and articulating their grievances in a more civilized manner. Gaining access to the voting rights was the only way in which the voice of southern population would matter, and the government would finally be forced to curb the local administrations and invest in the much needed infrastructures of education.¹⁴⁸

The *Idea Nazionale* responded to the events in Verbicaro with an article by Maurizio Maraviglia who expressed a position opposite to Salvemini's. Maraviglia argued that the real problem of the South could never be solved through economic modernization or the creation of schools and infrastructures. The position of the *Idea Nazionale* was that the "civil conscience" that the Mezzogiorno "could not produce by itself" could only be acquired through the participation in the experience of war.¹⁴⁹

Leaving aside the aspect of the pro and anti Libyan camps the issue that Verbicaro truly represented the quintessential "moral issue" of the Southern population.

Certainly, both their colonial and their socially conservative agenda influenced the nationalist stance on the riots of Verbicaro. At the same time, in terms of ideological coherence, it made perfect sense for the nationalists to argue that war rather than

¹⁴⁸ Salvemini, "La polveretta" *La voce*, III, 36, 1911.

¹⁴⁹ Maurizio Maraviglia, "Vericaro e l'Italia", *L'idea nazionale*, I, 28, 1911.

universal suffrage would build the conscience that the southerners lacked, since they understood civilization and modernization first and foremost as nationalization, and they believed that nothing other than victorious war could inspire a sense of national belonging. As we will see in chapter 4, once the hostilities with Turkey broke out in September the attraction towards the war rhetoric was too strong to resist for Prezzolini. After all his years of dedication to the cause of the Mezzogiorno he endorsed the Libyan campaign, albeit with some reluctance, proving that ultimately his position was closer to the Corradinian nationalists than to Salvemini's, and causing the latter to end his collaboration with *La voce* to found his own paper, *L'Unita'*. Above all, Verbicaro seemed to many a painful reminder that the Southerners were indeed "other", as Cesare Spellanzon wrote on *La Lupa*, a people "oblivious and resigned to living in *our* civilization", displaying the key attributes of violence, individualism, rejection of the State.¹⁵⁰

The nationalists, however, refused to accept that stance and in fact, in response to Verbicaro and the polemics it inspired, pursued the Libyan campaign with renewed vigor, arguing that the conquest would benefit the Mezzogiorno as much as the rest of Italy. In September in the *Idea nazionale* Corradini dismissed the programs for the environmental, social and economic development of the South –including more schools, reforestation, land reclamation, water management, and the eradication of Malaria. Those enterprises, however laudable, would not change the Mezzogiorno as quickly and thoroughly as the conquest of Lybia. Corradini proclaimed the South as "tied" to Africa rather than Europe from a point of view of "political geography". He argued that by contributing to the "europeization" of Northern Africa –through its colonization and modernization, Italy

¹⁵⁰ Spellanzon, "Davanti alla realta'", *La lupa*, II, 50, 1911.

would create a “favorable condition” for the Mezzogiorno that would allow it to become “European” in turn. Rejecting the discourse of the “two Italies”, Corradini reminded his readers that the whole of the “official Italy” was in fact “South of Europe” and did not possess the “energy” to elevate the Mezzogiorno. Italy as a whole needed an experience that could release its latent forces: just like emigration acted on the individual emigrants as a catalyst for change through the act of challenging the unknown, the conquest of Libya would have a similar effect of regeneration for the whole of Italy, marking the beginning of a new Risorgimento¹⁵¹.

The nationalist rejection of the discourse of the “two Italies” was not absolute, but rather it was a process by which elements of that discourse were inserted into the nationalist agenda of national aggrandizement and inclusion of the South into the nation. The Corradinians proposed a discourse of inclusion of the South, both in terms of *mise en valeur* of certain stereotyped aspects of southernness (such as “individualism” and “violence” when serving the cause of the greatness of the motherland) but also in terms of forging a renewed national conscience - both in the North and the South – through war.

Conclusion

Part I has analyzed the main aspects of the discussion of the Southern Question – the subversion of negative stereotypes, the colonization through contact, and the nationalization through the experience of war – as they were discussed in the nationalist

¹⁵¹Enrico Corradini, “Lettere dalla Cirenaica. A quanti e’ utile l’occupazione di Tripoli”, *L’ Idea nazionale*, I, 30, 1911. Alberto Caroncini in the same issue of the magazine specified that it was important to maintain that the relationship between the Italian south and Libya was not the same as the relationship of the Italian south to the rest of Italy: simply the Italian South and Tripolitania had similar agronomic problems related to drought. Caroncini, “Mezzogiorno e Tripolitania”, *Idea nazionale*, I, 30, 1911.

magazines. The nationalist stance towards the South was aimed towards the *inclusion* rather than the exclusion of the Southerners from the national fabric. While the Liberals defined Italy in contrast and opposition to the South, and by a process of marginalization of the Southern populations, the nationalists re-defined Italy so as to include the Southerners and gave them an equal role to the Northerners in the future development of the nation. While the Liberals had used the marginalization of the South to render the North more “modern” and closer to the North European civilization, the nationalists “Europeanized” the South in order to elevate the entire country. The ultimate nationalist goal was not so much the elevation of the economic and social conditions of the South but a cultural shift that would bring about the transformation of the Southerners from an “Italic plebe” into part of the “Italian people”.

While attempting to come to terms with the Southern Question, the nationalists had to confront their own prejudice towards the South. The nationalist culture produced a complex and at times contradictory discourse, at first attempting to subvert existing categories of southernness by co-opting violence and corruption as acceptable forms of civilized behavior - with the caveat of the State being able to channel that behavior towards aims that were useful to the aggrandizement of the nation. Over the course of the period between the birth of *La voce* and the Libyan war the nationalist culture tried to come to terms with the Southern difference discussing the possibility of internal colonization, and favoring a “technical” approach to other approaches , such as racial mixing. The Libyan war determined the final shift by providing the nationalist with an event to pursue which would act as a catalyst for the process of national unification for *both* the North and the South.

Corradini's discourse of the "Europeization" of the South through the conquest of Libya represented the point of arrival of the Nationalist debate over the Southern Question and in fact the campaign for the intervention in First World War would not be seen as linked to the solution of the Southern Question as the Libyan campaign had been. The nationalists did not declare the Southern Question "solved" after the conquest of Libya, but were unanimous in the belief that the creation of an Italian colony in North Africa had produced a surge of patriotism and thus accomplished an important first step in the construction of a stronger and more broadly felt national identity. In this respect, their vision of the Libyan campaign was shared by most of the Liberal press.

The next chapter will discuss the nationalist discourse on emigration and colonization, which presented expansion and colonization as the defining feature of the Italian race. The nationalists, Corradini above all, proposed the model of the Ancient Roman soldier-settler, who conquered inferior civilizations and populated colonies of settlement. The rejection of the discourse of two separate races in the North and the South, allowed the nationalists to propose this discourse linking fertility and vitality of the race and Italian imperialism.

PART II: Emigration and Colonial Conquest

Chapter 3: Emigration and Demographic theories

The themes of emigration and colonialism have been the most closely scrutinized by the existing historiography on nationalism, because they featured prominently in the nationalist rhetoric.¹⁵² A large part of the historiography has interpreted the nationalist movement as the voice of various economic and political interests who were looking for a way to speed up the process of economic modernization.¹⁵³ This interpretation tends at times to downplay the importance of ideology, and to see the nationalistic discourse as a rhetorical veneer for industrial interests. Others have looked at the modernization argument from a more broad cultural perspective, insisting on the importance of the ideological contents of the imperialistic literature and on the cultural influences that contributed to the nationalist blend of authoritarianism and imperialism.¹⁵⁴ This line of

¹⁵² Corradini and his followers defined themselves from very early on as supporters of State-sponsored imperialistic conquest. Corradini was in favor of colonialism from the early days of *Il Regno*, and the Italian Nationalist Association adopted his theories and argument, as well as his rhetoric, between 1910 and 1911. Enrico Corradini, "Qualche altra parola", *Il Regno*, I, 3, 1903. See also Raffaele Molinelli, "Il nazionalismo italiano e l'impresa di Libia", *Rassegna Storica del Risorgimento*, LIII (II) (Apr-Jun 1966): 285-318.

¹⁵³ This is the key argument made by historians like Franco Gaeta, *Il nazionalismo Italiano*, cit.; Gioacchino Volpe, *Italia moderna*, (Firenze, 1973); Richard Webster, *L'imperialismo industriale italiano. Studi sul prefascismo* (Tornio: Einaudi, 1974); Massimo Salvadori, *Storia dell'età moderna e contemporanea* (Torino: Loescher, 1990). For an overview of the existing historiography see Saverio Battente, "Alle Origini dell'Imperialismo Coloniale Italiano da Crispi a Mussolini", in *Italian Politics and Society*, 57 (Spring 2003): 36-49. It is interesting to note that this economic interpretation of the nationalist stance on emigration and colonial expansion can be traced back to the polemic initiated by Gaetano Salvemini and Giuseppe Prezzolini on *La voce* during the campaign in favor of the invasion of Libya in 1911. See the next chapter for a more thorough discussion of the debate between the nationalists and the *vocianti* over the issue of Libya.

¹⁵⁴ See in particular Silvio Lanaro, *Nazione e lavoro: saggio sulla cultura borghese in Italia, 1870-1925* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1979); Emilio Gentile, *Il mito dello stato nuovo. Dall'antigiolittismo al fascismo* (Bari: Laterza, 1982); Giuseppe Are, *La scoperta dell'imperialismo: il dibattito nella cultura italiana del primo Novecento* (Roma: Lavoro, 1985). Within this line of interpretation there is a disagreement on whether the nationalists represented a break from the liberal tradition (Gentile), or whether the Italian liberal culture - because of the unique socio-economic condition of Italy at the time of Unification - possessed inherent antidemocratic and racial tendencies that were further developed by the nationalist and eventually by the Fascist ideology (Lanaro). See also Gentile, *La grande Italia*, cit.. Some historians have focused on the work of refinement of the Corradinian theory done by the jurist Alfredo Rocco, who incorporated the idea of "proletarian nation" into his complex ideology of modernization, laying the foundation for the

interpretation sees the nationalist imperialistic discourse as having a racial component that Italian intellectuals derived particularly from French sources. However, these historians do not analyze in detail the cultural origins of the racial colonial discourse of the Italian nationalists, or situate it within the larger context of their demographic discourse. My contribution to the historiography is to situate the nationalist demographic discourse in the European context, and to look more specifically at the construction of the Italian identity as ‘Roman’ and racial.

1. The ‘proletarian nation’

Emigration was one of the most remarkable features of Italian society. The numbers of Italians moving abroad during the period between Unification and World War One were staggering: the steady increase of the last two decades of the 19th century was followed by a surge in the period 1900-1915, peaking in 1906 with almost 800,000 departures, and in 1913 with well over 870,000 departures.¹⁵⁵

During the last decades of the 19th century the early *meridionalisti* – Villari, and Franchetti and Sonnino in particular- supported emigration because they believed that it constituted an “outlet” – *valvola di sfogo* – for the surplus in the Southern population.

corporative state. These studies have the benefit of delving deeper into the meaning of the discourse of modernization centred on the “nationalization of the private life”, but tend to focus on the juridical and economic aspects of modernization, rather than on the many cultural implications of the nationalist discourse. See in particular Saverio Battente, “Alle Origini dell’Imperialismo Coloniale Italiano”, Cit.

¹⁵⁵ From roughly the middle of the nineteenth century to the 1890s the majority of emigrants came from Northern Italy, while in the following period the migrants came mostly from the South. During the 1890-1914 period most of the migrants from the Italian Southern regions went to North America. The predominantly came from Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Basilicata, Calabria and Sicily. In Northern Italy the emigrants came mainly from Venetia and small, economically depressed areas in the alpine and north-central regions. These migrants mainly headed towards Northern Europe (France, Belgium Germany, Switzerland) and South America. The statistics are from Zeffiro Ciuffoletti, Murizio Degl’Innocenti, *L’emigrazione nella storia d’ Italia (1868-1975)* (Firenze Vallecchi 1978).

Emigration served the purpose of maintaining a more peaceful society by averting the danger of revolutionary uprisings. In addition it brought economic benefits: better contracts between landowners and workers and higher salaries forced the landowners to invest in the improvement of their lands and increase their productivity. Thus, the *meridionalisti* argued, emigration had the double benefit of bringing social stability and the capitalistic transformation of the Italian agriculture.¹⁵⁶

At the same time, however, emigration was depicted in a negative light by literature that focused on the conditions of emigrants – the gruesome trip, the exploitation upon arrival, the lack of support from the Italian consular authorities.¹⁵⁷ This type of literature, by contributing to create a negative image of emigration, helped strengthen the “Africanist” current. Under the Depretis government (1881-87) important sectors of the Italian political and cultural elites, influential economic interests –such as the shipping and shipbuilding industries- as well as a sizeable portion of the public opinion were in favor of establishing an Italian colony in Ethiopia. However, in 1887 the project was temporarily halted after Italy suffered a military defeat in Dogali from the forces of Ras Alula Engida – then governor of the Ethiopian Emperor Yohannes IV.

In the same year, the government passed to Francesco Crispi, arguably the most openly expansionist of the Italian prime ministers of the Liberal period.¹⁵⁸ Crispi opposed the emigration of Italian workers abroad and hoped to divert the flux towards Italian

¹⁵⁶ See chapter 1 for a discussion of the Italian *meridionalisti* writers, their thought and influence. Ciuffoletti, *L' emigrazione*, cit., 127-132.

¹⁵⁷ The sentimental literature of novelists such as Edmondo De Amicis, catered to the Italian middle and upper- class reading public which received this essentially anti-emigration literature with a mixture of pity and offended national pride. Ciuffoletti, *L' emigrazione*, cit., 75. One example of this is De Amicis' novel *Sull' Oceano*, (1889) which followed the emigrants' trip from Genoa to Montevideo, and then along the Rio de la Plata to Buenos Aires.

¹⁵⁸ Christopher Duggan, *Francesco Crispi, 1818–1901: From Nation to Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) and *Ibid., The force of destiny: a history of Italy since 1796*, cit.

colonies. He opposed the argument made by the *meridionalisti* according to which emigration was an “outlet”, and instead framed emigration in terms of loss of Italian identity. Crispi saw the emigrants living abroad –whether on a seasonal or a more permanent basis- as part of the nation, and wanted to redirect emigration towards an Italian colony in Ethiopia. Crispi intended to use the African colonial enterprise both as a distraction from internal problems, and to as a way to combat the spreading of socialism among the Italian peasants by offering them the option to migrate to an Italian colony.

Crispi’s policy of African expansion culminated in the defeat of Adwa (1896), in which the forces of the Ethiopian emperor Menelik overwhelmed the Italian forces led by General Oreste Baratieri, causing 7,000 Italian casualties.¹⁵⁹ The military defeat abruptly ended the Italian expansionistic adventure in Africa. Most of the groups which had supported his policy in Africa withdrew their support and Crispi’s own resignation as Prime Minister and eventual exit from the political scene seemed to mark the end of Italian expansionism in Africa.

The new century opened with Luigi Einaudi’s *Un Principe mercante*– A Merchant Prince.¹⁶⁰ Einaudi and the young economists who rallied around the liberal magazine *La riforma sociale* proposed the theory of “pacific economic expansion” in South America, which was the alternative to Crispi’s “Africanist” stance. *Un Principe mercante* followed the commercial success of the Italian entrepreneur Enrico Dell’Acqua, who owned a textile industry and sold his products primarily to Italian emigrants in Argentina and Brazil. Einaudi promoted at the same time the image of a new Italian bourgeoisie - risk-taking and entrepreneurial, and the image of Italian emigrants who

¹⁵⁹ The cultural impact of the Defeat of Adwa is discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁶⁰ Luigi Einaudi, *Un Principe mercante: studio sulla espansione coloniale italiana* (Torino: Edizioni Bocca, 1900).

demonstrated their resourcefulness by escaping poverty. The crucial point of Einaudi's work was that the peaceful nature of the Italian economic penetration in Argentina was possible because the Italian emigrants maintained their sense of identity and chose to purchase products of Italian industries, thus promoting the development of the national economy. The permanence in the emigrants of a sense of identification with their motherland rendered the intervention of the Italian government and the formal establishment of a colony superfluous. At the same time, Einaudi argued, it was paramount to protect the identity of the emigrants from assimilation into the cultures of their countries of arrival through the promotion of ties between emigrants and motherland – for instance through the institution of schools, periodicals and cultural institutes.¹⁶¹

Enrico Corradini was the fiercest opponent of the theory of “peaceful penetration”. He first elaborated his theories on *Il Regno*, and further developed them his trip to South America in 1908. Corradini rejected the Einaudian approach proposing in its stead the theory of the “proletarian nation”:

“I call proletarian those nations that, like Italy, are in a state of dependence
[...] Emigration is the dispersion of our people throughout the world, on foreign
soil, among foreign peoples. Do not judge just based on the wealth of a few
individuals. [...] Do judge nationally and agree with me that emigration is, [...]

¹⁶¹ According to Giuseppe Are, author of an influential study on the subject, *La scoperta dell'imperialismo*, cit., the idea of creating a greater Italy in South America was an illusion, bound to be crushed by the reality of the new world order, characterized by the crisis of liberalism and the emergence of imperialism. Are argued that even England, the cradle of liberalism, was beginning to adopt protectionist policies, both at home and throughout its empire: “Instead of the old purely economic conception of the empire, a new imperialism was introduced, which identified itself essentially in territorial expansion and military conquest”. Are, cit, 58.

an anti-imperialism of servitude”.¹⁶²

Corradini argued that emigration was the opposite of imperialism. The Italians who lived abroad were not successful businessmen but they were an impoverished and exploited workforce, which, contrary to Einaudi’s argument, lost their Italian identity and “dispersed” among foreign peoples.

The formula became very well known. The most famous example of the popularity of the expression “Proletarian nation” is probably the oration *La grande Proletaria s’e’ mossa* that the poet Giovanni Pascoli pronounced in Barga in 1911 in occasion of the Libyan war.¹⁶³ Pascoli particularly lamented the loss of Italian identity – *italianita’*, which derived from the humble nature of the jobs the Italian emigrants were forced to do:

“Italy used to send its workers to do everything that is difficult and humble, and therefore most difficult: build roads into inaccessible places, build cities where the land was vast and virgin, plant crops where there was desert, to shine shoes in the streets corners. [...] [the emigrants] were forced to change land , to renegade their nation, to no longer be Italian.”¹⁶⁴

But what was “*italianita’*”? To Corradini being Italian meant, first and foremost, being “Roman”. In an initial passage of his novel *La patria lontana* (1911) the heroic protagonist who is “fiercely Italian” is introduced saying that classic “*Romanita’*” was “blood of his blood and flesh of his flesh, an expression of the most vigorous collective

¹⁶² Corradini expressed these views in several articles and speeches throughout his career. For instance in the speech “La nazioni proletarie e il nazionalismo” read in various Italian towns (Naples, Florence and Venice among others) available in Corradini, *Scritti e discorsi 1901-1914*, edited by Lucia Strappini , (Torino: Piccola biblioteca Einaudi, 1980).

¹⁶³ The speech was first published in *La Tribuna*. Pascoli, “La grande proletaria s’e’ mossa” *La Tribuna* 27 Nov 1911.

¹⁶⁴ Pascoli, “La grande proletaria s’e’ mossa”, cit.

will of grandiosity, unity and power”.¹⁶⁵ In the Corradinian rhetoric being Roman is seemingly a mix of blood and cultural traits consisting in “the will to grandiosity, unity and power”. However, in another essay the meaning of classic *Romanita*’ was clearly outlined as “natural in us italics [who have been] profoundly Hellenized at first then Romanized [...] is a form of imperialism, it is the virtue of strength until victory is accomplished, and it is called beauty”.¹⁶⁶ Being Italian was based on cultural and behavioral traits, which Corradini defined as “a form of imperialism”. The association of “Romanita” and “imperialism” was one of the dominant features of the nationalist rhetoric.

There are many studies analyzing the “cult” or the “myth” of Rome and *Romanita*’ under the Fascist Regime. Notably, Emilio Gentile has argued that, along with the myth of the Duce, the myth of Rome “was the most pervasive in the Fascist symbolical universe”.¹⁶⁷ Corradini, however, did not use the “*romanita*” to create a cult of the nation -as Mussolini did during the Fascist Regime, but rather to construct the Italian identity in terms of racial continuity with an imagined past, and by attaching qualities that he viewed as quintessentially “Roman”.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Enrico Corradini, *La patria lontana* (Milano: Treves, 1911), 24.

¹⁶⁶ Enrico Corradini, *Il nazionalismo italiano* (Milano: Treves, 1914), 18-19.

¹⁶⁷ Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 77.

¹⁶⁸ Other analyses of the ideal of the *Romanita*’ in the Fascist ideology are R. Visser, “Fascist Doctrine and the Cult of the *Romanità*,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 27.1 (1992): 5–22; L. Quartermaine, “‘Slouching towards Rome’: Mussolini’s imperial vision,” in *Urban Society in Roman Italy* edited by T. Cornell and K. Lomas (London, 1995), 203–15; M. Stone, “A flexible Rome: Fascism and the cult of *romanità*,” in *Roman Presences: Receptions of Rome in European Culture, 1789–1945*, edited by C. Edwards (Cambridge and New York, 1999), 205–20; M. Chiapparo, “Le mythe de la Terza Roma ou l’immense théâtre de la Rome fasciste,” in *Présence de l’Antiquité grecque et romaine au XXe siècle*, edited by R. Poignault (Tours, 2002), 399–420; K. Fleming, “The Use and Abuse of Antiquity. The Politics and Morality of Appropriation,” in *Classics and the Uses of Reception*, edited by C. Martindale and R. Thomas (Oxford, Malden, and Carlton, 2006), 127–37; Jan Nelis, *Constructing Fascist Identity: Benito Mussolini and the Myth of Romanità Classical World*, 100 (4) (Summer 2007): 391-415; L. Braccisi,

Corradini's discourse presented emigration as nothing short of a national disaster: from both an economic and cultural point of view. The Italian emigrants provided cheap labour to other countries, while the fatherland received no commercial benefits –the countries of arrival of the Italian emigrants purchased far more foreign than Italian products. Secondly the experience of emigration eventually resulted in the loss of national identity and cultural assimilation of the Italians into other national communities.¹⁶⁹

Corradini's argument became the point of reference for many nationalist intellectuals during the first decade of the twentieth century and, after the establishment of the Italian Nationalist Association in 1910, it became the official stance of the nationalist movement. In 1904 Prezzolini lamented that the Italians, who could boast “an expansionist tradition dating back to the Ancient Romans”, were condemned – as emigrants- to being assimilated: “Within a couple of generations the Italian workers in New York become Yankees”.¹⁷⁰ The economist Filippo Carli in his speech at the First Nationalist congress addressed the double damage that emigration caused to the Italian nation:

“Now our emigrants are pulverized within their countries of arrival, so that the individual [...]loses its *ethnic* characteristics and with them the desire to purchase

L'antichità aggredata: Memoria del passato e poesia del nazionalismo (Rome, 1989); and P. Bondanella, *The Eternal City: Roman Images in the Modern World* (Chapel Hill and London, 1987).

¹⁶⁹ This argument was repeated in various speeches, which were later published in *Discorsi Politici*, (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1923) and was also the subject of Corradini's speech at the First Congress of the Italian Nationalist Association of 1910 entitled “Classi proletarie: socialismo, nazioni proletarie: nazionalismo” in *Il nazionalismo italiano. Atti del congresso di Firenze* (Firenze: Quattrini, 1911)

¹⁷⁰ Prezzolini “Le cosiddette spese improduttive”, *Il Regno*, I, 39, 1904.

products from his homeland . Hence an economic *and* cultural damage”.¹⁷¹

The idea that the emigrants could “lose” their “ethnic characteristics” shows that the nationalists, intended race in cultural terms. Circumstances could affect a person’s ethnic identity, because it was based on behavior, specifically, “imperialistic” behavior. That is why the humble position occupied by the Italian emigrants in the country of arrival negated their identity as Italians.

In place of emigration, the nationalists proposed to create a colony in Africa. The State alone had the power to transform, through an imperialistic policy , the emigrants from “proletarians” into “an army” and eventually into small landowners, and thus recuperate and boost their national- and racial- identity.¹⁷²

The nationalist discourse on emigration proved influential. In 1911 a group of nationalists led by Luigi Federzoni participated to the second Congresso degli Italiani all’ Estero – Congress of the Italians living abroad. The nationalist delegation won an important victory, as was proudly reported in an editorial of the *Idea Nazionale*:

“The congress has represented the stance of all the dispersed *italianita*’ across the lands and seas but joined in great unity of sentiments, of will and of aspirations directed towards a very solicitous care of *the future destiny of the race in the world*, instead of the single individuals in this or that country of arrival”. The Congress had in fact officially passed a motion proposed by Federzoni, endorsing the initiative of occupying Libya.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Filippo Carli, “La politica economica della Grande Italia” *Atti del congresso di Firenze*, cit.174.

¹⁷² Prezzolini “Le cosiddette spese improduttive”, cit.

¹⁷³ The motion was presented in the following passage: “The Congress of Italians living Abroad has simply made its own the motion of Tripoli approved by the Central Committee of the Italian Nationalist Association”. “Una grande e vittoriosa affermazione nazionalista”, *L’ Idea Nazionale*, I, 17, 1911.

La voce gave a very critical account of the events.¹⁷⁴ Liberal agronomist Stefano Jacini lamented that the Congress would have been the right place for a reasonable and grounded discussion on emigration, but for the presence of the nationalists that had assumed the “attitude of leaders”. He then addressed the nationalists sarcastically:

“Oh citizens of the *Great Italy*, apostles of the *Idea Nazionale* [...] Oh irresponsible! Your bellicose posture costs you nothing. [...] Why the devil did you come here, and why did someone have the infelicitous idea of inviting you?”

Jacini argued that the small delegation of emigrants had voted for Federzoni’s motion on Libya without understanding its implications, and simply buying into the nationalist rhetoric. Jacini lamented that the motion had placed the Italian government – who had sponsored the Congress- in an embarrassing situation because it had declared the intention of occupying lands in a country that was at peace with Italy. The nationalist victory was indeed significant, since, when Italy did declare war on Turkey a mere four months after the Congress, the nationalists could claim that their propagandistic efforts had been rewarded.¹⁷⁵

In the same issue of the *Idea Nazionale*, Maurizio Maraviglia reported on one of the thorniest issues discussed at the Congress, namely the question of whether the Italian state should allow the emigrants to have double citizenship. At the Congress the nationalists pointed out that double citizenship would “accelerates the *ethnic* absorption of the emigrants into the other countries”, and that the “spiritual considerations” should come before the economic interests of individuals. Maraviglia concluded remarking:

“Were our compatriots residing abroad convinced of the goodness and importance

¹⁷⁴ Stefano Jacini, “Il secondo congresso delgi italiani all estero”, *La voce*, III, 26, 1911.

¹⁷⁵ “L’ Ora di agire per l’ Italia e’ giunta”, *L’ Idea Nazionale*, I, 28, 1911.

of these reasons? We don't know. But it is certain that the opposite argument, inspired to the safeguard of their personal interests did not prevail. And that was a nationalist victory".¹⁷⁶

In the nationalist discourse, the act of colonization itself -in its double aspect of war and settlement- was the catalyst to reinforce the identity of the Italian population. In racial terms colonization was the opposite of emigration; if the Italians lost their ethnic characteristics by becoming emigrants, by being soldiers and settlers they stayed true to their identity as descendents of the Ancient Romans. Pascoli's speech hailed the outcome of colonization in just such terms:

"There [in the Colonies] our workers will be [...] farmers on the fatherland's soil and instead of denying the name of the fatherland they will open roads, cultivate lands, divert waters, build homes and ports always seeing the *tricolore* [Italian flag] by our sea. [...]They will be called Rumi, which is a pledge and certain promise. YES! Romans."¹⁷⁷

To the Liberal Einaudian model of a "merchant prince", who took advantage of the Italian identity of the emigrants to sell them his products, the nationalists opposed a mode of expansion inspired to the Ancient Roman "soldier/settler". Where the Liberal model was based on a combination of market and cultural forces, the nationalist model of modernization expected the absolute subordination of the individual to the state during

¹⁷⁶ Maraviglia " Il problema della cittadinanza", Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Pascoli, "La grande proletaria s' e' mossa", *La Tribuna*, cit..Pascoli correctly interpreted the term "Rumi" to mean "Roman". However the term was used in the Ottoman Empire to indicate different religious or political identities: "Rumi" could mean "Turk" but also "Greek Orthodox", as they both had a claim (one political, the other cultural) as the successors of the Eastern Roman Empire. For an interesting discussion of the various meaning of the term see Giancarlo Casale "The Ethnic Composition of Ottoman Ship Crews and the 'Rumi Challenge' to Portuguese Identity" *Medieval Encounters*, 13 (2007): 122-144.

war and the employment of a “millenarian” ability to farm.¹⁷⁸ The nationalists constructed their model of “soldier-settler” on the vague image of the Ancient Roman colonizers, whose ability to bring agricultural techniques to the Roman colonies in Northern Africa was overly emphasized by the nationalist propaganda – as decades later it would be by the Fascist.

The nationalist rhetoric was replete with references to the ability of the Italians to fight and to farm. During a visit to Tunisi Corradini remarked on the fact that the Italian emigrants were “magnificent colonial champions”. Italy possessed

“...more than any other nation[...] men hardened to all forms of work and combat [...] the true representatives of the race of dominators, which had grandiose designs. These [the emigrants] are the men who would enable Italy to keep and exploit its colonies if they [the emigrants] were put to use”.¹⁷⁹

The emigrants, to Corradini, represented the true heirs of the “race of dominators”, the Romans, and the only means through which Italy would be able to conquer and maintain its colonial possessions. For Corradini—as for Alfredo Orio, the hero of Corradini's novel *La Guerra lontana* (1912)—“nations don't acquire, they conquer” their prosperity, their wealth, their greatness, their glory.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ In ancient Roman times the “*limitani*” were the soldiers given the task of defending the frontier of the newly conquered territories as well as farm the lands allotted to them. For an interesting discussion of the hiatus between the colonial discourse on the soldiers-settlers and the socio-economic realities of the Roman colonies in North Africa see Massimiliano Munzi, *La decolonizzazione del passato : archeologia e politica in Libia dall'amministrazione alleata al regno di Idris* (Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2004).

¹⁷⁹ Corradini, “Le miniere, la ricchezza, la civiltà” *L'idea nazionale*, I, 21, 1911.

¹⁸⁰ Tullio Pagano, “From Diaspora to Empire”, *MLN*, 119 (1) (January 2004): 67-83.

The young nationalist writer Gualtiero Castellini echoed Corradini in his propaganda for the conquest of Libya:

“Four were the elements the Romans had to Romanize the world: their blood, water, iron and stone. The stone to build, the iron to fight and to plow the soil, the blood to fight and reproduce, the water to fertilize [...] a Latin nation is coming to claim the heritage of its ancient mother[Rome]: Italy”.¹⁸¹

Once the war broke out the military virtues of the Italian soldiers were frequently praised by the nationalist press:

“Thank god the vigor, physical courage, and the sentiment of war”, one nationalist commentator wrote in September 1911 “are not inferior in our race compared to the most civil races that surround us”.¹⁸²

The recurring theme of the racial predisposition of Italians towards agricultural labor and its connection to the Roman past was one of the features of the nationalist propaganda during the Libyan campaign. In his articles and speeches, Corradini argued that the Italian race had the ability to form colonies based on intensive agricultural exploitation, absolving the double function of producing agricultural goods for national consumption and for export.¹⁸³ In April 1911, the poet and novelist Federico De Maria held a conference in Rome in which he exalted the Italian emigrants, hoping that they would soon be sent to Libya to continue the “Roman greatness”, concluding that “the

¹⁸¹ Gualtiero Castellini, *Tunisi e Tripoli* (Torino: Bocca, 1911), 108.

¹⁸² P.S. “Gli italiani mancano di spirito guerresco?” *L' Idea Nazionale*, I, 29, 1911.

¹⁸³ Corradini's writings on Libya were published as *L' ora di Tripoli* (Milano: Treves, 1911) and *Sopra le vie del nuovo impero : dall'emigrazione di Tunisi alla guerra nell'Egeo* (Milano: Treves, 1912) See also the next chapter.

whole country should follow this vanguard armed with hoes”.¹⁸⁴ On the outbreak of the war with Libya in September, an editorial on the *Idea Nazionale* commented:

“A wonderful prey awaits [us]: two vast regions [Tripolitania and Cirenaica] that the hard labor of this strong italic people, expert more than any other because of its millenary use of the hoe, will know how to render fertile and reclaim from the desert once more”.¹⁸⁵

The German sociologist, syndacalists and nationalist sympathizer Robert Michels noted the indissoluble link between growing population and Italian imperialism:

“Some have chosen to label Italian expansionism as the ‘imperialism of the paupers’ – ‘*imperialismo della povera gente*’. This is a thesis on which many have agreed, nationalists such as Corradini (the real father of the expression), syndacalists such as Arturo Labriola, poets such as Giovanni Pascoli, and scientists such as Alessandro Chiappelli[...] The fact is that *Italian imperialism aims primarily at providing for its excess population* -excess that is essentially proletarian- *a more dignified way of life for itself and for the nation* to which it belongs. And that [argument] is what they [the Italian imperialists] use as justification before History and Law”.¹⁸⁶[Italics mine]

¹⁸⁴ Federico De Maria, “L’Italia e la Tripolitania”, *L’ Idea Nazionale*, I, 9, 1911.

¹⁸⁵ Editorial, “La Guerra” *L’ Idea nazionale* , I, 32, 1911.

¹⁸⁶ Robert Michels, *L’ imperialismo italiano : studi politico-demografici* (Milano: Societa editrice libraria, 1914), 92-93 , quoted in Lanaro, cit., 79. Michels’ thesis of an essentially demographic motivation for Italian imperialism reflected not only the system of beliefs held by Corradini and his followers, but by many. Among which politicians of the caliber of Francesco Crispi and Giovanni Giolitti – and eventually the demographic argument would become part of Mussolini’s ideological arsenal. Nicola Labanca has noted how big the discrepancy was between rhetoric and reality when it came to the demographic argument: the Italian emigration towards the Italian colonial empire (including Libya and later on Ethiopia) always remained marginal when compared to the emigration towards the Americas and Australia. Nicola Labanca “L’imperialismo coloniale dell’ultima delle grandi potenze. Una rassegna di studi e problemi”, in *Africa e Mediterraneo*, 2 (1996): 4-17.

Italian imperialism developed, according to Michels, primarily as an outlet for the excess population. As we have seen emigration caused the loss of *Italianita'*, which affected the dignity of the entire nation –as well as that of the individuals. Thus the excess population, which was the primary reason for emigration, became, according to Michels, the main argument for colonial expansion. A key point of the Corradinian argument was in fact that the government should pilot the transition from “proletarian” nation into “Roman” colonial power by employing the country’s biggest asset: its burgeoning population. However, as we will see, the nationalists also used their high fertility rate as a proof of the quality of the Italian race.

2. Nineteenth and twentieth century demographic theories

In the nationalist rhetoric the issue of population was paramount and was largely influenced by the development of demographic and biological sciences, which addressed the issue of population from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective. In the early 20th century in particular Pronatalism was a well respected stance held by many Italian sociologists, geographers, and economists, and was an essential component of the cultural climate in which the nationalist ideas would develop.¹⁸⁷

The term “Pronatalism” indicates a the political and cultural movement aimed at maintaining a steady rate of increase in the population through various means, including, but not limited to, financial incentives to large families, campaigns against birth-control

¹⁸⁷ Silvio Lanaro in his seminal work *Nazione e lavoro*, cit. argued that the nationalistic stance of writers such as Corradini was hegemonic in Italy during the post-unitarian Liberal era (1870-1924). Italian nationalism was not only made of minor and marginal writers, but rather was part of a larger cultural milieu that drifted towards imperialism and authoritarianism. The “seduction of imperialism” affected many Italian thinkers having different -and often opposite – political views. The common desire for a rapid and complete modernization and for an increase in the international standing of Italy led syndacalists to be in favor of colonialism alongside liberal economists like Luigi Einaudi. See *Nazione e lavoro*, cit., 78 and following.

education, and legislation against abortion. In 1924, the Italian demographer Filippo Virgili observed:

“The 18th century closed with the terrible cry of alarm raised by Robert Malthus against the dangers of excess population; the 19th century ended among the preoccupations of the demographers for the lowering of the birth rates and the imprecations of the moralists against the Malthusian practices, the twentieth century opened with the study of viriculture and the hypothesis of eugenics”.¹⁸⁸

The Anglican pastor and economist Thomas Robert Malthus with his *Essay on the principle of population* (1798) posed the question of the relationship between resources and population. He famously argued that the population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio, while resources increase only in an arithmetical ratio.¹⁸⁹ Malthus posed the question of which classes reproduced most and which individuals “deserved” to reproduce: namely he addressed the issue of the quality - along the question of quantity- of the population. He argued that the majority of population growth was due to the “irresponsible” reproductive habits of the lower classes, which led to food shortages and economic crises. The government should not intervene during the cyclical crises that led to a shrinking of the population –especially among the poorer sections of society- because it was a natural way of the system to rid itself of its excess population.¹⁹⁰

After the middle of the 19th century the birth rate of countries such as France and the UK began to show signs of decline and observers of this development split between

¹⁸⁸ F. Virgili, *Il problema della popolazione* (Milano: Vallardi, 1924), 593. Quoted in Mantovani, cit., 66.

¹⁸⁹ See also T. isenburg , “Il dibattito su Malthus e sulla popolazione nell’ Italia di fine ‘800”, *Studi Storici* 3 (1977): 41-67; C Pogliano , “L’ enigma demologico. Natalita’ , popolazione , socialismo”, *Schema*, 1 (1985).

¹⁹⁰ This Malthusian approach was adopted for instance by the British Government during the Irish Famine. See for instance Edward G. Lengel, *The Irish through British eyes: perceptions of Ireland in the Famine era* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002).

“Neo-Malthusians” and “Populationists”. The first considered the decline in the birth rate as a characteristic of evolved societies, and in fact campaigned in favor of the spreading of birth control education to the lower classes. Conversely, the “Populationists” rejected the Malthusian caveat against unchecked population growth, and believed it to be dangerous: the increased competition among European powers over colonial possessions convinced them that a low birth rate could translate into a military handicap, and that, in the long term, a low birth rate could also lessen the ability to populate and control the vast European colonial empires overseas. Within a few decades the populationist argument equating demographic strength with international prominence became increasingly prevalent over the Neo-Malthusian camp, at first in France, and gradually in other countries as well.¹⁹¹

It may seem strange that in a country characterized by an explosive demography and emigration such as early-nineteenth-century Italy there should be cries of alarm over depopulation. Yet such fear was exactly what prompted Giorgio Mortara, professor of Statistics, Demographics and Economics in various universities, and nationalist sympathizer, to write a book entitled *The Nightmare of Depopulation in Italy* in 1912 – which was the text of a lecture he gave at the University of Messina in 1911. Mortara

¹⁹¹Yves Charbit, *Du malthusianisme au populationnisme: les économistes français et la population, 1840-1870* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1981). Elisa Camiscioli, “Producing Citizens, Reproducing the 'French Race'”, *Gender and History* 13 (3) (2001): 594. Joshua H Cole, *The Power of Large numbers: Population, Politics and Gender in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cornell university Press, Ithaca, 2000); Carl Ipsen, *Dictating Demography: The Power of Population in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge university Press, Cambridge, 1997); William H Schneider, *Quality and Quantity : The Quest for biological Regeneration in Twentieth Century France* (Cambridge university Press: Cambridge, 1990) ; Richard a Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration : Eugenetics and the Declining Birthrate in Twentieth –Century Britain* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1990); Elizabeth Domansky , “Militarization and Reproduction in World War One Germany” , in *Society , Culture and the state in Germany, 1870-1930*, edited by Geoff Eley (University of Michigan Press: Ann arbor, 1996), 427-63.

lamented that the reduction of fertility preannounced “the stagnation of all the manifestation of national vitality”¹⁹². After the peak of births in 1887, the birth rate began to decline in Italy -although the decline was minimal compared to the UK and France. In parallel to this development Italy saw the spreading of literature discussing birth –control, and more in general, the means of curbing reproduction, which at the time were collectively labeled as neo-Malthusian methods.¹⁹³

In Italy, the discussion on Neo-Malthusianism began towards the end of the 19th century and intensified during the Giolittian period.¹⁹⁴ Between 1910 and 1913 three events marked the peak of the debate on Neo-Malthusianism. The first was the Congress on the Sexual Question organized, among others, by Giuseppe Prezzolini in 1910. The second was the acquittal of Secondo Giorni, who had been on trial for having written a book entitled *The art of not making children: the practice of Neo-Malthusianism* (1911).¹⁹⁵ And the third was the birth of the first Italian magazine of sexual education in Turin (1913) called *Sexual Education: review of Neo-Malthusianism and Eugenetics – L’educazione sessuale: rivista di neomalthusianismo e di eugenica*. The Neo-Malthusians - intellectuals like Napoleone Colajanni, Francesco Nitti and Achille Loria- were far outnumbered by the pronatalists, who were primarily nationalists, like Gini and Mortara, and revolutionary syndacalists like Alfredo Polledro and Alfonso De Pietri- Tonelli.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Giorgio Mortara, *L’ incubo dello spopolamento in Italia* (Messina, 1912).

¹⁹³ See, Silvio Lanaro, cit., chapter 1.

¹⁹⁴ See Robert Michels, *L’ imperialismo italiano. Studi politico-demografici*, cit., 68-69.

¹⁹⁵ Secondo Giorni, *L’ arte di non far figli: Neo-malthusianismo pratico* (Firenze : Tip. Cooperativa, 1911).

¹⁹⁶ By this time (1910-1913) The nationalists and the revolutionary syndacalists had already found several points of commonality, including the fact that both groups supported the Libyan war. Silvio Lanaro argued that for the neo-Malthusians the strength of a country resided in the intelligence of its leaders, in the entrepreneurial spirit of its financial aristocracies, in the average productivity level of its economic system, for the populationists in the “spiritual” peculiarity of its masses , in the physical dimensions of its industry , and in the ideological homogeneity of its people. Lanaro, *Nazione e lavoro*, cit., 57, n 89.

The Congress for the Sexual Question (1910) – organized by Prezzolini, the renowned Turinese pathologist Pio Foa’, and the leader of the Female Union Ersilia Majno- was an unprecedented event in Italy and hosted the most important discussion of the decade on Neo-Malthusianism in Italy.¹⁹⁷ During the Congress, the issue of birth was discussed in terms of “degeneration” on both sides of the fence of Neo-Malthusianism. The objectors argued that birth control violated the laws of nature and would lead to the extinction of the race. The advocates of contraception, such as Prezzolini, said that birth control would reduce population, but improve the overall “quality” of the individuals, who would otherwise be brought up in poverty and be prone to “hereditary degenerative diseases” such as cretinism, blindness, syphilis, and tuberculosis.¹⁹⁸ Interestingly, after a strenuous defense of birth control, Prezzolini ended up changing his mind and approving a joint statement with historian Gaetano Salvemini and psychiatrist Roberto Assagioli, in which it was deemed “dangerous” to have a systematic propaganda for birth control “under the current intellectual and moral conditions of our country”. The defeat of birth control at the Congress was motivated by the fear for the lack of “moral” restraint particularly on the part of the lower classes, if the function of reproduction was disassociated from sexual activity, but it also expressed the overall weakness of the neomalthusian front in Italy.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Prezzolini dedicated an entire issue of his magazine to reporting the debates and the papers presented at the Congress. See “Il Convegno sulla Questione Sessuale”, *La voce*, II, 49, 1910. The congress addressed three fundamental issues: sexual education, birth control and the celibacy of the clergy.

¹⁹⁸ Prezzolini had already expressed those ideas in “La questione del Neo-Malthusianesimo”, *La Voce*, II, 36, 1910.

¹⁹⁹ The nationalist criminologist Scipio Sighele wrote about the congress on *Il Marzocco* on November 20th 1910 arguing that a “true” woman would not aspire to equality with man because women found their gratification in motherhood, thus emancipation was a way to forced masculinization. See also *Eva Moderna*, (Milano: F.lli Treves, 1910), 45-57.

Among growing fears of “depopulation”, “degeneration” theory came to the fore in many European countries, as observers expressed increasing concerns over high infant mortality rates, venereal and mental diseases, criminality and alcoholism. In 1857 the French physician Benedict Morel defined “degeneration” as a “morbid deviation from an original type”. He argued that even if, at the outset, degeneration was “slight”, it contained “transmissible elements of such nature that anyone bearing in him the germs becomes more and more incapable of fulfilling his functions in the world; and mental progress, already checked in his own person, finds itself menaced also in his descendants”.²⁰⁰ In other words, degeneration was the contrary of the Darwinian concept of evolution. The affected individuals became increasingly incapable to function and transmitted their handicap to their descendents.²⁰¹ After the Franco-Prussian war, the theory of degeneration gained prominence especially in France, spurring a growing body of medical studies on crime, prostitution, and insanity toward the end of the century, and deeply influencing the emerging sciences of psychiatry, anthropology, and criminology.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Benedict Morel, *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine et des causes qui produisent ces variétés maladives* (Paris, 1857), 863, quoted in English in Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (New York: Appleton, 1895), 16.

²⁰¹ Daniel Pick has shown how ideas of medical decline — or degeneration — were deeply intertwined with the political and scientific developments of this period, becoming the central focus of numerous social and biological investigations. Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: a European Disorder.c.1848-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1993).

²⁰² For estimating the influence of the theory of degeneration, it is sufficient to look at Cesare Lombroso's theory of “atavism”. Lombroso postulated the existence of an unevolved ‘criminal type’, a biological anachronism, which was detectable through unmistakable morphological and physiognomic signs. Another famous theorist of degeneration was the Hungarian physician and journalist Max Nordau, who lamented increasing rates of hysteria and mental disorder in his widely read and controversial 1892 book *Degeneration*. For Nordau and numerous contemporaries, nineteenth-century technologies had exerted a deleterious effect on the mind and body, leading to a fatigue-induced hysteria, which was then passed on through the generations. Anthropologists and biologists applied degeneration theory to non-white ‘races’, viewing entire peoples as degenerate, or singling out individuals who had decayed from the true properties of their racial type through exposure to foreign cultures and climates.

The scientific debate over the causes and symptoms of degeneration spurred a renewal of the discussion of the quality of the population based on new scientific findings. The British anthropologist Francis Galton is often credited for having coined the term “eugenics” in his 1883 book *Inquires into human faculty and its development*.²⁰³ Eugenics was a new branch of genetics studying the transmission of hereditary characteristics to improve the quality of human races. The interest for eugenics peaked in the early decades of the 20th century in many western countries, including Italy. Even though the word “eugenics” was not used in Italy until 1912, the scientific debate centered on the means to improve the quality of the offspring began much earlier.

The official birth of eugenics in Italy is marked by the participation of an Italian delegation to the International Congress of Eugenics, held in London in July 1912. The Italian delegation was composed by many well-known social scientists, who had adopted the Positivist method and philosophy²⁰⁴: anthropologists Giuseppe Sergi and Alfredo Niceforo, psychiatrist Enrico Morselli, economist Achille Loria, and sociologist Robert Michels - only to name some of the most prominent participants.²⁰⁵ Among them, Giuseppe Sergi in particular was one of the first and most enthusiastic eugenicists, as well as being one of the founders of the Italian Committee of Eugenicist Studies in 1913. Sergi’s work was characterized by a concern for degeneration and the ways to prevent

²⁰³ Galton was Charles Darwin’s half-cousin and a firm believer in evolutionary theory. His work was also deeply influenced by British biologist William Bateson, who coined the term “genetics” in 1905.

²⁰⁴ By “Positivism” I intend the complex of epistemological principles developed in the second half of the 19th century as the bases for the emerging social sciences, according to which social sciences should apply the methods of natural sciences to study human behavior.

²⁰⁵ On the birth and development of Italian eugenics see Girogio Israel, Pietro Nastasi, *Scienza e razza nell’ Italia fascista* (Bologna: Il mulino, 1998); Claudia Mantovani, *Rigenerare la società. L’eugenetica in Italia dalle origini ottocentesche agli anni Trenta* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2004); Claudio Pogliano, *L’ossessione della razza. Antropologia e genetica nel XX secolo* (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2005); Francesco Cassata, *Molti sani e forti. L’eugenetica in Italia* (Bollati Boringhieri: Torino, 2006).

it.²⁰⁶ The list of degenerations included the mental illness, suicide, criminality, and prostitution. However, Sergi also singled out many other degenerate “types” such as beggars, and various social “parasites”. He divided the “degenerates” between curable and incurable: for the curable he indicated education and assistance, for the others he proposed “artificial selection”. Since he feared above all the hereditary transmission of the worst cases of degeneration, he suggested isolation, deportation and detention on islands for those individuals, so that they could be prevented from reproducing: “Artificial selection” he argued “is regeneration”.²⁰⁷

3. The nationalist discourse on pronatalism and eugenics.

The nationalists Corrado Gini and Mario Morasso wrote on demographic issues and eugenics. Their works show the influence of pronatalist and eugenic theories, which they attempted to adapt to the peculiarities of the Italian situation and their nationalist agenda. In particular these nationalist thinkers developed a “Law of empire” that for all its obvious Social Darwinist influences, placed fertility rather than physical attributes as the essential quality of dominant races. They both rejected the idea of “racial purity” and argued instead that the quantity of a population was overall a better guarantee of success than a strict qualitative selection.

During the decade leading up to WWI Corrado Gini was one of the most prominent Italian authorities on demographic issues, and became one of the most important Italian eugenicists in the 1920s and 1930s. He was professor of Statistics -in

²⁰⁶ Giuseppe Sergi, *Le degenerazioni umane* (Milano: Fratelli Dumolard, 1889). Sergi’s theories are discussed in Mary Gibson, *Born to crime : Cesare Lombroso and the origins of biological criminology* (Wesport, CT; London: Praeger, 2002)

²⁰⁷ Sergi, *Le degenerazioni* , cit., 227-228. Quoted in Mantovani , *Rigenerare la società*, cit.61.

Cagliari, Padua , and Rome - and also held courses in political economy, biometrics and sociology, reaching the apex of his career in 1935 when he established the first Italian course in Statistic, Demographic and Actuarial Sciences.²⁰⁸ Gini was a member of the Italian Nationalist Association and an enthusiastic supporter of Italian colonial expansion. In *I fattori demografici dell' evoluzione delle nazioni* (1912) – a collection of his university lectures- Gini argued that nations have collective personalities that obey biological and genetic “laws”, and that such laws influence their behavior towards historical and social events. One of the most fundament biogenetic principles was the idea that national communities, just like individuals, went through an aging process – of growth, maturity, and senile decadence - and that they “acted” according to their age. He rejected Malthus’ theory on important points. Firstly he rejected the idea that a nation should limit its population growth in order to avoid the risk of food shortages. Secondly he argued that it was up to the lower classes to maintain the high levels of fertility and assure the growth of the country’s population. Even as a eugenicist, Gini put quantity ahead of quality. Unlike many demographers of the time, he linked a high fertility rate with the process of modernization of the country, instead of considering it as an indicator of a pre-modern socio-economic system.

Gini considered a high fertility rate as the main signal of youth – and thus of “strength” and “vitality”. Reproductive capacity varied from one people to another, the same way as it varied from one individual to another. “Young” nations such as Italy, according to Gini, were characterized by extreme prolificacy because the lower classes maintained a high degree of fertility, even though the upper classes committed biological

²⁰⁸ His first published book, *Il sesso dal punto di vista statistico* (1908), was a review of the natal sex ratio that relied very heavily on statistics to conclude that the tendency to produce a child of one or other sex is to some extent inheritable.

“suicide” by having very few children. Conversely, in “old” nations the lower classes behaved like the upper classes, damaging the overall fertility index of the country. Gini viewed the lower classes’ more active reproductive behavior in an extremely favorable light: the lower classes absolved the function of being a demographic reserve for the nation. In “old” national communities, where the lower classes aped the reproductive habits of the upper classes, the balance between the “suicide” of the upper classes and the prolificity of the lower classes was altered, weakening the entire national community.²⁰⁹

Interestingly, Gini saw a high reproductive index as a guarantee for a high degree of evolution: the larger the number of individuals subjected to natural selection, the higher the quality of the selected individuals. As a leading eugenicist he suggested a set of rules to safeguard the quality of the offspring. The rules included avoiding marriage among relatives and the reproduction of criminals, fighting the spread of venereal diseases and the excessive consumption of alcohol. However he believed that overall pronatalism alone would increase both the quantity and the quality of the population, and as such it should be pursued above all else.²¹⁰

Several of his ideas found an echo in the writings of other nationalist writers, such as Corradini, and Mario Morasso.

²⁰⁹ Gini’s theory completely subverted Guglielmo Ferrero’s argument proposed in *L’ Europa Giovane* (1897) according to which Latin races, and Southern Italians in particular, were characterized sexual precocity and an excessive fertility : the waste of energy and will towards the reproductive function determined the inferiority of fertile races and their incapacity to produce. Ferrero, *L’ Europa giovane: studi e viaggi nei paesi del Nord* , cit. .

²¹⁰ Corrado Gini, *I fattori demografici dell’ evoluzione della nazioni*, (Torino, 1912), 34. Quoted in Silvio Lanaro, *Nazione e lavoro*, 45. See also MacGregor Knox, *To theT hreshold of Power, 1922/33: Origins and Dynamics of the Fascist and National Socialist Dictatorships*, vol 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), especially Chapter II, “Italy and Germany as nation-states”, 1871-1914. See also Claudia Mantovani, *Rigenerare la societa’: l’ eugenetica in Italia dalle sue origini ottocentesche agli anni trenta* (Rubettino; 2004), 65-75.

Corradini dedicated an essay to an analysis of Gini's book, freely reinterpreting his theory. Gini had argued that the high fertility of the lower classes guaranteed the health of a race by providing a flow of new individuals to replace the dying upper classes, characterized by a low reproductive index. Corradini proceeded to apply Gini's findings on class relationship to nations. He argued that the most fertile races had the right to supplant the less fertile ones – like individuals from the lower classes had the right to supplant the dying upper classes. That was, according to Corradini, the “moral” base of imperialism: “the cathgotic imperative of nature for the preservation and the propagation of the species”.²¹¹

As early as 1903, Moraasso hailed emigration as a sign of the vitality of the Italian race: he praised its spontaneity, which he saw as a sign that at least the Italian people, if not their rulers, were ready to embrace the “Law of empire”, a biologic concept not dissimilar to what Gini would indicate as the reason why the most “youthful” nations were naturally predisposed towards both reproduction and expansion.

“Those human societies that will not employ all their energies to reinvigorate and enlarge themselves, those that will not direct all their efforts into seeking the broadest range of action, those who will not be guided by the idea of the empire, inevitably will be condemned to disappear, to be incorporated by the largest, most fighting races that will have inspired their politics to the main rule of life: the expansion of domination[...]Like the English and perhaps more than the English the Italian people has a natural ability to spread itself, which is superior to any other people. The Italian people not only has in itself this potential, but it also displays the effective capacity because of its inexhaustible fertility. [...] The

²¹¹ Corradini, *Il nazionalismo*, cit., 219.

English and the Italian are the only two races to have universal qualities and thus have the right to a universal destiny.”²¹²

If the English had already demonstrated their racial qualities by creating the world’s largest empire, the Italians had yet to prove their virtues on the battlefield, but they already proved their potential through their fertility. In comparing Italy to England Morasso concluded that the English and the Italian were the only two ‘races’ having qualities that entitled them to world domination: what the English possessed in terms of military and economic power, the Italians supplied in terms of sheer numbers. The Italians reproduced like no other race and through emigration were already colonizing the world, without any help from their government:

Every year, Morasso lamented, a potential “army” of half a million people spread through the world as a guarantee of Italy’s future domination, it was up to the government to use it. Emigration was the reaction of Italian people to the lack of an imperialist policy:

“The Italian people react against the petty politics and the obstinate ignorance of democracy by obeying to the greatest law of life, *the law of empire*, and provides by itself to its future”.²¹³

Both Gini and Morasso’s understanding of race in relation to demographic issues prove how a direct transposition of the anthropological argument used by German theorizers of Aryan supremacy did not work for the Italian nationalists. This should not be interpreted as a lack of a truly racial discourse in the Italian nationalistic culture but

²¹² Mario Morasso, “A proposito del viaggio del Re a Londra”. *Il Regno*, I, 1, 1903

²¹³ Morasso, “A proposito del viaggio del Re a Londra”. *Il Regno*, cit.

rather as a specifically Italian approach to the problem of race.²¹⁴ Gini, who had been trained as a social scientist, and had direct experience with the statistical method, argued that physical appearance was but one of the markers of good racial stock: aesthetic taste, logic and morals were determining factors as much as stature and cephalic index.²¹⁵ For his part, Morasso relied on anthropological stereotypes when describing the English racial type – blond hair, long limbs, elongated heads- but he relied on fecundity and behavior when describing the Italians.

In his essay on the origins of the European races – *L' origine delle razze europee* (1895), Morasso debunked Sergi's theory about the separate origin of the Mediterranean race, which the Sicilian anthropologist had discussed in *L' origine e la diffusione della Razza Maditerranea* (1895).

Sergi had developed his theory in direct opposition to Nordicism – the theory according to which the Aryan race was pure and naturally superior to other Europeans- espoused by authors such as German-American anthropologist Theodor Poesche, Austrian linguist Karl Penka, German anthropologists Ludwig Wilser and Otto Ammon, and French anthropologist Valcher de Lapourge.²¹⁶ As discussed in the Introduction, the

²¹⁴ For a discussion about Italian “racism” as a distinct but not a lesser form of racism vis-à-vis its German counterpart see A Gillette, *Racial Theories*, cit.; also Roberto Maiocchi, *Scienza italiana e razzismo fascista*, cit.; and MacGregor Knox, *To the threshold of power*, cit.

²¹⁵ Lanaro, *Nazione e Lavoro*, cit., 45 and following.

²¹⁶ See Aaron Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy*, cit., 25 and “*Volkgeist*” as *Method and Ethic. Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition*, edited by George W. Stocking, Jr. (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 127 and following. Until the 1880s most German philologists and archaeologists were convinced of the Asian origin of Indo-European cultures, but at the 1882 Frankfurt assembly of the German Anthropological society the Pan-Germanist anthropologist Ludwig Wilser proposed that the original home of Germans and all their Indo-European “linguistic parents” was Scandinavia. Pursued by Penka, the Scandinavian hypothesis reintroduced Arthur de Gobineau’s myth Aryanism into serious academic German science and generated a heated debate on the original homeland of the Aryans during the last decades of the century. Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882), was a French aristocrat who developed the bases of the theory of racial superiority of the Aryans in his book *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1853-55). His work inspired the racist thought of

Aryan theory was centered on the idea of the purity of the race and considered the people in habiting the Mediterranean basin as a product of racial mixing between Aryans and Africans, and thus inferior racially. By contrast, Sergi argued that the Mediterranean race was its own “pure” race, and one of three main branches of a common Eurafrikan group, which was split into a black African component, a Mediterranean component, and a Nordic component. The Mediterranean race (which in turn was made of different branches, such as the Pelasgians or Latins, the Iberians, the Libyans, etc.) was, in Sergi’s view, “the greatest race in the world’, having created the Minoan, Hellenic and Latin civilizations. However, in his subsequent book *La decadenza della nazioni latine* (1900) Sergi argued that while the Mediterraneans were creative geniuses, they were also more prone to chaos tending to lapse into anarchic or demagogic society, the Aryans of the North, due to their adaptation to colder climates, had become naturally more peaceful and hard-working, hence better suited for modern economic and political structures.²¹⁷

In direct opposition to both Sergi and the Nordacist racial theories, Morasso took issue in particular with the idea of separate and pure races. He argued that any anthropological theory postulating the existence of pure races was deeply flawed and that every race existing in present-day Europe was a result of the mix between many ethnic groups which in the beginning were at war among each other. Morasso completely rejected the idea of a common race migrating from an original homeland, and argued that

writers such as Houston Stewart Chamberlain, author of the *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899), and widely considered as one of the main exponents of the Pan-Germanic movement.

²¹⁷ See Gillette, cit., 26.

the majority of mankind was still organized by migrant groups kept together by the sexual tie.²¹⁸

Morasso placed primary importance on behavior. And particularly on what he called the Law of Empire, which was an imperialistic interpretation of the Social Darwinist principle by which the strongest and fittest races tended to expand and conquer weaker races. The “Law of empire” appeared often in Morasso’s writings but proved elusive to pinpoint. Morasso’s rhetorical use of the concept reveals a simplified understanding of the Social Darwinist concepts of the “struggle for survival” and the “survival of the fittest”, mixed with the essentials of Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy²¹⁹, whereas Gini had developed the theory of “young “ and “old” nations based on his Positivist training and demographic observations. Morasso embraced the notion of “natural law” –intended in the most simple terms as the right of the strong to supplant the weak- but rejected the idea that physical traits and racial purity could be the only factors determining which races were most suited for dominance. By focusing on fertility rather than appearance, the Italian nationalists managed to find a basis for the natural law argument that was linked to physicality, but that also comprised behavior. The importance of the physical attribute of fertility in the Italian race was further strengthened

²¹⁸ Some time after the Bronze Age the different “ethnic gangs” either intermixed or destroyed one another, so that the strongest and fittest races took over the best territories and attracted other ethnic groups. Progressively the small ethnic gangs became large groups- Morasso used the Romans as an example of a small ethnic group who gradually incorporated others, as it expanded its political and territorial influence.

²¹⁹ In 1898 Morasso rejected his debt to Nietzsche’s thought: “It is not a matter of Nietzsche, his superman and his system of moral revision. [...] I admire Nietzsche, and admired him when no one in Italy yet knew who he was, but I firmly assert that my insights on universal aggregations [...] have absolutely nothing to do with Nietzsche [...] These ideas, which have an exclusively scientific and positive basis are mine”. Morasso, *Uomini e idee del domani –l’ Egoarchia* (Turin , 1898)xi. Franco Ferrarotti observes about Morasso’s thought : “It is essentially positivist, evolutionist, basically Spencerian”. Franco Ferrarotti, *Time, Memory and Society* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 94. Franco Gaeta also argued that Morasso and Corradini’s views were directly influenced by Positivism and Darwinism. Franco Gaeta, *Il nazionalismo italiano*, cit., 110.

by Morasso's argument according to which the "sexual bond" was the primary element of cohesion in human society, even in the modern world.

"Biologically", Morasso argued "the fecundity of the woman and the race is a demonstration of youth, vigor, expansionist power, capacity to last.[...] it is the most prolific races that [...] dominate the world, it is the most fertile races that send their pioneers scattered across far-way lands to contrast the conquest of other races less numerous and less vital. [...] *Fecundity is the preparation, the foundation of the future empire, it is one of the essential conditions of the new imperial race.*"²²⁰

The fertility of the Italian people was both the primary source of internal cohesion as well as the means through which the Italian race propelled itself towards territorial expansion and conquest, following the law of nature. In the nationalist discourse fertility, above all else, was the racial quality that entitled a nation to be imperialistic.

Conclusion

In light of the demographic arguments exposed in this chapter, it is possible to provide a more complete analysis of the nationalist discourse on emigration and colonization. The Corradinian nationalists saw emigration as an act of passive acceptance of defeat, determining the loss of national identity, and thus an expression of overall weakness. Conversely, Colonization was seen as the affirmation of the will power of the nation, an act that strengthened, or even forged Italian identity, and the ultimate demonstration of strength and unquestionable proof of the power and quality of the race. Even though the nationalists' demographic discourse was not immune from eugenic

²²⁰ Mario Morasso, *L'imperialismo nel secolo XX*, cit., 294-95.

considerations, it gave precedence to quantity over quality as a guarantee of greater selection and success. The idea of competition among nations was discussed using the biologic language of the social sciences inspired by Social Darwinism- Morasso's "Law of Empire" and Gini's bio-genetic theory on nations- but fertility itself was substituted to physical attributes and racial purity as a marker of racial superiority.

Chapter 4: The Libyan campaign.

Historians have long debated the political, economic and cultural origins of the Italian colonial ventures of the late 19th and early 20th century, but only recently historiography has turned its attention towards aspects of Italian Colonialism that had been removed from the collective memory, such as the genocide of the Cyrenaic peoples perpetrated by the Fascist regime, or the use of poisonous gasses during the 1935 Ethiopian campaign. One of the most enduring obstacles to historical accuracy has been the self-absolutive myth of the “good Italian”, which dominated the postwar scholarship. The myth originated in the propagandistic effort of the Fascist regime to promote the image of the Italians as colonizers who build roads, hospitals, schools, and who generously toiled on the African soil sharing with the local peoples their millenarian knowledge of agriculture. This myth would endure well after the end of WWII. The pioneering works of Roberto Battaglia, Angelo Del Boca, and Giorgio Rochat, although initially marginalized, gradually opened up the discussion and an increasing number of historians particularly from the 1990s onwards have turned their attention towards Italian Colonialism with an eye for both factual accuracy and the need for a critical interpretation of events that had been clouded in myth.²²¹

²²¹ The revision of the “myth of the good Italian” gained momentum after the publication of David Bidussa’s *Il mito del bravo italiano*, cit. In the following years a series of historical works further dismantled the myth, particularly Davide Rodogno *Il nuovo ordine mediterraneo : le politiche di occupazione dell’Italia fascista (1940-1943)*, (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002); *Crimini e memorie di guerra: violenze contro le popolazioni e politiche del ricordo*, edited by Luca Baldissara e Paolo Pezzino, (Napoli: L’ancora del Mediterraneo, 2004); *Giudicare e punire : processi per crimini di guerra tra diritto e politica*, edited by Luca Baldissara e Paolo Pezzino, (Napoli: L’ancora del Mediterraneo, 2005); Filippo Focardi, *L’immagine del cattivo tedesco e il mito del bravo italiano: la costruzione della memoria del fascismo e della seconda guerra mondiale in Italia* (Padova: Imprimerie Rinoceronte, 2005). In 2004, the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* devoted an issue entitled “The hidden pages of contemporary Italian history: war crimes, war guilt and collective memory” to the discussion to the crimes of war and imperialism committed by Italy during the Fascist regime. The essayists take issue in particular with the relationship between history and memory, and the lack of a collective critical evaluation of the behavior of Italian soldiers and citizens, in favor of the self-absolutive myth of the Italians *brava gente* (good people).

While the role of the nationalist propaganda in favor of the Italian invasion of Libya has long been established, the racial aspect of such propaganda has been dealt with only superficially.²²² The following pages, far from being a comprehensive study of the nationalist campaign for the invasion of Libya, focus on the racial aspects of the nationalist propaganda during the campaign. The Italian experience in Libya shaped the nationalist racial discourse in important ways by reinforcing the nationalist rhetoric in the direction of a combination of biological as well as cultural racism.²²³

1. Colonial conquest as a tool for building the national conscience.

Some historians have argued that colonies were essential to the process of construction of national identity of European colonial powers.²²⁴ In very broad terms, the Italian colonial experience was not dissimilar from those of other countries: the colonial

Journal of Modern Italian Studies 9 (3) (2004):269-361. The historiography of Italian colonialism that has challenged previously held assumption about the benign nature of Italian imperialism has focused on practices of warfare, administration and repression, as well as an analysis of the Fascist – and to a lesser degree the Liberal- racial rhetoric. An essential bibliography includes: Angelo Del Boca, *L'Africa nella coscienza degli Italiani : miti, memorie, errori, sconfitte* (Roma : Laterza, 1992); *Gli italiani in Africa orientale* (Roma ; Bari: Laterza, 1976); *Gli Italiani in Libia* (Roma : Laterza, 1986-1988); Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare, storia dell' espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino 2002); *Bibliografia della Libia coloniale: 1911-2000* (Firenze : L.S. Olschki, 2004); *In marcia verso Adua* (Torino : Giulio Einaudi, 1993); *Italian colonialism* edited by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (New York ; Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); *A place in the sun : Africa in Italian colonial culture from post-unification to the present* edited by Patrizia Palumbo (Berkeley : University of California Press, 2003); *Italian colonialism : legacy and memory*, edited by Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Frankfurt ; New York : Peter Lang, 2005).

²²² Even historians like Labanca and Molinelli, discuss the nationalists propaganda in terms of their internal political agenda and the influence they exerted on the Italian Liberal elites and only deal with the racial aspect of their discourse cursorily. Labanca, *In Marcia*, Cit. and Raffaele Molinelli, “Il nazionalismo italiano e l' impresa di Libia”, *Rassegna Storica del Risorgimento*, LIII (II) (Apr-Jun): 285-318.

²²³ My main references for the political aspects of the campaign for the invasion of Libya are Raffaele Molinelli, “Il nazionalismo italiano e l' impresa di Libia”, cit., Angelo Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Libia*, cit., Roccucci , *Roma capitale del nazionalismo*, cit.

²²⁴ See for instance Linda Colley, “Britishness and Otherness: An argument”, in *Journal of British Studies*, 1992: 309-22 in which she argues that colonial wars allowed the different inhabitants of Great Britain (English, Scottish, Welsh and to a degree Irish) to focus on what they had in common, rather than on what divided them; A.L. Stoler, F. Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda”, in *Tensions of Empire*, edited by Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) the editors show the interplay of various stereotypes, and tropes defined the relationship between Metropole and Colony, constructing opposing identities between Europeans and their colonial subjects.

wars of the 1880s and 1890s provided the Italians the possibility to construct their identity in opposition to the colonial “other”.²²⁵ The Italian Liberal elites attached to the outcome of the African colonial wars a great deal of national prestige and considered them as part of the process of national aggrandizement, economically, tactically, and culturally. However, the failed attempt to conquer Ethiopia determined a temporary interruption of government-sponsored initiatives in Africa for over a decade.²²⁶

The Corradinian nationalists picked up where the Liberal elites had left off and re-proposed and strengthened the association between the process of national Unification and the act of colonial conquest, specifically linking the Risorgimento to the conquest of Libya. In their view Italian Unification had not been accomplished solely to rid the Italians of foreign rulers, but to create a country that could compete with the most powerful countries in the world, and in order to accomplish that goal Italians had to feel a strong sense of attachment towards the fatherland.²²⁷ The conquest of Ethiopia was supposed to be part of that process: if it had been successful, it would have established Italy as a colonial power, which was the first step in an evolution that would have brought Italy in competition –and eventually war- with other, more established European powers. The nationalist propaganda centered on the idea that the historical path that was abandoned after the defeat in Ethiopia should be reentered with renewed vigor in order to continue the forge a stronger sense of national identity.

²²⁵ Michele Nani, *Ai confini della nazione*, cit., 37-95.

²²⁶ For the Italian association to the colonial wars of the 1880s and 1890s to the Risorgimento see Nani, *Ai confini della nazione*, cit., 93 and following; Giorgio Rochat, “Adua: analisi di una sconfitta”, in *Adua. Le ragioni di una sconfitta*, edited by Del Boca (Laterza: Bari, 1997), 346; and *L’imperialismo italiano. La politica estera dall’Unità al fascismo*, edited by A. A. Mola (Editori Riuniti, Roma 1980), VII-XXVI.

²²⁷ Gentile, *La grande Italia*, cit. chapter VI.

The Italian defeat at Adwa -and subsequent abandonment of imperialistic policies by the Liberals- was the starting point of the nationalist campaign for the invasion of Libya. The battle of Adwa, fought in 1896, marked the conclusion of the First Italo-Ethiopian War. The Italian forces, which included a significant contingent of African *askari*²²⁸, under the command of General Baratieri were soundly defeated by the Ethiopian forces of Emperor Menelik that greatly outnumbered them. The casualties on the Italian side were over six thousands, in addition to over two thousand prisoners. The cultural shock of the Italian defeat was of immense proportion: it was the first time a European power had been beaten on the field by an African army since the beginning of the Scramble for Africa.²²⁹ After the defeat, the Italian Parliament clamored for the resignation of the most ardent promoter of Italian Colonialism, Prime Minister Francesco Crispi. Publicly disgraced, Crispi resigned as Prime Minister and all but disappeared from the political scene – with the exception of maintaining a seat in the Italian Parliament. The Prime ministers who succeeded him avoided any further attempt to conquer African lands, halting Italian expansion in Africa for over a decade.

The first issue of the *Idea Nazionale* was distributed on the first of March 1911, on the fifteenth anniversary of the Italian defeat at Adwa, which had been both the culmination and the failure of the first wave of Italian colonialism.²³⁰ The choice was of

²²⁸ The *Askari* were troops comprised of Africans recruited in various parts of the continent serving in the armies of European colonial powers.

²²⁹ H.C. des Fosses in *L' Abyssinie et les Italiens* (Paris: Douniol, 1897) effectively expressed the cultural and political importance of the battle of Adua as follows: "Everywhere the indigenous peoples know that white Europeans have been defeated by the Ethiopians. The news of the battle of Adwa has spread throughout the Black Continent with incredible rapidity. The white man is no longer considered a superior being; he has lost his privilege. Now it is known that he is not invincible and the indigenous peoples no longer fear him; they no longer fear coming in conflict with him. For this reason the importance of the battle of Adwa can never be overstressed. It is an event ushering the beginning of a new era for Africa", quoted in Labanca, *In marcia verso Adua*, cit.

²³⁰ Editorial, "Il dovere di ricordare", *L'Idea Nazionale*, I, 1, 1911.

extraordinary symbolic significance to the editors of the Roman paper, as both an auspice and a symbolic reference to its political program. The name of the Ethiopian location evoked powerful memories and the Corradinian nationalists considered the defeat of Adwa as the event which had caused the nation to lose its cohesion and faith in itself and its future. The defeat on the battlefield and the thousands of Italian casualties had not been the “real tragedy of Adwa”: the true calamity had been the effects of the defeat on Italian political culture and society.²³¹

Firstly, the defeat had important political consequences. After Crispi’s resignation, the “Africanist” current in Liberal Italy was silenced and the rise of Giolitti promoted gradual democratization and allowed the growth of the socialist movement.²³² In the eyes of the nationalists this had enabled the Socialist Party to preach its “materialistic gospel of class warfare” to the masses, thus promoting individualism to the detriment of the self-sacrificing ethos that enabled the identification of the individual with the nation. Secondly, the defeat of Adwa had been used to reinforce the theories proposed by anthropologists, such as Giuseppe Sergi, who had predicted the “inevitable decadence of the Latin peoples”.²³³ The nationalists considered the Anthropological School to be largely responsible for weakening the idea of a Italian destiny of greatness,

²³¹ For a discussion of the impact of the failed Ethiopian campaign in Italy see Nicola Labanca, *In Marcia verso Adua*, cit.. For the impact of Adua on the nationalist movement see Emilio Gentile, *La grande Italia*, cit., Angelo D’Orsi, *Da Adua a Roma : la marcia del nazionalfascismo (1896-1922 : storia e testi* (Torino: N. Aragno, 2007) and Adriano Roccucci, *Roma, capitale del nazionalismo*, cit..

²³² See previous chapter.

²³³ Giuseppe Sergi *La decadenza della nazioni latine* , cit.. See chapter 1.

highlighting internal racial differences among Italians and instilling the idea of the decadence of the Southern Europeans.²³⁴

Thirdly, the defeat of Adwa had interrupted the path that, in the nationalist view, had begun with the Risorgimento, a path that should have led Italy not only to accomplish territorial Unification – from the Alps to Sicily, but to realize grandiose projects of political and territorial aggrandizement. In proposing a link between the wars of national Unification and the colonial wars, the nationalists were inspired by the work of the writer Alfredo Oriani, author of *La lotta politica in Italia* (1892) and *La rivolta ideale* (1908). Oriani remained largely unknown and isolated during his life, and became famous posthumously when the Corradinian nationalists and the *Vocianti* began to praise his vision and his interpretation of Italian history. Politically he appealed to the nationalists because he was anti-democratic, in favor of a strong all-powerful State, and because of his agenda of Colonial expansion. His interpretation of Italian history centered on the regret for the fading of the heroic days of struggle for national Unification into the day-to-day mediocrity and petty concerns of the newly established liberal state. Oriani argued that the differences among Italians were so deep, and the sense of national identity so tenuous, that only a major war, by forcing millions to face tragedy and the prospect of mortal danger, could finally produce a true sense of national belonging.²³⁵

The nationalists recognized in Oriani their cultural predecessor and fully embraced his idea that war was the only means of cementing the Italian sentiment of

²³⁴ The nation, in the words of the hyperbolic nationalist prose, had become “inebriated by the prospect of its own demise” because of the “indecent rhetoric” of the “false” anthropological science, announcing the “inevitable decadence of the Latin peoples”. See “Il dovere di ricordare”, *L’Idea Nazionale*, cit.

²³⁵ Oriani’s (1852-1909) also wrote the political novel *Fino a Dogali* (1889). He was greatly admired by Mussolini, who between 1927 and 1936 promoted the publication of all his *Opera Omnia* comprising 30 volumes. Mussolini often hailed Oriani as one of the precursors of the Fascist ideology. See William Kilborne Stewart, “The Mentors of Mussolini” *The American Political Science Review* 22(4) (Nov., 1928): 843-869.

national unity. Even though colonial wars were not the major European conflict that Oriani envisioned, they were considered by the Corradinian nationalists as essential in forging in the individual a stronger sense of attachment towards the fatherland. To the writers of the *Idea Nazionale* the invasion of Ethiopia –which had resulted in the defeat of Adwa- had been the “first logical consequence” of the Risorgimento. Since the very first issue, their paper argued that in order to reenter the stage of History as a protagonist, Italy would have to revamp their colonial past by launching a new colonial campaign in the only land in Northern Africa that had not been occupied by a European power: Libya.

The campaign for the invasion of Libya began in the first issue of the paper as both a way to avenge Adwa and as a way to put Italy back on the path indicated by Oriani - building a national conscience through the experience of war. In the words of Luigi Federzoni: “The name of Tripoli seemed to erase the name of Adwa”.²³⁶ Corradini had expressed the importance of war as a means to build the sense of national cohesion in many of his works, and particularly in his novels. It is therefore not surprising that a passage from *La guerra lontana*, dedicated to Adwa, and published in 1911, was republished in the first issue of the *Idea Nazionale*. In the piece, Corradini described the scene of a group of journalists working for the fictional paper “Giornale di Roma” who receive the news of the defeat at Adwa and for the first time perceive a “bond amongst themselves that is stronger than friendship” – “*un vincolo piu’ forte della stessa amicizia*”:

²³⁶ *L’Idea Nazionale*, “Il dovere di ricordare” and “Che cosa si vuole per la Tripolitania”, I, 1, 1911. The quote is from Luigi Federzoni autobiography *Paradossi di Ieri*, (Milano, Mondadori, 1924), quoted in Roccucci, *Roma capitale del nazionalismo*, cit. See also Sergio Romano *La quarta sponda* (Milano: Bompiani, 1977) who claimed that Adwa was to the Italian Nationalists what the Alsace and Lorraine were to *Action Francaise*, cited in Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia*, cit., 52.

“Selfish and cynical men, journalists, man consumed by vice, suddenly felt, or began to feel, a new man surge within themselves, a man opposite to what they had been until that very moment, a man that only a few hours earlier they would have mocked, a man capable to suffer a pain that belonged to all and to nobody at the same time and did not affect their bodies or their material possessions”.²³⁷

This passage refers to the surge of national feelings following the defeat of Adwa, which, even through its failure, had nonetheless awoken in many a sense of hurt pride and belonging to the motherland. In Corradini’s view, if the ruling elite had not abandoned the colonial enterprise, those patriotic feelings could have been channeled and the colonial war would have accomplished the task of creating a true Italian identity. The “new man” Corradini referred to was characterized by the depth of his devotion towards the motherland and the bond he felt towards other Italians: a bond “stronger than friendship”, which in the novel is not elaborated as a bond of blood, but as a reference to the idea of “organic” nation adopted by Corradini and his followers.

As we have seen, the idea of “organic nation” – which was first proposed by Corradini, and later elaborated by the jurist Alfredo Rocco- postulated the absolute identification of the individual with the nation and the subordination of its individuality to the needs of the nation.²³⁸ Franco Gaeta in his seminal work on nationalism explained that having placed the nation at the center of the State and having delegated to the state the determination of the common good and the management of the national resources - both economic and human- the nationalists laid the foundations for an authoritarian

²³⁷ *L’Idea Nazionale*, “La notte della battaglia d’ Adua a Roma”, I, 1, 1911. See also Ronald S. Cunsolo, “Libya, Italian Nationalism, and the Revolt against Giolitti”, *The Journal of Modern History* 37(2) (Jun., 1965): 186-207.

²³⁸ See Chapter 2.

relationship between the State and its citizens.²³⁹ “War”, Gaeta argued “became the supreme manifestation of the spirit and power of the nation; a school of discipline, of abnegation, of virility; the moment in which its ideal, economic, and political unity was celebrated”. The “new man” of the Corradinian novel was one that identified with the motherland and felt a sense of kinship with others who shared his devotion. The pain felt by the “new man” does not affect his “material possessions” because, in opposition to the “materialistic” conception of the socialist ideology, he identified the national loss with a personal loss.²⁴⁰

2. The first stage of the Libyan campaign: fertility and idleness

Well before the Libyan campaign, Corradini’s early followers adopted his expansionistic agenda, which involved a more intensive exploitation and enlargement of the existing Italian colonies in East Africa, as well as the acquisition of new lands - even though the exact location of the future colonies remained vague. During this period, the Corradinian discourse focused on the potential of the land itself and the ability to the Italian settlers to transform the African lands into productive agricultural colonies. Corradini’s first political paper, *Il Regno*, often discussed the economic potential of the African territories, when managed and farmed by Italian settlers. One example of this attention to colonial issues is Giovanni Papini’s interview with Gino Bartolomei-Gioli, who was the director of one of the most prominent “Africanist” institutions -the Istituto

²³⁹ Franco Gaeta, *Il nazionalismo Italiano*, (Napoli: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1965).

²⁴⁰ The passage also contained an autobiographical reference, as Corradini claimed that the defeat of Adwa had been the single event that led him to abandon the pursuit of exclusively literary interests in favor of political engagement as testified by the article “Abba Carima”, which he wrote as editor in chief of *Il Marzocco* on March 1896. See Angelo D’ Orsi, *Da Adua a Roma: la marcia del nazionalfascismo (1896-1922) : storia e testi*, cit. page 9 and following.

Coloniale Italiano. Gioli discussed at length the crops that would be most likely to flourish in the Italian Colonies in East Africa, and the best ways to ensure Italian domination on the lands.²⁴¹

During these early years the presentation of the Africans was accomplished through stereotypes based on exotic fascination and literary conventions rather than a consciously racial lexicon and consistent imagery. Pierludovico Occhini, one of Corradini's closest collaborators, described his trip to the Italian Colonies in terms that tended to be literary rather than scientific, even when describing of the "colors" of the many "races" he saw in the *bazar* of Massaua - "soot-colored" Sudanese and "reddish-black" Somalis- giving preference to the description of the beauty and exotic qualities of the places he encountered. The central theme consistently presented in these early nationalist writings was the potential that was being released through the "tireless efforts" of the few Italian settlers in lands that otherwise would be left largely unproductive by the "lazy" and "inept" local populations.²⁴²

The propagandistic effort for the invasion of Libya began in earnest in March 1911 with the foundation of the *Idea Nazionale*. The propagandistic strategy was carefully coordinated by the Corradians, who made up the majority in the Executive Committee of the ANI. In March they adopted a resolution to pressure the Italian government and force the issue of the invasion of Libya.²⁴³ A series of conferences followed dedicated to the topic of the Italian economic interests in Libya and the potential of the land to become a colony of settlement, and a number of books were published in

²⁴¹ Giovanni Papini, "Quel che si fa in Eritrea", *Il Regno*, I, 12, 1903. See also Raffaele Molinelli "Il nazionalismo italiano e l' impresa di Libia". Cit. and Adriano Roccucci, *Roma, capitale del nazionalismo (1908-1923)*, cit..

²⁴² *Il Regno*, "Massaua", II,22; "Asmara", III, 2, 1906; "Verso Cheren", III, 4, 1906.

²⁴³ See previous chapter for the adoption of the nationalist resolution by the Congress of the Italians abroad.

order to spark interest in the Italian public on the issue.²⁴⁴ The hold the Corradinian group had over the ANI allowed them to impose their will on the rest of the members: throughout 1911 the issue of Libya took the precedence over the issue of the *terre irredente*, as Federzoni announced at the seventh congress of the Trento-Trieste Association in April. Federzoni explained in an article in the *Idea Nazionale* that the ANI remained an irredentist association, but the issue of the Italians living in the Austrian Empire had to be subordinated to the issue of the overall “spiritual and political” well-being of the nation.²⁴⁵

The organizational effort was accompanied by a press campaign held primarily in the *Idea Nazionale*, and to a lesser extent in the Milanese *La Grande Italia*. Gualtiero Castellini was particularly active, in fact, his *Tunisi e Tripoli* was the first of the nationalist works dedicated to Libya. Even liberal papers such as the pro-Giolitti *La Stampa*, *La Tribuna*, and *Il Giornale d'Italia* expressed support for the Libyan invasion

²⁴⁴ Angelo De Boca in *Gli Italiani in Libia*, cit., discusses the long term international and national economic and political causes for the decision of the Giolitti cabinet to pursue the invasion of Libya, stressing the importance of the propaganda of the ANI and the *Idea Nazionale*, particularly in chapter II. See also Molinelli, “Il nazionalismo italiano e l’ impresa di Libia”. Cit. , and Adriano Roccucci, *Roma, capitale del nazionalismo (1908-1923)*, cit. who discusses the frantic pace of the propaganda campaign in the capital. In the spring Corradini held conferences in Genoa, Florence, Rome and Milan, Vittorio Vettori in Naples and Paolo Arcari in Parma. The main nationalist works devoted to the Libyan issue were: Gualtiero Castellini, *Tunisi e Tripoli*, cit.; Enrico Corradini, *L’ ora di Tripoli* , cit.; Giuseppe Bevione, *Come siamo andati a Tripoli* (Torino : F.lli Bocca, 1912). Bevione during the Libyan campaign was not yet a member of the ANI and collaborated as a special correspondent from Libya to the Torinese paper *La Stampa*. According to Del Boca he made some of the most hyperbolic and untruthful claims regarding the fertility of the land in Libya.

²⁴⁵ The ANI had an executive committee composed of Corradini, Luigi Federzoni, Maurizio Maraviglia, Goffredo Gobbi and Luigi Valli. Three out of five were editors of the *Idea Nazionale*. The executive committee of Roman Group of the ANI did not include the same members but was heavily influenced by the *Idea Nazionale* group. See Raffaele Molinelli, “Il nazionalismo italiano e l’ impresa di Libia”. Cit. , and A. Roccucci, *Roma, capitale del nazionalismo (1908-1923)*, cit. The article by Federzoni “Tripoli e l’ irredentismo: un dilemma che non esiste” was published in response to the criticism by one of the collaborators of *La Grande Italia* in *L’Idea Nazionale*, I, 14, 1911.

and published many articles dedicated to a description of the land and the possibilities for colonization.²⁴⁶

The language used by the nationalists to describe Libya as a land and the Libyan people absolved on the most basic level the function of propaganda tools -aimed at advertizing the economic potential of the colony and the ease of the conquest, but they also provided an image against which the identity of the colonizers could be constructed.²⁴⁷ The imagery through which the nationalists presented their perspective colony centered on the fertility of the African land and on the “idleness” and “incapacity” to conquer nature of the native populations. The nationalist description of Libya was often ridiculed by its adversaries for its unrealistic emphasis on the fertility of the soil and for the claim that the local populations –“Arabs and Bedouins”- would support the Italian troops in the event of a war against Turkey.²⁴⁸ The attributes of fertility of the land and of the peaceful “idleness” of the population emphasized the qualities of the Italian

²⁴⁶ *La Grande Italia*, published between 1909 and 1913, was directed by Ambrogio Cordara, and featured articles by Paolo Arcari, Michele Pericle Negrotto, Gualtiero Castellini, Luigi Federzoni, and many others. In 1910 the paper had become the official voice of the Trento-Trieste Association and expressed nationalist tendencies in favor of irredentism and democracy. The magazine ceased publication after the second ANI congress in which the anti-democratic position of the Corradinian nationalists prevailed and the democratic members resigned from the ANI. For a discussion of the liberal press and their campaign in favor of the invasion of Libya see Marcella Pincherle, “La Preparazione dell’ opinione pubblica all’ impresa di Libia”, *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, III (1969): 450-82 and Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia*, cit.. passim.

²⁴⁷ My frame of reference are the works of Edward Said, *Orientalism*, cit. and Tzvetan Todorov, *The conquest of America: the question of the other*, cit. . William Connolly observed that “Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-identity”. Quoted in Kevin C. Dunn *Imagining the Congo: the international relations of identity* (New York, N.Y.; Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England : Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 27.

²⁴⁸ See for instance “Perche’ non si deve andare a Tripoli”, *La voce*, III, 35, 1911. Prezzolini often authored editorials attacking the Corradinian nationalists, mockingly labeling them as “*conquistadores*” whose ignorance regarding the effective agricultural potential of the African lands and the political ramifications of an Italian attack was “almost heroic”. “La coltura italiana e Tripoli”, *La voce*, III, 39, 1911.

conquerors – or *conquistatores* as Prezzolini mockingly called them- welcoming their qualities as soldiers and settlers.²⁴⁹

During the months between March and September 1911 the *Idea Nazionale* was the central tool of the interventionist campaign. Libya was presented as a “land of marvelous fertility”²⁵⁰ with the potential to become a florid agricultural colony under Italian management. The representation of the region of Tripolitania in particular, was often accomplished by exaggerating attributes related to fertility and by imaginative descriptions of Libya as a “Garden of Eden”. In *Tunisi e Tripoli* Castellini described in such terms the oases around Tripoli and Corradini’s *L’ Ora di Tripoli* also proposed the theme of the Garden of Eden, describing Tripolitania as covered by desert only on the surface.²⁵¹

In September 1911 a cartoon appeared in *La Grande Italia* in, further emphasized the fertile qualities of Libya. The caption under the picture says: “GIOLITTI hesitating: “Tripolitania!....A land to be fertilized....Will I be capable?....”²⁵²

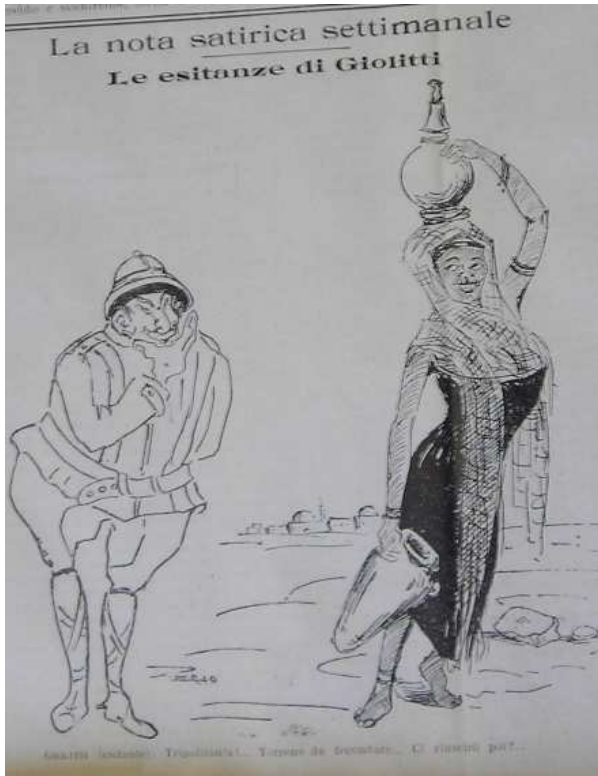
The cartoon is based on the symbolic parallel between cultivation of the fertile land and the sexual act. The image portrays a smiling, healthy-looking Libyan woman holding containers for water and possibly oil, wearing bracelets and a headscarf.

²⁴⁹ See previous chapter.

²⁵⁰ Gualtiero Castellini, *Tunisi e Tripoli*, 188

²⁵¹ The Corradinian nationalists, Beviore perhaps above all others, claimed that the land was rich in water, which run in underground rivers, and thus having the potential to be extremely fertile. Castellini, *Tunisi e Tripoli*, cit. chapter VII. Corradini “La foglia secca”, *L’ Idea Nazionale*, I, 24, 1911. Corradini often returned on the issue of water writing: “I held the tree brunch that offered itself to the passage while on my horse, and I severed it and saw its marrow-like inside and its wood saturated by sap, and there was never a dry branch or a leaf burned by the sun”. Corradini “Da Cirene a Bengasi”, *L’ idea Nazionale*, I, 29, 1911.

²⁵² *La Grande Italia*, II, 39, 1911.



“Giolitti’s hesitancy”. Cartoon published in *La grande Italia* .

The fertile attributes are emphasized, as she appears to have large bosoms and hips. The woman appears to be waiting but also about to move, as though hopeful to be held back but at the same time impatient to move forward. Giolitti is standing rather still, yet leaning forward to better admire the woman. He is wearing a desert uniform, as though ready to invade. He appears to be deep in thought and tempted by the possibility of “fertilizing” the woman while at the same time concerned about his own sexual prowess, one hand holding his chin, the other held firmly behind his back.

The fertility of Libya is emphasized by the shape of her body; her look towards Giolitti is an invitation be possessed physically. Giolitti’s -and by extension the whole liberal elite’s- lack of masculine attributes was one of the dominant motives of the nationalist propaganda since the time of Adwa. By hesitating Giolitti is not only missing the opportunity to “colonize” that so easily presents before him, but demonstrates a lack of masculinity: his military uniform does not correspond to the act of war. The woman in the cartoon represented both the land and the people of Libya: the fertile land, rich in

resources and water; the people, friendly and waiting for the Italians, but also ready to be civilized by someone else if the Italians should take too long.²⁵³

The fertility of the land was but one of the recurring motives in the nationalist rhetoric. The nationalists also proposed a narrative according to which Libya had failed to develop from the point of view of technology and infrastructures after the Romans were replaced by the Arabs: neither the Arab conquest, nor the Ottoman, had been able to continue the process of development initiated by the Romans. The nationalists could rely on a vast array of existing stereotypes that characterized the European representation of colonial subjects. According to Kevin Dunn, “imagining the Other relied on constructing the European *Self*, usually through the employment of binary oppositions and the demarcating and policing of boundaries of difference”.²⁵⁴ The existing European discourse on “savagery” often presented an array of images of the colonial natives ranging from the “irrational” and “helpless” victims of the natural environment and of external powers that exploited them, to “violent brutes”, and “child-like simpletons”.²⁵⁵ Between March and September 1911 the nationalists downplayed the brutish component in the Arab and Bedouin populations in favor of the image of the helpless savages eager to be colonized by the Italians.²⁵⁶

²⁵³ For a discussion of the Italian sexual fascination for African women see S. Palma, *L' Italia coloniale* (Editori riuniti: Roma, 1999), 36-7; 42-47-54-55; G. Campassi, M.T. Sega, “Uomo bianco, donna nera: l' imagine della donna nella fotografia coloniale”, in *Rivista di Storia e Critica della fotografia* 5 (1983): 54-62; F Surdich, “La donna dell' Africa orientale nelle relazioni delgi esploratori italiani (1870-1915)” in *Miscellanea di Storia delle Esplorazioni* V (1979): 191-220. Also Michele Nani, *Ai confini della nazione*, cit. 61 .

²⁵⁴ Dunn, *Imagining the Congo*, cit, 27.

²⁵⁵ Interesting studies of the “feminization” of the Colonial other are Ann McClintock, *Imperial leather: race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest* (New York; London: Routledge, 1995) and Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity, the “manly Englishman” and the “effeminate Bengali” in the late nineteenth century* (Manchester and New York: Machester Univ. Press, 1995).

²⁵⁶ The work of Michele Nani on 19th century racial discourse period shows that, during the African Colonial wars of the 1880s and 1890s, the image of the “good African” was often constructed by the Italian Liberal press in opposition to other Africans who were aggressive or exploitative. At the same time this

In contrast to the land which was exceptionally fertile and full of potential, Corradini described the Arabs as “primitive”, “decrepit”, “segregated from the human consortium”, and the Bedouins as “hordes of paupers”, “less than a *plebe*”, and a “proliferation left on its own” by the Turks.²⁵⁷ In the nationalist rhetoric the Libyans were portrayed as “lazy and inert”²⁵⁸, who “moved slowly” and ate “like animals”.²⁵⁹

“These people”, Corradini noted: “have no civil institution to turn to, they have no commerce, no public, nor private works, and live almost entirely on the income of a land they don’t know how to cultivate”.²⁶⁰

Corradini’s description -which would also be reprinted in the volume *L’ ora di Tripoli* (1911) - was echoed in Castellini’s *Tunisi and Tripoli*.²⁶¹ Castellini presented the Tripoline “system of road cleaning” to give his readers “*an idea of the civilization of the Libyans*”: “I couldn’t help but laugh seeing the tiny cart travel on the road driven by an Arab boy agitating a tube”.²⁶² The anecdote was deliberately intended to emphasize the incapacity of the Arabs to build tools and devices that were not rudimentary- their technological impairment being a sign of their barbarism. In the nationalist narrative, the local populations of Libya were unable to cultivate and to build infrastructures, and were

imagery tended to coexist with other stereotypes emphasizing brutish and violent savagery. By contrast the nationalist discourse, during the months prior to the invasion, concentrated exclusively on images of peaceful, helpless Libyans in need and in search of a civilizing agent. This was in large part due to the tactical expedient of presenting the war in Libya as easy conquest: instead of a violent population that needed to be “domesticated” by the Italian efforts, they presented a population that was already eager to be colonized by the Italians thus offering the most favorable prospect. M Nani, *Ai confini della nazione*, cit, 62.

²⁵⁷ Corradini, “Lettere dall’ Africa Romana”, *L’ Idea Nazionale*, I, 23, 1911.

²⁵⁸ Anon., “I pigmei”, *L’ idea Nazionale*, I, 30, 1911. Even though the title seems to indicate otherwise, the article was about Libya. The term “Pigmies” referred to the Italian socialists who were led by Filippo Turati, which the nationalists described as “short and ugly”.

²⁵⁹ Castellini, *Tunisi e Tripoli*, cit, 50, 64.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Corradini, *L’ ora di Tripoli*, cit.

²⁶² Castellini, *Tunisi e Tripoli*, cit, 76

at the mercy of the natural environment and of the Turks who failed to bring them the advantages of civilization – intended here as economic and technological development.²⁶³

The *Idea Nazionale* proposed a very strong anti-Turkish propaganda, which went hand in hand with their description of the Arabs and the Bedouins. While the Libyans were “incapable of evolving”, and “unable to control their natural environment”, the Turks were “incapable” of absolving their function to civilize the Libyans, and were therefore unworthy to keep their possessions. A long series of articles in the spring and summer of 1911 emphasized the hostility of the Turks towards the Italians in Libya, and presented the possibility that the German or the French might take Libya before the Italians organized an invasion.²⁶⁴ The reports of the trips of Castellini and Corradini to Libya were full of anecdotes in which they had encountered the hostility of the Turks and the collaboration of the Arabs.²⁶⁵

In the nationalist rhetoric, the Turks appeared as they had in much of the existing literature on the Orient, from Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* (1721) to Shelley’s poem *Hellas*, to European travel and diplomatic literature in terms of “passivity”, “indolence” and “resistance to renewal”.²⁶⁶ For instance, Castellini describes the greatness of the Arc of Marcus Aurelius in Tripoli, contrasting with the narrow and dirty streets and the

²⁶³ In chapter 2 we have seen how the Corradianian nationalists viewed civilization as economic and technological development – and at the same time refused to classify violent tendencies in the Italian southerners as symptoms of “barbarism”.

²⁶⁴ The fears of the French and particularly the German expansion in North Africa increased after the Moroccan crisis in July 1911. “Germania e Francia per la conquista del Marocco e la pavida inerzia dell’ Italia”, *L’ Idea Nazionale*, I, 19, 1911

²⁶⁵ See for instance “L’ Italia alle prese con I Giovani Turchi”, *L’ Idea Nazionale*, I, 8, 1911; Corradini, “Lettere dall’ Africa Romana”, *Ibid.*, I, 23, 911; Corradini, “Storia turca di un viaggio italiano”, *ibid.*, I, 25, 1911; “Il Pericolo Tedesco in Tripolitania”, *Ibid.*, I, 16 1911; “Vecchi e nuovi oltraggi all’ Italia in Tripolitania”, *ibid.*, I, 19, 1911. .

²⁶⁶ For stereotyped images of the Turks see Asl Crakman, *From the "Terror of the World" to the "Sick Man of Europe"*, cit.; and *Interrogating Orientalism: contextual approaches and pedagogical practices*, cit..

dilapidated homes of the Libyans, lamenting that the Roman building had been left to the “Turkish neglect”.²⁶⁷ The Turks because of a mixture of indolence and incapacity²⁶⁸ had allowed Libya to remain uncivilized:

“[the Truks] left all in abandonment in those unlucky lands [Libya], because of their natural aversion to renewal [...] so they neither do anything nor allow other people do anything and are contented with their political domination”.²⁶⁹

Castellini noted that, because of the “Turkish impotence”, “Tripoli remains what it is: unchanged”.²⁷⁰ Corradini noted how even the Young Turks who had restored the Turkish Parliament in 1908 and imposed a new, progressive course to Turkish politics, had “done nothing” to improve the situation in Libya: they had build no schools, no roads, no railroads.²⁷¹

The presentation of Libyans as passive, purpose-less, and incapable of extracting resources from their territory and the Turks as unwilling to civilize them- allowed the nationalists to develop an image of Italians which was civilized in place of savage, active instead of passive, knowledgeable instead of ignorant – in short the ‘otherization’ of the Libyans highlighted the *Roman* qualities of the Italians. To this end, the frequent references to ancient Rome appeared to express in grandiose terms the historical origins of Italian expansionism in North Africa, and provided a cultural justification to reclaim the Roman colonies. The references to the remnants of Roman architecture, to the cultivation of certain plants – “our” oranges, “our” olive trees- the constant reference to

²⁶⁷ Castellini, *Tunisi e Tripoli*, cit, 78.

²⁶⁸ Castellini spoke of “Turkish impotence” before the task of civilizing Libya. Castellini, *Tunisi e Tripoli*, cit., 73, and described the Turks as behaving “with oriental indolence”, *ibid.*, 72.

²⁶⁹ Federico De Maria, “L’ Italia e la Tripolitania” *L’ Idea Nazionale*, I, 9, 1911

²⁷⁰ Castellini, *Tunisi e Tripoli*, cit, 73.

²⁷¹ Corradini, “Lettere dall’ Africa Romana”, cit.

what used to be called *mare nostrum* – “our” sea-²⁷² testified that the Africans had “needed” the Roman civilization in the past, just like present-day Libyans “needed” the Italian civilization. This operation confirmed the presentation of the African culture as incapable to change without outside stimuli.

The discussion of the Libyan Other also inspired the question of how the Italians should absolve their “mission to civilize” once the conquest was completed. The available “civilizing mission” models were “assimilation” and “association”.²⁷³ The French model of “assimilation”, a product of the republican ideology, was based on the idea that the native African populations could be elevated through the destruction of native institutions and practices, and through direct contact with the moral and material advantages of modern civilization. This model was in fact abandoned by the French, according to Alice Conklyn, particularly after WWI, when the African elites in the colonies began to demand rights of full citizenship. The model of “association” was a way to “civilize” the native populations by of interacting with the local elites, trying to work with African institutions, reshaping rather than trying to crush them. This administrative model had been preferred by the British both in India and Africa. It had however been abandoned in India after the “Indian mutiny” of 1857 in favor of direct colonization.

The nationalist primarily conceived the civilizing mission in terms of *mise en valeur* of the land, rather than the task of “civilizing” its people. While a significant part

²⁷² Both Castellini’s *Tunisi and Tripoli*, cit.and Corradini’s *L’ ora di Tripoli*, cit.made frequent references to the legacy of civilization that the Ancient Romans left behind, from the Arc of Marcus Aurelius to the olive trees.

²⁷³ For a discussion of the transition between “assimilation” and “association” in the French Colonies see Alice Conklyn, *A mission to civilize : the republican idea of empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford : Stanford university press, 1997).

of their propaganda was devoted to the means to transform Libya into a florid agricultural colony, there was no discussion on how to “civilize” the Libyans themselves, but only on the best way to manage the colony after its conquest. For instance, Corradini discussed how in Tunisia the French collaborated with a group of young, educated Arabs who wanted to modernize their country, following the model of the Young Turks in the Ottoman Empire, by requesting schools and infrastructures from the French. He did not however clarify whether such a model of collaboration would be enforceable in Libya, but it can be inferred that he considered a policy of “association” with the Arabs possible.²⁷⁴ In one of the conferences promoted by the ANI, Federico De Maria argued that the indigenous populations of Libya would be glad to be under Italian domination because they could see how the British and the French domination had “improved” Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia. He claimed that the Libyan populations would prefer the Italians to the “barbaric” and “oppressive” Turks, because servitude under European rule would be tempered by the benefits of progress.²⁷⁵

The economist Maffeo Pantaleoni was a nationalist sympathizer and an enthusiastic supporter of the Libyan invasion.²⁷⁶ In December 1911 Prezzolini commented on two apparently contradictory statements expressed by Pantaleoni regarding the issue of how the Libyans should be treated. In the first statement, which

²⁷⁴ Corradini, “Lettere dalla Tunisia”, *L’Idea Nazionale*, I, 20, 1911.

²⁷⁵ “L’ Italia e la Tripolitania”, *L’ Idea Nazionale*, I, 9, 1911. The seminal work about the French “civilizing mission” is Alice Conklin’s *A Mission to Civilize*, cit.. Conklin argues that in spite of the lofty, Enlightenment-inspired, ideals of the Third Republic, the French attitude and policies towards the African populations were most decidedly racist.

²⁷⁶ Maffeo Pantaleoni(1857-1924) was a major contributor to the Italian school of economics, and advocate of neoclassical economics. Known for his anti-socialism, for his enthusiastic support of nationalism, he later embraced Fascism, and was rewarded with a seat in the Senate. He also participated in D’Annunzio’s Carnaro government at Fiume. Along with Vilfredo Pareto – who was also a nationalist sympathizer and later an admirer of Mussolini- and Antonio De Viti De Marco he is considered one of the most prominent Italian Economists of the early 20th century.

appeared in late September in on the most widely read Italian daily - *Il Giornale d' Italia* - Pantaleoni asserted that Italy should respect “the religion, mores and the civil law of the indigenous populations” in Tripolitania. However a few weeks later in November, he wrote in the *Popolo* - a regional magazine based in Gallipoli:

“The bastardized current population [of Libya] resulting from the mixing of the most repugnant human races, should be driven away and destroyed *and substituted with good Italian blood*” [italics mine].²⁷⁷

While remarking sarcastically on the unresolved contradiction within the pro-invasion camp, Prezzolini did not express his own opinion on which policy he advocated in Libya. In short, there was no consensus among the Corradinian nationalists as to whether association or replacement would be the best policy to adopt towards the Libyans, but it should be noted that the option of wiping out the Libyans and replacing them with Italian settlers was not out of the question, and that the writer proposing it was not an obscure supporter of the ANI, but Italy’s leading neo-classical economist and a professor of Economics at the University of Rome.

3. The second stage: Libyan “savagery” and Italian “civilized” violence.

The first stage of the campaign was characterized by a confident outlook regarding both the success of the military operations, and the ability of the Italians to absolve their mission to civilize the Libyans once the conquest was completed. However, under the confident façade, was an underlying fear of failure based on the memory of the Italian defeat in Ethiopia in 1896. The nationalists argued that the Italian failure had been due to a policy of “excessive leniency” towards the natives in East Africa and at times

²⁷⁷ G. Prezzolini, “Accordi tripolini”, *L' Unita*, I, 3, 1911.

expressed concern that the ill-fated policy would be adopted again in Libya, bearing similar results. The use of force was therefore advocated as the best way to secure the Italian domination over the indigenous people:

“The African dream [in Ethiopia] became a sad adventure, which the country [Italy] could not nobilitate with blood; [spilling the blood of the natives, i.e. punishing them] would have given us the respect of peoples in the early stages of civilization who neither know nor admire anything but the cult of force!”²⁷⁸

The nationalists argued that the timidity of the government in pursuing an aggressive foreign policy and the refusal to adopt violent means of domination—inevitably led to the “emasculat[i]on” of the Italian people. This view was based on a different portrayal of the natives: in place of the image of peaceful “idleness” and it proposed an image of blind and brutish violence, which, if left unchecked, changed by contrast the image of the Italians, annihilating their masculinity. In its opening issue the *Idea Nazionale* reminded the readers that after the battle of Adwa, the *negus* Menelik had personally given the order to mutilate the bodies of the fallen Italian soldiers by emasculating them.²⁷⁹ The memory of the emasculation served two purposes. On one hand, it was an act of unspeakable cowardice and savagery, and represented the proof that any feelings of solidarity towards the Africans were misplaced, because they were incapable of acting according to basic rules of “civilized” warfare, such as the respect for the bodies of the defeated enemies. It also symbolically extended the emasculation to the

²⁷⁸ “Per le nostre colonie in Eritrea e Benadir”, *L' Idea Nazionale*, I, 19, 1911.

²⁷⁹ *L'Idea Nazionale*, “Il dovere di ricordare”, cit. The theme of brutish violence had been part of the Liberal discourse about savagery. See Michele Nani, *Ai confini della nazione*, cit. for a discussion of the attitude of the liberal and socialist press page 83 and following. Nani cites reports of the emasculation of the Italian wounded soldiers rather than the Italian dead in the *Gazzetta del popolo*, March 28th 1896. *Ai confini della nazione*, cit., 87, note 200.

Italian nation itself due to the choice of the governments that succeeded Crispi to abandon the conquest of Ethiopia and not respond to the “savage” violence, with violence, thus allowing the savagery to go unpunished. As we have seen, the theme of the violent and savage nature of the indigenous Libyan populations was downplayed for the first few months of the interventionist campaign. However, the issue of using violent means of domination to counter the violent savagery of the Libyans would present itself in dramatic terms after the Arabs and Berbers, contrary to the Italian expectations, sided with the Turks and organized a guerrilla to repel the Italian invasion.

When the Giolitti government finally declared war on Turkey on September 29th 1911 the Corradinian nationalists exulted. To better underline all the main points of their campaign the *Idea Nazionale* published an excerpt from Oriani’s novel *Fino a Dogali* (Milano: Galli, 1887)²⁸⁰:

“If the more civilized had not always conquered the less civilized, civilization would have never grown.[...] The white race disputes the land of the inferior races, calling them to its civilization: those who fail to respond will be condemned; those who resist will be destroyed. [...] If Italy could be reborn as a nation, the secret [...] lies in the necessity that History has of its [Italy’s]work and in the capacity of our people to perform it.”

The theme of the civilizing mission featured prominently and it was linked to the “rebirth” of Italy as a nation-state. The selected passage from Oriani also refers to the destiny of the “inferior” races who fail to respond or resist the civilizing impetus of the “white race”. The Arab and Bedouin anti-Italian insurgence starting in the month of

²⁸⁰ Editorial “L’ Italia s’e’ desta”; “Una pagina ignota di Alfredo Oriani”, *L’Idea Nazionale*, I, 31, 1911. See also the editorial “Il Popolo d’Italia alla conquista delle sue colonie”, *ibid.*, I, 32, 1911.

October 1911, would provide precisely the kind of scenario and response that Oriani had so chillingly predicted.

Following the Italian bombardment and subsequent occupation of the main ports of Libya -including Tripoli and Cyrene, the Turk and Arab forces initially appeared to retreat, while in fact reorganizing and planning a guerrilla-style counter-attack. On October 23rd in Sciara Sciat, in the eastern zone of the area around Tripoli, guerrilla fighters under Turkish leadership - but consisting for the majority of Arabs - attacked the Italians who found themselves also attacked unexpectedly from behind by men and women of all ages living in the homes on the outskirts of Tripoli. The Turkish-Arab forces did not keep their Italian prisoners alive but executed them in the cemetery of Rebab or in Suk-el-Giema. The mode of the execution would be the most shocking aspect of the attack to the Italian public opinion. According to Del Boca, Italian survivors found their comrades “crucified, impaled, torn apart, decapitated, blinded, emasculated”.²⁸¹

The events of Sciara-Sciat were a turning point in the war. The retaliation of the Italian forces during late October and the month of November was merciless and provoked a chorus of protests, particularly in the British and French press. The Italians arrested hundreds of people and searched every home in Tripoli and surrounding areas, executing many of the arrested, while shipping the rest to confinement. In spite of the Italian retaliations, the Libyan guerrilla continued into most of 1912.²⁸² After the events of Sciara-Sciat, resentment towards the population of Libya spread from the trenches to the pages of the main Italian newspapers. Correspondents from the newspapers of Britain,

²⁸¹ Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Libia*, cit., 109-110. The exact number of Italian victims is unknown, but according to Del Boca they were over five hundred.

²⁸² The exact number of Arab victims is unknown, but, according to Del Boca, the casualties were at least one thousands and the deported were between four and five thousands. Del Boca and other historians agree that the Italian repressions should be considered as an act of genocide against the people of Libya.

France, Germany, and the US described the details of the Italian repression, and some of them left Libya in protest for the acts of cruelty that the Italians were perpetrating towards the locals. All the main Italian papers had correspondents at the front, who portrayed the situation in completely different terms: to the Italians the brutality of the retaliation appeared completely justified by the cruelty that the Libyans had displayed in Sciara-Sciat. Among others, Prezolini accused the British journalists of hypocrisy, pointing out that “the race that invented concentration camps” had no moral grounds to criticize the Italian repressions.²⁸³

Corradini, Castellini and Federzoni went to Tripoli in October to observe the war closely. Castellini’s articles published by the *Gazzetta di Venezia* were later collected in the volume *Nelle Trincee di Tripoli* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1912). The following passage from the Preface provides an insight into the effects produced by Sciara -Sciat:

“[...] I will not recall the image of the crucified *bersagliere*, as he appeared to me for the first time in the shade of a large olive tree. [...] But I have to say that when I saw the poor, deformed body I did not feel repulsion, I did not feel excessively moved at the thought of the horrendous martyrdom; I felt an impetus made exclusively of deadly indignation and sudden surge: revenge”.

He continued to say that all the Italian soldiers felt this kind of “impetus”, described as “human and savage” at the same time, “brotherly but wild”. Further down he added:

“Who will attempt the subtle psychological analysis of the fierce feeling arising in the soul of a man whose brother has not been killed but tortured? Nobody. Yet this kind of impetus is part of war, and the face of the fighter rendered wild by the

²⁸³ Prezolini “Le ‘atrocita’ italiane”, *La voce*, III, 46, 1911.

events is sad, and yet the indignation that will lead him towards death is holy”.

Before the events of Sciara-Sciat the nationalists were still undecided regarding the best method of administration to adopt in Lybia once the conquest was completed. Soon after the outbreak of the hostilities, the *Idea Nazionale* published an unsigned article by “expert” who had been invited to discuss how the colony could be best organized. He advocated a policy of “association” towards the Arabs in particular and argued that “every race had its civilization” and the colonizing country should respect it, fostering development without violently changing its essential characteristics.²⁸⁴

Such an opinion would become unthinkable only a week later. One of the images in Castellini’s *Nelle Trincee di Tripoli* captures the shift in the nationalist attitude towards the indigenous peoples of Libya. The caption of the picture says “Rebels caught in the Oasis and escorted by a *pattuglia* of the 18th *Fucilieri*”.

In place of the smiling Libyan woman, symbol of fertility of the land, there are two grim-looking, barefooted men, both bound with ropes and held by the Italian soldiers, who are also unsmiling. Instead of a reference to the sexual intercourse between the masculine Italian nation and the feminine Libya, there is a relationship between Italian captors and Libyan captives, one determined not by the willingness of both parties but by violence.

During the months following Sciara-Sciat the *Idea Nazionale* increased the references to Arab and Bedouin savagery and cruelty. This attitude is exemplified in a series of articles dedicated to the anti- Italian riots in Tunisi.

²⁸⁴ A.M., “Per l’ assetto della Tripolitania nostra”, L’ *Idea Nazionale*, I, 34, 1911.



Libyan “rebels” caught in the Oasis and escorted by a *pattuglia* of the 18th *Fucilieri*.

In November 1911 members of the Italian emigrant community in Tunisi had been attacked by a number of Arab and Bedouin residents of the town, leaving about ten dead on each side. The incidents were portrayed in the *Idea Nazionale* complete with the most graphic details of what was defined as a “massacre” of Italians. The locals were described as “crazed” and “blood-thirsty”, but most importantly hitting their victim “almost always in the back”. The detail of a seven-year-old girl who had her eyes ripped out by a “negro”

was repeated several times.²⁸⁵

The *Idea Nazionale* essentially proposed once again the theme of ‘savagery’ of the Arabs and Bedouins, consisting in acts of excessive and unmotivated violence perpetrated through treachery or towards a helpless victim - a child, a prisoner, a dead body. The lack of a valid motivation was considered the key to distinguish the violence of the “uncivilized” from the violence of the “civilized”. Arabs and Bedouins were described as “ferocious”, “coward”, and motivated purely by “religious fanaticism” and “racial hatred”.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ “Il massacro di Tunisi”, *L’Idea Nazionale* I, 38, 1911 ; “Le responsabilita’ del governo francese”, *Ibid.*, I, 39, 1911.

²⁸⁶ “Le responsabilita’ del governo francese”, *Ibid.*, I, 39, 1911.

The disappointment for the Arab “betrayal” in Libya was thus extended to the entire North Africa, as the distinctions between Arabs and Bedouins became more blurred, as the “Arabo-Berbers” were now characterized by “bestial ferocity”.²⁸⁷ Also the association between race and behavior became more definite. The cultural stereotypes of ‘savagery’ were accompanied by attempts to describe the North African populations in racial terms. The inhabitants of Morocco were claimed to be a single entity resulting from the mixing of the “Semite Arabs and Berbers” with the African “proto-Lybian”. The anti-Italian feelings of the African populations were thus explained in both cultural and racial terms, and the case of the Egyptian Copts was noted as an exception. The Egyptian Copts, described as “non Semitic” because of their dolichocephalic skull, thin lips and nose, were accused of having “betrayed they race” by embracing fanatic Islam.²⁸⁸

Cultural and biological racism thus coexisted and reinforced one another in the propaganda of the *Idea Nazionale*. Both aspects were called in support of the change of direction prompted by the events of Sciara-Sciat. The new situation in which the local population had unexpectedly surged against the Italians called for the use of force, brutal repression and the direct military control of the colony. Throughout the rest of the conflict the *Idea Nazionale* spurred the Giolitti government to launch a larger offensive in Libya and called upon the military to use force rather than persuasion because the indigenous population would only respect the invaders through fear.²⁸⁹

The model relationship between Italians and indigenous populations became that of the *askari* in the Italian army. The *Idea Nazionale* celebrated the Somalian and

²⁸⁷ Editorial, “Lesà civilta”, *L’ Idea Nazionale*, II, 2, 1912

²⁸⁸ Franco Frusci, “La Spagna e il Marocco”, *L’ Idea Nazionale*, I, 39, 1911; Ugo Farfara, “Il nazionalismo egiziano e la guerra italo-turca”, II, 4, 1912.

²⁸⁹ “L’illusione della pace”, *L’ idea nazionale*, I, 43, 1911;

Eritrean soldiers for their discipline and obedience, but mostly praised the excellent leadership of the Italian Generals, who had been able to quell the “racial hatred” of the “savages” turned them into loyal soldiers. Rather than a model of “association”, the Corradinian nationalists were now envisioning the full subjugation of the indigenous people under direct military command, since “force is the only means to dominate barbaric peoples”²⁹⁰. The local populations would have to choose between submitting themselves obediently to their Italian colonizers or perishing. The *Idea Nazionale* argued that ultimately what distinguished Italian violence from African violence was that the Italian violence had the purpose of civilizing through conquest, while the African violence was blind, cruel, and animalistic.²⁹¹

As the war ended in the fall of 1912, the Corradinian group congratulated themselves in the pages of the *Idea Nazionale* for the effect that the conflict had produced in Italy. They claimed that the war had absolved its function of strengthening the bond among Italians and had increased the national pride and prestige abroad. The military in particular had displayed the qualities of the “new man” that the Corradinian nationalists wanted to see emerge from the Risorgimento, a man willing and capable of conquest through violent means, thus demonstrating that war had indeed the power to “elevate the Italian race”.²⁹²

The political propaganda of the Corradinians did not go unchallenged, but there was no significant opposition to their racial discourse on the Libyans. The socialist press and the republican paper *Il Secolo* were the main adversaries of the *Idea Nazionale*'s

²⁹⁰ “La sottomissione degli Arabi” , Ibid, II, 20, 1912

²⁹¹ “I nostril ascari in Libia”, *L' idea Nazionale*, II, 7, 1912; Franco Spada, “La colonizzazione della Libia”, Ibid., II, 5, 1912; P. Occhini, “La sottomissione degli Arabi” , cit; “Per tenere la Libia”, Ibid., II, 36, 1912.

²⁹² “Un anno di Guerra”, *L' Idea Nazionale*, II, 40, 1912.

campaign for the invasion of Libya.²⁹³ However, the Socialist Party's response to the Libyan war was not unanimous; in fact the disagreement over Libya was one of the determining causes of the split at the congress of Reggio Emilia of 1912, between the revolutionary socialists, led by Benito Mussolini, and the reformists, led by Filippo Turati. Some within the socialist party went as far as supporting the war -specifically Leonida Bissolati and Ivanoe Bonomi – and were consequently expelled from the Party in 1912. Turati was in a difficult position: on one hand he condemned the war in principle as an act of capitalistic aggression, at the same time he refused to believe until September that Giolitti would actually give the order to invade Libya. Consequently, his anti-war campaign in *Avanti* and *Critica Sociale* was exceptionally mild compared to the nationalists'. Mussolini, on the other hand, exploited the situation to gain visibility by attacking both the government and Turati in many ways more viciously than he did the nationalists from the pages of his weekly paper *Lotta di Classe*. Because of his involvement in an anti-war demonstration held in Milan in September 1911 he was jailed for five months, but his popularity soared to the point that he became one of the leaders of the revolutionary socialists and eventually director of the main socialist daily *Avanti*.²⁹⁴

²⁹³ The *Idea Nazionale* responded to the Socialist Party's leader Turati by claiming that the socialist wanted to deny to people who have conquered their civilized status over centuries the "great human right" of conquering lands which lay abandoned or poorly exploited by "lazy or inert" races such as the Libyans. "I Pigmei", *L' Idea Nazionale*, cit.

²⁹⁴ For the attitude of the Italian left towards the Libyan campaign see Maurizio Degl'Innocenti, *Il socialismo italiano e la guerra di Libia* (Editori riuniti: Roma, 1976) and, more recently, Richard Drake, *Apostles and Agitators: Italy's Marxist Revolutionary Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003). The Libyan conflict also created a split in the files of the Revolutionary syndacalists. Three of the leading syndacalists, Paolo Orano Angelo Oliviero Olivetti, and Arturo Labriola, advocated proletarian and socialist support for Italy's imperialistic war with Turkey. According to David Roberts, they supported the war "primarily because of the revolutionary psychological effect they felt it might have on the Italian workers and on Italian society" and "were not advocating war as a means to overcome class conflict and create class solidarity[...] they envisioned the war experience as the kind of preliminary revolution Italy required before syndacalism could fully develop". *Pagine Libere*, the official organ of the Italian

The socialist anti-war stance was motivated by the ideological association between imperialism and capitalism²⁹⁵, rather than by the rejection of racist ideas. The opponents of the Libyan war believed that it would strengthen the bourgeoisie and should be opposed as such. The supporters believed that the war might work to the advantage of the socialist cause in the long term, because, by making the bourgeoisie stronger and further polarizing class warfare, it would pave the way for the socialist revolution. Turati's statements at the Congress of Modena were very harsh towards the Libyan enterprise, but seemed insufficient to the revolutionary socialists:

“The colonial history of all nations is always more or less about brigandage. [...] ours is brigandage in its purest form. With the aggravating circumstance of being perfectly fruitless; of turning itself, first and above all , against the interests of our own country” .²⁹⁶

The leaders of the extreme left accused him of being too soft towards imperialism and argued that according to his logic if the Libyan war had actually been profitable and advantageous for the proletarian settlers, then the case could be made for the Libyan war. Turati deflected with the argument that the rise of imperialism was a necessity for the development of capitalism and thus a precondition for the socialist revolution.

syndacalists was forced to cease publication because of the bitter dispute among its editors over the issue of Libya. David D. Roberts *The syndicalist tradition and Italian fascism* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1979). See also Zeev Sternhell, *The birth of fascist ideology*, cit. . Another split occurred between Guido Podrecca and Gabriele Galantara who ran the satirical illustrated magazine *L'Asino*. The paper was openly socialist and had a huge following even though it was never officially recognized by the Italian Socialist Party. Podrecca was in favor of the Libyan enterprise, supporting Bissolati's position, while Galantara was hostile to the war, the tension among the two long-time collaborators fueled by the Libyan war would explode at the outbreak of WWI. Alberto Pellegrino, *Il travaglio delle idee: un secolo di caricatura nella comunicazione e nell'arte* (Recanati: Bieffe, 2008).

²⁹⁵ This association of imperialism and capitalism predated the writing and publication of Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917).

²⁹⁶ Quoted in Drake, *Apostles*, Cit., 118.

Turati did not averse the depiction of the Africans, and the Libyans in particular, as “barbaric” any more than he rejected the prejudice against the Italian South. In fact one of the central points of his opposition to the Libyan war was that the Italian government should concentrate its attention to the colonization of the Italian South rather than Africa, proposing a parallel between the barbarism of the two. A backward a poor country, such as Italy, “that has not yet succeeded in eliminating barbarism and the Middle Ages from a large part of itself” should not waste financial resources in a desert across the sea.²⁹⁷

Gaetano Salvemini, who strongly opposed the Libyan war, attacked Turati for his stance that combined a persistent prejudice towards the South and a mild condemnation of the war.²⁹⁸ Salvemini agreed that the money spend on the invasion of Libya would be better spent in the South but rejected the depiction of the South as barbaric and the parallel with the Africans. From the pages of his paper *L'Unita'* he blasted the socialist leadership for its lack of determination in the months prior to the war and for its inattentiveness to the issue of Libya until mid September 1911, when it was too late to counteract effectively the propaganda of the nationalists.

The Vociani expressed a very strong opposition to the invasion, but their opposition did not contain a critique of the racial discourse of the Corradinian nationalists. Prezzolini, in close collaboration with Salvemini, challenged both the claim that Libya could be successfully transformed into an agricultural colony, and the claim that the Arabs would side with the Italians against the Turks in case of a war. Prezzolini lamented that while the Italian South desperately needed infrastructures and schools the Corradinian nationalists wanted to divert the limited financial resources of the Italian

²⁹⁷ Ibid. , 119.

²⁹⁸ Gaetano Salvemini, “ Tripoli e I socialisti”, *L'Unita'* , I,1, 1911.

state to the valorization of Libya.²⁹⁹ When the war broke out, he decided to restrain from further criticizing the invasion of Libya, because he felt that his patriotic duty was to support the country during a time of war, but at the same time he maintained his critical stance against the Corradinian nationalists, accusing them of exploiting the war to increase their popularity. Prezzolini's attitude determined the end of Salvemini's collaboration with *La Voce* and the creation of the magazine *L'Unita'*, in which Salvemini continued his campaign against the war in Libya and for the economic, social and cultural improvement of the Italian South.

The Liberal press supported the nationalist views - even a moderate newspaper such as *Il Corriere della Sera*- focusing on the economic and strategic advantages of the war rather than the ideological and racial implications of the nationalist discourse. However after Sciara-Sciat the Liberal press portrayed the Libyan savagery in terms that were very close to the nationalists, for instance by publishing letters from soldiers who described the Libyans in animalistic terms. Additionally, the catholic opinion posed no significant challenge to the racial discourse proposed by the nationalists. A significant part of the

²⁹⁹ "Perche' non si deve andare in Tripolitania", *La Voce*, III, 35, 1911. For the discussion of the Italian South seen as an internal colony see chapter IV. In support of his arguments Prezzolini cited the findings of a study by the Jewish Territorial Organization (JTO) that had investigated the possibility of establishing a Jewish agricultural colony in Libya and had concluded that Libya was not suitable for Agriculture primarily due to the scarcity of water. For a discussion of Salvemini and Prezzolini activity against the *Idea Nazionale* see Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia*, cit. 62-64. The polemic between Prezzolini and the *Idea Nazionale* continued throughout the summer, with vitriolic exchanges of insults in the pages of both *La Voce* and the *Idea Nazionale*. Castellini responded to Prezzolini's -and the JTO's- claims of the scarcity of water in Libya by saying that the JTO's findings were not valid because the Jews were great tradesman but would never be able to create a successful agricultural colony. Gualtiero Castellini "L' Ora di Tripoli incalza", *L' Idea Nazionale*, I, 13 1911. Many of Prezzolini's friends like Alberto Caroncini, Luigi Ambrosini and Giovanni Papini supported the invasion of Libya. Caroncini rejected the idea that the conquest of Tripolitania would take money away from the *Mezzogiorno* and argued that the only money the Italian government would spend in Tripolitania would be going towards the military. Papini did not oppose the occupation of Libya and in fact boasted that while still a collaborator of *Il Regno* he had been among the firsts to advocate the expansion of the Italian colonies. At the same time he rejected the idea that the Libyan war could absolve the function of building the national consciousness, and he predicted that the "real" war would soon overshadow any colonial dispute. Alberto Caroncini, "Mezzogiorno e Tripolitania" *L'Idea Nazionale*, I, 30, 1911 and Giovanni Papini, "La guerra vittoriosa", *La voce*, II, 42, 1911.

Catholics was pro-war, largely for financial reasons: one of the main Italian enterprises in Libya was the Banco di Roma, which invested in the modernization of Libya and saw the economic participation of many interests close to the Vatican.³⁰⁰ Catholic magazines such as *Rassegna Nazionale* echoed the Corradinian nationalists on many points and did not reject their racist presentation of the Libyans. The only significant difference was that while a part of the nationalists supported an annihilationist stance towards the Libyans, the Catholics envisioned mass conversion as a tool of “civilization”.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the *Idea Nazionale*'s campaign in favor of the invasion of Libya was motivated by their overall colonial agenda, in connection with the concept of war as a tool for the construction of a national conscience. The use of racial stereotypes language followed patterns which predated the Libyan war and that had been used by the Liberals during the colonial campaigns of the 1880s and 1890s. The language of colonization was also international in its scope with many of the stereotypes and patterns repeating themselves in different period and different countries, albeit with variations. Michele Nani has shown how the liberal “racial” discourse of the late 19th century did not feature a “scientific” language, but rather resorted to the repetitive presentation of cultural stereotypes.³⁰¹ The difference between the nationalists and the Liberals was the insertion of the discourse on savagery into the broader scope of remaking Italians according to the idea of organic nation. In the first stage of the campaign the presentation

³⁰⁰ See A D' Alessandro “Il Banco di Roma e la Guerra di Libia” in *Storia e Politica* (July-September 1968): 491-609.

³⁰¹ See Michele Nani, *Ai confini della nazione, stampa e razzismo nell'Italia di fine Ottocento*, cit., particularly pages 60-63.

of the Libyans as “uncivilized” emphasized by contrast the ability of the Italians to bring civilization, as their Roman ancestors had done. In the second stage, particularly after the episode of Sciara Sciat, the Libyans were presented as over-masculine violent brutes, whose blind violence was contrasted with the civilized violence of the Italians and justified a regime of brutal domination over those who had rejected civilization. Overall from an ideological point of view the Libyan war served a crucial function in strengthening the nationalist ideology, by providing a climax to the discourse of continuity with ancient Rome, by providing an outlet for emigration and the means to elevate the South along with the North, and finally as a tool for the construction of a national conscience according to the idea of organic nation.

PART III: Anti-Semitism

Chapter 5: Rejection

Renzo De Felice was the first to identify a relationship between nationalist and clerical anti-Semitism, however he considered the first as a “lesser” and more superficial form of anti-Semitism compared to the Catholic discourse.³⁰² Even though in recent years there has been a renewed interest in the study of the roots of Fascist anti-Semitism, the existing literature tends to deal with the nationalists cursorily without fully exploring the ideological relationship between nationalism and conservative Catholicism, and its impact in the nationalist anti-Semitic discourse.³⁰³ According to De Felice, before WWI, nationalist anti-Semitism was “limited to an elite” and “vague”. He acknowledged the repetition of “traditional” and “vaguely spiritualistic” formulas, but maintained that they

³⁰² In his seminal 1961 essay, he argued: “At the beginning of the 20th century nationalist, revolutionary syndacalistic and -eventually- fascist anti-Semitism gradually joined catholic, or rather, clerical anti-Semitism. This new anti-Semitism was and remained largely inferior to the clerical: on one hand [the new anti-Semitism] borrowed [from the clerical anti-Semitic discourse] a series of arguments (the anti-Christian Jew, the mason Jew, the Jew leeching off the national resources, and eventually the antinational Jew and the Bolshevik Jew), on the other hand it was devoid of [the clerical anti-Semitic discourse’s] systematic narrative and meaning”, Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il Fascismo*, cit. , 43.

³⁰³ See for instance Maria Mantello, *Ebreo, un bersaglio senza fine, storia dell’antisemitismo* (Scipioni, 2002), and especially Enzo Collotti, *Il fascismo e gli ebrei: Le leggi razziali in Italia* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 2003) and Giorgio Fabre, *Mussolini razzista: Dal socialismo al fascismo: la formazione di un antisemita* (Milano: Garzanti, 2005). A few works have focused on the Fascist period specifically, demonstrating that the regime’s racial policies were Mussolini’s own choice - rather than Hitler’s imposition -and part of his project for the creation of the “new Italian man”, which took momentum after the strengthening of the totalitarian project after 1936. See for instance Bruno Segre’s *Gli ebrei in Italia* (Milano: Fenice, 1993), Alberto Cavaglioni’s *Storia degli ebrei in Italia* (Torino: Einaudi, 1995), and Aldo Mola’s *Isacco Artom e gli ebrei italiani dal Risorgimento al Fascismo* (Foggia: Bastogi, 2002) give a more composite experience of the life of the Jewish Italian communities. Collotti’s *Il fascismo e gli ebrei*, cit. and Bonavita’s *L’offesa della razza: razzismo e antisemitismo nell’ Italia fascista* (Bologna: Patron, 2005) represent important contributions to the study of Italian anti-Semitism in relation to the Racial Laws of the Fascist period. These works take issue with the notion that anti-Semitism was not only alien to Italian culture, but marginal to the fascist doctrine, because of size of the Jewish Italian community (in 1938 there were 47,000 Jews in Italy, or less than 1,1 Jews in a thousand), its integration in Italian society and culture, and the absence of episodes of popular violence. These works also helped dismantling another myth: that Italian racism under Mussolini had been “mild” compared to racism in Nazi Germany, because it “discriminated” against, rather than “persecuted” Jews. See also Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *La cultura fascista* (Bologna: Il Mulino 2000), 236, Giorgio Candeloro, *Storia dell’Italia moderna. Il fascismo e le sue guerre* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1981), vol.IX, 447-448, and Giorgio Fabre, *Mussolini razzista*, cit.; Romano Canosa, *A caccia di ebrei. Mussolini, Preziosi e l’antisemitismo fascista* (Milano: Mondadori, 2007).

were “of no political consequence”³⁰⁴. Alexander De Grand rightly situated the anti-Semitic polemic in the context of the rejection of democracy and the building of the alliance with the clericals, but did not explore the ideological link between nationalist anti-Semitism, anti-modernism, and clericalism.³⁰⁵ Without arguing for a direct connection between the catholic alliance and anti-Semitism this chapter delves deeper into the ideological connection between the two.

Italian anti-Semitism for the most part had “spiritual” rather than “biological” roots, with the Catholic Church playing a prominent role in both encouraging cultural anti-Semitism and at the same time stemming the influx of the more extreme forms of northern biological racism.³⁰⁶ The “biological” view, which predominated in the North European racists, claimed to be based on scientific observation and the application of scientific methods to classify races based on hereditary biological traits. By contrast the “spiritual” or “cultural” approach, which predominated in Italy, relied on myths and intuition as the bases of racial differences to justify a hierarchy among races. The two approaches to race were often intertwined, with biological racists relying on speculation and imagination given the inconclusiveness of “scientific data”, and “spiritual” racists struggling to reconcile their belief in historically determined racial differences and principle of hereditariness.³⁰⁷ In the second half of the 19th century the conservative

³⁰⁴ De Felice, cit., passim

³⁰⁵ Alexander De Grand, *The Italian Nationalist Association*, cit.

³⁰⁶ For a discussion see Aaron Gillette, *Racial Theories*, cit. , Introduction.

³⁰⁷ The Italian scientists proudly supported the racial laws of 1938, avowing the originality of the Italian “spiritual” anti-Semitism vis-à-vis the German “biological” approach. The scientific theories which supported racism and created the cultural grounds for the fascist notion of race have been explored by Israel and Nastasi in *Scienza e razza nell’ Italia fascista*, cit. , by Maiocchi in *Scienza Italiana e razzismo fascista* cit., and his *Scienza e fascismo* , cit. by Aaron Gillette in *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy*, cit. and finally by Pogliano in *L’ ossessione della razza*, cit., passim. The main contention of these studies that the Racial Laws of 1938 were not just a measure adopted by Mussolini to please his German ally, but that they stemmed from an Italian tradition of writing about race dating from the 19th century. The Italian scientists

clerical literature, which was by far the most significant source of anti-Semitism in post-Unitarian Italy, embraced new “cultural” anti-Semitic tropes that enriched its arsenal of traditional anti-Judaic discourse. The Dreyfus affair in particular was the turning point in which the catholic discourse adopted a stance that mirrored the French anti-Semitic movement *Action Française*.

In the fall of 1911 the nationalist movement - and the Corradianian group in particular, was ready to reap the benefits of their successful campaign for the invasion of Libya and enter the political scene with their own candidates for the political elections that would be held in 1913. Their newly found visibility led the nationalists to clarify their political stance concerning democracy. This crucial passage, in which the Corradianian anti-democratic position eventually prevailed, coincided with the gradual forging of an alliance with the conservative clericals. While anti-Semitism was not a prerequisite of the alliance with the Catholics, it was not by mere coincidence that the Corradianian paper, which was on the forefront of the national-clerical alliance and of the antidemocratic tendency, would be the one to publish one of the most openly anti-Semitic

openly defended their independence of views and most of them fully supported the racial policies of the Fascist regime in the late 1930s. The Italian racist propaganda had in common with the Germans not only the proclaimed need to expel the “excessive” number of Jews in the academic world, but also the proclamation of a national way of doing science. The “Italian way of doing science”, or “Galilean way”, was seen in opposition to two equally “foreign” scientific approaches: as the excessively practical German way, and the excessively theoretical Jewish way. “Spiritual” racism was in no way a “lesser” form of racism, but simply a different way to justify persecution and segregation. In Germany the scientific community was on the forefront of the anti-Semitic campaign, and promoted the idea that there were two ways of being a scientist -an “Aryan” and a “Jewish” way, at war with one another. The Nazis use of genetics and anthropology to justify their racial doctrines has been amply debated in historical literature. See for instance: A. D. Beyerchen, *Scientists Under Hitler: Politics and the Physics Community in the Third Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); A. Shields, “Mathematics, Race, and Biology”, in *The Mathematical Intelligence* 10 (1988); J. Olff-Nathan, *La science sous le Troisième Reich* (Paris: Seuil, 1993); and M. Rennenberg and M Walker, *Science, Technology and National Socialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

attacks of the Giolittian period.³⁰⁸ The alliance with the Catholics was openly based on the common aim to stem the influence of democracy, socialism, and Freemasonry in Italian society. The anti-modern discourse proposed by both the clericals and the nationalists included Anti-Semitism as part of the same discourse linking all aspects of socially and politically progressive modernity and viewed the Jews as the more active promoters of “materialistic” values - individualism, equality, cosmopolitanism.³⁰⁹

The primary goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that nationalist anti-Semitism was not a collection of isolated incidents limited to certain individuals, but that it was consonant to the particular brand of anti-modernism that characterized the nationalist movement.

1. The sources of anti-Semitic discourse: Clerical anti-modernism and French anti-Semitism

From the middle of the 19th century the conservative Catholic opinion - rather than the Vatican itself- developed a discourse linking democracy, socialism, Freemasonry and Judaism with the decline of the power of the Church and with the consequent general decline of European society. The central argument was that ever since emancipation the Jews had allegedly been at work to undermine the Church. The assault to the Church was

³⁰⁸ See De Felice, cit., and Mario, Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo in Italia: dal 1848 alla guerra dei sei giorni* (Milano: F. Angeli, 2003).

³⁰⁹ My interpretation is based on the definition of Italian nationalism as a movement that embraced economic and cultural modernity considered as genuine expressions of Western culture – from capitalistic enterprise to the advances in modern technology, but strongly opposed social and political modernity – which included democracy, socialism, pacifism and international cooperation that weakened and negated the principles that had propelled the European civilization forward. The definition of nationalism as a composite movement combining both modernity and its rejection has been proposed, among others, by Emilio Gentile, see for instance: *La grande Italia* cit., and “The Conquest of Modernity”, cit. 55-87. Also by Zeev Sternhell *The Birth of the fascist Ideology*, cit.. passim

the means through which the foundations of traditional European society were gradually being dismantled and replaced with the progressive values embodied by the French Revolution. This discourse converged and was deeply intertwined with the anti-Semitism of movements such as the *Action Française*, which exerted a significant influence on Italian nationalism.

The Catholic Church's traditional hostility towards the Jews dated back to medieval times and was centered on theological accusation of "deicide". It is commonly referred to as anti-Judaism to distinguish it from modern anti-Semitism, which evolved as a reaction to the emancipation of Jews following the French Revolution.³¹⁰ Traditional anti-Judaism provided the ideological framework for the persecution and the segregation of Jews across Europe, and a series of tropes and stereotypes derived from the original theological accusation. The purported hatred of Jews towards Christians motivated by their punishment – the Diaspora - for their sin of deicide allegedly led the Jews to commit atrocities such as the ritual murder of Christian children and to conspire against the gentiles. Their purported incapacity to comprehend the higher Christian Truths – and thus repent- was motivated by their blind greed, which drove them in the malicious intent to economically exploit Christians through usury. Traditional anti-Judaism thus justified the persecution of Jews as a form of "self-defense" (from ritual murder, from usury, from anti-Christian plots, etc.) but it also, at least hypothetically, contemplated the inclusion of Jews into the fold of Christianity through their conversion.

The gradual emancipation of Jews throughout Western Europe beginning in the late 18th century and their greater participation to the cultural and political life led to the

³¹⁰ For instance David Kerzer, among others, uses this distinction in his *The Popes against the Jews: the Vatican's role in the rise of modern anti-Semitism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001).

development of new forms of anti-Semitism, both cultural and racial.³¹¹ In the second half of the 19th century in particular the old pattern of traditional anti-Judaism became intertwined with the new cultural anti-Semitism centered on the claim of a pernicious influence exerted by the Jews in modern society, politics and culture, to the detriment of traditional structures. This interplay of stereotypes and tropes proved influential in the Italian nationalist culture, both for ideological and tactical reasons.

The path which brought traditional anti-Judaism closer to modern anti-Semitism originated in the particular territorial and political situation of the Papacy in the second half of the 19th century. The first decades after Italian Unification were marked by a deep contrast between the Italian Kingdom and the Vatican. Italian Unification was completed through the loss of the temporal power of the Church over the lands of central Italy. Pope Pius IX reacted against the Italian Unification with the *Non-Expedi* - a policy by which Italian Catholics were forbidden from participating to political life.³¹² The Italian government responded by passing laws aimed at the secularization of Italian political, social and cultural life, in particular excluding the Church from the field of public education. At the same time anti-clerical stance criticizing the temporal power of the Church and its involvement in Italian politics became widespread among liberal politicians and observers. The political and cultural contrast with the Italian State prompted a surge in the anti- modern discourse of the Catholic Church, exemplified by

³¹¹ See George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution*, cit..

³¹² The *Non-Expedi* policy summed up in the motto “neither elected nor elector” was adopted after the constitution of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861.

Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), a document which condemned progress, liberalism and modern civilization.³¹³

During the period of contrast with the Italian state traditional catholic anti-Judaism gradually combined with a discourse that associated the emancipation of the Jews with the rise of liberalism and individualism and the consequent decline of the authority of the Church.³¹⁴ Even though the official position of the Vatican was not overtly anti-Semitic, the Catholic or rather clerical opinion was very vocal in their condemnation of the Jews, and expressed itself in the many Catholic papers that exploded both nationally and locally after 1860. By most of the Catholic press, particularly the Jesuit paper *Civiltà Cattolica* the Jews were labeled as promoters and agents of modernity, and were accused of plotting in secret to destroy the Catholic Church. One example above all is the fact that Leo XIII's encyclical *Humanum Genus* (1884) against Freemasonry and Socialism, was interpreted by many conservative catholic papers in anti-Semitic terms, and the link between Judaism and Freemasonry became an established centerpiece of the Catholic discourse against the Jews.³¹⁵

³¹³ In 1864, along with the *Syllabus*, Pius IX published the encyclical *Quanta Cura* condemning, among other things, modern civilization and freedom of conscience.

³¹⁴ See Michele Nani, *Ai confini della nazione*, cit., Part 3, 157 and following. Nani justly observed that anti-Semitism became one of the distinctive elements of the new system of communication that the Catholic Church developed after the Italian Unification. Nani, Cit., 177; see also Renato Moro, *La Chiesa e lo sterminio degli ebrei* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2002); and Giovanni Miccoli, "Santa Sede, questione ebraica e antisemitismo fra Otto e Novecento" in *Storia d' Italia. Annali II, Gli ebrei in Italia*, 2t. edited by C Vivanti (Einaudi: Torino, 1996-97).

³¹⁵ In terms of periodization, the anti-Semitic campaign began right after the conquest of Rome (1870), increasing in intensity the eighties and nineties (peaking in the 1891-2 and 1898-9) and lessening with the end of the pontificate of Leo XIII (1903), and finally peaking again towards the end of the Giolittian period in spite of Pius X being personally well disposed towards the Jews. See Andrew Canepa, "Cattolici ed ebrei nell' Italia liberale (1870-1915)" in *Comunita'. Rivista di informazione culturale* 32 (1978): 43-109; and Canepa, "Pius X and the Jews: A Reappraisal", *Church History* 61 (3) (Sep., 1992): 362-372.

The complex mixing of traditional anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism can also be seen in the ambiguous clerical stance towards anti-Semitic associations such as the German *Anti-Semitic League*. For instance in 1881 the Catholic paper *La voce dell' operaio* commented:

“It is easy to say, as many papers do, that the Anti-Semitic League is ‘shameful’, ‘a return to barbarism’, and ‘worse than the Middle Ages’. One also has to look at how those poor people cope with the suffocating embrace of Judaism”.³¹⁶

The theological argument of the Jewish rejection and murder of the Messiah was thus enriched by new arguments which questioned the very bases of the principle of conversion: namely the question of whether the Jews could truly change their nature, given their ancestral and inextinguishable hatred for Christians. Even though the Vatican officially condemned violence, the episodes of popular anti-Semitic violence were presented acts of “self-defense”, as popular outburst of popular anti-Semitism had been in the past, but it now also displayed the acceptance of some of the key stereotypes of modern anti-Semitism and consequent abandonment of the idea of conversion. As David Kerzer justly observed: “In theory, the belief in the Jews’ salvation through conversion remained, but conversion became more distant – a praiseworthy yet wholly impractical goal”.³¹⁷

Towards the end of the 19th century, the Dreyfus Affair further strengthened this discourse. The events surrounding the Jewish captain of the French army wrongly accused of being a German spy were used by the clerical opinion to add a new accusation

³¹⁶ “Gli studenti a Berlino e il movimento antisemitico” in *UC*, 24 Apr 1881, quoted in Michele Nani, *Cit.*, 181. The translation is mine.

³¹⁷ Nani, *Cit.* 182-3. David Kerzer, *Cit.*, 138.

to their arsenal of anti-Semitic tropes: the Jewish conspiracy to weaken the nation.³¹⁸ The theory purporting the existence of a “Dreyfusard conspiracy” was most radically formulated in the *Civiltà Cattolica*, which argued that an “obscure power” had thrown France into upheaval in order to humiliate the guardians of the nation. In this way, the Dreyfus case was interpreted as part of “an important conspiracy against Catholic and French interests” devised by the Jewish plutocracy together with Freemasons, Protestants, socialists and anarchists.³¹⁹

Even though the Catholic Church remained an international institution with a universal claim to spiritual leadership, the Italian clericals increasingly identified themselves with the Italian nation – as well as identifying the Italian nation with Catholicism.³²⁰ The Catholic Church’s adoption of its own brand of nationalism may seem contradictory, given the association of the nation with the modern era. In fact, the Catholic argument turned the association upside down by attaching the concepts of “tradition” and “memory” to the idea of nation, and by identifying the “true” national

³¹⁸ The official Vatican position during the Dreyfus Affair was neutral, but the most prominent catholic papers expressed a strong anti-Dreyfusard bias. Maurizio Molinari, *Ebrei in Italia: un problema di identità (1870-1938)* (Firenze: La giuntina, 1991). The Catholic paper *Italia Reale* for instance espoused identical views to Drumond’s anti-Semitic paper *Libre Parole* during the Dreyfuss affair. Nani, cit., 157-8.

³¹⁹ “Il caso di Alfredo Dreyfus”, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 5 February 1898, 273-87. See also A. Prontera, “La Civiltà Cattolica et l’affaire Dreyfus” in *Les écrivains et l’affaire Dreyfus*, edited by Géraldi Leroy (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1983), 58-64.

³²⁰ The same was true for Catholics living in other countries. For the convergence between Catholicism and nationalism in the name of “tradition” in France see Pierre Birnbaum, “*La France aux français*”: *Histoire des haines nationalistes* (Seuil, Paris 1993). For the Italian case see Guido Formigoni, *L’Italia dei cattolici: fede e nazione dal Risorgimento alla Repubblica* (Bologna: Il mulino, 1998); M Guasco, “Il contetto di nazione nel cattolicesimo italiano”, in *Humanitas* 2 (1999): 229-40; and Danilo Veneruso “Movimento cattolico e questione nazionale”, in DSMCI, Aggiornamento 35-47. In Italy, along with the idea of nation proposed by the Risorgimento, existed another idea of nation that was anti-modern, anti-liberal and kept together by the catholic faith. See Formigoni, cit.; but also Mario G Rossi *Il movimento cattolico tra Chiesa e Stato in Storia d’ Italia*, vol III *Liberalismo e democrazia (1887-1914)*, edited by G. Sabbatucci and V. Vidotto (Laterza: Roma- Bari, 1995), and Rossi, *Le origini del partito cattolico. Movimento cattolico e lotta di classe nell’ Italia Liberale* (Editori riuniti: Roma, 1977).

identity of catholic countries such as France and Italy with Catholicism. In this respect, the clericals were able to propose an anti-Semitic discourse according to which the purported attack against the Church on the part of the Jews overlapped with the accusation of destroying the foundations of the nation.³²¹

Clerical anti-Semitism during the Dreyfus affaire mirrored the discourse of the nationalist French movement *Action Française*, which was extremely influential in the Italian nationalist culture. *Action Française* – AF - was the name of both a movement and a periodical founded by Maurice Pujo and Henri Vaugeois that rejected the French Revolutionary values and the Republic that had been established after the fall of Napoleon III. AF was founded in 1898 during the Dreyfus affaire, in part as a reaction to the pro-Dreyfusard campaign launched by Emile Zola and others, and became one of the points of reference of anti-Dreyfusard camp. Charles Maurras joined a year after the foundation of AF, quickly becoming the chief ideologue of the movement and converting the founders to his own monarchist stance.³²²

³²¹ As Emilio Gentile argued :“the Dreyfus affair was interpreted in Italy as a global conflict between opposing concepts of man and politics, a conflict in which were at stake not only one man's fate but also the destiny of humanity during a period of rapid changes that were threatening to shatter the pillars of traditional society, dragged through the vortex of modernity”. Emilio Gentile, “The Struggle for Modernity”, cit., 497-511.

³²² *Action Française* has been the object of many studies, particularly Eugen Weber, *Action française; royalism and reaction in twentieth century France* (Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press, 1962). One of the main historiographical issues has been whether AF should be considered a Fascist movement, or simply a reactionary, right-wing movement. Ernst Nolte considered the *Action Française* to be the first fascist party in his controversial *Three faces of fascism; Action Française Italian fascism, National Socialism* (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965). Zeev Sternhell has cited the group as a major, direct intellectual influence on fascism in *The Birth of the fascist Ideology*, cit. and *Neither right nor left: fascist ideology in France* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1986). See also Robert Soucy, *French fascism: the first wave, 1924-1933* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1986), and more recently Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Knopf, 2004).

Maurras created a genuinely counterrevolutionary, far-right movement based on “integral nationalism” -*nationalisme integrale* – that in many ways inspired Corradini’s idea of “organic nation”. “Integral nationalism” was the doctrine according to which the nation is an organic unit in which the individual completely identifies with the nation, and recognizes the nation’s aggrandizement and priorities as superior to its own personal advance. Maurras’ particular brand of nationalism was ideologically indebted to the *Revanchisme* of the founder of the *Ligue des patriotes* – Patriotic League, Paul Déroulède; to the anti-Semitism of the leader of the anti-Dreyfusard camp Edouard Drumond; and finally to the nationalism of *la Terre et les Morts* – the Land and the Dead – of Maurice Barres.³²³ AF’s reactionary ideology was centered on the return of the Monarchy and the rejection of the principle of *laïcité* – secular society- adopted in France in 1905.³²⁴

Monarchism, Catholicism and Anti-Semitism formed the core of AF’s ideology. Both the Monarchy and the Catholic Church were seen as true emblems of French tradition, and sources of social cohesion and stability against the advance of democracy, liberalism and socialism. Maurras, like Drumond and Barres, believed that France had to be liberated first and foremost from foreign influences –*meteques*- within French society and culture, including the Jews, but also the Protestants, and the Freemasons, in whom he saw the true “kings of the Republic”. Anti-Semitism was a crucial component of

³²³ According to Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of the fascist Ideology*, cit. , 9: “This formula of Barres was in fact only the French counterpart of the German formula *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Soil), and it showed that the old theory, consecrated by the French Revolution, that society was made up of a collection of individuals, had been replaced by the theory of the organic unity of the nation”. William Curt Buthman, *The Rise of Integral Nationalism in France. With Special Reference to the Ideas and Activities of Charles Maurras* (New York: Columbia University Press. 1939).

³²⁴ The 1905 law passed by the Left Coalition officially separated Church and State and deprived Catholicism of its privileged position as state religion.

Maurras' ideology, but it is important to note that for the most part his discourse against the Jews -against their involvement in French finance, culture, politics and economy - was not the outcome of scientific racism – as it was the case for many German and Austrian anti-Semites- but rather it was the outcome of an anti-modern stance not dissimilar to that of the Catholic Church. For its part the Vatican regarded the AF with distrust, similarly to the attitude that it would hold towards the nationalist-clerical alliance in the Italian elections of 1913.³²⁵

In both the Corradinians and the nationalist Revolutionary syndacalists the opposition to anti-clericalism and Freemasonry went hand in hand with their appreciation of the role of Catholicism. The Giolittian period in Italy mirrored to a large degree the post-Dreyfusard climate in France³²⁶: the political forces that found the democratic system corrupted and inefficient rejected anti-clericalism, attacked Freemasonry and began to re-evaluate the role of the Catholic Church. In this respect, the influence of French thinkers was fundamental: the Corradinians were influenced by Charles Maurras, and the revolutionary syndacalists by Georges Sorel.³²⁷

In France, as Zeev Sternhell pointed out, anti-Semitism was a basic element of the revolt against the liberal consensus and the social-democratic consensus, and was to be

³²⁵ The relationship between AF and the Vatican soured in 1926, when Pius XI officially condemned the *Action Française*. Several of Maurras's writings as well as the periodical were placed on the Index of Forbidden Books. In 1939, following the Spanish Civil War, Pius XII ended the condemnation.

³²⁶ Gentile argued: "The French situation and the Italian situation were regarded as very similar: in both cases there was a conflict between reactionary and democratic forces; a duel between the champions of the Reason of State and those of the Rights of Man. Actually, the crisis in the two nations had little in common, but the tendency to look for analogies inspired most comments on the Dreyfus case". Gentile, "The Struggle for Modernity", cit., 498.

³²⁷ Prezzolini for his part, even as an atheist, admired the philosophy of the catholic Charles Peguy, a former Dreyfusard who decried the effects of the victory of Dreyfusism and anti-clericalism in France.

found in both the Maurassian nationalists and the revolutionary syndacalists like Sorel.³²⁸ The founder of the Revolutionary syndacalists movement drifted away from Marxism and became close to Maurras during the 1909-10 period. His closeness to nationalism led him to mirror Maurras anti-Semitism in his paper *L'Independance*, however Sorel did not simply imitate Maurras' anti-Semitism, but felt a genuine commonality of ideas³²⁹. Sorel adopted all of the tropes of French nationalist anti-Semitism, in particular the argument that the Jews were responsible of having corrupted French society and weakened the nation, going as far as reporting that Jews in Russia routinely murdered Christian children.³³⁰ Orano was a disciple of Sorel and his political experience resembled Sorel's in important ways.³³¹ In 1904 he left the Socialist Party and eventually found a common ideological ground with Corradini's nationalism.³³²

Corradini was often accused of copying AF.³³³ During the first year of existence

³²⁸ Sternhell, *The birth of the Fascist ideology*, cit., 127.

³²⁹ According to Sternhell Sorel's anti-Semitism was in way inferior to Drumond's.

³³⁰ Sternhell, cit., 84-86.

³³¹ Orano supported the Fascist regime anti-Semitic policy, contributing with his volume *Gli ebrei in Italia* (1937) to the climate of intolerance towards the Jews which characterized the late 1930s. Unlike other notable anti-Semitic writers such as Giovanni Preziosi and Julius Evola, Orano always remained closer to "cultural" anti-Semitism arguing that the Jews were bound to be absorbed into the Italia nation, so long as they severed all ties with the international Jewish community and embrace the campaign of the Fascist regime against Zionism and Jewish finance. About Orano's anti-Semitism see De Felice, cit.; Toscano, cit. and Francesco Germinario, "Latinità, antimeridionalismo e antisemitismo negli scritti giovanili di Paolo Orano (1895-1911)", in *Nel nome della razza: il razzismo nella storia d'Italia 1870-1945*, edited by Alberto Burgio, cit. . Orano's anti-Semitic production is especially notable for the publication of *Gli ebrei in Italia* (Roma : Casa editrice Pinciana, 1937).

³³² A discussion of all the ideological commonalities between the Revolutionary socialists and the Corradinians would go beyond the scope of this chapter. The issue has been studied extensively: see Gaeta, *Il nazionalismo Italiano*, cit. ; Alexander De Grand, *The Italian nationalist association*, cit., Sternhell, *The birth of the fascist ideology*, cit. ; and E Genite, *Il mito dello stato nuovo*, cit.

³³³ Sighele appreciated Barres and Maurras as thinkers but abhorred them as politicians. See *Pagine nazionaliste* (Milano:Traves, 1910), 217-26. The Italian historian Luigi Salvatorelli and Benedetto Croce both believed that Italian nationalism "copied" its French counterpart; the Fascist philosopher Giovanni Genite also acknowledged the dependence of Italian nationalism from the French. Gioacchino Volpe in *L'Italia in cammino: l'ultimo cinquantennio* (Milano: Treves, 1928) noted that the Italian nationalists had been susceptible to foreign influences - especially French- : Nietzsche, Barres, Maurras, but also Bergson and Sorel. However he did not believe this influence to be overly significant. Delia Frigessi noted a French origin for the Italian nationalist ideas of "race", "stripe" and "blood". E. Weber, *Action Française*, cit. saw

of *Il Regno* Prezzolini felt compelled to clarify:

“It would be strange and, let us admit it, ridiculous to follow a borrowed nationalism that referred to a foreign tradition and to ideas that did not belong to our race; [...] we must prefer ideas that originated from Italian minds, and nourished through the observation of Latin things”.³³⁴

While they openly admired Barres and Maurras, the nationalists always claimed their own originality. In fact the main difference between the French and the Italian nationalists was that the French rejected modernity in all its aspects, while the Italians, as we have seen, were enthusiastic proponents of economic and cultural modernity, and in this sense, as Emilio Gentile has argued, were close to the Futurist movement.³³⁵ On the other hand the Corradinian nationalists, like the AF, rejected social and political modernity, including liberalism and democracy, and eventually sought to form a coalition with the clericals, which went beyond mere electoral tactics but involved a deeper ideological commonality based on the role of the Catholic Church as a bulwark against the advance of modernity.

an identity of views between Maurras' paper and the *Idea Nazionale*. Franco Gaeta discusses the issue in his *Il nazionalismo italiano*, cit., and argues that ideologically there was a coincidence between Barres, Maurras and Corradini, Coppola and Rocco. But Italian nationalism copied the French only formally: the Italian nationalists did not need to search abroad. Italian nationalism was the outcome of a process of involution of the ideas of Gioberti and Spaventa, and more in general of the Italian Risorgimento, which in itself already possessed the seeds of authoritarianism. Sternhell observed that “Essentially the principles of Italian nationalism were hardly different from those developed in France some twenty years earlier”. Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of the fascist Ideology*, cit., 9.

³³⁴ Giuseppe Prezzolini, “L' aristocrazia dei briganti”, *Il Regno*, I, 3, 1903.

³³⁵ Gentile, “The Conquest of Modernity: From Modernist Nationalism to Fascism”, *Modernism/Modernity* 1(3) (Sept. 1994): 55-87.

2. *The opposition between Judaism and 'Romanita'*

In 1908 Corradini wrote:

“If the Roman has an antagonist, that is the Jew[...] One conquered the world, the other was dispersed and enslaved of all the powers. [...] This brought its querulous begging and its bitterness among other people, the other spread its blood and its law”.³³⁶

According to the Corradinians and the revolutionary syndacalists Judaism was the opposite of *romanita*'. The Romans were the initiators of western culture through their instinct for domination: their virtues were first of all military, but also creative and productive. The Romans constituted an “organic nation” in Corradini’s eyes, because the individual was subordinated to the interests of the national community.

Conversely, the Jews lacked all the qualities that made a nation strong and powerful. Corradini’s explanation was that in the case of Jews it was not the common people who was enslaved but the kings and the aristocrats, so that the new kings and aristocracy had to come from the plebes.³³⁷ The Jewish plebes forged a nation devoid of domineering instincts, whose kings instead of expressing “ideas of domination”, were kings “of the weak, the paupers and the widows”: the Bible, Corradini continued, had produced the “first populist king” and the “first socialism”. For all the above reasons the Jews were the opposite of a nation, just like the Romans were its embodiment.

Corradini’s ideas were very close to Paolo Orano’s. The genealogy of Orano’s anti-Semitism can be traced back to both Sorel’s influence and his own interest in Judaism which predated Sorel’s association with French nationalism and anti-Semitic

³³⁶ Enrico Corradini, *L' ombra della vita* (Napoli: Ricciardi, 1908), 169.

³³⁷ Corradini, *L' ombra della vita*, cit. 169-173.

campaign. Orano had been a disciple of the Italian Anthropological school, but his work always reflected more interest in the cultural and psychological dimension of racial difference, rather than biologism. His interest in the Jewish question dated back to the end of the 19th century when he published *Il problema del cristianesimo* (1898), in which he dismissed the Jewish contribution to Christianity in favor of the “Roman” contribution.³³⁸ Orano labeled the Jews as an “oriental” people who were “passive”, and “stuck in the contemplation of death”. The Jews were contrasted to the ancient Romans who were “the essence of western culture” because of their ability to modify nature to their advantage, and their thrust towards conquest.³³⁹ The book did not contain anti-Semitic passages but expressed a prejudice and a stereotype, which placed the Jews firmly into the oriental category. Orano’s discourse centered on the dichotomy between the Orient –passive and the West-active, of which ancient Rome was the first expression, and the Catholic Church had been a product.

Corradini mirrored Orano’s position perfectly. In an article that predated the syndacalists-nationalist collaboration he argued that the Jews were a

“[...]miserable and marvelous people, inept and terrible, a people of humble louses and violent brutes, a little people enclosed between the arid desert, rocks and sea, and between the great empires of the West and the Orient that walked over its humble and wild flesh. [The Jews were] *the antagonist of Rome like idle despair is the antagonist of victorious action*, and in its suffering and its abjection

³³⁸ Paolo Orano, *Il problema del cristianesimo*, (Roma: Lux, 1898)

³³⁹ The category of “romanita” according to Germinario derived by Orano’s anthropological training and was common to his interpretation of southern inferiority as well. Francesco Germinario, “Latinità, antimeridionalismo e antisemitismo negli scritti giovanili di Paolo Orano (1895-1911)”, in *Nel nome della razza: il razzismo nella storia d'Italia 1870-1945*, cit.,110.

they derived from Asia their wonderful and ridiculous dream of world domination. [...] *Rome transformed that dream in action and fact*".

And concluded that the Vatican continued the same Roman tradition of "will and power" in the Catholic religion.³⁴⁰

Corradini echoed Orano's argument according to which the Jews - again represented in Orientalist terms of idleness and powerlessness- had elaborated a religion that entitled them to world domination as the Elected People, but had been unable to translate that dream into reality. The Romans "will" and "power" – the essence of the West- had realized the dream, which was inherited by the Vatican and perpetuated through the centuries. The ambiguity of Corradini's piece, alternating positive and negative adjectives towards the Jews, did not hide the essential anti-Semitic tone, which reflected Orano's fundamental opposition between Jews and Christians, as a reflection of the opposition between East and West, idleness and activity, power and powerlessness.³⁴¹ In light of this contrast between *romanita'* and Judaism, the contribution of the Jews to modernity was viewed as parasitical, and their association with socialism, democracy, and pacifism was inscribed into their inability to produce and dominate.

Before proceeding to analyze the peak of Italian nationalist discourse against the Jews and its points of commonality with the clerical anti-Semitic discourse, it is important to clarify the path that led to a nationalist-clerical alliance after the Libyan war.

³⁴⁰ E. Corradini, "Tornando sul nostro programma", *Il Regno*, I, 45, 1904.

³⁴¹ The stereotype of Jewish apathy had been one of Drumond's recurring themes in his 1886 book *France Juive*. Germinario, Cit, 111. It is interesting to note that one of the main inspirations of the nationalist movement, Alfredo Oriani, had also expressed the trope of the incapacity of the Jews to "create" and thus their tendency to be "parasitical" of Western creativity. See "I deicidi", in *Fuochi di bivacco*, (Bari: Laterza, 1913) 236-41, which was published posthumously.

3. *Towards a formal alliance between Nationalism and Catholicism.*

In broad terms the nationalistic culture was anti-Masonic and pro-clerical, although the path through which the Italian nationalists approached Catholicism varied among individuals and among the different nationalistic currents. From an ideological standpoint the rejection of democracy and the “rediscovery” of the social and political role of the Church provided the framework for the Italian nationalists’ anti-Semitism. Anticlericalism and Freemasonry were intimately connected: anticlericalism was common to a broad range of political positions and had played an important role in post-Unitarian Italy in establishing a culture centered on liberal and democratic values; Freemasonry was the most prominent Italian anti-clerical organization. During the Giolittian period Freemasonry was instrumental to the creation of electoral alliances known as “*blocchi*” between the Radical and the Socialist parties, and as such it was a political adversary of the nationalists.³⁴² The nationalists opposed both anti-Clericalism and Freemasonry on the grounds that they promoted the spread of socialism, democracy, pacifism and cosmopolitanism, which in the nationalists’ view weakened the nation and produced ineffective and corrupted governments.

La voce represented an exception because their attitude towards the Jews was not based on the rejection of anti-clericalism and had different ideological roots. Prezzolini remained an atheist and opposed both Clericalism and Freemasonry throughout his life. In 1910 he maintained that Catholicism was preferable to Freemasonry when arguing with a fellow *vociano* and neophyte mason Ferdinando Agnoletti: “Who wouldn’t prefer Catholicism to Freemasonry?”. However a few weeks later he claimed the contrary while

³⁴² The most prominent success of this strategic alliance was reached in 1907 with the election of the anti-clerical candidate Ernesto Nathan, a Freemason and a Jew, as mayor of Rome.

arguing with a Catholic *vociano*, Alessandro Casati. Casati had complained because of an article by Scipio Slataper that had appeared on *La voce* entitled “The two Popes” which he accused, with Prezzolini’s approval, both Freemasonry and Catholicism of having a corrupting influence in Italian society and politics. Prezzolini responded:

“I wish and dream more serious, more honest and more religious anti-clericals: but if we only have Notari, Nathan , Podrecca, well it is not my fault , but of Catholicism who made them that way: and we must content ourselves, and prefer these [anticlericals] to the Jesuits”.³⁴³

Prezzolini’s internal turmoil was not representative of the nationalist movement as a whole. The Nationalist Association, spurred by the Corradinian nationalists, repudiated democracy and at the same time began to approach the Catholics on the common ground of antisocialism. During this transition the *Idea Nazionale* published a number of articles – initiated by a piece by Francesco Coppola entitled “Israel against Italy”³⁴⁴ - discussing the role of international Jewish finance, and prominent Jews in politics, journalism and Freemasonry, who were accused of undermining the Italian imperialistic ambitions. The context in which the debate initiated by Coppola took place provides insights into the themes and language that characterized the exchange itself.

³⁴³ “Pro e Contro la massoneria” , *La voce* , II, 35, 1910; *Carteggio Alessandro Casati, Giuseppe Prezzolini* edited by Dolores Continati (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura; Lugano: Dipartimento della pubblica educazione del cantone Ticino, 1990), 204.

³⁴⁴ Francesco Coppola, “Israele contro l’ Italia”, *L’ idea nazionale*, I, 38, 1911. This famous article was discussed by Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il Fascismo* Cit.; Franco Gaeta, *Il nazionalismo italiano*, cit. ; Alexander De Grand, *The Italian Nationalist Association*, cit. ; and more recently Mario Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo in Italia: dal 1848 alla guerra dei sei giorni* (Milano: F. Angeli, 2003), Enzo Collotti, *Il fascismo e gli ebrei: Le leggi razziali in Italia*, cit. , and Giorgio Fabre, *Mussolini razzista*, cit.. It should be noted that while the existing literature refers to the incident rightly pointing out its anti-Semitic nature a thorough analysis of the piece is lacking.

In the midst of the Libyan war, the Italian Nationalist Association (ANI) went through a phase of interior turmoil. The association's First Congress in 1910 had produced only a vague political agenda, aimed at keeping together various strands of nationalism: imperialistic and irredentist, democratic, liberal and anti-democratic. The Libyan war had rewarded the efforts of the imperialists -above all the *Idea Nazionale* group – and disappointed those who would have preferred to resolve the irredentist issue before any colonial venture was attempted. The next point of contention was to establish once and for all whether nationalism was compatible with democracy. The debate was fierce with the Corradinian group representing the anti-democratic tendency, and Scipio Sighele, Paolo Arcari, Luigi Valli and others, particularly in the Milanese section, representing the democratic tendency. In the Congress of 1912, the Corradinians prevailed once again and the democratic nationalists resigned in block.

The anti-democratic turn in the Nationalist Association anticipated, but also in many ways coincided, with the gradual abandonment of the anticlerical rhetoric and the subsequent alliance with the Catholics, led once again by the Corradinian nationalists. The ANI was born as an anti-clerical movement, and it was natural for it to be so, given the history of hostility between the Italian State and the Vatican. However, between 1911 and 1912 the time was ripe for a tactical change. During the first decade of the 20th century, particularly under the pontificate of Pius X (1903-1914), there had been a gradual rapprochement between the Italian State and the Vatican, with the Pope allowing Catholics to vote for Liberal candidates in order to prevent the victory of socialist

candidates.³⁴⁵ In preparation for the elections of 1913 the moderate liberals led by Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti were eager to strike a deal with the Vatican – subsequently known as the Gentiloni Pact. Giolitti had in fact broadened the electorate by granting near universal male suffrage in exchange for the support of the reform socialists in the Libyan war, and the upcoming elections would be the first to be held according to the new electoral law. Fearing that the extension of the suffrage would increase the numbers of socialists seats in the parliament to the detriment of his own party, Giolitti made an alliance with the only force that was able to compete with the Socialist Party in terms of appeal to the popular classes. In exchange for the votes of the Catholics the liberal candidates had to subscribe to a seven-point program, which included support for religious instruction in public schools and opposition to divorce and anticlerical legislation - essentially allowing the Catholic Church back into cultural and political sectors that had been secularized ever since Unification.

The nationalists entered the political stage for the first time in 1913. The upcoming elections inspired among the Corradinian nationalists similar tactical considerations to those that prompted the alliance between the liberal moderates and the Catholics. The ANI was to run five candidates - all of whom were eventually elected: Luigi Federzoni and Marquise Luigi Medici del Vascello in Rome, Count Piero Foscari in the small town Mirano in Veneto, Count Romeo Gallenga-Stuart in Perugia, and Camillo Ruspoli Prince of Candriano in Lombardy. The nationalists presented titled aristocrats as candidates and a socially conservative political program that were unlikely to gain the support of the newly enfranchised classes without the help of the Catholics. In

³⁴⁵ The encyclical *Il fermo proposito* (1905) addressed to Italian Bishops discussed the creation of the *Azione Cattolica* – a lay association devoted to the propagation of Catholicism and world-wide charitable activities, The encyclical also discussed the issue of the catholic vote to halt the growth of socialism.

addition to the need to broaden the popular base of their own party, they shared the liberals' fear for the growth of the Socialist Party.

While the liberal wing of the nationalist association wanted to remain equidistant from both Catholicism and Socialism, the Corradinian group began to build the case for an alliance with the Catholics since the end of 1911.³⁴⁶ The Corradinians fully intended to capitalize on the notoriety and sympathy that their campaign for Libya had gained to the ANI in the Catholic circles, particularly among the clerical-moderates, also known as conservative Catholics, led by Count Giovanni Grosoli, Marquis Filippo Crispolti and Count Ottavio Cornaggia. Grosoli, Crispolti and Cornaggia controlled a large part of the catholic press through the Societa' Editrice Romana and exerted their influence in the Catholic Electoral Union headed by Count Giovanni Gentiloni.³⁴⁷

However, the connection between nationalists and Catholics went beyond anti-socialist tactics and imperialistic sympathies. Nationalism and Catholicism shared an

³⁴⁶ Zanetti, "Il primo congresso", *L'idea nazionale*, I, 40, 1911; "Movimento Nazionalista", *L'idea nazionale*, II, 15, 1912; Maurizio Maraviglia "I partiti e la riforma elettorale", *L'idea nazionale*, II, 20, 1912, for a discussion of the shift towards Catholicism in the Nationalist Association see Alexander De Grand, *The Italian Nationalist Association.*, cit.

³⁴⁷ During the Giolittian era, the Catholics were divided in roughly three factions: the ultra-conservative, who refused any kind of compromise with or participation in the Liberal State, the clerical moderates, who were eager to collaborate with the conservative forces to stem the growth of socialism and democracy, and the pro-democratic tendency represented by Don Luigi Sturzo, founder of the Popular Party. The Societa' Editrice Romana created through Grosoli's initiative and finances published catholic magazines in various Italian towns: *L'Italia* (1912-1968) in Milan, the *Momento* (1903-1929) in Turin, *L'Avvenire d'Italia* (1896-1968) in Bologna, and finally *Il Corriere d'Italia* (1906-1929) in Roma. All of Grosoli's papers gave their enthusiastic support to the Libyan invasion, and for that were severely chastised by the Vatican, which had not made its official position on the conflict known. Aside from being nationalist sympathizers during the Giolittian period, Grosoli, Crispolti and Cornaggia eventually adhered to Fascism. At the time of Mussolini's March on Rome Grosoli in particular publicly broke up with the founder of the first Italian catholic party – the Popular Party, Don Luigi Sturzo. There is a broad literature on the elections of 1913 and the role of the Catholics, the Gentiloni pact and the strategy of the nationalists. Aside from the already cited work by De Grand, *The Italian Nationalist Association*, cit. See also Franco Gaeta, *Il nazionalismo italiano*, cit., Ronald S. Cunsolo "Nationalists and Catholics in Giolittian Italy: An Uneasy Collaboration", *The Catholic Historical Review* 79 (1) (Jan., 1993): 22-53; and Hartmut Ulrich, *Le elezioni del 1913 a Roma: i liberali fra massoneria e vaticano* (Milano; Roma; Napoli: Dante Alighieri, 1972).

ideological opposition towards certain aspects of modernity: democracy, socialism, individualism. In many ways, the Corradinians nationalists had more in common with the conservative Catholics than with the moderate liberals. As Franco Gaeta observed, to the Corradinians democracy and socialism were intertwined forces that shared egalitarian, anti-militaristic, internationalist values. In the eyes of the nationalists, who saw war as a key aspect of nation-building, democracy and socialism were essentially part of a single anti-expansionist, and thus anti-national movement.³⁴⁸ As we have seen, the democratic-socialist connection was reinforced by the electoral alliances known as “blocchi” that the socialist and the republicans formed during the Giolittian age, and which led to remarkable victories in administrative elections.³⁴⁹

Anti-socialism and anti-democraticism formed the ideological bases for the convergence between the nationalists and the Catholics. The rejection of modernity which both movements identified with liberalism, democracy and the rise of socialism brought them close for the elections of 1913, but any long-term alliance was complicated by an important divergence of opinion on the crucial question of identity. The Catholics rejected modernity in favor tradition and an idea of nation that gave primacy to religious affiliation over any other kind of allegiance. The nationalists, by contrast, proposed an alternate idea of modernity based on the annihilation of the individual into the nation – a “religion” of the nation- which made the Catholics uneasy.

³⁴⁸ Franco Gaeta, *Il nazionalismo italiano*, cit. and M. Maraviglia, “Nazionalismo e democrazia”, in *Idea Nazionale*, I, 42, 1911; F. Coppola, “Nazionalismo e democrazia”, in *Idea Nazionale*, I, 44, 1911; F. Coppola, “Postilla a L. Marchetti, Per intenderci sulla democrazia”, in *Idea Nazionale*, II, 1, 1912.

³⁴⁹ See also Richard Webster *The Cross and the Fasces: Christian Democracy and Fascism in Italy* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press, 1960) , 3-21.

The dialogue - half discussion, half polemic- between Filippo Meda - banker, politician and editor of the Catholic papers *L' Osservatore Cattolico* and *L' Italia* - and the editors of the *Idea Nazionale* reflects the important differences and reciprocal diffidence between the Catholics and the nationalists. Meda argued that the nationalist movement would emerge as a strong political force thanks to their campaign in favor of the invasion of Libya. While he approved of the nationalist stance against socialism, he also remained perplexed by their cult of the state and its rationalization of the use of force to settle conflicts: he agreed with the nationalists on the fact that national interests were superior to class goals, but held that religious values superior to both.

The *Idea Nazionale* responded by acknowledging the important ideological divergences but arguing that the Catholics were not a menace to the Italian institutions, while Socialism, with its internationalist tendencies was a real threat to the State coming from within the national fabric. Cooperation between Catholics and nationalists was seen by both sides as necessary, but not devoid of ideological contrasts.³⁵⁰

4. *The peak of anti-Semitism during the Libyan war*

This final section demonstrates that anti-Semitism peaked during the Libyan war, and that it was consistent with the nationalist ideology of anti-modernism mediated from clerical and French sources and of opposition of Judaism to *romanita'*. The First Congress of 1910 had expressed no official position on the Jews, however just one year after the birth of the ANI, an underlying anti-Semitic prejudice surfaced rather abruptly in

³⁵⁰ F Meda, "Il nazionalismo", *Il Corriere d' Italia*, August 12 1912; Meda, "Il problema del nazionalismo e la liberta' d' insegnamento", *Il Corriere d' Italia*, August 14 1912; Meda, "La nostra risposta" *Il Corriere d' Italia*, Sept 1 1912 . For the nationalist response "Il nostro anticlericalismo", *L'Idea Nazionale*, II, 33, 1912 and "Nazionalisti contro clericali", *ibid.*, II, 36, 1912.

the *Idea Nazionale*, understandably generating alarm among some of the Jewish members of the nationalist movement. There was in fact a significant Jewish component in the ANI itself, scattered across the spectrum of political positions: democratic, liberal, and authoritarian. Scipio Sighele, one of the most fervent democratic nationalists, involuntarily prompted the anti-Semitic surge by criticizing the ambiguity of the nationalist movement on the issue of democracy and particularly taking issue with the attitude of the *Idea Nazionale*.

Sighele was one of the most authoritative members of the Nationalist Association and an internationally renowned criminologist, specialized in the “psychology of the crowds”.³⁵¹ He was primarily an irredentist who believed that nationalism could and should coexist with liberalism and democracy. Soon after the creation of the ANI – and after having followed closely the development of the *Idea nazionale*- Sighele became a vocal critic of what he considered an antidemocratic and reactionary taint that was being associated to nationalism. A close observer of French nationalism and a close reader of both Maurras and Barres, Sighele attacked the Corradianian nationalists in his *Il nazionalismo e i partiti politici* (1911), accusing Corradini of being anti-democratic for “esthetic reasons” rather than for study and conviction, and lamenting the anti-democratic

³⁵¹ Born in 1868 in Brescia into a Jewish family from the Trentino region, which was under Austrian domination, he was trained as a lawyer, but soon directed his interest towards the field of criminal anthropology. A disciple of Cesare Lombroso he collaborated with some of the most famous members of the Italian Anthropological school, such as Guglielmo Ferrero and Alfredo Niceforo. His most renowned work on the psychology of the crowds was *La folla delinquente* (Torino: F.lli Bocca, 1891), which was translated in several languages, and exerted a significant influence on Gustave Le Bon. He also devoted some of his studies to the issue of women’s emancipation: while he supported an improvement of the condition of women in Italian society, he strongly opposed feminism, and saw women as a tool for the aggrandizement of the fatherland. He argued that the patriotic duty of women was to produce healthy children while men’s duty was to fight wars; *La donna nova* (Roma: E. Voghera, 1895); *La donna vera* (Roma: E. Voghera, 1898) and *Eva moderna* (Milano: F.lli Treves, 1910). His Trentine origin determined a fierce irredentist position and led him to being one of the founders of the ANI. In the last years of his life he produced influential books on the subject of nationalism: *Pagine nazionaliste* (Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1910); *Il nazionalismo e i partiti politici* (Milano: Fratelli Treves editori, 1911) and, after his exit from the ANI, *Ultime pagine nazionaliste* (Milano: F.lli Treves, 1912).

tendencies in the Nationalist Association: in essence he was concerned that the *Idea nazionale* group was gradually and surreptitiously leading Italian nationalism down the path of the *Action Française*.³⁵² He accused them of opportunism and ambiguity and challenged the Corradinians to come clean and say whether they were pro or against democracy.³⁵³

In the issue of the *Idea nazionale* that was supposed to review Sighele's work – and address his challenge, the editors explicitly refused to comment on the book.³⁵⁴ Instead they indirectly chose to respond through Francesco Coppola in an open letter directed not to Sighele, but to Charles Maurras, and significantly entitled “Israele contro l' Italia”- Israel against Italy.³⁵⁵ Coppola opened his piece by professing deep admiration and a sense of intellectual kinship with Maurras. He then proceeded to illustrate the main point of his article, which was a denunciation of the “anti-Italian campaign” organized by the foreign press, particularly in Germany and Austria during the Libyan war. Coppola pointed out that the “rhetoric of humanity” and “civilization” had been used by the critics of the Italian imperialistic ventures to accuse the Italians of “barbarism” against the Turks. It is important to highlight Coppola's construction of the opposition between the type of civilization and values in the name of which Italy was being criticized and the idea of civilization and values that the nationalists supported. Coppola ironically remarked that the British and the Germans had not upheld humanitarian values during

³⁵² Sighele, *Nazionalismo e i partiti politici*, cit., 114 -25, 161-79, 186-87 196- 98; *Pagine nazionaliste*, cit., 217 -22 and *Ultime pagine nazionaliste* 76- 77. See also De Grand, *The Italian nationalist association*, cit. chapter 2, and Gaeta, *Il nazionalismo italiano*, cit., passim.

³⁵³ For his part Sighele agreed that democracy in Italy at the time did not function properly, but limited his dislike to the men who ruled rather than the institution of democracy itself. He believed that nationalism not only was compatible with democracy but could only be realized through democracy. Sighele, *Nazionalismo e partiti politici*, cit..

³⁵⁴ “Frontispizi”, *L' Idea Nazionale*, I, 38, 1911.

³⁵⁵ Francesco Coppola, “Israele contro l' Italia”, *L' Idea Nazionale*, I, 38, 1911.

their own colonial campaigns – respectively “in Egypt and Transvaal” and in “China and central Africa”- but now they criticized “barbaric” Italy, who had given the world “three immense civilizations”³⁵⁶ and defended the Turks who destroyed three civilization – Arabic, Greek and Roman- and “never left a fertile seed on its path of devastation”. In Coppola’s view by hypocritically attacking Italy, Europe was going against its own cultural heritage, since Italy “through imperial Rome and catholic Rome was twice the mother of Europe”. The only explanation for Europe turning against itself was that a culturally external element was driving the campaign:

“There is above all a Semite campaign, a formidable campaign organized and disciplined by the Jewish and cosmopolitan high finance” [italics in the original text].

Such campaign, in his view, was enabled by the alleged control of the Jews on the European press through their informants and journalists³⁵⁷, but most importantly by the Jewish finance, which owned most papers, and lent money to the Turkish government in exchange for concessions. The “Jewish coalition” was motivated by financial motives - to influence the Turkish and Italian interest rates, to ensure the monopoly over “usury lending” to the Ottoman Empire, and to continue the war as long as possible so as to substitute the Italian enterprises in the Orient. In addition the Jewish plot intended “to weaken the national spirit that is resurging in Italy”.³⁵⁸ Italy was presented as “another

³⁵⁶ We can guess that Coppola referred to Ancient Rome, Catholicism, and the Renaissance.

³⁵⁷ He claimed that the informers for the Reuter press agency and the Central News were both Jewish and determined to feed false news about the war, which were then propagated to all the main British, German and Austrian newspapers.

³⁵⁸ Silvana Patriarca has remarked on the importance of the Libyan war, which was seen by the nationalists and by many non-nationalist intellectuals and politicians as a necessary act of cultural renewal, and an event that would boost the confidence that the nation had in itself. Silvana Patriarca, *Italian Vices: Nation*

desired prey” of Jewish greed, and Coppola accounted for this last and most important motivation as follows:

“[...] Because everybody knows – and You [Maurras] better than anyone- that the elevation of the national spirit, and of the traditional and heroic ideals, automatically causes the lowering of materialistic individualism, and thus of the purely plutocratic values on which the Jewish international coalition has founded its conquest”.

Adding further down:

“[It is] the war of Gold against Blood [...] once again Jewish gold speaks in the name of ‘humanity’ and demagogic ‘justice’, and finds its natural ally in the puritanical hypocrisy of Protestantism”.

Maurras’ “four confederate states”- Jews, Protestant, Freemasons and “foreigners”- reappeared in Coppola’s eyes, as a confederate international power targeting Italy, but he was confident in a “higher justice”, according to which “the superior civilizations fulfill their purpose in the world, for the good of the world”, and “the great millenarian and never-ending races, which find again their youth and their mission, substitute wherever possible the sterile races that a precocious senility condemns to disappear”.

Coppola response to Sighele’s accusations was thus not only to reaffirm his distaste for democracy, but to openly and proudly embrace Maurras’ discourse linking Judaism, materialism the “demagogic principles” – “humanity” and “civilization”- as

and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 114.

mere veils for greed. It is hard to overstate the points of commonality between Coppola's self-consciously Maurrasian article and the main tenets of the AF. Maurras was predictably very proud to publish Coppola's piece on the first page of the *Action Française*.³⁵⁹ The leader of AF commented that the most important point of Coppola's letter was that it expressed the "nascent anti-Semitism" of the Italian culture. For too long, Maurras lamented, Italy, which had been for the most part Dreyfusard, had seemed to somehow fail to recognize the "formidable power of the Jews". However, the simple fact that a Jew was currently mayor of Rome was a symbol of that very power, and finally the Libyan war had awoken the Italians to the full impact of "Jewish cosmopolitanism". Maurras' observations did not take into account the many instances of nationalist anti-Semitism throughout the Giolittian period: the Corradinian *Il Regno*, for instance had expressed its distaste for the control that the Jewish financiers had established over the French Socialist Party led by Jean Jaures, and labeled Marxism as a Jewish doctrine; Paolo Orano had lamented the Jewish control over the Italian socialist party and over Freemasonry earlier than Coppola.³⁶⁰

As the decade progressed, Orano's anti-Semitism resembled more and more the Sorelian-Maurrasian stance, particularly in his magazine, *La Lupa*. In it, Orano revisited the arsenal of anti-Semitic stereotypes and tropes that were common to the clerical literature, as well as to the French anti-Semites. Mere months before Coppola's article, Orano had argued that the Jews through Freemasonry wanted "to oppose and destroy not

³⁵⁹ "Le nationalisme italienne. Una lettre de Francesco Coppola a Charles Maurras", *Action Française*, 322, Nov 18 1911.

³⁶⁰ "Capitale e umanità", *Il Regno*, I, 25, 1904; Prezzolini, "Fra chi e' la lotta di classe?", *Il Regno*, I, 48, 1904; Orano, "Per la salvezza del principio", *La lupa*, I, 5 1910.

only the political Church but the Church as a religious institution” and were preparing to “take possession” of Italy politically so as to eliminate even the smallest sign of Catholicism. Linking back to his older argument about the essentially Roman – and thus Western- nature of Catholicism Orano lamented that by destroying the Church, the Jews would destroy the Italian “pride”, “moral principles” and the “will power”. “The Italy run by the Jews” – at the time Italy happened to have a Jewish Prime Minister (Luigi Luttazzi), a Jewish mayor of Rome (Ernesto Nathan), and a Jewish leader of the socialist party (Claudio Treves)- would be an Italy “devoid of ideals”.³⁶¹ In another article appeared in *La lupa* it was argued that the moral corruption of Judaism had penetrated so deeply into Italian culture that in Italy there were no “free thinkers” who would address Sorel’s request to discuss Jewish ritual murder.³⁶²

The tropes used by Coppola testified to the influence of the clerical anti-Semitic propaganda in Italy. One of the central themes of clerical anti-Semitic propaganda was that Jews were moved by hatred for Christians, which led them plot and collaborate with other “enemies” – in the Italian case the Turks- to destroy Christian nations. The plot was supported through the skillful manipulation of the press, freemasonry, liberal political parties, and governments.³⁶³ Financial power – the “Gold” – allowed them to corrupt and control public opinion, and was the principal instrument for the ultimate goal of dominion against the “Blood”, meaning the national community to which they had never belonged. This imagery had become commonplace in the Italian clerical press during the Dreyfus

³⁶¹ P Orano, “Per La salvezza del principio”, cit..

³⁶² Article without title signed “Y”, *La lupa*, II, 40, 1911.

³⁶³ The *Idea Nazionale* conducted a campaign against Freemasonry in the Spring of 1913. While during this campaign they officially did not link Judaism and Freemasonry, many of the responses published on the *IN* did argue that the Jews controlled Freemasonry; two examples above all were Orano and Alfredo Rocco’s responses. De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei*, cit., 53.

affaire, in which many catholic papers – from the *Italia Reale* to the *Democrazia Cristiana* - essentially echoed the anti-Dreyfusard rhetoric of Drumond and *Action Française*. The old anti-Judaic accusation of usury had thus become intertwined with the modern anti-Semitic accusation against unfair capitalistic practices, held together by the myth of Judaic greed and blind materialism – this in itself also an echo of the Biblical image of the Golden Calf.³⁶⁴

The other major theme in Coppola's anti-Semitic piece was the Corradinian antagonism between *romanita'* and Judaism, nation and non-nation. To a nationalist like Coppola, in fact, the gravest offense committed by the Jews was of course that of attempting to suffocate the "rising national spirit" which had been the most desired outcome of the Libyan war.³⁶⁵ In other words, the Jewish machinations were threatening the project of nationalization of the masses that the nationalists had set as the main goal of their action. The democratic and socialist rhetoric of the international press, which accused the Italians of conducting a "barbaric" campaign against the Turks, aimed at

³⁶⁴ As Kerzer has observed, biological racism is not the only significant feature of modern anti-Semitism. There are equally important components which came from, and were reinforced by the Catholic Church. Any list would have to include the following: "There is a secret Jewish conspiracy; the Jews seek to conquer the world; Jews are an evil sect who seek to do Christians harm; Jews are by nature immoral; Jews care only for money and will do anything to get it; Jews control the press; Jews control the banks and are responsible for the economic ruination of untold numbers of Christian families; Jews are responsible for communism; Judaism commands its adherents to murder defenseless Christian children and drink their blood; Jews seek to destroy the Christian religion; Jews are unpatriotic, ever ready to sell their country out to the enemy; for the larger society to be properly protected, Jews must be segregated and their rights limited". Kerzer, Cit., 206. Coppola's article reproduced most of the motives that were central to Catholic anti-Semitism.

³⁶⁵ De Felice and Toscano both observed the importance of the war against Turkey in creating a mood receptive of anti-Semitism even outside the nationalist circles. In spite of the professions of loyalty towards Italy made by the Italian Jewish community (as testified by a series of articles on *Il Corriere Israelitico* in October 1911), Coppola's articles found an echo in several widely read newspapers such as the Turinese *La Stampa* the Florentine *La nazione*, and the Neapolitan *Il mattino*, all of which reported that the foreign press hostility was due to Jewish control. These series of accusations along with Coppola's accusations were reported in the *Il Corriere Israelitico*: Guastalla "Antisemitismo italico", *Il Corriere Israelitico*, 31 Oct 1911 and "Israele contro l' Italia?", *Il Corriere Israelitico*, 30 Nov 1911. See De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei*, cit. 66 and following and Toscano, *Ebraismo*, cit. 43 and following.

vilifying the Italian efforts and concomitant surge in patriotic feelings. It was the clash of two opposite views of civilization: the nationalist claimed to be the bearers of the true Roman/Western civilization, based on the necessity of expansionism and refusal of individualism; the other was based on abstract principles of human equality and pacifism. To Coppola the second view was merely a smokescreen for the “materialistic individualism” that the Jews had spread through their control of public opinion to enable their conquest. The “oriental” disposition towards “parasitism” enabled them to accumulate wealth exploiting western capitalism. Orano’s view thoroughly complemented Coppola’s. His essential argument equating Catholicism with “*romanità*” meant that the Jews would destroy Italian “will power” and “pride” which coincided with the surge in patriotic feelings that Coppola had associated with the Libyan war .

The Congress of December 1912 would prove Sighele right. The motions proposed by Corradini and Forges-Davanzati condemning democracy and associating it with socialism and freemasonry were passed by a majority, and the ANI veered resolutely to the right. Most of the democratic members of the ANI, among which a few Jews members such as Enrico Finzi and Raffaello Carpi, resigned.³⁶⁶ The congress of Rome marked the beginning of a new openly authoritarian phase coupled with an open alliance with the clericals.³⁶⁷ With the election of 1913 looming the nationalist rhetoric mirrored the clerical rhetoric, pitting the conservative-nationalist-clerical alliance against the alliance of democrats, socialists and freemason. The clerical papers were explicit in including the Jews in the alliance, while the *Idea Nazionale* chose to avoid the direct

³⁶⁶ Gualtiero Castellini, *Fasi e dottrine del nazionalismo italiano* (Milano : R. Quintieri, 1915), 24; Paola Arcari, *Le elaborazioni della dottrina politica nazionale fra l'Unità e l'intervento: 1870-1914* (Firenze : Marzocco, 1934-1939)16, 21-22; De Grand, Cit.

³⁶⁷ De Grand, cit., 41.

mention of Jews, even though in the Spring of 1913 they held a campaign against Freemasonry.³⁶⁸

Conclusion

The elements of clerical anti-Semitism and opposition of Judaism and *romanità* were thoroughly intertwined in the nationalist anti-Semitic discourse. Nationalist anti-Semitism during the Giolittian period cannot simply be discounted as marginal because of its important ideological implications. The features of this discourse were reproduction of stereotypes and tropes on Jewish cosmopolitan finance, control of society and politics through freemasonry, the overall aim to weaken the Italian nation. Even though anti-Semitism in this stage cannot be considered a central component of Italian nationalism, it cannot be interpreted as a superficial and transitional stage, but rather as a consequence of a series of coherent ideological premises.

It is important to note that for the most part the nationalist anti-Semitic discourse analyzed in this chapter was not directed towards Italian Jews, but towards international Jewry. The attitude towards Italian Jews, which is the object of the next chapter, was predominantly aimed at the separation – cultural as well as political- of the Italian Jews from cosmopolitan Jewry through assimilation into the Italian culture.

³⁶⁸ An analysis of the electoral propaganda and tactics for the elections of 1913 would be beyond the scope of this chapter. For an overview of the main themes see De Grand, cit. and Canepa, cit.

Chapter 6: Assimilation

The issue of Jewish assimilation goes to the heart of the question of racial definition of national identity: one hand the idea that Italian Jews could relinquish – in part or in full- their Jewishness in favor of Italian identity indicates that both identities were considered by the nationalists to be cultural and modifiable, rather than being biological, inherited and immutable; on the other hand, the nationalist sources while seemingly pressing for assimilation questioned the possibility the Jews could – or that they would choose to- modify their behavior. Thus the analysis of the discourse of assimilation confirms that the nationalist definition of the nation was a combination of cultural and biological racism, with a definite preponderance of the cultural factor. Italian nationalists accepted and even admired individual Jews as collaborators of their cultural ventures and as members of the Nationalist Association, but this superficial acceptance was conditional to the rejection – in all or in part- of Judaism and the acknowledgement on the part of the Jews themselves of the essential incompatibility of Judaism with Italian identity.

A fundamental component of the chapter is the analysis of the attitudes of the Italian Jews who participated in the nationalist movement and were caught between the pressure towards assimilation and the attempt to maintain a dual identity as Jews and Italians. The sources demonstrate that there were several cases in which Italian Jews were instrumental in reinforcing the nationalist discourse in favor of assimilation - by supporting Otto Weininger's philosophy, by not participating in the Zionist movement, by dissociating from "international Jewish finance", and finally by continuing to be

members of a movement that displayed an attitude ranging from open anti-Semitism to a no less subtle pressure towards cultural assimilation.

1. The “misunderstood equality”

Zeev Sternhell justly noted that many “self-respecting anti-Semites” expressed “friendship for particular Jews, admiration for a ‘good Jew’ [...], or a certain fascination for ancient Judea, or an enthusiasm for modern Zionism”.³⁶⁹ A cursory look at the membership in the nationalist movement and cultural venues reveals a substantial Jewish presence in the Nationalist Association, among the *vocianti*, and among the Revolutionary Syndacalists, a presence that did not prevent the nationalists from adopting anti-Semitic tropes of clerical and French origin - as seen in the previous chapter. Unlike France or Germany, Italy was a country in which the existence of anti-Semitism was denied or minimized ever since Unification, even by the nationalists themselves.³⁷⁰ However looking at the broader cultural context it is possible to affirm that the widespread belief in the “lack” of anti-Semitism in Italy was due to what the Jewish historian Arnaldo Momigliano –cousin of the *vociante* Felice Momigliano - called “misunderstood equality”.³⁷¹

³⁶⁹ Zeev Sternhell, *The birth of the fascist ideology*, cit. 86. in the cited passage Sternhell was referring to Sorel’s predilection for Jews like Bergson, in spite of his anti-Semitism.

³⁷⁰ For instance in 1910 Giuseppe Prezzolini planned to have a special issue of *La voce* entirely dedicated to “Semitism and anti-Semitism” in which the opening piece “Why anti-Semitism does not exist in Italy” would have been written by him or Giovanni Papini. The failed realization of the special issue is discussed by Alberto Cavaglioni in *La filosofia del pressappoco, Weininger, sesso, carattere e la cultura del novecento*, (Napoli: Ancora del mediterraneo, 2001), 58 and following. Cavaglioni also provides the index of the issue, which would have included several Jewish and non Jewish collaborators – including Georges Sorel whose article would have been titled “Edouard Drumond and French anti-Semitism”. Overall -as the chosen title of the issue suggested- it would have reflected the opinions of both Jews and anti-Semites.

³⁷¹ Arnaldo Momigliano, *Pagine ebraiche*, (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1987), xvii.

Arnaldo Momigliano argued that ever since Unification the Italian Jews enjoyed a remarkable degree of integration into Italian society. However, like in other countries, integration was often – though not always- coincidental to varying degrees of assimilation- through conversion, mixed marriages, detachment or even abandonment of religious practices, etc. Specifically in the Italian case there was a large degree of assimilation, thanks in part to the enthusiastic endorsement of Italian Jews for the process of national Unification – which they associated very closely to their own emancipation – and sense of loyalty towards the Italian State.³⁷² The unified Italian State afforded the Jews an unprecedented degree of upward social mobility and integration - in that respect the Italian situation was not dissimilar to other parts of Western Europe.³⁷³ Emancipation and upward mobility placed the Italian Jews in the position of having to choose between three options: assimilate completely, thus losing their Jewish identity; retreat into their communities to the detriment of their Italian identity; or attempt the path of integration

³⁷² See for instance Salvatore Foa, *Gli ebrei nel Risorgimento italiano* (Assisi/Rome: Carucci, 1978) and Gina Formigini, *Stella d' Italia stella di David. Gli ebrei dal Risorgimento alla Resistenza* (Milano: Mursia, 1998) . More broadly The dominant historiographical interpretation is the theory of the “parallel nationalization” proposed by Antonio Gramsci in, *Il Risorgimento* (Roma: Editori Riuniti 1971) and Arnaldo Momigliano, *Pagine ebraiche*, cit. The argument is that the weakness of Italian anti-Semitism was due to the adoption of Italian Identity on the part of Italian Jews which paralleled – and in some ways even anticipated- that of the rest of the population. See also Renzo De Felice, “Stato, società e questione ebraica nell' Italia unita” , *Stato Nazionale ed emancipazione ebraica : atti del Convegno Stato nazionale, società civile e minoranze religiose : l'emancipazione degli ebrei in Francia, Germania e Italia tra rigenerazione morale e intolleranza : Roma 23-25 ottobre 1991*, edited by Francesca Sofia and Mario Toscano, (Roma: Bonacci, 1992), 421-32. and *Storia d' Italia, Annali II, Gli ebrei in Italia*, tomo II, *Dall' emancipazione a oggi*, edited by Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1996-97), see also more recent studies such as Francesca Cavarocchi, *La comunità ebraica di Mantova fra prima emancipazione e unita' d'Italia* (Firenze: Giuntina, 2002).

³⁷³ Elizabeth Mahler Schachter, “Perspectives of nineteenth-century Italian Jewry”, *Journal of European Studies* (March , 2001); Riccardo Calimani, *Di ebrei, di cose ebraiche e del resto* (Florence: Giuntina, 1984), 89 See also Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 12; and *Assimilation and Community. The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, edited by Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

while retaining their ethnic and religious diversity, namely to maintain a dual identity, Jewish and Italian.³⁷⁴ Understandably, the pressure towards assimilation created anxiety within the Italian Jewish community, reflected in the two main Jewish papers of Liberal Italy *Il Corriere Israelitico* and *Il Vessillo Israelitico*, which expressed pride in the achievements of their fellow Jews in their full participation in the intellectual and political life of the newly unified Italy, but at the same time campaigned for the preservation of Jewish identity, decrying the dangers of assimilation.³⁷⁵

The “misunderstood equality” refers to the pressure towards assimilation that the Italian Jewish community had to face since Unification in exchange for the rights of full citizenship.³⁷⁶ Arnaldo Momigliano coined the expression discussing specifically the stance of one of the most prominent Italian philosophers of the twentieth century, Benedetto Croce, who exerted a profound influence on the *vocianti*. In his seminal *Storia d' Italia* (1928) Croce expressed his delight in stating that in Italy there was “no sign of the foolishness called anti-Semitism”.³⁷⁷ However, even though he was an anti-fascist and was well known for his support to the Jewish Italian community during the fascist persecutions, soon after WWII he wrote:

“The world goes on with too many necessary victims and martyrs, and it would be possible to spare the unnecessary [victims and martyrs] *created by a few surviving traits of a barbaric religion* [Judaism], *by the idea of ‘elected people’*, which is so

³⁷⁴ Maurizio Molinari, *Ebrei in Italia: un problema di identità (1870-1938)* (Firenze: La giuntina, 1991) 119, quoted in Schachter, “Perspectives”, cit.

³⁷⁵ Schachter, “Perspectives”, cit.

³⁷⁶ For an insightful discussion see Alberto Vivanti’s preface to Francesca Cavarocchi, *La comunità ebraica*, cit.

³⁷⁷ Benedetto Croce, *Storia d' Italia: dal 1871 al 1915* (Bari: Laterza, 1928).

unwise that Hitler adopted it - and unfortunately he was endowed with the means to attempt its foolish realization”[italics mine].³⁷⁸

Croce’s highly controversial statement reflected not so much anti-Semitism – he was and remained opposed to all forms of segregation and persecution³⁷⁹ - but the anti-Judaic prejudice and intolerance towards the Jewish diversity, and, still more troubling, the association between the Jewish resistance towards complete assimilation and the resulting anti-Semitism.³⁸⁰

The nationalist culture developed its stance within a context in which many liberals - Croce being just one example, while rejecting anti-Semitism, considered the Jewish refusal to assimilate as a leading cause of persecution. The nationalists embraced anti-Semitism – without adding much original material to the existing tropes - and challenged the Jews directly to assimilate or suffer discrimination.

2. “Cultural” assimilation: overcoming Jewishness

La voce’s anti-Semitism is a contentious issue: Emilio Gentile has argued that *La voce* was decidedly not anti-Semitic, while Alberto Cavaglioni has interpreted the

³⁷⁸ Cesare Merzagora, *I pavidì: dalla cospirazione alla Costituente* (Milano: Istituto editoriale Galileo, 1946). Benedetto Croce’s remarks were contained in a letter to Senator Merzagora that was used as a Preface to the book. Croce’s letter is discussed by Roberto Finzi in “Il triplice colpo subito dagli universitari” in *Il difficile rientro: il ritorno dei docenti ebrei nell’università del dopoguerra*, edited by Dianella Gagliani (Bologna: CLUEB, 2004), 47-51. See also Segre, *Memorie di vita ebraica* (Roma: Bonacci, 1979), 370-2.

³⁷⁹ See for instance Fabio Fernando Rizi, *Benedetto Croce and Italian fascism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

³⁸⁰ This issue was discussed by Finzi in “Croce. Lettera sul ‘popolo eletto’. Questione ebraica, una controversa corrispondenza con Merzagora”, *Corriere della Sera*, 29 June 1998. He justly remarked on the poor taste of the Crocean comparison between the religious concept of ‘elected people’ and Hitler’s racism, especially considering that the letter was written so soon after the Holocaust. Corrado Vivanti pointed out that Croce’s opinion on the need for Jewish assimilation had also been expressed previously “La storicità e la perpetuità dell’ idea massonica”, *La critica*, 1918, quoted in Francesca Cavarocchi, *La comunità ebraica*, cit., IX, n 6.

enthusiasm for Otto Weininger's philosophy as a tangible sign of the anti-Semitism of the *vocianti*.³⁸¹ While recognizing both Gentile and Cavaglion's interpretations their merits, I argue that rather than being anti-Semitic –like *La lupa* or the *Idea Nazionale* – the discourse of the *vocianti* was centered on the cultural assimilation of the Jews into western culture. *La voce* proposed a direct association between Christianity and western morality – from Immanuel Kant to Friedrich Hegel, reinforcing the idea of the extraneity and inferiority of traditional Talmudic Judaism vis-a-vis western culture, and arguing the necessity to reform Judaism – either through the absorption of Christian moral teachings into Judaism or through complete de-Judaization, including formal conversion. In one respect, *La voce* was dissimilar from other nationalist papers. As seen in the previous chapter, the revolutionary syndacalists *La lupa* and the Corradinian *Idea Nazionale* viewed the Catholic Church as an expression of “*romanita*” and as a symbol of western culture to oppose to Judaism. Prezzolini viewed the Vatican as a corrupted and obsolete institution, and his paper never trumpeted the moral value of Roman Catholicism but rather of Christianity *tout court*. The main frame of reference through which the *vocianti*

³⁸¹ Emilio Gentile, “The Struggle for Modernity”, cit. 497-511 ; Alberto Cavaglion, *La filosofia del pressappoco*, cit.. Emilio Gentile's argument is largely based on his interpretation of the *vocianti* as “radically different” from imperialistic and authoritarian nationalists, specifically because, unlike the Corradinians, the *vocianti* were in favor of democracy. While *La voce* included contributors who were undoubtedly democratic – Gaetano Salvemini and Giovanni Amendola just to name the most prominent- as a magazine it expressed an idea of democracy and progressive modernity was very different from that of Italian democratic and socialist forces, since the *vocianti* widely criticized the Enlightenment tradition, rationalism and individualism. If the Corradinians sought inspiration from Maurras and Barres, the *vocianti*, while not immune to the charm of the French nationalists, preferred the Dreyfusard Charles Peguy. Peguy (1873-1914) was a renowned essayist, poet and editor in chief of one of the most influential journals in early 20th century France, the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* (1900-1914). In his youth he embraced socialism and vigorously supported the Dreyfusard camp along with Sorel, Zola and others. However he underwent profound spiritual change embracing Catholicism, rejecting modernity and eventually coming at odds with his friends in the Dreyfusard camp. Because of his anti-modernism and his strong Catholic faith Peguy was influential among the French nationalists – and indeed was cited as a major influence by Benito Mussolini. Similarly to Peguy, Prezzolini appreciated the Dreyfusards' commitment to Justice over reason of State, but despised the French anti-clerical legislation and did not support the development of the progressive ideals of the Third Republic after the Dreyfus affaire.

presented the relationship between western morality/Christianity and Judaism was the philosophy of the Austrian-Jewish philosopher Otto Weininger. Prezzolini chose Jewish collaborators – Giulio Augusto Levi and Felice Momigliano - to review Weininger's work and discuss the possibility and the consequences of "overcoming Jewishness" - which in Weininger's case was ultimately accomplished through formal conversion and marriage to a Gentile, followed by his own suicide.

Prezzolini first read Weininger and introduced him to the readers of *Leonardo* in 1906, giving a raving review of his work.³⁸² He described *Sex and Character* as a psychological and philosophical study of the human mind centered on a theory of "sexual types". In essence *Sex and Character* combined commonplace tropes of anti-Semitic and Orientalist literature, constructing a dichotomy between the Jew/Oriental/feminine and the Christian/Western/masculine. The central argument of Weininger's book was that every human being is a unique combination of the masculine and the feminine element, so as to create an infinite number of individuals displaying characteristics of both genders in unequal measure –some individuals being more masculine than feminine, or vice versa. Similarly, Judaism was a psychological disposition that could affect Jews and Christian alike: it was left to the individual to strive to overcome one's Jewishness. Each of the two principles, according to Weininger, embodied certain characteristic that were alien to the other: he saw the masculine/Christian principle as active, productive, and essentially moral, and the feminine/Jewish principle as passive, unproductive, and incapable of understanding morality.

³⁸² Giuliano il Sofista (Giuseppe Prezzolini), "Un nemico della femmina. Otto Weininger *Geschlecht und Charakter*, 7a edizione 1905, pag. XXII-608 –*Über die Letzen Dinger, Min einem biograph, Vorwort von M Tappoport, 1904, 2a edizione*", *Leonardo*, Anno IV, Oct-Dec. 1906.

Prezzolini particularly appreciated Weininger's "method", by which the Viennese philosopher divided the world into two opposing principles.³⁸³ Alberto Cavaglion has justly observed that a theory such as the one exposed in *Sex and Character*, with its oversimplified, "child-like" approach to women and Jews, felt right at home in Italy, where the culture was already imbued with masculinity, prone to over-simplification and more likely to embrace a cultural over a biological racial discourse.³⁸⁴ In that sense the appeal of *Sex and Character* to Prezzolini resided in its ability to voice prejudices and stereotypes that were already mainstream in Italian culture and centered on the celebration of western rationality, morality and creativity. In practical terms the Weiningerian concept of assimilation translated into his own conversion to Christianity and marriage to a non-Jewish woman, which were followed by his suicide. Even though the *vocianti* always trumpeted Weininger's originality, in essence Weininger's philosophy consisted in repetition of anti-Semitic stereotypes combined with misogynistic stereotypes and translated into traditional forms of assimilation: conversion and mixed marriage.

As director of *La voce* Prezzolini maintained his interest in Weininger and in 1910 published positive reviews of his work by the literary critic Giulio Augusto Levi, and by Felice Momigliano, professor of Psychology and Philosophy at the Magistero in Rome.³⁸⁵ Nancy Harrowitz has noted that Levi's review reflected the attitude towards

³⁸³ Compared to products of the positivistic anthropological science, Weininger's sweeping generalizations about gender, religion and morality appeared to Prezzolini to have the nobility of "Platonic ideas". Giuliano il Sofista, "Un nemico della femmina", Cit.

³⁸⁴ Cavaglion has argued that Weininger was more influential than Freud in Italy, because the Italian culture was more predisposed to accept Weininger's simplistic, misogynistic, anti-Semitic and irrational approach to the human psyche than Freud's. Alberto Cavaglion, *La filosofia del pressappoco*, cit..

³⁸⁵ Alberto Cavaglion, *Felice Momigliano (1866-1924)* (Bologna: Il mulino; Napoli: Istituto italiano per gli studi storici, 1988).

Weininger that was held by most of the *vocianti*: Weininger's work was endlessly praised for its intuitive grasp of the "feminine" essence, but the issue of anti-Semitism was dealt with rather superficially, refusing to openly acknowledge the full implications of Weininger's work.³⁸⁶ Cavaglioni frames Weininger reception into the decline of the sense of Jewish identity at the turn of the century among the Italian Jews and argues that Levi was the perfect person to review Weininger's work, as a "de-Judaized" Jew.³⁸⁷ In fact, Levi's review of Weininger highlighted the centrality of Christianity in Weininger's thought, and framed him in unmistakable terms of western philosophy:³⁸⁸ it did not contain a hint of criticism towards Weininger's anti-Semitism, but was full of praise for his grasp of the essence of morality and his dedication to the attainment of spiritual perfection -to this end he compared Weininger to Immanuel Kant, the philosopher of western morality *par excellence*.³⁸⁹

Levi noted that Weininger's understanding of morality was inescapably Christian and western and praised the Austrian philosopher's intuition that "anti-Semitism began

³⁸⁶ Nancy A. Harrowitz, *Antisemitism, misogyny, and the logic of cultural difference: Cesare Lombroso and Matilde Serao* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994). On p. 79 Harrowitz observes: "Levi's reaction to Weininger is emblematic of the stance of the *La voce* critics: he summarized many of Weininger's remarks on the inferiority of women, directly and unabashedly repeating the points that Weininger raises in his book. Yet on the subject of Jews in Weininger's theories, Levi, although himself Jewish, is almost mute. [...] This censorship and rewiring on Levi's part are telling. They characterize the relationship of this group of Italian critics to Weininger's text and demonstrate the willingness of a Jewish critic to overlook the most damaging part of Weininger's text in a move that can only be called self-denying".

³⁸⁷ Cavaglioni, *La filosofia del pressappoco*, cit. , 33-35.

³⁸⁸ Giulio Augusto Levi, "Ottone Weininger", *La voce*, II, 9, 1910. In 1910 Prezzolini had also intended to have a whole issue of *La voce* entirely dedicated to "Semitism and anti-Semitism", in which Weininger would have been discussed extensively.

³⁸⁹ Immanuel Kant's fame as the philosopher of western morality derives primarily from his works *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), and *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), in which Kant based the primary ethical principles – which he called "categorical imperatives" – on reason rather than faith. Levi wrote of Weininger: "[Weininger] was perhaps the most deep, most ardent, and most rigorous Kantian to ever walk on earth". Levi, "Ottone Weininger", cit.

with the recognition of the Jew in oneself”.³⁹⁰ There were degrees of Jewishness depending on the individual, but Weininger’s fundamental teaching was to try to overcome it. Weininger’s value and interest to the *vocianti* resided in the latter point: changing one’s Jewishness implied an understanding of Judaism as cultural and behavioral, not biological, and as this aspect did not differ from traditional Catholic anti-Judaism.

Conversely, Momigliano admired Weininger’s work, but disapproved of both his formal conversion to Christianity and his suicide and argued that the values of Christianity had penetrated in contemporary culture to such a degree that they rendered conversion unnecessary.³⁹¹ In Momigliano’s view, by committing suicide, Weininger had deserted his duty to “renew the Jewish soul” through the adoption of the western/Christian value system, leaving his work unfulfilled.³⁹² The Austrian philosopher, according to Momigliano, had justly denounced the limitations of Judaism but instead of reforming his faith, he had gone too far in his assimilation - and the drastic attempt to overcome his Jewishness had been the primary cause of his suicide. Conversely, Momigliano praised the work of Israel Zangwill, who, after breaking away from Herzl’s movement, had founded the Jewish Territorial Organization (1905) devoted to the search of places –other than Ottoman-controlled Palestine -where Jews

³⁹⁰ “[Weininger affirms] that we hate in others only that which is odious in us, and that *anti-Semitism is generated from seeing the Jew in ourselves*, at least as a possibility. He [...] wanted to *free himself* [...], and elevate himself to Goodness and pure spirit” [italics mine]. Levi, “Ottone Weininger”, cit.

³⁹¹ Momigliano was dissatisfied with traditional Judaism, and endeavored to renew his religion through the fusion with Christianity: to this end he abandoned Talmudic Judaism and interpreted Jesus Christ as an Israeli prophet, without completely abandoning his Jewish heritage. He wrote in his will: “Although I have professed and upheld in my writing and in propaganda *a personal kind of Judaism that adopts the ethical values of the teachings of Jesus* as the ultimate result of the prophets of Israel, I intend to die in the religion of my fathers”. Arnaldo Momigliano, *Pagine ebraiche*, cit. This passage is quoted from the English translation *Essays on ancient and modern Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 145, n 1

³⁹² Felice Momigliano, “Tre israeliti”, *La voce*, IV, 6, 1914.

could settle.³⁹³ Author of the play *The Melting Pot* (1908), Zangwill was in the eyes of Momigliano an “advocate of cultural enrichment through the mixing of different cultural heritages”³⁹⁴. Momigliano praised him for “renewing the Jews” through “the assimilation of the best elements of the western cultural tradition”.³⁹⁵ Zangwill appealed to Momigliano because, unlike Weininger, he had not abandoned his Jewish identity, but aimed at “improving” Judaism through the assimilation of European cultural elements.³⁹⁶

As the examples above have illustrated *La voce*’s path to assimilation through the philosophy of Weininger glossed over the anti-Semitism of *Sex and Character*, and instead focused on the paths of reformation of Judaism and assimilation through the adoption of Western/Christian values. The function of Levi and Momigliano in support to Weininger was fundamental, as both the Jewish collaborators of *La voce* failed to recognize him simply as an anti-Semite, and accepted his theory in part or in full. Levi and Momigliano’s comments on Weininger confirmed the fundamental opposition between

³⁹³ Felice Momigliano, “Tre israeliti”, cit.

³⁹⁴ Zangwill’s play depicted the life of a Russian-Jewish immigrant family in the United States. The protagonist David Quixano is an enthusiastic supporter of the mixing of different ethnicities and cultures into the single American culture. To this end he is willing to marry a Russian Christian immigrant, who is the daughter of the officer responsible for the murder of half of his family during a Pogrom. On the importance and influence of Zangwill play in American culture see for instance Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible; Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*, (Princeton University Press, 2001).

³⁹⁵ Momigliano, “Tre israeliti”, cit.

³⁹⁶ Another *vociano*, Antonio di Soragna, expressed even more directly the necessity to “westernize” Judaism in a review of the work of the founder of British Liberal Judaism Claude Goldsmith Montefiore - *Gesu’ di nazareth nel pensiero ebraico contemporaneo* (Modena: Formiggini, 1914). Antonio di Soragna, “Gli israeliti e Gesu’”, *La voce*, VI, 9, 1914. Like Momigliano and Levi, Soragna supported a renovation of Judaism through the appreciation of the teaching of Jesus Christ. Soragna participated with other *vocianti* - Alessandro Casati, Stefano Jacini and Giovanni Boine- to the magazine *Il Rinnovamento* (published in Milan between 1907 and 1909), expression of liberal catholicism. Montefiore’s book –which included an introduction to the Italian audience by none other than Felice Momigliano himself- made the highly controversial claim and Jesus Christ’s teachings were not merely a form of Jewish heresy, but an expression of Judaism itself. Soragna argued that Montefiore’s “double quality as a Jew *and* a westerner” enabled him to recognize the moral teachings of Jesus and present a historically accurate vision of Jewish history. Soragna exhorted Liberal Jews to study Montefiore carefully and “meditate”, so that they could gain “a deeper a more objective understanding” compared to “the rabbis and the conservative element in general”.

traditional, Talmudic Judaism and the moral values of western Christianity, and reinforced the idea that Judaism needed to be either abandoned in favor of Christianity or changed at its roots through the absorption of western/Christian values.

3.1. “Political” assimilation: the rejection of Zionism

The Zionist movement founded by Theodor Herzl in 1897 contained the explosive message that the Jews scattered throughout the world, and particularly those who were the subject of persecution, deserved a homeland. Because of the overall weakness of the Zionist movement in Italy, the nationalist discourse did not perceive Zionism as a priority or a threat, thus the relation of the Italian Jews towards the international Jewish community did not become an issue until the Libyan war –as shown in the next section.

The majority of Italian Jews did not support Zionism in part because of their strong sense of Italian identity, in part because of the fear that their support could be interpreted as unpatriotic.³⁹⁷ There were significant expressions of support for the Zionist cause, particularly on the Triestine *Il Corriere Israelitico* thanks to the energetic guide of Dante Lattes, who first translated Herzl’s seminal work *Der Judenstaat* – “The Jewish state” – into Italian.³⁹⁸ However, the most widely read Jewish paper in Italy, the

Piedmontese *Il Vessillo israelitico*, was hostile to Zionism since the creation of the

³⁹⁷ See for instance Simonetta Della Seta Torrefranca, “Identita’ religiosa e identita’ nazionale nell’ ebraismo del Novecento” in *Gli ebrei nell’Italia unita, 1870-1945 : atti del 4. Convegno internazionale, Siena 12-16 giugno 1989* (Roma: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1993); and Maurizio Molinari, *Ebrei in Italia: un problema d’ identita’ (1870-1938)* (Firenze: La giuntina, 1991).

³⁹⁸ On Italian Zionism see the interesting contributions by Alberto Cavaglion, “Tendenze nazionali e albori sionistici” *Gli ebrei in Italia, Annali 11*, edited by Corrado Vivanti, cit., 1293-1356 and in the same volume Simonetta Della Seta and Daniel Carpi, “Il movimento sionistico”, 1321-68. For a survey of the main trends of Italian Zionism in English see E.M. Schechter, “Perspectives”, cit., 55-56. According to Schechter, Lattes viewed Zionism as the spiritual and cultural renewal and reawakening of a national Jewish consciousness in opposition to assimilation. It must be noted however that *Il Corriere Israelitico* was the expression of the Triestine Jews, who lived under Austrian domination and felt the problem of anti-Semitism more acutely than the Jews living in Italy.

movement in 1897: *Il Vessillo* rejected Zionism on the grounds of an “indestructible affection for the one and only motherland” Italy, while at the same time expressing solidarity for the persecuted Jews of Eastern Europe.³⁹⁹ The dominant trait of the position of the Italian Jewish community towards Zionism was the expression of sympathy towards the persecuted Jews but an even stronger affirmation of the extraneity of the Italian Jews from the Zionist project.⁴⁰⁰

The issue of Zionism touched the heart of the question of loyalty of the Jews towards the Italian nation, and as such in some cases hints of Zionist sympathies among Italian Jews were received with alarm among non-Jewish Italians. For example in 1905 renowned jurist and Senator Carlo Francesco Gabba addressed an appeal to the Italian Jews to publicly repudiate and fight Zionism from the pages of the Florentine clerical paper *Rassegna Nazionale* (founded in 1879).⁴⁰¹ Essentially Gabba argued that the Jewish proud proclamation of their identity and the elevation of this identity to the rank of a nation would be the cause for anti-Semitism. He warned that even in Italy, where anti-Semitism, in his own words, “did not exist”, the support for Zionism might generate anti-Semitism. Conversely, Gabba hoped for the complete assimilation of the Jews into Italian

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁰⁰ See also Mario Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo*, cit., 48 and following and Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il Fascismo*, cit., 31-78.

⁴⁰¹ Carlo Francesco Gabba, “Un appello agli Israeliti italiani. A proposito del Sionismo”, *Rassegna Nazionale*, XXVII, Vol. 145, 1st Oct 1905. It is interesting to note that what prompted Gabba’s piece was the participation of a single representative of the Italian “delegation” to the Zionist congress of 1905. Gabba pondered: “To openly and solemnly affirm the Jewish nationality, the Jewish national conscience, the Jewish cosmopolitan solidarity, and even their aspiration to have their own State or Colony, is it not an open and solemn confirmation of what the anti-Semites have been preaching against the Jews in many Christian states? [...] Isn’t it an instigation to have open warfare between Christians and Jews, and pushing the Jews themselves to be the first to declare this war?”.

society, similarly to the scenario that the German historian Theodor Mommsen had envisioned as the only “cure” for German anti-Semitism.⁴⁰²

Among the nationalists the predominant attitude was a dismissal of Zionism, and in Corradini’s case even a transitory and superficial sympathy towards the movement, both based on the fundamental assumption that the overwhelming majority of Italian Jews were not interested in joining the ranks of the Zionist movement – a view that was thoroughly corroborated by the Jews who participated in the nationalist movement.

Felice Momigliano, commented on the Zionist Congress of 1903 in *Nuova Antologia*, writing an apology of socialist Zionism. His goal was to inspire sympathy towards a movement that he considered directed to the masses of Jewish paupers and proletarians which made up the majority of Eastern European Jews while at the same time reaffirming that the Italian Jews were completely assimilated in Italy.⁴⁰³ A very similar position was expressed by Primo Levi “*l’italico*” regarding the 1905 Zionist Congress.⁴⁰⁴ “*L’italico*”, who would become an enthusiastic supporter of the Nationalist Association after its creation in 1910, discussed the division between the “intransigents” – who had the majority in the Congress and refused to build the Jewish State in places other than Palestine- and the others –among which were Max Nordau and Israel Zangwill – who were open to other possibilities.⁴⁰⁵ Levi significantly devoted a large part of his article to arguing that the Zionist propaganda in Italy was pointless and potentially

⁴⁰² On this episode see Albero Cavaglion “Tendenze nazionali e albori sionistici”, cit., 1301-2.

⁴⁰³ Felice Momigliano, “Il proletariato ebraico e il Sionismo”, *Nuova Antologia*, 1 Oct 1903, 403-424. This article is discussed in Albero Cavaglion “Tendenze nazionali e albori sionistici”, cit., 1318-19.

⁴⁰⁴ Levi, who was an art critic, and always signed his articles as “Primo Levi *l’italico*” with the obvious intent to highlight his pride in his Italian identity.

⁴⁰⁵ Primo Levi *l’italico*, “Il Sionismo e il suo Congresso”, *Nuova Antologia*, 16 Aug 1905, 691-700. This article is also discussed in Cavaglion “Tendenze nazionali e albori sionistici”, cit., 1318-19.

damaging. He stated that “In Italy more than anywhere else the physical and spiritual fusion [between Jews and gentiles] is complete”, and proceeded to explain:

“For the majority of the Italian Jews [...] what does Judaism represent? Not a different religion, because few of them are observant, and, among those, most consider it a formality; not a different race. [Judaism] represents a familial tradition, of which they should be proud even when they have the weakness of hiding their origin”.

Levi concluded arguing “It would be a calumny to suggest that the Jews might feel like foreigners – *stranieri*- in Italy”.⁴⁰⁶

The Congress of 1905 received coverage on *Il Regno*, which defined Zionism as “an uncivil utopia” because it presumed that the Jews were incapable of assimilating into other peoples.⁴⁰⁷ Zionism offended the Jews by denying them the capacity to assimilate, but most importantly it offended the European countries who had accepted the Jews into their societies. Overall the stance of *Il Regno* was to disparage Zionism as an ill-conceived ideology that did not deserve to be taken seriously and “died”, along with its founder Herzl, in 1904.⁴⁰⁸ Corradini, however, expressed a fleeting sympathy towards the Zionist movement. He did not discuss the concrete organization of the movement, nor its meaning in relation to the Jewish presence in Italy, but rather he focused on the idea of Zionism, which he viewed as an awe-inspiring “will” towards conquest.⁴⁰⁹ The feature that rendered Zionism worthy of Corradini’s admiration was its quintessentially *western*

⁴⁰⁶ Primo Levi l’italico, “Il Sionismo e il suo Congresso”, cit., 699-700.

⁴⁰⁷ “Zionism if taken seriously is an insult towards the countries that count Jews in their populations and towards the Jews themselves who belong to those countries; the *Jews should repudiate it and protest* [italics mine]” Anonymous, “A proposito dell’ ultimo congresso sionista”, *Il Regno*, II, 17, 1905.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Enrico Corradini, “Sion e Roma”, the essay is contained in *L’ ombra della vita*, cit., 169.

“drive towards domination”: he viewed the settlement in Palestine and the formation of a Jewish state as an act of “imperial conquest”. His admiration was inscribed in the context of his discourse opposing the Jews and the Romans, centered on the “passivity” of the firsts in relation to the “imperialistic drive” of the seconds –as discussed in the previous chapter. “Zion” was worthy of admiration when it behaved like “Rome”: “This is the messianism, the nationalism and the imperialism of the Jewish people. This is its empire and its peace, which remind of the empire and peace of Rome”⁴¹⁰. Corradini’s sympathy towards Zionism was short-lived: it was soon forgotten and replaced by hostility towards “cosmopolitan Jewry” in the context of the nationalist campaign for the invasion of Libya.

The relative weakness of Zionism among Italian Jews explains the superficial and cursory interest in the movement on the part of the nationalists in the early part of the decade. The perception of the possible involvement of Italian Jews in “cosmopolitan Jewry” would surface vigorously and rather abruptly during the Libyan campaign, and assume the form of a pressure towards the complete detachment from international Jewry.

3.2. “Political” assimilation: the rejection of “cosmopolitan Jewry”

As seen in the previous chapter, after the outbreak of the Libyan war – just as the Corradinian nationalists began to discuss forming an alliance with the clericals and to reveal their anti-democratic agenda- there was a surge of anti-Semitic discourse in the *Idea Nazionale*. Francesco Coppola’s charges aimed at the “international Jewish

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

conspiracy against Italy” prompted an alarmed response among the Jewish members of the ANI. The protests in turn inspired Coppola to attack once again, this time charging the Italian Jews directly with the accusation that they felt a greater allegiance towards “cosmopolitan Jewry” than towards Italy.⁴¹¹

This section discusses a crucial aspect of the discourse of assimilation: the demand that the Italian Jews detach themselves from the rest of European Jewry. It is necessary to analyze this discourse separately from Coppola’s initial anti-Semitic outburst in order to understand the relationship between nationalist anti-Semitism and anti-Judaic discourse of assimilation. Among historians who have surveyed the nationalist discourse, De Felice dismissed Coppola’s response as “embarrassed”, and De Grand described it as an act of damage control to avoid mass desertion in the ANI.⁴¹² These interpretations consider the initial attack as being tempered by the subsequent demand of assimilation. In reality, the two aspects of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaic pressure for assimilation were complementary.⁴¹³ The pressure towards the separation between the Italian Jews and the international Jewry should not be interpreted as a sign of weakness of the anti-Semitic discourse, because that very pressure derived from the essential recognition of Judaism as alien to Italian culture. The ANI was at first formed

⁴¹¹ Francesco Coppola, “Il mio antisemitismo”, *L’ Idea Nazionale*, I, 40, 1911.

⁴¹² Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei*, cit., 53, n 3; Alexander De Grand, *The Italian Nationalist Association and the rise of fascism in Italy*, cit., 34-36.

⁴¹³ Mario Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo in Italia*, cit., 41 and following; Enzo Collotti, *Il fascismo e gli ebrei*, cit. 18 and following. Unlike De Felice, De Grand, Toscano and Collotti consider the articles appeared on the *Idea Nazionale* as the first significant examples of anti-Semitism outside the clerical literature, and the first signals of a trend that would begin to gain momentum with the First World War. However since none of their works is a study of Italian nationalism, an analysis of the ideological and discursive aspects of the nationalist literature remains unexplored. See also Delio Cantimori, “Prefazione”, in De Felice, *Cit*, x-xvii and Francesco Perfetti, *Il movimento nazionalista*, cit., 123-25.

without a clear political agenda, but the Libyan war was the first event that forced the association to clarify its goals and its political tendencies – imperialism over irredentism, clericalism and authoritarianism over democracy. It was in this context that the Jews were pressured for the first time since the foundation of the ANI to prioritize their identity as Italians over their identity as Jews.

In November 1911 after the publication of Francesco Coppola’s article “Israel against Italy” – that alleged the existence of an “international Jewish conspiracy” against the Italian effort in Libya- the Jewish members of the ANI reacted immediately. Raffaele Levi presented his resignation from the Association – which was rejected on the grounds that the *Idea Nazionale* was not the official magazine of the ANI- and Alberto Musatti, leader of the Venetian section of the ANI and personal admirer of Enrico Corradini, demanded flat out whether the paper intended to drive Italian nationalism into the footsteps of the Action Française. Outside the ANI, the *Vessillo Israelitico*, the most authoritative paper of the Italian Jewish community, registered the offense, but remained apparently optimistic about the future, and confident in the inability of the nationalist anti-Semitic propaganda to spread to the rest of the country: the editorial stated that the charges of the “ultra-nationalists” did not frighten the Jewish community, “because Italy has the virtue to destroy every kind of malicious germs”.⁴¹⁴

The other editors of the *Idea Nazionale* defended Coppola, stating that he was simply “reporting the facts”, but at the same time attempting to reassure Levi, Musatti and the other Jews in the ANI that his article was referring exclusively to non-Italian Jews. Coppola resigned his seat in the directorate of the ANI, but maintained his position

⁴¹⁴ “Parole Chiare”, *L’ Idea Nazionale*, I, 39, 1911. *Vessillo Israelitico*, 59 (1911): 661-2.

as editor of the *Idea Nazionale*, thus appearing to appease his critics, but in fact gaining even more autonomy for his attacks. In his rebuttal on the *Idea Nazionale* he appeared in some ways even bolder in his accusations than he had been in the first article.

Firstly he accused the Jewish members of the ANI of “playing the victim” then he clarified that the meaning of his anti-Semitic piece was restricted specifically to foreign Jews:

“‘Israel’ to us means , no more no less, the conscious or unconscious organization, the Jewish cosmopolitan financial power and solidarity; it means a sort of ethnic nationalism, predominantly financial, international, that does not coincide with the various nationalisms of the individual European nations: *a sort of cosmopolitan nationalism that works and fights for its own interest, as it is its right, but from which the autochthonous nationalisms of every country have a right to defend themselves* when threatened” [Italics mine].⁴¹⁵

Once again anti-Semitism was defined in defensive terms. “Israel” was in Coppola’s definition a nation held together by common interests -predominantly economic in nature- and operating mainly through an international financial network: the nation ‘Israel’ had the allegiance of Jews living in various European countries who fought for the interest of cosmopolitan Jewry rather than the interest of their country of residence. Italian nationalism was by definition ideologically opposed to any interest, class, or group that might promote its own interest to the detriment of the aggrandizement of the nation, particularly in foreign politics. The Libyan war had provided for the first time the opportunity to address the issue of the divided loyalties of Italian Jews.

⁴¹⁵ F Coppola, “Il mio antisemitismo”, *L’ Idea Nazionale*, I, 40, 1911.

The Italian Jews, Coppola argued, had been “lucky” to be left out from the international Jewish coalition, and they should not try to identify with it: “I don’t intend to start Italian anti-Semitism”, he continued “because *in Italy there is no Semitism*”. “Unless”, he continued, the Italian Jews, by identifying with “Israel”, wanted to “create” anti-Semitism in Italy, “as they had done in France, Germany and Russia”. In fact, he claimed, Italy already seemed to display alarming trends: Italian Jews had reached high levels in the political and financial hierarchy, and the leading socialist paper *Avanti!* was now “wholly in the hands of Jews”.⁴¹⁶

These statements should not be underestimated: in essence Coppola asked the Jews in the ANI to choose between “causing” anti-Semitism, and dissociating themselves from international Jewry - which he constructed as a hostile national entity. Far from offering an apology, Coppola was placing the Italian Jews on the defensive: siding with “Israel” made the Italian Jews enemies, from whom the nationalists had “a right to defend themselves”. In fact the request to the Italian Jews to disassociate themselves from “Israel” gave him the opportunity to address the “alarming trends” of Jewish penetration in Italian institutions and political parties, and thus question the loyalty of the Italian Jews and their place in Italian society. He directed against the Italian Jews the accusation of reproducing the pattern of behavior of the international Jewry in Italy itself, which contradicted the possibility that Italian Jews could in fact – or would chose to- be different. This last point in Coppola’s attack was consonant with the attitude he assumed after WWI as director of a new magazine called *Politica*, in which he accused the Jews –

⁴¹⁶ The complaint for the “excessive” number of Jews in the Italian Socialist Party was widespread particularly among the revolutionary syndacalists, who mirrored Sorel’s stance towards the French Socialist party. See Robert Michels, *La sociologia del partito politico nella democrazia moderna* (Turin: Utet 1912) 274- 80; Orano had also expressed this critique in Paolo Orano, *La massoneria dinnanzi al socialismo* (Firenze: L. Cenni, 1905).

without distinction between Italian and foreign- of having undermined the strength of the modern State through universalistic abstractions such as “democracy” and especially “socialism”.⁴¹⁷

The Jewish response to Coppola’s attack in 1911 was for the most part one of silent acquiescence: the weak response of the Jewish members of the ANI in particular was a form of legitimization of the discourse of assimilation. In spite of several threats of resignation, only Scipio Sighele eventually resigned. Levi, Musatti and the rest of the Jewish members were satisfied with Coppola’s resignation from the directorate and the assurance from the *Idea Nazionale* group that they were not the official voice of the ANI –even though they remained the most widely read and well known nationalist paper in Italy. Sighele, who was isolated from the rest of the Jews in the ANI, remained convinced that there was no alternative to resigning, which he did in a series of letters appeared on the *Tribuna* in the spring of 1912.⁴¹⁸ His rupture with the ANI did not change the direction of the Association - since no one else followed his lead. In his final letter to the *Idea Nazionale* he pointed out:

“The directorate keeps issuing statements [...] dethatching itself from Coppola’s anti-Semitic article. But that doesn’t make it any less true that Coppola’s article, in fact articles, do exist, they are **a fact** (you can laugh at my positivist attitude but I believe facts and not the official statements that would like to erase them), *a fact*

⁴¹⁷ The article is cited in Giorgio Fabre, *Mussolini Razzista*, cit., 225.

⁴¹⁸ Sighele, “Le incertezze del nazionalismo”, *La tribuna*, 17 Apr 1912; and “Il partito dei reduce” *La tribuna*, 13 Apr 1912.

that proves the existence of an anti-Semitic, and thus reactionary, current within the nationalist movement" [Bold in the original article].⁴¹⁹

Sighele's accusation against the directorate of the ANI was important for two reasons. Firstly he denounced the hypocrisy in the official rejection of Coppola's article, while he was still a member of the ANI - and one allowed to voice his ideas on the most widely read nationalist paper. Secondly Sighele saw Coppola's articles as going beyond the opinion of an individual, but testifying the existence of an "anti-Semitic current" within the ANI. This current, was the same that wanted to impose a "reactionary" turn to the nationalist movement, namely the Corradinian nationalists. The *Idea Nazionale* attacked Sighele openly saying that he had become a "*bloccardo*" - namely a member of the democratic-socialist alliance.⁴²⁰ Coppola for his part stated that he would not retract or change anything of what he said⁴²¹, in fact he stated that:

"If a 'reactionary' is someone who feels the most sincere disgust for egalitarian, humanitarian, pacifist, and demo-socialist individualism, someone who feels nauseous at the thought of the 'immortal principles of Eighty-nine', someone who finds the usual antimilitaristic and anticlerical proclamations disgusting, then I am a *reactionary*" [Italics in the original text].⁴²²

Interestingly, in the same issue Alberto Musatti defended the *Idea Nazionale*

⁴¹⁹ "Una lettera di Scipio Sighele", *L' Idea Nazionale*, II, 17, 1912

⁴²⁰ "La cose a posto", *L' Idea Nazionale*, II, 17, 1912; Corradini stated that Sighele's departure actually strengthened the Association, which needed "people who think, not crybabies". "Lasciandoci ci fortificano", *L' Idea Nazionale*, II, 19, 1912

⁴²¹ "Una liquidazione", *L' Idea Nazionale*, II, 18, 1912.

⁴²² Ibid.

against Sighele, arguing that as a Jew he did not believe in the existence of an anti-Semitic current in the ANI:

“My presence and unchanged support for the Association testifies to my belief that such current [the anti-Semitic current] does not exist and Sighele will acknowledge that I care at least as much as he does, but probably much more.”⁴²³

Musatti and the other Jewish members of the ANI never clarified why, unlike Sighele, they did not believe in the existence of an anti-Semitic current. Coppola was certainly not isolated in the ANI: the *Idea Nazionale* defended him personally and never criticized the content of his attack against “Israel”, and, more importantly Luigi Federzoni – who was one of the editors- and Gualtiero Castellini – who was Sighele’s nephew by marriage- had the opportunity to confirm their support of Coppola’s theory during their stay in Libya in November 1911. While in Tripoli as correspondents for various papers, Federzoni and Castellini came in contact with Walter Weibel - correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, who, according to Castellini, had falsely written that Italian soldiers “killed their wounded enemies and raped the Libyan women”. Castellini fondly reported the content of a note that Federzoni sent to Weibel intimating him to leave Tripoli: “Today a ship is leaving [Tripoli]: I suggest that you take it and go elsewhere *to spin your lies that serve the thieving usurer Jews who pay you*”.⁴²⁴

Federzoni and Castellini were among the most recognizable names in the ANI. The meaning of Federzoni’s note and its closeness to the accusations made by Coppola

⁴²³ “Una lettera di Albero Musatti”, Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Gualtiero Castellini, *Nelle trincee di Tripoli* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1912), 87. The note was dated November 20th 1911, only days after the publication of Coppola’s first article. *Nelle Trincee di Tripoli* was a collection of the articles published by the *Gazzetta di Venezia* during the course of the first three months of the Libyan campaign.

against cosmopolitan Jewry were unmistakable, but were not the object of criticism or comments on the part of the Jewish members of the ANI. Considering the context in which the note had been written –against a German journalist who had vilified the Italian soldiers at war in Libya- a protest could have been interpreted as a confirmation of Coppola’s accusation of identifying with “Israel” rather than Italy.⁴²⁵

As seen in the course of this chapter, the Jewish members of the ANI were not alone in their willingness to compromise their Jewish identity by tolerating anti-Semitism in the association of which they were members. However, the compromise was often felt with uneasiness and regret, as was the case of a Jewish collaborator of *La lupa*, Raffaele Ottolenghi. Ottolenghi wrote six long articles presenting to the readers the Jewish population of Ethiopia –the “Falasha”- that, to him, symbolized the purity of untamed “oriental Jewry”: he lamented that, next to the Falasha, the Italian Jews were “defeated”, “assimilated”, “servants” in search of recognition in Italian society.⁴²⁶ Ottolenghi embraced the discourse opposing Jews as “oriental” and essentially “other” from Western

⁴²⁵ In the climate of the Libyan war even *La voce* expressed indirectly the opposition between Italians and Jews outside of Italy. An article simply signed by “*un fiumano*” - “an inhabitant of Fiume” -described the oppression of the Italian population by the Jews who operated as agents for the Hungarians. “La tragedia dell’ italianita”, *La voce*, V , 35, 1912. The jurisdiction of the city of Fiume, which was predominantly inhabited by Italians, had been allotted by the Habsburgs to the Hungarians after the Compromise of 1867. The article centered on the forced “Magyarization” of schools, academies and the civil service, but it was not the Hungarians who were perceived as oppressors, but the Hungarian Jews: “One sees these Chauvinistic bullies everywhere, easily distinguishable by the screeching sound of their voices, by their sinister and distrusting look, and by the Judaic nose. Because let us say that the majority of Hungarians in Fiume are actually “Magyarized Jews”, very different from real Hungarians, nobles and gentlemen that respect us, as we respect them”. The article contained some of the most common anti-Semitic stereotypes: the surreptitious infiltration in the administration to the detriment of the majority of the population, the ungentlemanly conduct and lack of morality, and even some physical traits – the sinister look and Judaic nose – that made them stand out. The Jews were “Magyarized” but were impostors for the “noble and gentlemanly” Hungarians, they simply used Hungarian identity as a tool for the oppression of the Italians. This episode remained isolated in Prezzolini’s magazine, but it stands out for its vehemence and testifies of the spreading among the *vocianti* of the view of Jews as enemies of the Italians that was fueled by the Libyan war.

⁴²⁶ Raffaele Ottolenghi, “I Falasha” in six parts published on *La lupa* between February 3rd (II,17) and July 9th (II,39)1911.

society and culture, but did not believe that the Jews had gained in dignity or wisdom through their assimilation. Years later Orano would comment on Ottolenghi- who committed suicide in 1914- in his anti-Semitic work *Gli ebrei in Italia* (1937):

“[Ottolenghi’s suicide] revealed to me the incurable uneasiness [...] of the Jewish mind implacably beaten between the proud presumption of the superiority of Judaism, and its right to prevail in the social consciousness and in social institutions, and the reality of the State of the Church, of Latinity, of the Empire, of aggressive nationalism”.⁴²⁷

Ottolenghi expressed the anguish of the Italian Jews who were involved in a movement characterized anti-Semitic and assimilationist tendencies that were the inescapable feature of aggressive ideology centered on the superiority of western culture and that constructed the Jews an enemies.

Conclusion.

The analysis of the nationalist discourse on the Jews demonstrates that the nationalist culture was anti-Semitic, but until the Libyan war, it embraced a discourse of assimilation which allowed the Jews the capacity to change – specifically to be absorbed into Western culture, and to adopt Christian/western values. The Libyan war would cause the questioning of this principle even though it would not be until after the First World war that some nationalists began to see the Italian Jews as indistinct from international

⁴²⁷ Orano, *Gli ebrei in Italia* (Roma: Casa editrice Pinciana, 1937), 66, quoted in Wiley Feinstein, *The civilization of the Holocaust in Italy: poets, artists, saints, anti-Semites* (Madison; Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University press; London: Associated University presses, 2003), 279.

Jewry, and thus as enemies, to which the possibility of– as well as the capacity for– assimilation was denied. The conflict would bring Italian nationalism even closer to European anti-Semitism, as testified by the production of writers like Coppola and especially Giovanni Preziosi – respectively in the magazines *Politica* and *La vita italiana* – who reproduced anti-Semitic tropes and stereotypes –such as the Jewish control of the Italian political and economic system, and the Jewish international conspiracy- with hitherto unknown regularity and vehemence.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁸ See De Felice, *Storia*, cit. 74 and following; Toscano, *Gli ebrei*, cit. 47 and following; and, more recently, Enzo Collotti, *Il fascismo e gli ebrei*, cit. , chapters 1 and 2.

Conclusion

The main historiographical contributions of this dissertation are in the fields of European racism and anti-Semitism, and in tracing the origins of Fascism.

The Italian nationalist racial discourse demonstrates that there was a range of racist positions that did not necessarily involve the theorization or the practice of genocide. It should not come as a surprise that the Italian nationalists were racist, when their French and German counterparts were anti-Semitic political formations like Action Française and the Pangermanic League. However, there were circumstances peculiar to the Italian situation that rendered the Italian nationalist racial discourse unique. First and foremost, the Southern Question, which rendered a simple transposition of the discourse of racial purity impossible. The South, as we have seen, was constructed as a resource in terms of its explosive demography, while the issue of the “quality” of the population was downplayed. The Italian South rendered the Italian nationalist racial discourse in many ways opposite to its French and German counterparts.

In the early part of the 20th century the South was a stronghold of Giolittismo. Having failed to gain the support of the southern peasant electorate, the Italian Socialists lamented the barbarism of the South, and focused their strategy on the North. Conversely, the nationalists attempted to appropriate the South, by claiming, as we have seen, the Southern Question as a nationalist priority. However, the nationalists ultimately failed to gain significant support in the South, as testified by the lack of nationalist candidates in the southern regions during the 1913 elections. The landed elites remained loyal to the Liberals, since the protectionist tariffs that the nationalists wished to impose on foreign

goods would damage their economic interests by reducing the exports in the Italian agricultural sector. The newly disenfranchised southern peasants were more susceptible to the Catholic propaganda than to the imperialistic rhetoric of the nationalists.

The Italian nationalist racial discourse seems closer to the European colonial discourse when one looks at the Libyan campaign. The imagery of the Africans used by the Corradinian nationalists was the common idiom among colonial powers. The description of the Libyans as inept children or in turn as brutish savages placed the Italian nationalist sources squarely into the European racial discourse on Africa. However, instead of using modern technology and Nordicism as a proof of superiority of the Europeans over the Africans, the Italian nationalists relied on an imagined Roman past and on the “millenarian ability to farm” that characterized the Italian race. The peculiarities of Italian case with its late and incomplete economic modernization and its history of contact with the populations of North Africa, once again set the Italian nationalists apart from their North-European counterparts.

The nationalist movement is often considered a precursor of Fascism, as discussed in the Introduction to this study. Many of the racial themes proposed by the nationalists became staples of the Fascist rhetoric, albeit with slight variations. However, the nationalist movement was fundamentally elitist when compared to the fascist. In spite of the calls to national and racial unity, the nationalists did not intend to alter the Italian hierarchical social structure, nor did they address the Italian peasantry directly – even though peasants featured so prominently in their arguments. Furthermore, the Nationalist conferences and speeches were invariably held before a wealthy and educated public.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁹ See Introduction, 25-6.

The most important idea that transferred from the nationalist to the fascist discourse is the trope of “romanita”. Mussolini argued for the continuity between the ancient roman soldiers-settlers and modern-day Italians, and applied the “roman” rhetoric to his ruralist and populationist discourse. In the Colonies, Mussolini applied some of the most brutal aspects of the nationalist discourse, specifically the use of brutal force – if necessary to the point of extermination- over the Africans who resisted colonization. In other words, the Fascist regime maintained both the nationalist idea of colonial war as a way to awaken dormant racial qualities in the Italians, and applied genocidal means of domination – particularly during the campaign of suppression of the Libyan insurgence in the 1920s and the Ethiopian campaign in 1935. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the fascist campaign in Ethiopia found its direct antecedent in the nationalist rhetoric during the Libyan campaign of 1911, particularly after the events of Sciara Sciat.⁴³⁰ This latter point is particularly important because it demonstrates how the criminal acts perpetrated by the Fascist regime in Ethiopia found their rhetorical ancestry in the corradinian rhetoric against the Libyan insurgents.

In terms of anti-Semitism, this dissertation demonstrates how the tension between rejection and assimilation of the Italian Jews into the nation was the defining trait of the Italian nationalists’ attitude towards the Jews. Judaism, particularly in its most traditional forms, was given a negative connotation, and in fact was construed by Corradini as the antithesis of “romanita”. However, it should be noted that it was the Libyan war that triggered the most notable episode of anti-Semitism. The war could be interpreted as a major event that brought to the surface a deep-seated hatred towards the Jews. However, it could also be interpreted as a tactical opportunity to strengthen national unity in the

⁴³⁰ See chapter 4.

face of a purported enemy threat and, at the same time, strengthen the nationalist-clerical alliance in view of the 1913 elections. The pressure towards assimilation overall far outweighed the rejection of Italian Jewry, and, in this respect, the Italian nationalists were at odds with the Action Française and the Pangermanic League.

Compared to the peak of nationalist anti-Semitism of 1911, the Racial Laws of 1938 also lend themselves to be interpreted as both a tactical expedient to strengthen the alliance with Nazi Germany, and as an outburst of genuine anti-Semitism prompted by the aftermath of the Ethiopian war. Both in Libya and Ethiopia the act of colonization drew international condemnation upon Italy. In the case of the Ethiopian war, the diplomatic isolation eventually led Mussolini into forming an alliance with Hitler. In both cases international hostility prompted the search for an internal enemy. The main difference is that the Racial Laws marked the first time anti-Semitism became an official policy of the Italian Kingdom.

The Racial Laws were possible because stance of the Fascist Party mirrored in many ways the situation in the ANI: the Jewish presence in the Nationalist and Fascist Parties was accompanied by the pressure towards assimilation and genuine anti-Semitism. My analysis shows that the Jewish presence in the ANI should not be interpreted as a sign of the weakness of Italian anti-Semitism, but rather as a sign of the acceptance on the part of the Jewish members of the nationalist movement of the necessity to compromise with the anti-Semitic “current”. The permanence of Jews in the ANI after Coppola’s anti-Semitic tirade implied the acceptance of the discourse by which the Italian Jews had to disassociate themselves from international Jewry in order to be considered members of the Italian nation

Studying the previously neglected racial discourse clarifies important aspects of the nationalist ideology, which have been dismissed as mere rhetoric by the existing historiography. First and foremost, the study of racial discourse clarifies the function of the theme of *romanita'*, which, as we have seen, was used as a response to the theories that postulated Aryan superiority. *Romanita'* also served the more specific function of providing a model of imperialism which could be presented as “within easy reach” for the Italians. With a relatively modest industrial development – compared to other West-European countries- Italy’s mode of colonization had to rely on the country’s main assets – or rather, what the nationalist rhetoric constructed as assets: its burgeoning population, and its predominately agricultural economy. The Ancient Roman model of colonization lent itself to being emulated in a modern-day agricultural colony. The nationalists also intended the *mise en valeur* of Libya as exploitation of natural resources and construction of infrastructures, however the majority of the propaganda focused on the agricultural potential of the country. Therefore, fertility and ability to farm were constructed as racial qualities linking the Ancient Romans to modern-day Italians.

The *romanita'* was also used in opposition to both the Libyans and the Jews. Having defined *romanita'* as the quintessentially Western ability to conquer and to manipulate the environment, the Italian “race” could be pitted against “oriental” races that were “idle” and “incapable” to create and produce –as in the case of the Libyans- but also that were incapable of transforming their “ universal visions” into reality – as the Jews.

Much remains to be done to improve this study. Firstly it is necessary to explore further the trope of “romanita'” and its relation to the idea of West, clarifying the

connections and the difference between “romanita”, “latinita” and western culture. The issue of gender also needs to be explored further, both in the sense of examining the role of women in the nationalist racial rhetoric, and in the sense of interpreting certain tropes through the prism of gender – a case in point would be to explore the topic of Crispismo in terms of masculinist rhetoric. Finally, much remains to be examined in the phase that goes from WWI to the merging of Nationalism and Fascism in 1921. For instance, the development of the nationalist racial rhetoric against Soviet Russia after the Revolution of 1917.

This dissertation demonstrates that the history of racism in Italy is longer than previously thought and more complex. If racism is defined as the targeting of individuals and groups for discrimination or persecution, then the Italian nationalist ideology responds to that definition. The nationalists supported the conquest of Libya based on a discourse that presented the inhabitants as incapable to evolve beyond the “primordial” stage, and unchangeable having remained in the “same” state of incivility since ancient times. They also advocated the use of force as the only way to deal with “savages”, and some of them – Maffeo Pantaleoni first and foremost- even envisioned the possibility of completely replacing the indigenous element and substituting it with the Italian. Regrettably, the Fascist Regime had the willingness and the means at its disposal to transform the nationalist racial rhetoric into practice.

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