



Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Master's Degree Programme in
Comparative International Relations

Final Thesis

**Libya, the “Nineteenth Region of
Italy”: between oppression and
integration.**

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Matriculation Number 885595

Academic Year

2025 / 2026



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INTRODUCTION

The annexation of Libya as the nineteenth region of Italy during the Fascist Period was one of the primary ambitions of the Government, indeed, the African colonial project was part of the Fascist agenda, especially to determine the Italian strength at an international level.

The Italian presence in the colony, from 1911 until the outbreak of the Second World War was characterized by several impasses and contradictions. Since the beginning of the conquest, the image portrayed of the colony, especially by the Fascist Regime, was very distant from reality.

This thesis will examine the contradiction between propaganda and reality to examine the motives behind the Fascists' portrayal of the Libyan colony at home, particularly in magazines and the periodical press, and the extent to which this portrayal differed from the actual conditions of the colony.

This part of the Italian history is often undertreated, and yet it represents an important chapter of the Italian's past. The Italians aspirations to conquer overseas territories begun after the Unification of Italy, meanwhile other European Powers were already present in the African continent.

At that point Italy desired to be recognized at an international level and, for this reason, modified its priorities and policies. In fact, even though the internal situation of the country was unstable and social fractures were present, the geopolitical desire of expansion became part of the domestic policy. In fact, the conquest of Libya should have been the solution to the problem of mass emigration, unemployment and the lack of international prestige. Once these ambitions became integral part of the domestic policy, the Liberal Government started in 1911 the process of Libya's occupation, completed by the Fascist Regime in 1932.

In the recent decades, the interest of scholar towards the Italian colonialism has grown considerably, in fact, this topic has been analyzed under several lenses. Scholars such as Giorgio Rochat, Angelo Del Boca, Nicola Labanca, Alessandro Pes, Emanuele Ertola and more, challenged the myth of *Italiani Brava Gente* and provided a different perspective from the one delivered by the propaganda at the time. The authors chosen as secondary sources for this thesis encompass the Libyan conquest and occupation through different perspectives. Indeed, Del Boca's work report the violence committed by the Italian government in the colony invalidating the myth of Italian as a good colonizer. Recently, scholars in this field concentrated their attention to the impact that certain policies applied regarding race, propaganda and colonial ideology had on the Italian and indigenous population. Indeed, scholars such as De Napoli and Berhe examined the juridical and administrative ambit of colonial governance, essential to understand the treatment towards the indigenous and the differences between the colonizer and the colonized. This thesis contributes to these studies,

considering the management of the Libyan colony under several aspects, especially examining the investments during the presence of Italo Balbo as governor of Libya.

The primary source material includes national journals and — most centrally — the Fascist colonial periodical *LIBIA*, which provides a pivotal lens through which to examine the regime's self-representation of its colonial project. Published under the governorship of Italo Balbo, *LIBIA* functioned simultaneously as a promotional vehicle, an ideological instrument, and a record of colonial life, making it a complete and in-depth source for historical analysis. Primary sources are contextualized with the secondary literature, including the works of contemporary historians in this field, as well as scholars of gender and Fascist ideology such as De Grazia.

The thesis attempts to reconstruct the occupation of Libya; the central question guiding this analysis is whether the Libyan colony, part of the Italian Empire, was integrated or whether the contrast between propaganda and historiographical interpretations reveals a different reality.

The fascist imperial ambitions reflected a desire to present Italy as a unified empire on the international arena, showcasing its strength. For this reason, the information delivered through propaganda emphasized the success of its “civilizing mission” and its policies toward both Italians and indigenous populations. However, the information delivered by the Regime, examined by recent studies, reveals contradictions, exposing the difficulties that the Fascist Regime encountered and the consequent failure of its imperial ambitions.

This thesis adopts a multidisciplinary approach, considering the factual history analyzed through the lenses of a contemporary perspective. The thesis is divided in three chapters that encompass the several phases of the Italian venture in Libya.

The first chapter concentrates on the origins of the Italian ideology that led to the invasion of Libya in 1911, moreover, it is reported the long-standing period of occupation and the violent repression before the Pacification and the declaration of victory in 1932.

The second chapter is divided into thematics and interrogates the type of colonialism applied and the information delivered, especially to the Italian population regarding the environment and the inhabitants of the colony.

The third chapter has as its primary source the analysis of several volumes of the periodical *LIBIA*, published during the years of Italo Balbo as Governor of Libya. The principal objective of this volume was to share the accomplishments of the colony in Italy and at an international level. For this reason, the volume is an inestimable source to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the investments and projects in the colony. The analysis of this volume will be integrated with the contemporary studies regarding the thematics evaluated – tourism and architecture, race and citizenship, demographic

colonization and the role of women in the Libyan colony – in this way, a critical analysis concerning the information depicted in the periodical can be accomplished.

It should be noted that this thesis focuses specifically on the Libyan dimension of Italian colonialism. The reconstruction of the Italian past is essential for the building of the national identity and therefore requires careful investigation. Moreover, it is essential to recognize the nature of the colonialism imposed on the Libya population. Only through a critical analysis of the narratives disseminated by the Regime can a more accurate and historically grounded understanding of this context be accomplished.

THE ITALIAN OCCUPATION OF LIBYA: FROM WAR TO SUBMISSION

1.1 Birth and development of colonial ideology

Colonial expansionism has been crucial in building the history of Italy. Even before its Unification, there were figures such as Nino Bixio¹ who were prompt to establish commercial ties with foreign nations, thereby facilitating the trans-border movement of goods and the subsequent enrichment of individuals through international trade (Ertola, 2022:15-17).

In this section, it will be discussed the reasons that led Italy to begin its colonisation process, and which were the opinions inside of the country regarding this matter. This initial paragraph will provide a better understanding of the reasons behind the start of this process and the political choices that were taken afterwards during the liberal and fascist eras.

During the 19th century, the colonisation process accelerated in Europe, concomitant with an internal modernisation of the continent. The European countries' interest in Africa and Asia was aroused by the exotic nature of the regions, thus initiating the Scramble for Africa² (Labanca, 2002: 15-16). Meanwhile, some countries in Europe, such as Great Britain, France and Spain were mighty and could expand their markets, the Kingdom of Italy had only recently achieved unification, and was still experiencing significant internal instability.

The Italian elite-initiated deliberations on establishing a colony, with two primary motivations underpinning this action. Firstly, the objective was to identify new territories for Italian migrants seeking employment opportunities in foreign countries. Secondly, the ambition was to enhance Italy's global standing.

Nevertheless, the matter was subjected to internal deliberation, as certain scholars posited that the establishment of a colony served as a pretext to evade social reforms, thereby failing to enhance the quality of life for the populace, particularly in the southern regions of Italy, which were underdeveloped compared to the northern ones. This opposition is intrinsically linked to the *questione meridionale*³.

The idea of colonising to expand the market was presented by Cristoforo Negri, a professor of political law and science at the University of Padua, in 1863. According to this perspective,

¹ Genoa, 2 October 1821 – Banda Aceh, 16 December 187. Was an Italian military officer and politician, one of the most famous historical figures associated with the Italian Risorgimento.

² an expression that became famous thanks to the newspaper "The Times" in 1884

³ The term "Questione Meridionale" is employed to denote the economic and social issues that pertained to the developmental challenges experienced by the southern regions of Italy, especially after the Unification of Italy. The phenomenon is intricately intertwined with the influence of "Mafia".

Italy could have been considered as a pair with the other European Powers. Professor Negri was not the only scholar to discuss the necessity of modernising the country; however, he was one of the first scholars to link the migratory flows to the colonisation process. In his view, the colony had to be considered more as a trading partner, rather than a territory to be exploited.

Nevertheless, a divergence of opinion emerged within the country, with the debate being split between two distinct approaches. The first perspective was connected to the concept of Malthusian imperialism, which aimed to conquer a territory to divert emigration abroad and solve internal problems connected to overpopulation, such as *the question of the south* and unemployment that impacted Italy during those years. The other approach embraced a liberal stance, emphasising that the state should refrain from interfering in the flow of trade (Ertola, 2022, pp. 20-24). It is understood that the initial conception of the African continent, as perceived from the Italian perspective, was informed by the concept of exoticism.

During the 1870s, this notion began to disseminate through various magazines that depicted the continent as a destination that was geographically proximate and appealing to the general population. This led to a prevalent belief among individuals that the African territories were unclaimed and available for exploration. Consequently, the desire to reach and conquer these territories became a prevalent sentiment among travellers and explorers (Ertola, 2022: 26-29).

The government's interest in other territories was demonstrated by the establishment of the Reale Società Geografica Italiana in 1867. This society united scholars, politicians and members of the state who organised scientific missions in unexplored territories, including Tunisia in 1875 and Somalia in 1891. These missions were necessary to address the questions surrounding the geographical potential of the territories (Labanca, 2002:38).

One of the main protagonists of Italian expansionism was Sidney Sonnino ⁴(1847-1922), an Italian politician who played a huge role and interest in this process. Sonnino believed in new political, social and economic reforms; for this reason, he held elevated expectations regarding the role of the Kingdom of Italy at an international level. At the end of the nineteenth century, the international arena was challenging the position of Italy. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was occupying Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Great Britain was penetrating the African continent, and France proclaimed its protectorate over Tunisia in 1881 (Labanca 2002: 49). The position that

⁴ An Italian politician of the conservative right, he was responsible for dealing with the southern question and served as Minister of Finance and Minister of the Treasury of the Kingdom of Italy from 1893 to 1896. He expressed strong opposition to Crispi's aggressive colonisation of Ethiopia. He served as Prime Minister for the first period from 8 February to 29 May 1906, and for the second period from 11 December 1909 to 31 March 1910. In 1914, he assumed the role of Minister of Foreign Affairs, a position he held until 1919. During this time, he played a pivotal role in the negotiations that culminated in the signing of the Treaty of London.

Sonnino endorsed over these events was to follow his values of freedom and nationality (Monzali, 2017: 9-14).

Sonnino's perspective on the relationship between emigration and colonialism is of particular interest. He regarded this process as a solution to the emigratory flow of Italians and as a means of gaining international recognition. This perspective led him to support Francesco Crispi (1818-1901), the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1887 to 1889, in his endeavours to expand the Italian presence in East Africa, particularly in Eritrea.

The pro-French politics initiated by his successor, Antonio Starabba di Rudini, in 1896 were pivotal in pursuing Italy's interests in Tripolitania. This shift in policy also prompted a change in the Italian government's stance, as evidenced by the ratification of the Visconti Venosta-Barrère agreement in 1900. This agreement recognised Morocco's sovereignty over the territory from France, while France acknowledged Italy's aspirations towards Libya (Monzali, 2017: 21-23).

From the beginning, Libya was portrayed as a mythical place. In 1880, Manfredo Camperio published a review of Gerhard Rohlfs' exploration of Libya in a magazine he directed. The first impression portrayed is the similarity of Libya to the Mediterranean Italy, and the necessity to conquer the territory — or rather, to reconquer it — since it was already annexed to the Roman Empire in the past (Del Boca, 1988: 31-35).

Tripolitania was seen as the perfect colony for Italian emigrants, since it was described as lush and uncultivated; meanwhile, Cyrenaica was a desert, almost as if it had no borders, evocative and exotic, wild and left to its own devices. The pressure to establish a colony to achieve a certain status quo at the international level became increasingly urgent, and Italian nationalist groups began to promote Libya as the key to the success of this mission.

The regions of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were portrayed as a "paradise on earth", "beautiful oases" and much more. Indeed, during the 1830s, scholars began to describe Libya, an example. Is the journalist Enrico Corradini, famous for being the founder of the Italian nationalism (Ertola, 2022:80). In his book *Conquista di Tripoli*, Corradini described the region of Tripolitania as a barren landscape, a consequence of the failure of the Ottoman Empire to provide adequate care for the territory, there are no tools of modernisations, no cars, no electricity and also the water was lacking, the place reflected the poverty of the Turks and, according to Corradini, it needed Italian help to improve (Corradini, 1912: 46-49).

The initial endeavour to gain entry to the region was characterised by an economic approach. The decision to undertake a specific incursion into the area was made in 1905, with Banco di Roma, a financial institution under the direction of Ernesto Pacelli, engaging in activities that

were associated with the clerical domain and the Vatican. The decision was made by Tommaso Tittoni, the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time.

The impact of the Bank on the territory of Libya was significant; the construction of industrial and agricultural tools started in several cities, among which were Benghazi, Derna, and Tripoli (Del Boca, 1988: 39).

Before 1905, the absence of an Italian capital in Libya precluded the prospect of investment. Concurrently, the Turks granted a concession to a French company for the construction of a port, a decision that provoked concern in Italy.

Tittoni, therefore, commissioned Cassuto, author of a tourist and economic guide to Tripoli, to determine a strategy for gaining access to the region, given the opposition of the Turks.

The proposal entailed the establishment of an Italian banking institution, with its own capital. To establish a trust-based relationship between the Ottoman Empire and the bank, and permit its entry into the country, it was necessary to demonstrate that the bank was not affiliated with the government but was private (Mori, 1957, pp. 102-118).

An alternative method of achieving peaceful penetration of the area was to formally recognise Italian schools as institutions. Indeed, in 1898, Crispi issued a decree stipulating that institutes abroad would henceforth be regarded as state schools. Furthermore, several clinics were established in Tripoli, Benghazi and Derna. This proved to be of significant advantage when Italy entered the territory as a conqueror, as it already had a base to rely on. Moreover, other compatriots were already present in Libya, including Neapolitans, Florentines, and Sardinians. These strategic choices were of all-pivotal importance to the Italian propaganda policy (Del Boca, 1988: 46-48).

The newspapers obscured the reality of the situation, fabricating reports and presenting the news with an excess of optimism. In 1911, the conquest of Libya became imperative, in part due to the portrayal of the war against the Ottoman Empire as a straightforward and cost-free endeavour, with minimal humanitarian and economic implications.

The government of Giovanni Giolitti (1842-1928) determined that 1911 was the opportune moment to invade Libya and commence hostilities against the Ottoman Empire.

This decision was undertaken due to the internal pressure made by the nationalist movements, especially referring to Enrico Corradini (1865-1931), one of the heads of the movement and a firm believer in the colonisation process connected to the emigration one. It is also imperative to acknowledge the international pressure that has been exerted because of a demonstration conducted by the German Navy in the vicinity of the Moroccan coastline, specifically of Agadir. This demonstration had the potential to disrupt the equilibrium in the Mediterranean region.

The nationalist movement established a national newspaper entitled *L'Idea Nazionale*, utilising this medium for the purpose of propaganda. Indeed, the newspaper adopted a particularly assertive tone regarding the conquest of Libya, thereby rendering it a matter of national significance for the definition of the country's identity.

In opposition to the nationalist perspective, the socialists advocated for investments in the southern regions, perceiving them as a domestic extension of the African continent. Furthermore, the Kingdom of Italy did not implement a tributary reform, a measure adopted by other European colonial powers. It was therefore the case that the costs were shouldered by the proletarians, whilst the benefits were accrued by the bourgeoisie (Saviano, 1974: 1-10).

The discourse surrounding the invasion stood in contrast to the prevailing reality. The notion that Libya constituted a rich source of resources, with the potential to enrich other nations such as France or Germany, was a gross misrepresentation of the situation. The assertion that the Ottoman Empire did not represent a significant impediment and that the conquest of Libya was essential for facilitating Italian emigration, was demonstrably false. However, this interpretation triumphed, and on September 28th, Italy delivered an ultimatum to the Ottoman Empire, proclaiming its domain over Libya.

Initially, the Ottoman Empire advocated for peaceful expansion, a policy which Italy pursued, as has been documented. However, it also advocated for Libya to remain in its current state, thereby establishing a protectorate.

Giolitti, however, was not satisfied with this response and consequently decided to declare war against the Ottoman Empire on the 29th of September 1911.

1.2 The invasion of Libya

Following the failure of Italy at Adua, the establishment of a victorious strategy was imperative. Moreover, it was hypothesised that the Ottoman Empire, due to its internal struggles, would not be an impediment for the victory of the Kingdom of Italy. However, the war proved to be more challenging than anticipated. Libya's population was approximately 750,000, with a significant proportion residing along the coast and others dispersed across the expanses of the Gebel desert. The population as a whole rejected the invasion, instead aligning with the Ottoman forces (Labanca, 2002:113).

The Italian invasion of Libya was kept secret until the last minute. For this reason, the military organisation was far from being excellent. The head of the expedition, 66-year-old Carlo Caneva and the lieutenant generals Guglielmo Pecori Giraldi and Ottavio Briccola did not know how to respond and how to act.

The bombardment commenced on the 3rd of October, and afterwards, the invasion had to continue by land. Initially, the operation functioned, even though there were not many soldiers on the territory, and the army entered until Tagiura, a Libyan city located in the periphery of Tripoli.

The initial urban centres to be captured following the fall of Tripoli were Tobruk, Derna and Homs. The latter proved to be a particularly arduous undertaking due to the presence of an Ottoman military force operating in conjunction with the Arab populace, who exhibited a strong reluctance to surrender.

Simultaneously, the occupation of the Berca barracks in Benghazi proved to be a challenging undertaking. To quell the resistance, it became imperative to launch a bombardment on the territory, despite the absence of any fortifications to target (Del Boca, 1988: 96-108).

Initially, some of the Arab and Berber populations seemed favourable to this invasion and were trying to understand what they could gain from it, until they realised that Italy was no different to the other colonial powers and that it intended to control the area in an imperialistic way, without sharing the power with the indigenous population.

Upon entering the area, the Italians found themselves confronted with the challenge of establishing a system for the administration and governance of the populace and the territory, indeed, the initial concept that was conveyed was that the dignity of indigenous peoples would have been upheld without any form of discrimination based on race or religion (Berhe, De Napoli, 2021: 26).

One of the most challenging experiences endured by the Italian army during the war was the episode at Sciara Sciat on the 23rd of October. On this occasion, the Ottoman army and the Arab forces encircled the oasis of Sciara Sciat and initiated an offensive. This encounter is notable for its intense and cruel nature, with both combatants and civilians engaging in a violent battle. Notably, the Italian soldiers were massacred. The severity of the military trials and punishments was such that it provoked a strong reaction from the Italian soldiers of Tripoli.

After this episode, on the 5th of November 1911, Giolitti made the final decision to annex the Libyan territories within the juridical framework of a colony, excluding the possibility of a protectorate (Labanca, 2012: 71) (Berhe, De Napoli, 2021:27).

From that moment, the rivalry between the two populations started to arise, and the Italians were harbouring an ever-growing desire for revenge towards the indigenous population. The sense of superiority and the perception of the locals as uncivilised increased, reinforced by the differences in lifestyle, language and environment.

Although this was the atmosphere on the front, the idea that had to be conveyed to the population on the peninsula had to be different.

Censorship and control of communication are two concepts often associated with the fascist regime. However, they were also present during Giolitti's government. In fact, the only journalistic activity in Libya consisted of daily bulletins provided by the Government. As Nicola Labanca, an Italian historian, also asserted, the censorship served to obfuscate the events occurring within the colony (Labanca, 2002:122).

Even though this strategy proved effective in Italy, it is imperative to acknowledge the role of foreign journalists in reporting the events on the battlefield. One example is the article in The Times published by George Macaulay Trevelyan (Del Boca, 1988, :108-123).

ROME, Nov. 1.—The reports which have been circulated in foreign countries that the Italian troops at Tripoli have been guilty of extreme cruelty in the war against the Turks and Arabs, killing women and children, the aged and infirm, and non-combatants, have caused intense indignation throughout Italy. These reports have already been officially denied, but Premier Giolitti took occasion again to-night to emphasize the denial and to make a statement on behalf of the Government and the whole nation. The Premier says:

If any reproach is admissible, it can only be on account of excess of humanitarianism. We have, perhaps, through exaggerated scruples, spared the lives and property of the enemy, and, in so doing, have exposed ourselves to grave risks. This, however, we have been pleased to do to prove that we are civilized and humane. Perhaps what is the bounty of the strong may be judged as weakness.

Our soldiers, trained in the school of loyalty, and accustomed to the uprightness of the Abyssinians, who are open enemies or steadfast friends, did not expect that the Arabs, after they had sworn fealty and received grain and flour and other concessions, would treacherously break their oaths and traitorously turn their arms upon the wounded. Among our heroic dead many were barbariously killed by the enemy after they had fallen gravely wounded.

In this article, the difference between the rhetoric used outside the Kingdom of Italy is reported, addressing the massacres and uncivilised manners towards Ottomans and Arabs.

Concurrently, the document also includes a report on the response of Prime Minister Giolitti, which presents a divergent perspective.

Indeed, he affirms that all the measures used were a response directly proportional to the damage that the Ottoman army and the Arab populations were causing. In fact, he emphasises the losses and injuries among the Italian army, stating that any action was necessary for their protection (The Times, 1911: 1).

Figure 1: The Times, 02 November 1911

CHIASSO, Nov. 1.—With a view to bringing the war with Turkey quickly to an end, the Italian Cabinet has decided that the Porte must either accept peace immediately or lose more territory.

This means that some of Turkey's valuable island possessions in the Mediterranean will be seized unless she submits to her fate.

This decision was reached at a series of secret conferences on Monday between Rear Admiral Aubry and members of the Cabinet. Admiral Aubry arrived in Rome secretly on Monday morning. Lengthy interviews with the Premier and the Ministers of War, the Navy, and Foreign Affairs followed. Definite arrangements were made for sending the Italian fleet into action against Turkey's Mediterranean possessions.

It is understood that the new plans will be acted upon as soon as the Marquis di San Giuliano, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, can reach the necessary understanding with the interested powers. It is expected that Italy will continue to spare the Albanian coast in order to avoid complications.

The New York Times

Published: November 2, 1911

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If peace could not be reached with the Ottoman Empire, Italy would have occupied as many territories as possible in the Mediterranean, leaving the Turks no choice (The Times, 1911: 4).

Figure 2: The Times, 02 November 1911

1.3 Towards the conquest of Libya

The invasion of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica can be divided into three phases. The initial phase is characterised by the invasion, during which troops advanced along the coast towards Tripoli until the most important cities were occupied - Tobruk, Derna, Homs, and Benghazi (Labanca, 2002: 117).

In his book *Conquista di Tripoli*, Corradini lauds the accomplishments of the soldiers, who, despite their fatigue, exhibited a profound sense of fulfilment. The essence of this invasion can be encapsulated in a single sentence from the book “*Stavamo conquistando la Tripolitania per il nostro bisogno, per la nostra utilità e per la nostra grandezza*”⁵ (Corradini, 1912: 22).

The author, a staunch nationalist, provided a vivid account of his experience and reward when he witnessed the Italian flag being raised on the territory that had just been conquered “*A terra, sulla nuda collina della spiaggia, apparve, visibile, tutta spiegata, la nostra bandiera. [...] Non l'avevo mai vista così grande, non l'avevo mai vista come allora. Non avevo mai visto la bandiera italiana*”⁶ (Corradini, 1912:10).

⁵ We were conquering Tripolitania for our needs, for our utility and our greatness.

⁶ On the ground, on top of the empty hill of the beach, materialised, visible, fully unfolded, our flag. [...] I had never seen it so mighty, I had never seen it like that before. I had never seen the Italian flag.

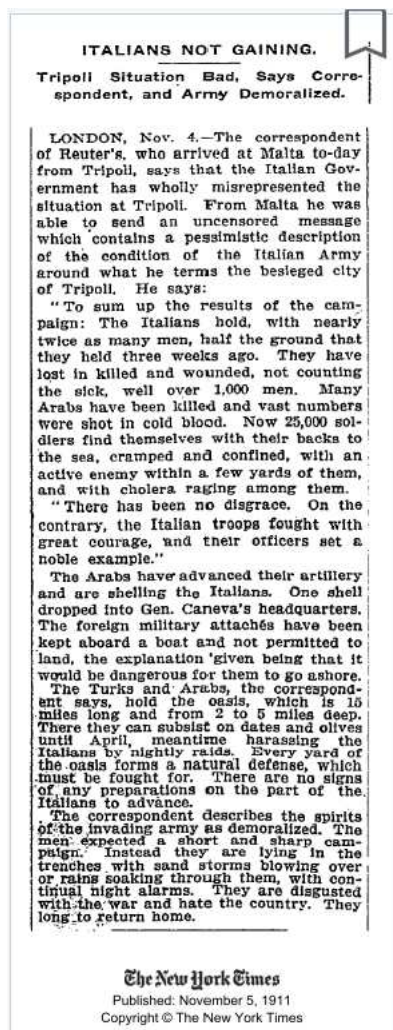


Figure 3: "ITALIANS NOT GAINING",
The Times, 05 November 1911

However, the initial phase proved to be particularly challenging, as it deviated from the original plan; in fact, the projection of an unopposed surrender by the Ottoman soldiers and the absence of resistance from the Arab population were inaccurate. The opposition demonstrated considerable strength, resulting in multiple casualties. This phase concludes with the formal declaration of the annexation of sovereignty, which was issued on the 5th of November 1911.

The second phase could be considered as more dynamic; indeed, the army had to conquer the internal part of the Libyan territories, and this had to be achieved without the protection of the navy but with Eritrean fighters (Labanca, 2002:116).

Indeed, the latter were particularly competent in facing this scenario, and they were also Islamic; for this reason, it might have been perceived as a minor threat for the Libyan population, which was not expecting this scenario.

The Eritrean fighters stayed in the area until 1932 and were cruel towards the Libyan resistance (Del Boca, 1988: 164).

The period following the invasion was marked by a period of stagnation. To resolve the situation, Giolitti entrusted Giuseppe Volpi, who had the responsibility of initiating

negotiations with the Sublime Porta. Negotiations were conducted by Said Halem, president of the Council of State in Istanbul, and for the Italian side by Volpi and Bertolini, Minister of the Colonies, and Fusinato, a professor of international law. Initially, the negotiation was arduous due to the different positions held by both sides (Del Boca, 1988: 178-180).

Meanwhile, in the territory, some progresses have been made, the situation in Cyrenaica was different, considering that the resistance, controlled by the Senussi, a religious-political group supported not only by the Arabic population, was still able to smuggle arms through the British Protectorate of Egypt. This situation was not favourable for the Italian's propaganda; for this reason, it was necessary to modify the strategy and adopt a more active one (Del Boca, 1988: 180-183).

Consequently, the first changes were adopted; indeed, General Caneva was substituted by Ottavio Ragni in Tripolitania; meanwhile, in Cyrenaica, General Ottavio Briccola endorsed the

operation (Del Boca, 1988: 187). The new military leadership sought to advance on and capture the oasis of Zanzur in north-west Libya on September 20th (Del Boca, 1988: 189-190).

The third phase of the Italo-Ottoman War was characterised by the outbreak of the Balkan Wars; due to this, the Ottoman Empire concentrated its focus elsewhere, and the War with the Kingdom of Italy lost importance. The diplomatic negotiations were ongoing, overseen by Volpi. In an ultimatum issued by Italy, the demand for Turkey to surrender in Libya was rendered explicit. Unless this demand was accepted, Italy declared its intention to suspend the negotiations and resume guerrilla warfare, particularly in the Aegean region. On the 15th of October, a preliminary peace agreement was reached in Ouchy (Del Boca, 1988: 191)

The Peace Treaty was signed by the representatives on October 18th 1912, marking the end of the war, and the Italian Kingdom gained the long-awaited territory in the Mediterranean (Labanca, 2002: 116-117).

However, due to the haste to Italy, it did not occur to anyone that in the Ouchy Agreement, a specific clause was posed by the Ottoman Empire to safeguard their interests in the region.

Indeed, Mehmed V, caliph of the Ottoman Empire, signed the treaty appending a specific clause in which the Ottoman Empire still possessed religious influence, while the Italians maintained the administrative and military one.

Despite the perceived victory of the Treaty of Ouchy in concluding the Italo-Ottoman War, the subsequent events indicate the considerable difficulty of maintaining the colony of Libya, particularly in terms of financial return. Ultimately, the perception was that the conquest constituted a moral reward for the Kingdom of Italy, perceived as a pair with the other European Powers.

1.4 The struggle to hold power

In the aftermath of the Ouchy Treaty, some issues required to be solved in Tripolitania. Primarily, there was the necessity to address the presence of Ottoman soldiers in the region, and secondly, to introduce a new administrative system to the Libyan territories. Finally, it was imperative to dismantle the Arab resistance still present in the inner regions.

Regarding the first issue, some Ottoman soldiers escaped in Cyrenaica and joined the Senussi Resistance; meanwhile, the others decided to obey orders and leave the territory. The administrative heads of the coastal territories agreed to hand over power, thus facilitating the settlement of the Italian authorities. Finally, the last point concerning the indigenous resistance was the most challenging issue for the Italians to address (Del Boca, 1988: 206-208).

Notwithstanding the Treaty of Ouchy, which provided the exclusion of the Ottoman Empire from Libya, some deputies, such as Suleiman el-Baruni⁷, informally still supported the resistance.

Cyrenaica was particularly difficult to control due to the fearless opposition of the indigenous resistance, mainly represented by the Berbers. Rome attempted to counterbalance their opposition by negotiating with the Berber representatives a form of colonisation that would be well-suited to their needs. Even though the negotiations started and both parties were positive about the outcome, the armistice was broken right after its initiation, due to the pressure that General Ragni exerted, since he believed that the only solution could have been found through force. In reality, General Ragni was highly supported by Giolitti; for this reason, new attacks towards the indigenous population proceeded (Del Boca, 1988: 208-213)

⁷ Born in Giado (1872–1940) was a religious leader, commander belonging to the Berber tribes of the Gebel Nefusa mountains, a symbol of Libyan resistance.



Following the conflict in Assaba, an offensive in the desert of Cyrenaica aimed at controlling the Gebel in 1913, the public discourse on Libya once again became a topic of discussion. This shift in public opinion was prominently featured on the front page of March 27th, 1913, of the newspaper *Avanti!*. The article defined the longstanding struggle of Italian forces as ridiculous. The title *La ripresa dell'avventura libica. Bel suol d'amore* already expressed the disappointment, indicating the false aspirations behind the conquest: "Tutta l'impresa libica, come è noto, è stata condotta a furia di menzogne: incentrata su falsi presupposti, proseguita tenendo celata la verità, circondata sempre da un velo di mistero⁸." According to *Avanti!*, the

⁸ The whole Libyan venture, as it is known, it was conducted with lies: based on false assumptions, continued hiding the truth, always shrouded in mystery.

Suleimàn el-Baruni, the representative of the resistance, attempted new negotiations with Bertolini, Minister of the Colonies, expressing some special rights that should be recognised for the Berber population.

In contrast, General Ragni, supported by Giolitti after having gained the new territories of Chicha, Yefren, Fassato, Giosc, Nalut, as far as Ghadames, was not interested in curbing its offensive.



Figure 5: L'Occupazione di Jeffren. El-Baruni offre di trattare e fugge, La Stampa, 28 of March 1913.

At the same time, *La Stampa*, on the 28th of March 1913, published an affirming that El-Baruni escaped after the negotiations and that the Kingdom of Italy won this war.

As it is possible to acknowledge, there is a huge difference in the spreading of the information.

On one hand, the article of *Avanti!* reported a critical thought regarding the situation in the Mediterranean; meanwhile, in the case of *La Stampa*, the article is based on the Italian superiority and abilities.



Figure 6: La prima giornata di Jeffren italiana, La Stampa, 29th of March 1913.

In an article dated on the 29th of March, La Stampa discusses the happiness of the indigenous people who had recently been conquered, referring to the conflict at Assab. The article does not engage with this event to discuss it, but rather to recount how General Ragni proceeded to visit the wounded soldiers to announce the news of the conquest, in an act of retribution for past actions (La Stampa, 1913).

In reality, el-Baruni returned to Turkey, still hoping that something would change; however, this should not be seen as a surrender, but as a last attempt to respect the agreements that were being negotiated. Yet Giolitti's Italy failed to convey this, reporting instead that the surrender was due to exhaustion. Outside Italy, the representative of the resistance received the praise he deserved for never having succumbed to corruption or fear in facing the foreign threat.

After the conquest of the Gebel, General Ragni organised the expedition towards Fezzan. The main objective was control the population over the territory that, after the loss of the Ottoman Empire, was left by itself and prevent the creation of another base for the Senussi resistance in Fezzan.

It is understood that his idea consisted of entrusting the heads of the Arab indigenous tribes, such as Sef en-Nasser, head of el-Giofra Oasis and an important outlet for access to Fezzan, as well as other merchants from Tripoli.

However, since Ragni was not supported by Minister Bertolini, he decided to leave and was substituted by General Vincenzo Garioni, and the project of conquering Fezzan was conferred to Colonel Antonio Miani.

The initial idea was to start from Sirte and undergo el-Giofra occupying Fezzan.

The expedition was hasty and militarily poorly organised, because the Italian army failed to maintain its commitments and even induced hostility among those who should have supported it, inducing false promises without being able to respect them.

The resistance comprehended more than 4 thousand fighters belonging to several tribes, more than the capability of Italy to counterbalance it (Del Boca, 1988: 216-220).

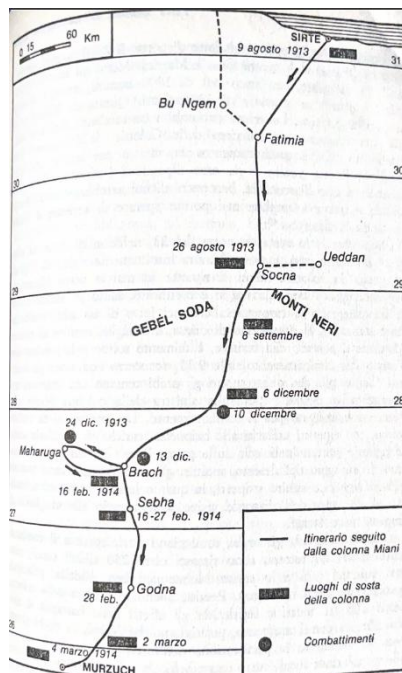


Figure 7: From Sirte to the conquest of Murzuch, Del Boca, 1988: 223

As we can see in this picture, this is the route from Sirte to the conquest of Murzuch.

The Italian militaries were isolated in the desert, rendering more challenging the delivery of supplies. This was not only due to the geographical distances but also because of the attacks by the Arabs. Moreover, the insurgents had not been vanquished; there were still many armed rebels in the area. If the Senussi were to openly declare war on Italy in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, it was inevitable that problems would also arise in Fezzan (Del Boca, 1988: 225).

On the 27th of July 1914, General Luigi Cadorna was appointed to the position of leading the Italian army in the conquest of Fezzan (Del Boca, 1988, pp. 229-230).

The spread of pan-Islamism has led to an increase in the organisational capacity of the resistance movement, thereby rendering it more challenging to address (Labanca, 2012: 123).

As a consequence of the international framework's dynamics and the difficulties in facing the Senussi resistance, all the Italian conquests so far resulted in fragile outcomes, and the resistance began uprisings in Fezzan, Ghibla and Sirtica.

The Italian soldiers relied on an attack pursued in 1915 by the British troops in Egypt that launched a particularly vigorous offensive against the Senussi resistance, leading Italy to harbour hopes that the Libyan resistance would also be influenced by this attack (Labanca, 2002:122).

At the beginning of 1915, the situation in Libya was disastrous; the Kingdom persisted in Tripoli, Homs, Bengasi, Cyrene, Derna and Tobruk (Labanca, 2012:122), but the losses were enormous; indeed, this period was compared to a new Adua. During the Great War, the Italian army had to combat for the same territories conquered in 1911-1913, and Ameglio, the General of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, tried to defend the positions, also claiming new soldiers (Labanca, 2012:135). During those years, despite some fighting, the situation remained at a

standstill, partly because the adversaries managed to take several Italian prisoners, which is why attempts were made to negotiate their release (Del Boca, 1988: 341-342).

Almost at the end of the War in 1918, it was necessary to shift attention from the war to that of the colonies; indeed, due to the new perspectives developed after the War, the idea of creating a new policy in the colonies began to be discussed.

A possibility was to introduce the *Ordinamento Bartolini*, proposed in 1914 but never applied; this legal system aimed to change indigenous customs as little as possible and not to force assimilation, especially given the differences in customs and religion. This approach would facilitate the establishment of a collaborative governance framework, with the local population playing a pivotal role in the decision-making process. Indeed, as early as 1917, the Ministry of the Colonies, Gaspare Colosimo, had proposed a shift in policy from assimilation to association. This proposal was transformed in law on the 11th of July 1917, leading to the establishment of two committees, one in Tripoli and the other in Benghazi, entrusted with the responsibility of providing counsel to the central government on specific policies about social and religious preferences.

Regarding this matter, Carlo Alfonso Nallino, an Italian Islamist and Arabist of the time, proposed several options to render the colony as autonomous as possible, especially regarding education. His proposal included the possibility of studying Arabic up to secondary school level, after which a compulsory Italian course would have been introduced.

Nevertheless, Tripolitania proclaimed its independence in November 1918, which was immediately rejected by Italy. However, due to changes in the international situation, Italy's response changed from rejection to negotiation (Del Boca, 1988:354-363).

A pivotal event was the *Convegno Nazionale Coloniale per il Dopo Guerra delle Colonie* issued in Rome in January 1919. This congress aimed to portray Italy at an international level as interested in the future of the colonies and ready to engage in constructive discussion; on this occasion, all the components of the colonial party were reunited (Monzali, 2017: 74).

The fear of the party concerned the 14 points of Wilson that urged the auto-determination of the populations; indeed, the creation of an international order such as the League of Nations was perceived by the Italian government as an inconvenience and not a way to facilitate their desire, which was for a colonial protectorate or direct annexation. The Ministry of the Colonies,

Colosimo, made a clear statement, mentioning the desire of the Kingdom of Italy, after years of fighting for liberty and independence, to be able to thrive (Monzali, 2017: 95-96).

However, due to the increasing of the anarchic movements present in the colonies, the sentiment inside the Italian public opinion began to mutate, and also the propaganda veered in position.



Figure 8: Parole di verità sul caso libico, *Avanti!*, 4th of June 1920

One example can be seen from the newspaper *Avanti!* The first one dates to the 4th of June 1920.

The article reported the serious events that arose in Libya, such as the capture of soldiers and the subsequent decision by the Minister for the Colonies Colosimo, not to publicise the occurrences. The newspaper reported all the news that materialised in the colony, and had been obscured by other journals,

informing the population of the decisions made by the government and the little achievements. At the same time, in Cyrenaica, as a result of the agreement *Modus vivendi* of Acroma stipulated between Britain, Italy and Idris es-Senusi in 1917, the possession of the territory did not require any particular effort on the part of Italy; however, it was still necessary to define who held the power. Once Giovanni Amendola became the Minister of the Colonies in 1922, he initiated a huge repression against the Libyan population. Indeed, in Tripolitania, he supported the violent manner of Governor Volpi against the resistance, and, even though in

Cyrenaica the Minister began the negotiation less rigidly, the overall situation did not develop as hoped.

Meanwhile, the leader of resistance al-Senusi decided, for health reasons, to withdraw from political life and handed over the reins to an intermediary, proclaiming Omar al-Mukhtar as leader of the resistance.

The issue that arose in 1921 and 1922 was that the Tripolitania resistance began to unite with that of Cyrenaica, which did not see its rights truly recognised by the Kingdom of Italy.

The arrival of the Fascist Regime marked a turning point in the administration of the Libyan territories. The initial objectives posited from the bourgeois were to gain as many monetary benefits as possible from the colonies and to be able to control the Libyan territory.

However, the legacy of the liberal period might be summarised in the failure to achieve the objectives initially stipulated.

Once fascism held power in 1922, Amendola ceased to be minister, leaving Libya unpacified (Del Boca, 1988: 411; 439-443).

Francesco Saverio Nitti, Minister of the Interior from 1919 to 1920, in his writings, reassumed this experience perfectly as here reported:

La Libia costa all'Italia fra la guerra e le spese di occupazione molti miliardi, è ancora, sarà lungamente un passivo per la vita nazionale. Con gli stessi miliardi, in buona parte spesi prima della guerra europea, l'Italia avrebbe sistemato e utilizzato il suo immenso patrimonio idraulico e sarebbe oggi in gran parte indifferente al problema dei combustibili fossili, che costituiscono per essa una vera servitù. La vera politica nazionale era acquistare l'indipendenza economica e non avere il dominio di un immenso spazio sterile. Le persone ignoranti descrissero in Italia la Libia come una terra promessa [...]. Un fenomeno di follia, perché la Libia non ha nessun valore, né agricolo, né commerciale, né militare [...] Se l'Italia non può abbandonare la Libia dopo averla presa, anche per

dovere verso le popolazioni, si dovrà sempre domandare perché l'abbia presa e perché l'abbia presa in forma violenta, quando si poteva avere facilmente dal Governo turco una serie di concessioni ⁹¹⁰

1.5 Italian Fascism in Libya: the final phase of conquest

After the March on Rome in October 1922, the fascist regime seized power. To understand the fascist vision of colonisation, this essay will refer to a speech delivered by the army officer Giovanni Roncagli¹¹ in 1926, which was subsequently published by the Italian Geographical Society.

In his speech, Roncagli emphasised the exuberance that the fascist movement has brought to Italy. One quote that perfectly resumes this concept is: “*Prima di essere una questione sociale, questa è una questione fisica, nella quale sono in contrasto la legge dello spazio con quella del numero.*” ¹²Indeed, it reproduces the idea of the liberal Italy that the Italians should work for the *Madre Patria*, rather than another country.

The objectives of the initial fascist approach towards colonialism were twofold: firstly, to reduce the number of Italian workers in foreign countries, and secondly, to invest in the colonies to achieve this reduction.

In the second part of the speech, Giovanni Roncagli concentrated his attention on one specific country: Libya. The country is usually described as empty and without a future. Still, following

⁹ Francesco Saverio Nitti, *Scritti Politici*, vol. I, Laterza, Bari 1959, pp. 73-74

¹⁰ Libya is costing Italy many billions in war and occupation expenses; it is still, and will remain for a long time to come, a burden on the nation. With those same billions – most of which were spent before the European war – Italy could have developed and utilised its immense water resources and would today be largely unaffected by the problem of fossil fuels, which constitute a real burden for the country. The true national policy was to achieve economic independence, not to rule over a vast, empty territory. Ignorant people in Italy described Libya as a promised land [...]. A phenomenon of madness, because Libya has no value whatsoever—neither agricultural, nor commercial, nor military [...] If Italy cannot abandon Libya after having conquered it – also because of a sense of duty towards its people – one must always ask why it took it and why it did so violently, when it could easily have secured a series of concessions from the Turkish Government.

¹¹ Giovanni Roncagli (1857-1929) was a fervent nationalist, supported of the fascist movement, and Secretary of the Royal Italian Geographical Society.

¹² Before being a social issue, it is a physical one, in which the law of the space is in contrast to the one of the number.

Roncagli, it demanded more investments to develop not only in terms of agriculture, but also from a tourism perspective.

Moreover, in his rhetoric, there is a reference to the Roman Empire and his ability to make Libya prosper, indeed, as Mussolini said - *In terra d'Africa c'è posto e gloria per tutti* ¹³ – if only there is the willingness to appreciate it (Roncagli, 1926:432-438).

According to Roncagli, one peculiar way of rendering the colony more attractive to the Italian population was the tourism industry. The concept under discussion will be developed in subsequent chapters of this thesis, with the third chapter focusing on this aspect.

Regarding the colonies, one of the goals of the fascist regime was to definitively conquer and pacify the territories of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. In the first case, however, it was not as easy as we shall see, since before gaining control of the territory, the fascist regime had to use terrible violence against the resistance.

The process of negotiation and the establishment of legislation in 1919 during the liberal era was proved unsuccessful, with the objective of guaranteeing citizenship to the Libyan populace. Consequently, it became imperative to devise an alternative strategy (Ryan, 2014:124).

As Nicola Labanca stated, the colonial period connected to the conquest of Cyrenaica is divided into years rather than into a singular operation. This is because the Italian Army had to conquer the same territories repeatedly.

From 1923 to 1927, the new tactics of the fascist government were discovered, first of all every form of association with the indigenous population was prohibited (Labanca, 2012: 163). Moreover, from 1925 the public consent was no longer necessary; thus, any decision could be referred solely to the ministers in office, in this case, the Minister for the Colonies.

The fascist regime undoubtedly introduced a New Era based on an aggressive expansionism, otherwise called the politics of prestige (Ryan, 2014:123). The politics of prestige was one of the main goals of the Fascist Party because the aim was to render the Kingdom of Italy Great again, a suitable successor of the Roman Empire (Labanca, 2002: 143).

An important milestone was the capture of Tarhuna, in the periphery of Tripoli, on the 29th of January 1923. The conquest of Tarhuna was significant not only from a military point of view but also from a civil one, since it was a green area. The conquest led to a series of governmental investments ranging from civil infrastructures to public institutions.

The *mujahedin*, this is the name of the Senussi resistance, attempted to reclaim the territory of Tripolitania, where the principal goal was Misurata, one of the most important Libyan harbours. The Governor of Libya, Giuseppe Volpi, was actually very concerned for the standards of living

¹³ In the land of Africa there is place and glory for everyone.

of the indigenous population since the only rights that they had were to pay taxes, have their land confiscated, and be exploited in their mansion. The concern of the Italian Governor of Tripolitania relied on the decision of the fascist government that forced the Libyans to pay the *decima*¹⁴, preventing the indigenous people from holding public offices to further separate the ethnicities, eliminating all forms of cooperation and expropriating land without paying the appropriate compensation (Del Boca, 1988:16-51).

The situation in Cyrenaica was different; the Governor Mombelli, from 1924, began to adopt controversial instruments to eradicate the indigenous population, such as bombs and gas, being confident that the central government would protect his decisions. In 1925, the situation worsened when the indigenous people desired to negotiate, but Mussolini denied any possible discussion due to their race being considered inferior. However, even if the strategy of increasing the repressive measures and impeding an open dialogue were adopted, nothing was gained; for this reason, Ernesto Mombelli, Governor of Cyrenaica, was replaced by Attilio Teruzzi. As it is possible to state, this change of tactics was still not sufficient; in fact, the definitive reconquest was slow in coming.

In 1927, Mussolini and Luigi Federzoni, the Minister of the Colonies, were unsatisfied because of the longstanding unstable situation of Libya and decided to modify their approach towards the region. In the Gebel desert, the resistance was still present, and it became imperative to find the correct strategy to penetrate the territories. The real change happened when Emilio De Bono was appointed to initiate a military campaign to occupy the Fezzan region in 1927 (Labanca, 2012: 166-170).

The difficulties in this operation arose especially due to the scarce investments in military equipment, which demonstrated the unpreparedness of the Italian Army. The Libyan territory was pivotal for Mussolini because it was positioned centrally between two great powers, France

¹⁴ The decima consisted in a public tax

and Great Britain; however, due to the military difficulties it was necessary to defend the territories already obtained through a larger share of financing. (Dal Boca, 1988: 80-85).

At this point, the conquest of Cyrenaica and Fezzan can be finally addressed, stating the end of the Libyan conquest.

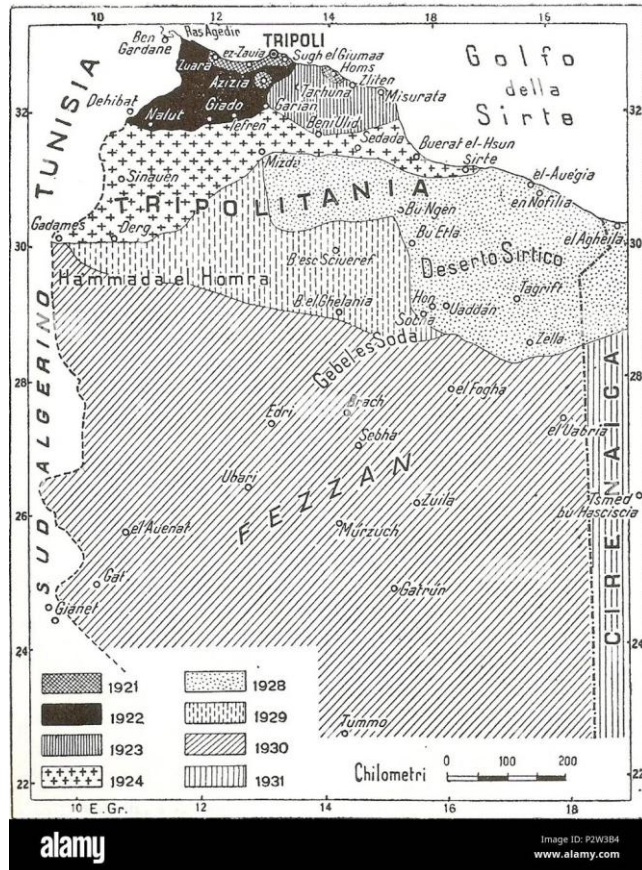


Figure 9: Phases of the conquest, Wikipedia, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Pacification_of_Tripolitania_and_Fezzan.jpg

The first conquest that will be addressed is that of Fezzan, which began in 1928 following the program made by Pietro Badoglio, Governor of Libya from 1929 to 1933. Throughout 1929, the military operations followed the route – Derg, Sciuerref, Brech, Sebha, until Murzuch. Again, the military advances were characterised by the utilisation of violence and the involuntary displacement of the indigenous population from their original locations. The operations, compared to the first conquest by Antonio Miani, were executed in small operational units, while the use of aircraft for supplies became essential to avoid the logistical issues that had already arisen in the past.

After the conquest of the North of Fezzan, the Italian militia was ready to conquer the

South and expand also towards Cyrenaica (Labanca, 2012:182-183). Among the generals that led the campaign against the Libyan resistance, Rodolfo Graziani emerged as a brilliant commander, and his successes were recognised. In 1930, Rodolfo Graziani assumed the command position as the Vice-Governor of Cyrenaica (Del Boca, 1988:148).

At this point, it is imperative to recall the figure of Omar al-Mukhtar, the representative of the insurgency. Al-Mukhtar was the primary target of the fascist regime, and his elimination would

undoubtedly facilitate the control of the rebels, who would be susceptible to external manipulation.

The operations comprehended the disarmament of the rebels; the tribal chiefs were no longer recognised as such, and their properties were confiscated. Furthermore, new rules were applied to social and civic life, resulting in social reforms.

An example is the expropriation of the property of the Senussi *zawiyas*¹⁵; the leaders were arrested, and the payment of the *zakat*¹⁶ was prohibited.

In the case of Omar al-Mukhtar, the absence of supporters and information was problematic, as it resulted in a massive diminishing of their military and political power (Del Boca, 1988:174). An important achievement by Rodolfo Graziani was the blockade of the east with Egypt, created with 270 kilometres of barbed wire, so that the Senussi could not resupply themselves. General Graziani believed that moving the population from the well-known deserts to a concentration camp would have arrested the hostilities, limiting their impact on the resistance. The initial occupation was of the Oasis of Cufra in 1931; the indigenous people from the South were forced to move to concentration camps. The major camps were from West to East; this method was consolidated and organised. The population of the Gebel was interned until 1934, and the whole world testified to this horrific behaviour (Labanca, 2012: 188-193).

The conquest of the city of al Akhdar in the Desert of Gebel was challenging; the area was vast, and it was not possible to use ground-based aircraft or weapons hunting since the bush was too dense to be deployed (Rochat, 2008: 36).

In the first three months, approximately 80,000 people were deported, and 90% of their means of subsistence, was destroyed or confiscated (Rochat, 2008:37). Afterwards, the nomadic and semi-nomadic people deported were almost 100 thousand, reaching the number of

¹⁵ Buildings and institutions associated with the Islamic Senussi

¹⁶ Islamic annual obligation



Figure 10 Death of Omar al-Mukhtar, : Libyan Heritage House,
<https://libyanheritagehouse.org/the-execution-of-omar-al-mukhtar-1>

approximately 100.000 people segregated (Del Boca, 1988:179) Regarding Omar al-Mukhtar, the changes in the Italian approach to the military operations led to a decisive loss in his military potential.

His resistance due to this violence was almost defeated; many rebels were killed or captured, and there was a dearth of armaments. On the 16th of September 1931, Omar al-Mukhtar was found and captured, without any process, he was hanged in front of the people in the concentration camp of Soluch, an inhabited centre on the Mediterranean coast of Libya.

Notwithstanding the accusations of high treason levelled against him, it is a matter of record that al-Mukhtar had never submitted to the Italian government nor received a salary. It is

evident that he was a prisoner of war, and as such, he should have been spared capital punishment. The behaviour of Italy confirmed that the actions of the Roman government were driven by a desire for revenge, leading to the creation of a martyr (Del Boca, 1988:206)

Before dying, his final phrase taken from the Quran was - *إِنَّا لِلّٰهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ* - *A Dio apparteniamo ed a Lui ritorniamo* (Surah Al-Baqarah Ayat 156, 2:156 Quran).

Initially, the resistance somehow survived, but it did not have a long life; in fact, at the end of January 1932, Badoglio proclaimed the defeat of the resistance, marking the end of hostilities (Labanca, 2012: 200).

Until 1930, the fascist strategy was complementary to the liberal one; afterwards, the outbreak of violence created a discontinuity. Mussolini was not preoccupied with being massacred by public opinion because, in Italy, the control of the news and propaganda was strictly controlled, and the reports spread by the international community were not taken seriously (Rochat, 2008:39). Moreover, abroad, another idea of concentration camps was disseminated, describing

them as safe and hygienic places. In fact, even after the fall of fascism, some people did not believe that these camps were the scene of violence and extermination. One example is General Canevari, who, as reported by Del Boca, described them as reserves with everything necessary (Del Boca, 1988: 186).

Although Badoglio maintained that the use of concentration camps was vital, in proportion to the years they had to fight before gaining control, not everyone agreed. Graziani himself, once he found the letters exchanged between the mujahideen and al-Mukhtar, realised how difficult their living conditions were. Indeed, a significant proportion of respondents expressed the opinion that they should be treated more favourably. (Del Boca, 1988: 216-217).

Following the formal declaration of victory on the 24th of January 1932, the governorship of Libya was assumed by Badoglio's successor, Balbo, in 1934. He was a governor who sought to make Libya as part of Italy (Rochat, 2008:39), investing heavily in infrastructure, tourism and propaganda. Indeed, he pursued the transformation of the colony into a settlement one, formulating novel strategies until he died in 1940.

In conclusion, Italy's great enterprise to conquer Libya began with the belief that it would be a quick battle against a declining Empire embroiled in internal conflict; however, this was not the case. Twenty-one years passed between the declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire in 1911 and the declaration of victory in 1932.

During these 21 years, the landscape shifted a lot.

Initially, it was a battle between the Kingdom of Italy and the Ottoman Empire. However, as the First World War progressed, the balance of power shifted, and the war evolved into a conflict between Fascist Italy and the Libyan Resistance.

It was difficult to hold onto power during these 21 years, both because of the Ottomans and, above all, because of the valiant Arab resistance, led in the final period by Omar al-Mukhtar.

The violence inflicted was unprecedented and has only been mentioned briefly until now.

The war had the consequence of resulting in a lack of significant investment in Libya, and these years did not improve the situation within the colony. On the contrary, the Italian army destroyed part of it. The second chapter will address historiography, evaluating the events from

a modern perspective and paying particular attention to the propaganda strategies used by the Liberal Government and the Fascist Regime.

The chapter will also seek to understand the discrepancy between what was done and what was said to have been done.

Finally, the third chapter will consider the journal *LIBIA*, founded by Italo Balbo during his tenure as Governor of Libya. The main question to be answered is whether Libya finally became the long-awaited colony, and whether the investments made contributed to this.

IL POSTO AL SOLE? MYTHS AND REALITIES OF ITALIAN COLONIALISM IN LIBYA

2.1 Ideology

The preceding chapter elucidated the conquest of Libya, as well as the military and diplomatic actions that led to it.

In this second chapter, the relationship between the Libyan colony and the Kingdom of Italy will be revisited through a contemporary lens.

The fascist regime proclaimed itself as the heir of the Roman Empire; for this reason, specific policies were adopted to reproduce this model at an international level.

One concept associated with this revolutionary phenomenon is that there is a clear distinction between “we and the others”, especially referred to as civilised and barbaric populations.

For this reason, through the justification of violence, it was possible to express its magnificence and combat the ‘others’. In fact, one of the methods used, as mentioned in the previous chapter, was the concentration camp (Finchelstein, 2008: 320-325).

According to Emilio Gentile, a remarkable historian in this field, the term totalitarianism might be attributed to fascism.

First of all, fascism was a mass revolutionary movement born in democratic Europe; additionally, it was attributed a religious meaning, known as the sacralization of politics.

The definition of Totalitarianism was formulated by the anti-fascist movement in 1923.

According to the Cambridge dictionary, *totalitarianism is a political system in which those in power have complete control and do not allow anyone to oppose them*¹⁷.

In the article by Gentile, the pillars on which this political system is based are coercion, propaganda, organisation of the masses, in which both men and women should develop specific skills required by the regime, respecting their roles, and finally, the creation of an enemy that needs to be eliminated. The entity of the enemy is not necessarily a stranger; it might also be a citizen who does not follow the directives of the regime.

However, it is erroneous to attribute the term regime to totalitarianism; indeed, this system is defined by the historian as a continuous experiment. It is strictly attached to the anthropological nature of the society that changes constantly.

One definition that can summarise the link between these two political systems is that totalitarianism is a feature of fascism, and the main points that support this thesis are three.

¹⁷ Definition of the Cambridge Dictionary

The first one is the organisational realm; in fact, to organise a brand-new society is easier to apply new policies to one class. Furthermore, it is easier to control classes through coercion if they are aggregated.

Secondly, the cultural realm, the political ideology of fascism, is based on myths and symbols. Indeed, the fusion between masses and individuals is essential; moral and social obligations are pivotal in creating a united front against an enemy.

Ultimately, the institutional domain is dominated by a single party that dictates the needs of the population (Gentile, 2008: 291-203).

The term *cult*, depending on the historical period, changes its definition; in this circumstance, it was attributed to the personality of Stalin.

The leader was identified as the subject of glorification and devotion, demonstrated through rituals or symbols. Cult is intrinsically connected to the concept of *political religion*, often associated not only with the Soviet Union, but also with the Fascist and Nazi regimes.

According to Benedetto Croce, an Italian historian and philosopher, believing in an entity is essential; as a consequence, due to the restrictions of the religious domain, the substitution of the old entity with a new one was of pivotal importance (Pish, 2016: 49-55).

This concept was explained by another personality during fascism: Giovanni Gentile, a politician and philosopher.

Gentile, in one of his books, "Origins and doctrines of fascism", dedicated a section explaining the connection between liberty and the State (Gentile, 2002:7). In this combination, the individual possesses both rights and duties; this is essential for the good of the community. In the absence of this combination, individuals focus solely on material matters, disregarding moral and spiritual considerations. (Gentile, 2002:10).

The specific concept of political religion is encompassed by the philosopher in the XV section of his book.

Morality and religion, essential elements in every consciousness, must be there, but they must be subordinated to the laws of the State, fused in it, absorbed in it. The human being [...] Is the will of the State with its synthesis of the two terms of authority and liberty. [...] the Fascist State is either not religious, or it is Roman Catholic. It cannot be irreligious because of the absolute value and authority. (Gentile, 2002:31)

From this passage, Gentile's intention can be deduced. Specifically, the text suggests that fascism is a morally independent entity that is not bound by the constraints of the church.

This serves to illustrate the fascist rhetoric that is associated with the concept of political religion. Collective rituals were particularly important for the regime; in a manner analogous to the Soviet case, a culture of leadership is evident in this context. Meanwhile, as in the Italian case, women were seen as a reproductive tool of a pure race, being this regime based on race differentiation (Banti, 2009:184).

The fascist ideology, based on the Roman myth and on the idea of demographic expansion, aimed at creating a new empire based on work, otherwise called corporate colonialism (Pasetti, 2016: 1-2).

In comparison to the Liberal Era, Mussolini did not adhere to Malthusian theory¹⁸, instead adopting Spengler's perspectives.

According to Mussolini, it was necessary to populate the colonies with the pure race; for this reason, it was seen necessary to increase the birth rates in favour of the Aryan race (Ertola, 2022: 103-106).

Another economic innovation attributed to the regime was the autarchic model, based on the consumption of Italian raw materials and products (Banti, 2009: 188).

The major challenges were the demographic imperialism and, simultaneously, the exploitation of the territories. The regime was extremely racist and aimed at the division between the indigenous and the Italian population; for this reason, the creation of a cohesive territory was impossible. It aimed to conquer the territory while maintaining a distance between Madre Patria and the colony (Labanca, 2007: 34-49).

The corporate colonialism renewed the idea of the civilising mission of the Italian Empire, creating an alternative option to respect the other types of colonialisms.

Moreover, the emptiness of the African territories was an excuse used by the regime to legitimise the social reform that was imposed during the colonial period in the colonies.

In one of his writings of 1930, the jurist Gaetano Napolitano wondered if it was suitable to incorporate the corporate system into Tripolitania, being that the Kingdom needed to coordinate several fields - agricultural, industrial and commercial ones.

In the colony, several reforms were implemented in that direction; indeed, the employment office was established in 1928, and private efforts were also made to create agreements between employers and workers. Moreover, a legislative act was enacted within the welfare sector, encompassing provisions for occupational accidents and insurance coverage for both disability and advanced age.

¹⁸ The Malthusian theory is referred to as the arrest of demographic growth due to overpopulation.

In conclusion, the relationship between totalitarianism and the racism present in Italy and its colonies should be highlighted.

Racism was decisive in creating the Italian concept of empire; indeed, some scholars argued that the implementation of antisemitic legislation was necessary to accelerate the totalitarian process and align with the Nazi Regime, which was portrayed as the new totalitarian model present in Europe (De Napoli, 2012:112-113).

2.2 Race

If colonialism is intrinsically connected with racism, an urgent question is whether it portrays itself as racist and whether the founding discourse that legitimises this practice is based on racism.

The perception of being racist modified over time; indeed, before the Second World War, it was considered an opinion, not a shameful crime. For this reason, it is necessary to investigate whether the colonialist movement identifies itself as racist.

Compared with other scholars who analyse the phenomenon through the Marxist perspective, in which racism and sexism are seen as expressions of class conflict and capitalist accumulation, De Napoli attempts to investigate the phenomenon differently, from a juridical perspective.

This was made possible by the juridical foundations of the modern state; nonetheless, how could Italian emigration to the colonies be legally and politically justified as a strategy for the demographic population?

Pasquale Stanislao Mancini ¹⁹was one of the first individuals who attempted to describe the connection between racism and colonialism through legal means. According to Mancini, race and nationality are strictly connected; in fact, he believed that the nations were a family and people within it should have had similar traits, the same history and culture to share.

During the 1880s, for Mancini, the African continent was without nations; for this reason, the law on the determination of peoples was not applicable. Moreover, Social Darwinism ²⁰widely spread, and the prevalence of one race over another was perceived as the law of nature.

¹⁹ Pasquale Stanislao Mancini, (Castel Baronia, 17 March 1817 – Naples, 26 December 1888) was an Italian lawyer, jurist, and politician.

²⁰ Social Darwinism is a theory presented by Charles Darwin in the 19th century. This theory is based on natural selection, in which the strongest win against the weaker. This theory was applied to justify the competition between races and classes.

Between the 18th and 19th century the phenomenon of colonisation was largely justified by scholars. A prominent example could be Giovanni Bovio, an Italian philosopher and politician who believed in the Republican Ideology, as the bearer of civilisation, modernisation and law. To resume, the general perspective among jurists of the time was based on the need for the African populations to be civilised, and for this reason, some of them also endorsed the use of violence (De Napoli, 2013: 800-811).

The assumption that some races are better than others was elucidated by some scholars of the epoch, one of them was Cipriani.

Lido Cipriani (1892-1962) was an anthropologist who lived during the Liberal and Fascist periods. In his notes, it is deducible that the scholar focused on observing the differences between animals and humans to better understand their functions.

In 1913, the subject's notebooks revealed a preoccupation with the concept of racism. Through meticulous observation of animals, he was able to deduce the fundamental differences between species.

The concept was transposed to human beings, with the belief that social life for humans is the expression of human life. Those who are harmful or unsuitable will be eliminated either by themselves, through suicide, or by society itself.

Furthermore, in his notes, Cipriani advanced a theory according to which human nature was distorted by the morals and rules of society. However, he believed that barbarian peoples did not have these social constraints and therefore found it easier to show their true nature.

The aforementioned concept facilitates the establishment of a dichotomy between culture and nature, as well as between civilised and uncivilised races.

Moreover, during the fascist period, the concept of race could be articulated in three grades: the biological racism, the racism based on the soul and finally, the one based on the spirit (Dell'Era, 2014:39-45). This differentiation was necessary to build a stronger conception of this theme (Poidimani, 2014:214).

Some scholars, such as Michele Sarfatti, argued that Italian racism was not spiritual but very biological, based on the external traits, not considering the culture or religion. The idea of a spiritual racism was developed to render Italy exceptional in comparison with Germany (De Napoli, 2012: 114-115).

In one of Cipriani's notebooks dated 3rd November 1922, he wrote that it is necessary to educate indigenous peoples and not exploit them and leave them in their ignorance, a concept that can be expressed as a *civilising mission*.

During the Fascist period, in 1924, he established the foundational principles of the racist concept of racial differentiation, predicated on internal and external factors, including environment, culture and society.

During the Fascist period, these ideas garnered widespread support and were the subject of robust propaganda. (Dell'Era, 2014: 45-57).

The role of women in defending the pure race was massive.

They had a biopolitical role in the Empire; in fact, they could not be engaged with an indigenous, otherwise, according to the law of 1936, she would have become a subject and not a citizen anymore. According to the sources, it is interesting to note that women were sent to the colonised territories also to prevent the sexual activity between men and indigenous women, creating many métissants (Poidimani, 2014: 216-217; 220; 227).

During the 19th and 20th centuries, a multitude of references to indigenous peoples could be found, particularly within the context of history textbooks.

The Italians were portrayed as civilisers; consequently, from an early age, the cultivation of a sense of patriotism becomes possible, as the definition of the other serves to define the self. Indeed, in newspapers such as *La Domenica dei Fanciulli*, the Italian-Turkish war was narrated, emphasising the sentiment of patriotism (Ertola, 2022: 87).

As these textbooks were intended for children and young people, the stories were often accompanied by images of the countries and adhered to a moral code, wherein the other was invariably regarded as the aberrant individual, the problem.

The following examples were provided to illustrate this point: *Il piccolo negro* and *L'uomo. Quale differenza!*

The first narrative was published in a children's book, featuring a young Black protagonist. He resided in a village where the majority of the population had become accustomed to his presence.

The narrative persists in its transformation of the atmosphere. Within the confines of a classroom setting, a scenario unfolds in which some children investigate, "Who is it, an atropophagus?" Meanwhile, one child engages in a mocking gesture directed towards another child. The inquiries that ensue: "Who are you, the *negro*?"

Following the incident, the child made sure to always shower before attending school (Gabielli, 2014: 81-83)

In this story, there are several points worth highlighting: the first one is the figure of the black child that raised curiosity, as the circus shows of the time, which often featured monkeys, unusual animals and people with deformities.

Secondly, the term anthropophagus²¹ was used since Colombo as a trait of the indigenous population, and it is against the principle of Christianity.

Thirdly, the comparison between the black colour of the skin and the dirt of the other child and the subsequent shame over that comparison symbolised the rejection and dehumanisation of the stranger.

The *L'uomo. Quale differenza!* A comparison of the aesthetic qualities exhibited by humans and animals is warranted.

The visual representation of the girl is characterised by harmony and elegance, while the animal is perceived in a divergent manner due to the presence of strong connotations. This concept can be transposed, thereby creating a distinction between the European and African male. The initial entity is distinguished as 'human', signifying the capacity for cognitive function and productive labour. In contrast, the latter is characterised by the presence of a simian mouth, serving a primarily alimentary function.

This story is an example of positive anthropology, in which the differentiation of races is based on facial connotations.

In schools, the simplification of this concept was necessary for children; for this reason, a series of visual patterns were reported in the textbooks, where it is possible to acknowledge the differentiation between the men is expressed not only through their facial features, but also through their clothing and accessories, which communicated their origins.

Indeed, the races were divided into four groups: white, characterised by harmonious features that indicated a pure spirit and an intelligent mind; yellow, very intelligent and with a contained nature; Malaysian, quite intelligent; and black, exhibiting a total lack of intelligence and never considered civilised (Gabrielli, 2014: 81-94).

Under the juridical perspective, one of the historians who dealt most extensively with this topic was De Napoli.

In the historiographic tradition, the initial consensus among scholars was that the adoption of racial legislation by fascist states was a direct consequence of their alliance with Adolf Hitler. According to Renzo De Felice, one of the major Italian historians, racism was spiritual and not biological; indeed, the main objective for the Italians was not to persecute but to discriminate. In fact, the principal idea behind this rhetoric assumes that the decision to apply discriminatory laws against minorities was connected to the relationship with Nazi Germany. Italians are not anthropologically prone to be racist; however, they failed to combat the Nazi rhetoric, joining with it.

²¹ Someone who practice Cannibalism

However, recent studies demonstrated that this rhetoric is a distortion of reality; indeed, Del Boca, in his writings, highlights the Italian endeavour to construct a myth that their colonialism was distinct from that of other powers (De Napoli, 2012:107-110).

The law practised in the colonies differentiated the citizen and the subject of the nation, which demonstrated the racial connotation in the impossibility of assimilating other cultures.

However, this practice is the opposite of the initial civilising rhetoric that the jurists used to justify colonisation; in fact, they created an alternative law, different from the Roman one, which is at the basis of the Italian juridical system. This choice was justified by the need to exemplify the system that had to consider many factors, such as traditions, culture, religions, distinct from our reality (De Napoli, 2013: 816-817).

The fascist law revolution, with the implementation of the racial and imperialistic legislation, can be defined as a totalitarian law, legitimised by imperial aspirations. At a certain point, the study of jurisdiction and positive anthropology became intertwined; indeed, the biological aspects were found to be more significant. Consequently, certain policies were inspired by positive science (De Napoli, 2013: 826-828).

In the following chapter, the connection between race and citizenship in the Libyan colony will be addressed, understanding the intentions of the regime towards the indigenous population.

2.3 Citizenship

During the 19th century, the terms citizen and subject, in the colonial discourse, overlapped.

In 1882, Stanislao Mancini, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, attributed the term ‘citizen’ to the inhabitants of the Assab colony²². This definition was in strong opposition to his personal beliefs, in which he saw imperialism as a form of oppression.

In order to resolve the controversy, colonialism was depicted as an educational process through which the newly acquired citizens would have been granted political and civil rights. This process can also be termed ‘pacific civilisation’.

This controversy initiated a policy of indeterminacy, where it was not possible to define a specific category. The first attempt to define the concept of subjecthood was conceived in 1909 with the Civil Code of Eritrea (De Napoli, 2022: 5-23).

Between the indigenous people in the colonies and the civilised people in Italy, there was a marked difference in culture, religion and habits; for this reason, they needed an alternative legislation.

The initial intention in 1911 in Libya was to respect the property without any distinction based on race or religion. This idea was not implemented after the annexation.

According to Bartolini's code, stipulated in 1913-1914, Italians should have cooperated with the indigenous people for the administration and management of the country; however, this project was never realised.

Moreover, the indigenous born in Libya before the 5th of November 1911 were Italian subjects, not equal citizens.

According to Nallino, the subjecthood could be substituted by the citizenship, but not the metropolitan one. In fact, to respect the Local Traditions, it was necessary to create an alternative approach far from the assimilationist one.

In 1919, the publication of the Statutes rearranged the administrative rules, “moral and political dignity of citizens guaranteed by the same rights that are here recognised of Italian citizens and are called to contribute to the government of public affairs and the administration of the territory”.

One of the most salient points was the creation of a Parliament elected by the population and the division of a territory into zones with a head of the commission; in Cyrenaica, the nomad tribes were the ones electing one member of the parliament representing them (Cresti, 2022:25-

²² First colonial possession acquired by Italy in 1869.

45). The principal objective of the law was to organise the power in society, creating an *Ordinamento Sociale*.

In 1917, in a volume published by Santi Romano, an Italian scholar of Public Law, the theory of institution is expressed through a realist perspective; in this case, the State is not the only legal system present; however, it is the one that decides what is for or against it.

In fact, the legal system is a complex phenomenon that arises when pluri-subjectivity, organisation and regulation are assembled.

Through this theory, the presence of Italy in Libya can be explained: the State has the leading role, but the existence of the local laws is ensured, considering the priorities and necessities of the Central Government (Di Stefano, 2022: 76-77).

The organisation of justice of this period is explained in a paper published by Alessia Maria Di Stefano, which encompasses two topics: the system of justice based on the different status of the population and the solution of conflict caused by cultural diversity according to the Italian Libyan colonial law.

According to the Royal Decree of the 6th of April 1913, no. 315, Italian subjects could enjoy the political and civil rights; meanwhile, the RD of the 20th of March 1913, no. 289, explained the different types of juridical authority.

For the Italian citizens, there was a regional tribunal with 1 judge for the Civil procedures and 1 judge plus 2 assessors for the Criminal ones. The indigenous people had an indigenous tribunal with one Italian judge and 2 Libyan assessors; the Sharia Courts had jurisdiction on the personal status, family law, succession and religious practices.

This system was far from perfect for the population; indeed, the dissatisfaction of Libyans was still present.

Some practices, such as the *omologazione* (approval) of Sharia sentences and the advocates, were seen as unnecessary (Di Stefano, 2022: 68-75)

This freedom was modified according to the change of regime; in fact, in 1927, local parliaments were abolished, and the equality between Italian citizens and those of Libya was not valid.

The concept of hierarchy is pivotal in this topic; in fact, this theme presents itself both inside and outside of the colony.

Within the confines of the colony, a clear delineation existed among the citizens based on the purity of their race. The Italian citizens residing in the colony were regarded as 'pure', while a distinct citizenship was conferred to the indigenous population. However, this citizenship did

not encompass the right to vote, nor did it entail access to public office. It was recognised as a form of civil rights, though its scope was less extensive than that of Italian citizenship.

Simultaneously, Aegean citizenship was held in higher esteem than Libyan citizenship. Conversely, Eritrean and Somali citizenship were regarded as being of lesser importance due to their designation as subjects.

Italo Balbo attempted to improve this situation by recommending Italian citizenship to Libyan citizens following specific criteria: being 21 years old, being monogamous, having a clean criminal record and being able to speak Italian fluently.

A certain degree of continuity between the liberal period and the fascist one was evident.

Even if, in the former, the division of citizens was predicated on the concept of a distinct civilisation, in the latter, this conception was almost entirely replaced by the notion of race. However, the division persisted in both cases.

Moreover, the fascist government, like the liberal one, had a pro-Muslim politics; in fact, even though the 1927 law reduced Libyan rights, they continued to be granted citizenship rather than being mere subjects.

On 9 January 1939, another law was promoted to prevent the acquisition of the Italian metropolitan citizenship. The Personal Statute that protected the rights of the indigenous regarding their religion and private life (civil rights) was used as a pretext to deny the access to the metropolitan citizenship: “È abrogata la facoltà di acquisto della cittadinanza metropolitana prevista dall’art. 37 del vigente ordinamento organico della Libia in quanto implica la perdita dello statuto personale e successorio²³” (art. 8 del decreto-legge 9 gennaio 1939).

This implied the renunciation of the Muslim religion in favour of obtaining citizenship; otherwise, the metropolitan citizenship was attributed only to the Christian natives (Renucci, 2005:1-17).

Additionally, even if Libyans had had more political rights, it would have been impossible for them to vote due to the lack of democracy.

As already specified by Nallino, for the indigenous population, the law in force in the Kingdom of Italy was not suitable, especially after 1938, when the concern regarding race increased.

To conclude, by the late 30s, several citizenships were attributed to the collectives: Metropolitan citizenship (Italy), Libyan Italian citizenship (colonial subjects), and Special Citizens (indigenous who aided the Italian government in the administration and military defence sectors).

²³ The right to acquire metropolitan citizenship provided for in Article 37 of the current Organic Statute of Libya is denied, since it entails the loss of the Personal Statute.

However, the racial prejudices prevented Libya from becoming part of the empire (Pergher, 2022:49-55).

The religion was a crucial aspect not only regarding the citizenship, but also the education and the subsequent position in the colonial society.

Indigenous people studied the Quran in specific schools called *katātib*, but also in mosques and *zawie*. In addition to the study of religious interpretation and Islamic law, Arabic language studies were also pursued. These schools were private and financed not by the State but by private entities; they counted a higher number of students compared to the state schools.

During the fascist regime, these private schools persisted despite the lack of funds and without being controlled by the state; however, the regime contributed to the decadence of these institutes. In fact, even if no laws were enforced to combat them, no measures were implemented to ameliorate their situation.

In 1935, Blabo proposed the creation of a private institute in Tripoli to study Islamic legislation and religion. The project entailed the training of teachers proficient in this pedagogical approach, the generation of funds from private individuals through the allocation of funds from the State, and the construction of accommodation for students residing remotely.

The classes had to be divided by intensity, from basic to advanced. In the first case, the number of students could reach 30 people per class, while in the second case, there could be a maximum of 10 per class.

The institution offered a more advanced educational experience in comparison to the elementary school. Italian language studies were still part of the curriculum, and students could choose between two tracks: teaching, which focused on educational subjects, or office work, which added Islamic jurisprudence and law.

Behind this project, there was a political aspiration; some scholars argue that it was essential to form educated citizens capable of administering the country, while others believe that it was to provide an alternative for Libyans so that they would not attend other schools in Tunis and Cairo.

The regime's primary concern related to the dissemination of its teachings in foreign territories, as it perceived this as a potential threat to the tenuous peace that had been established in Libya. Moreover, it is necessary to remember the conception of the Italian as a 'good coloniser' and the fascist philo-Muslim politics; this project had to demonstrate the good intentions of the regime towards the population.

Additionally, the control practiced by the Regime over the educational realm, was an essential part of the fascist ideology. The ‘new’ students would have been grateful towards the regime (Mustafa, 2018:1-19).

In conclusion, the willingness of the regime to allow the indigenous to participate in the life of the colony changes constantly. Initially, there was an attempt to introduce them into the social and political realm; however, due to beliefs based on race, a strict limitation was imposed. Due to ethnic differentiation, it was impossible to build a cohesive society in which all the subjects were represented; indeed, citizenship was conferred but never fully.

2.4 The propaganda

Before analysing the propaganda topic, it is necessary to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Italian perception of the colony.

The tradition of storytelling in public squares, encompassing narratives of historical figures such as the Turks or Moors, has been a long-standing cultural practice (Labanca, 2002: 225). During the eighties and nineties of the 19th century, the mass education of the Italian population regarding the colonies began. Since the acquisition of Assab in 1869, the first method adopted was through newspapers; indeed, the spreading of information regarding the events developing outside the Peninsula was entrusted to periodicals that described the territory as savage and erotic.

The racialisation process and the sharp distinction between black and white were spread through the illustrated brochures between 1885 and 1887, which combined diaries, articles, and books to familiarise Italian citizens with their estates abroad.

The stories narrated portrayed the foreigner as a polygamist and cannibal, often associated with a lack of respect between men, with women being viewed as having a lower status than animals. Furthermore, the young generation was educated within this perspective, primarily through the dissemination of journals and the school education system.

Moreover, the only images of the colonies were not photos that presented the reality, but iconographic elements that represented people's assumptions about Africa, such as palm trees and camels (Ertola, 2022: 45-46).

Pamphlets were distributed to the masses, depicting a mythological image of distant populations. The rhetoric employed in this instance is of a nature that portrays women as insatiable in their sexual desires and belligerent populations (Labanca, 2002: 230).

With the implementation of Kodak during the 90s, more realistic images of colonial life were published, including photos of black naked women, the most common subject advertised.

In Turin, in 1884, the inaugural Italian ethnographic exhibition was held, showcasing an indigenous village, in this case that of the Assab colony, which had been conquered in 1882, featuring a woman and a child.

An additional approach that facilitated the establishment of a connection between Italians and their colony involved the dissemination of dictionaries comprising terms from the language spoken in the colony.

Alfredo Camperio, an explorer and publicist who was previously mentioned in the first chapter, published a phrasebook containing translations of simple phrases such as “*Questo terreno è mio*” or “*Questo piatto è sporco, vai a lavarlo*” (Ertola, 2022: 47-49). This is an excellent example of how the colony should have been perceived and how the colonised should have been treated.

The colonial discourse became a pivotal element in building a renewed identity (Labanca, 2002:221).

While it is evident that propaganda was a pervasive instrument in the formation of a colonial consciousness, it is also imperative to acknowledge the challenges it faced.

Indeed, for Italians, this discourse was complicated since the majority of people were illiterate; moreover, the public opinion, as it has already been mentioned, was divided between colonists and anti-colonialists (Labanca, 2022: 222-223).

The depiction of the African continent transformed, assuming a more antagonistic character and being perceived as a territory that necessitated subjugation; this perspective was highly influenced by social Darwinism, in which an ethnicity prevailed biologically over the other (Labanca, 2002: 231).

In the context of Libya, the prevailing sentiment that the Italian populace was to be encouraged to embrace was that of desire.

The primary objective of writers and journalists in describing the territory was to evoke sentimentality rather than to provide an accurate description of the territory for what it was: an immense expanse of sand.

Indeed, the beginning of the colonial culture was widespread by reason of novels such as “Kif Tebbi” by Luciano Zuccoli, “Piccolo amore beduino” by Mario dei Gaslini and more; in these books, the plot revolves around the theme of struggle for love, stereotypes, and the Italian as the hero (Ertola, 2022: 97).

In addition, the patriotic books served to draw attention to the *Oltremare*.

One of the most significant writers associated with Italian nationalism, who notably glorified the conquest of Libya, was Enrico Corradini.

In *La Patria Lontana*, the country was associated with a concentration camp in which people have the instinct to protect themselves and improve their lives as much as possible.

The meaning behind this association is connected to the feeling of *nazionalità*; this concept of a shared objective serves as the unifying factor that fosters cohesion within a community, thereby propelling collective action and enhancing social integration. (Corradini, 1910:11).

Another evocative speech was attributed to Pascoli; in *La Grande Proletaria si è mossa*, the writer emphasised the concept of *Nazione proletaria*, held in 1911 in favour of the Italo-Turkish War.

The speech commences with a condemnation of the relocation of Italian workers to other locations: *prima ella mandava altrove i suoi lavoratori, che in patria era troppi e dovevano lavorare per troppo poco*. This sentence is intrinsically connected to Corradini's beliefs; indeed, the lack of opportunities in the territory and the abundance of labour are recurrent in his works. At a certain point in time, Pascoli's speech transformed its overall tenor:

Ora l'Italia, la grande martire delle nazioni, dopo soli cinquant'anni ch'ella rivive, si è presentata al suo dovere di contribuire per la sua parte all'aumento e incivilimento dei popoli; al suo diritto di non essere soffocata e bloccata nei suoi mari; al suo materno ufficio di provvedere ai suoi figli volenterosi quel che sol vogliono, lavoro; al suo solenne impegno coi secoli augusti delle sue due Istorie, di non esser da meno nella sua terza Era di quel che fosse nelle due prime; si è presentata possente e serena, pronta e rapida, umana e forte, per mare, per terra e per cielo²⁴ (Pascoli, 1911).

The Kingdom of Italy, represented as vigorous, prompt in sharing its modernity and providing for its workers, after years of serving others.

During the remainder of the discourse, significant improvements were highlighted, demonstrating the country's ability. (Pascoli, 1911).

According to the speech, Italians were represented as a generous army that treated the Arab population with profound respect. However, at the same time, according to the military rhetoric, there is widespread praise for the aerial bombardments executed in the area against the enemy's camps (Ertola, 2022: 91).

²⁴ Now Italy, the great martyr among nations, after only fifty years of renewed life, has come forward to fulfil her duty of contributing her share to the growth and civilization of peoples; to assert her right not to be stifled and hemmed in within her seas; to discharge her maternal task of providing for her willing sons the one thing they seek—work; to honour her solemn commitment to the august centuries of her two Histories, namely, not to be inferior in her third Era to what she had been in the first two. She has come forward powerful and serene, ready and quick, humane and strong, by sea, by land, and by air.

During the first years of occupation, the Italian Kingdom attempted to portray itself in the colony in the most favourable light.

The bourgeoisie of Italy was described in official images and texts as a successful elite, trustworthy and kind-hearted.

In reality, the internal situation of the country was disastrous, and this behaviour was portrayed just to demonstrate to the European Community the modernity of the Italian Kingdom so that it could be included in it.

In the Libyan colony, this idea was also useful to highlight the difference between the coloniser and the colonised; in fact, this was a practice to assert superiority over the indigenous.

One example of propaganda during the 20s is the Colonial Exposition of Genoa of 1914, in which the kind gestures of the Italian Colonisers were shown through photos.

The protagonist of the exposition that demonstrated the civilisation's mission of Italians was the *Educatorio della Menscia*. In this place, young adults were supposed to be educated by the Italian Army to be subsequently hired in the colonial troops; however, this institute was very similar to a prison, and the form of education was violent (Spadaro, 2013: 41-44).



Figure 11: *Le dame tripoline consegnano solennemente il glorioso vessillo italiano ai giovani arabi*, *La Nuova Italia*, 31st March 1914.

In this edition of *La Nuova Italia* of the 31st of March 1914, it is possible to notice the mention of the Institute.

This newspaper provides us with more information about the perception of the education system applied.

The benevolence of this project is emphasised; the young Libyans have been able to assimilate the new moral doctrine compatible with the Italian perspective. Their effort is evaluated by giving them the Italian flag. In this way, the Italian superiority is recognised, and the indigenous traditions are abandoned by the young people (*La Nuova Italia*, 31 March 1914:1)



Figure 12: *Class in Libya*, Spadaro B., 2013:46.

Simultaneously, the education of females was patriarchal in nature. Conversely, males were obliged to learn how to combat, whilst females were required to assume all the roles attributed to their gender. The categorisation was not based solely on gender, but also on race.

As it is possible to notice in this picture of *L'Italia Coloniale*, of May 1924, the Muslim and Jewish girls are dressed differently, with their native costumes, compared to the ribbons and white dress of the Italian girls.

This strategy was adopted to differentiate the gaze according to nationality (Spadaro, 2013:45-46).

During the 20s and 30s, more colonisers moved to Libya, and not all of them were of the elites; however, the sentiment of superiority and respectability was also demanded by the Italian middle class.

The biography of Aldo Zelli described the life of a middle-class family during the 20s that was obliged to transfer to the Libyan colony.

Usually, the experience of moving abroad is described as an exotic adventure; meanwhile, in this case, the preoccupations regarding life in the colony are realistic.

The family that used to live in Arezzo must accept the new land, people and weather, even though it should be perceived as part of Italy.

The experience of the family in the colonised land is characterised by the will to draw a line between the ethnicities and lifestyles. The writer, during those years, was a child, and the family was worried about the influence that the local people could have on him. For this reason, a strict lifestyle was conducted and, on every occasion, the difference between ethnicities was demonstrated, from the mess to child games.

An interpretation that could be attributed to the story is the contraposition between the curiosity of a young boy and the prejudices instilled by society and adulthood correlated to the elites (Spadaro, 2013: 55-65)

During fascism, this concept was exalted even more, considering the demographic projects for the Libyan colony, especially during 1938 and 1939.

The fascist ideology was interested in becoming the new leader in Europe during those years; for this reason, the colonialism chosen was competitive towards the others already present on the continent.

The use of tourism as a tool of propaganda was one of the main aspects of fascism; in this specific case, Libya was portrayed as a tourist destination; however, in the Italian minds was still pivotal to differentiate the races and create a coloniser's mindset.

One of the main publications during the 30s is by the Florence countess Onorina Bargaglia Petrucci, who visited the Fezzan and described the land according to the propagandists' requirements of the time.

Her writings were shared in intellectuals' circles to provide a wider perspective on the colonies abroad.

Often, in her books, it is possible to notice some pictures of young Libyan women, usually very young wives without shoes or tattered clothes. This demonstrated the barbarism of the indigenous and their lifestyle. For this reason, the paternalistic sentiment could be enhanced (Spadaro, 2013: 55-65; 77-83).

Since the seventeenth century, indigenous women have been perceived as exotic exemplars, from whom men were attracted.

In Petrucci's books, is present a judgemental representation of the indigenous women, from the affluent to the underprivileged.

This might be because all of them were, in a certain way, more attractive and exotic.

For this reason, the need to demonstrate the supremacy of the white race might have been a way to express a sentiment of jealousy and envy felt by the countess.

The influence of the propaganda was spread not only among adults, but also among children that needed to build their colonial knowledge.

Primarily, books are one of the main sources for children to develop their knowledge.

Books have been an essential tool for scholars to better understand the social perception of certain topics and how society desired to portray itself.

During the fascist period, after the introduction of *Testo Unico di Stato*²⁵, the government was the only one that possessed the key to education and the main narrative was the contraposition between 'us' and the 'other', especially regarding the colonialist project.

After the Italian Unification, textbooks were reprinted to substitute the historical narrative with a modern one; indeed, the principal objective was that of shaping a national identity and civil duties towards the unified Kingdom and its new institutions.

The colonial aspect during the Liberal period is present; however, it is not narrated in the same way as during the Fascist period.

In fact, the description of the colonies is not specific; there is a general Orientalist perspective present also in other European countries that referred to Africa.

The stories, such as the one of *Pinocchio in Africa*,²⁶ are concerned with creating a narrative that does not reflect reality but provides a hint regarding the abroad; this choice might have been adopted due to the lack of knowledge.

Testo Unico created a specific colonial narrative sharing information regarding the abundance and splendour of the colonies and the possibility of transferring there for a better life, rather than America. In fact, to create the 'new man', expansionism and colonialism were pivotal; moreover, the fascist doctrine was a mixture of the Old Roman Empire and the Modern Fascist one (Pes, 2013: 599-609).

Another act of propaganda might be likened to the Myth of the good Italian; indeed, this conception was created during the Liberal period and developed also during fascism.

It is particularly noteworthy that De Bono vociferously condemned the high levels of violence in the Libyan colony. In his book "Italiani, brava gente?", he reported the violence legitimised by Italians in the colonies; in this thesis, the focus is on the Libyan population.

One of the testimonies of the Libyan poet Fadil Hasin ash-Shalmani, who interned in Favignana Island, was:

Siamo in piccole celle, pressati,
senza la luce del sole
chiuse le porte di ferro serrate.

²⁵ Il *Testo Unico di Stato* promoted a fascist education, otherwise called indoctrination. This law, introduced on January 7, 1929, was part of Gentile's reform, inaugurated in 1923.

²⁶ It is a book published in 1911 written by Cherubini. The story develops around the adventures of Pinocchio in Africa, discovering new traditions and landscapes. In the story, the African people are initially mistaken for animals.

E ovunque io guardi, non vedo che Italiani²⁷

In this verse, the detention was described; additionally, even the sea crossing was arduous, the treatment of prisoners was deplorable, sanitary conditions were terrible, for this reason, diseases spread rapidly, and any deceased individuals during the journey were disposed of by being thrown into the sea.

The sentiment of violence spread especially after the battle of Sciara-Sciat; in fact, in Italy and in Tripoli, violence was excused as the natural tool of defence.

A prevalent notion among the Italian populace was that the violence perpetrated was justified and, in fact, trivial in comparison to the actions that ought to have been taken; in this way, the behaviour perpetrated was downplayed, and Italians declared themselves to be *good people*.

These episodes were reported by the newspaper *Avanti!*, condemning the hangings.

However, the violence is partially described, in fact, thousands of Libyans were interned in concentration camps. In 1916, on the island of Ustica, there were 1300 indigenous interned, the tenant Gherardo Pantano reported the facts:

Non è raro, purtroppo, sentire ufficiali distinti e di animo generoso proclamare le teorie reazionarie e più feroci, come, ad esempio, l'utilità della soppressione di tutti gli arabi della Tripolitania. Si raccontano con compiacenza, e come utili e belle imprese, cose sbalorditive: arabi trovati feriti gravemente e inondati di benzina e bruciati; altri gettati in pozzi e chiusi dentro; altri fucilati senza altra ragione che quella di un feroce capriccio. Vi sono ufficiali che si incaricano personalmente di simili esecuzioni, e se ne vantano. Altri che sistematicamente depredano paesi non ribelli, facendo in tal modo la migliore propaganda in favore dei senussi. [...] Donde venga ai nostri ufficiali tanta cieca ferocia e tanta sete di sangue, tanta raffinatezza di crudeltà, io non so comprendere ²⁸(Del Boca, 2005: 105-117).

The myth of the good coloniser is a concept that has been extensively studied in colonial historiography, and one of the leading exponents of these studies is Alessandro Pes. In one of his articles, he highlights how even in the republican era Italian colonialism is not condemned

²⁷ We are imprisoned in little crowded cells, without the light of the sun, closed by locked iron doors. Everywhere I look, I only see Italians.

²⁸ Unfortunately, it is not rare, to hear the respectable and generous minded Officers proclaiming the most violence and reactionary theories, such an example, the necessity of suppressing all the Arabs of Tripolitania. They recount with satisfaction, and as useful and glorious deeds, astonishing facts: seriously wounded Arabs and doused in petrol and set alight; others thrown into wells and closed in; others shot for no other reason than a savage whim. There are officers who personally undertake such executions and boast about them. Others systematically robbed villages that have not rebelled, thereby providing the best possible propaganda for the Senussi. [...] Where our officers' blind ferocity and thirst for blood, and such refined cruelty, I cannot understand.

how it should be. One example being in President Scalfaro's 1996 speech, where colonialism was harshly condemned, yet kinder words are always reserved for Italian colonialism, which was considered 'different'.

This difference lies in the idea that the Italian colonisers brought humanity and respect towards the African populations; however, this idea can be contradicted by recent studies. The following discussion will utilise Libya as a case study (Pes, 2023:256)

General Graziani, who was present in Libya, was one of the most prominent figures involved in the pacification of the colony from 1922 to 1932. Nevertheless, the subject's professional trajectory was founded on his combative and brusque demeanour; in fact, he was defined as the butcher of the Arabs. In this reconquest, Graziani was not alone. Although he served as the figurehead, the mind behind the operation belonged to Badoglio. Upon arriving in Libya in 1929, Badoglio declared the violent actions that Italy would take against the opposing forces (Del Boca, 2005: 165-168)

The decision to adopt a decisive strategy to vanquish the resistance was agreed upon by Graziani, Badoglio, and De Bono: the indigenous people of Gebel Akhdar and Marmarica needed to be deported. This operation included thousands of kilometres to be covered on foot and without stopping (Del Boca, 2005:175).

Some witnesses described the situation in the camp: a piece of bread had to suffice for the entire day, physical abuse was inevitable, and women, fearing sexual assault, hid themselves inside their tents. The spread of epidemics was caused by substandard hygiene and food conditions. Executions were scheduled to occur daily at noon in a designated area within the camp.

A similar fate was suffered by Omar al-Mukhtar, who was sentenced to death without trial in the Slouch camp (Del Boca, 2005:177-180).

As it is possible to state, the locution 'good people' was created during the colonial period; from the beginning, Italians were regarded as migrants in need of employment, a rhetoric that was also reused in the post-fascist and republican periods. In its early years, the Italian Republic, rather than denouncing colonialism, distinguished liberal and fascist colonialism, acknowledging the former as valid but not recognising the latter as legitimate. This diplomatic choice was made in order to distance itself immediately from any inconvenient responsibility (Pes, 2023: 258; 262).

To conclude, during the liberal era, the propaganda was mainly built on ideas and perceptions; meanwhile, during fascism, the indigenous people and their habits were constructed according to the necessities of the regime.

In the following chapter, the government of Italo Balbo in Libya will be analysed, especially emphasising his effort in rendering it a tourist destination. In fact, the present study will analyse some editions of the magazine *LIBIA*. The main objective is to collect the necessary information regarding the policies and investments applied, to understand whether Libya became an integral part of the Italian territory.

THE STORYTELLING OF THE EMPIRE: PROPAGANDA AND NARRATIVE IN THE REGIME

3.1 Promotion of the Libyan colony

This third chapter analyses the strategies of the Fascist Regime in order to promote the Libyan colony through the touristic sector, infrastructural investments and demographic colonisation, as objective to portray its imperial superiority at an international level.

In fact, the investment in the colony to valorise its resources was an aspiration correlated to the civilising mission.

In Libya, tourism was promoted since the Liberal Era, in 1914 by the Touring Club Italiano that used to organise excursions for professional figures that could help in the development process of the colony.

During the 1920s, the colony was promoted as an exotic and adventurous destination, different from the European comfort.

With the arrival of Balbo from 1934, to the program already prepared for tourists that consisted in excursions, cruises for young people and scholars, new activities were included, an example is the visit to the Jewish Quarter particularly decorated during the holidays, the excursion to the Oasis of Murzuch and Ghadames; and the Cruise of the Littoral Route inaugurated by Mussolini in 1937, that was the symbol of a new Era.

This chapter will concentrate especially on the analysis of several topics present in the volumes of the magazine *LIBIA* that reports the most interesting changes in the colony.

Aesthetically the magazine presented itself quite big, elegant and modern, representing the Fascist propaganda. Indeed, during fascism the use of images was pivotal for communication, for this reason, photos and drawings are the main protagonists. In some pages are present only pictures that represent the colony. The articles exposed the salient thematics concerning Libya's transformation and reproduced the celebrative language typical of the Regime, every detail reconducts to the heroic civilising mission. The project behind the magazine was to spread the information regarding the colony to the high and middle class of Italy and abroad. While the promotion of tourism was its main objective, the journal also functioned as a tool for shaping a colonial consciousness among the Italian population. Through its representations of Libya, it sought to make Italians who had never visited the colony aware of, and identify with, their role as members of a colonial power.

The analysis will be related to the historiographic studies and, also, to the thematics correlated to the second chapter.

From the first volume of 1937, it is possible to acknowledge a progressive change in the colony with new policies and strategies applied.

Initially, the protagonist of the volume was the Italian bourgeois and the connection between Italy, Libya and the Roman Empire. For this reason, archaeological sites were the main topic to be promoted.

Afterwards, the promotion of new construction was important to demonstrate the willingness of Italy to render Libya part of the Italian territory, in fact, in addition to the building of new hotels and cafes, new wells and routes were constructed.

Due to the aspiration of a demographic colonisation, Balbo planned the construction of several villages for the Italian families. The construction and management of these villages was supported by state organisations, moreover, these villages became themselves a new tourist attraction since their aesthetic perfectly blended with the territory. In this case, in the journal it is mentioned that the construction of these new villages was mainly for Italians, however, also new villages dedicated to the Arabs were built.

Another topic highlighted in *LIBIA* is the status of the Arab population, in fact, one of the politics of the Regime were the laws for Libyans such as the special citizenship, and the infrastructure that they could benefit from such as the sanatorium and the schools.

Apparently, the Fascist Government desired the active participation of the Arab population and their consent in having Italy as the holder of power.

At the same time, as will be highlighted by the journal *L'Africa Italiana*, there was no desire to assimilate the indigenous people and the propaganda strongly discouraged Italians to entrain relationships with the locals. In fact, the legislation was against *meticciato*, using pseudoscientific sources as a proof of incompatibility.

As regards the role of women in the development of Libya, *L'Africa Italiana* and *LIBIA* advertised the same information.

The main objective was to control the life in the colony and the population, not just from an administrative perspective, but the desire was to build a sentiment of membership.

However, the distance between the metropolitan citizens and the locals of the colonies did not permit this union, in fact, the separation between the two ethnicities did not change through time.

Italo Balbo built a colony that was portrayed at an international level as in continuous expansion, nevertheless, after his death there were still many goals to be achieved.

In this process, propaganda was the main tool used by the Regime, for this reason, the journal *LIBIA* is of pivotal importance in portraying the colony at an internal and international level.

Certainly, the touristic sector expanded and became an essential part for the economy of the colony, however, it could not be the colony's sole source of support. Moreover, tourism was intrinsically connected to other initiatives such as the demographic colonisation correlated to the construction of village and wells; archaeological discoveries and architectural aesthetics.

Additionally, it is necessary to remind that the information was delivered from propagandistic sources, consequently, a lot of problems present in the colony were not mentioned.

Through this magazine, it is possible to imagine the difficulties for the Italians in installing in a territory with difficult conditions of life, where water and hygienic conditions were absent. At the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge the difficulties for the indigenous in having their territory controlled by someone else and to have their customs and tradition changed.

This chapter will be divided into thematics and the information delivered by the propagandistic magazine *LIBIA* will be interpreted using the historiographic sources. This approach will render possible a critical analysis of the first source.

3.2 Narratives of Empire: Supplementary Propagandistic Magazine

LIBIA was not the only propagandistic magazine present during the Fascist Regime.

In fact, another relevant magazine that has been analysed by scholars is *L'Azione Coloniale*. This journal was founded in January 1931 by Marco Pomilio, the main role of *L'Azione Coloniale* was to promote an aggressive colonial policy based on the racial difference between Italy and the African Continent.

Nicola Labanca (2025), one of the most prominent contemporary historians that investigated the relationship between colonialism and fascism, in his article develops this thematic.

The method used towards the indigenous during the repression had been extremely violent. Moreover, Labanca emphasised that the magazine supported the inhumane method of Graziani in the Concentration camps, in fact, violence was portrayed as a necessary instrument for the redemption of the population and the total submission.

It is important to highlight that the violence in the colonies was not oriented to the extermination of a race, a policy adopted by the Nazi fascist regime in his borders.

The main concern of the Fascist Government was the division between indigenous and Italians. In fact, the separation was present in schools, administration and hospitals to avoid any mix with the natives that could bring to promiscuity.

Labanca highlighted these concepts through the analysis of *L'Azione Coloniale*.

Thus, according to his study, the colonial project was totalitarian and racist, in fact, it promoted the racial consciousness. Through this process, the aim was to create a “new Italian” that was conscious about his superiority.

The demographic colonisation was a concept widely advertised both by *LIBIA* and by *L'Azione Coloniale*, however, the main concern was focused on the Italian workers and the Imperialistic expansion, almost never mentioning the indigenous well-being.

The racial consciousness and the “new Italian” are two concepts correlated, in fact, the Italian had to be an example for the indigenous, however, it was necessary to maintain a distance, for this reason, the integration was not applicable.

Moreover, the new Italian had to master its superiority among other ethnicities and to improve the economic sphere of the Regime, consequently, the demographic colonisation was an essential component of this plan.

The role that the woman should play in the colony is described in *L'Azione Coloniale* and the concept is congruent with the journal *LIBIA*. Not only women had to take care of the house, but also, they had a biopolitical role. In fact, in the colonies they had to participate in the improvement of the economy and preserve the white race.

A term that was coined was “*massaia imperiale*” that recalls the role of the woman in the house but, at the same time, it was attributed to them a political and social role to build the Empire.

To conclude, *L’Azione Coloniale* was a powerful instrument of propaganda and the concepts reported in the article of Labanca are strictly connected to the ones reported in *LIBIA*.

Probably, the journal *LIBIA* concentrated its attention on the development of the Libyan colony considering not only the role of the Italian in the colony, but also the possible attraction and its development.

Labanca emphasised the totalitarian features of the regime to explain the propagandistic strategy, in fact, it is not possible to dissociate the authoritarian nature of the regime and its racial policies (Labanca, 2025: 29-57).

Compared to the other European Powers that had a liberal approach towards the colonies, the Fascist Government applied some specific limitation to the indigenous populations, no form of integration was envisaged, indeed, schools did not prepare the indigenous for pivotal role in the colony. The totalitarian feature of the colonialism is the obligation imposed to the indigenous to change their habits and customs despite the resistances demonstrated by the Senussi before the Pacification (Labanca, 2007: 40-44).

In some articles of *L’Africa Italiana* the totalitarian feature of the Regime and the racial policies mentioned by Labanca (2007), (2025) are present.

In the volume of 1938, the phenomenon of demographic colonisation is addressed from the fascist perspective. This permits us to better understand the intentions towards the colony.

In fact, according to the source, the demographic colonisation was a power instrument for the Empire, however, it should have been controlled, otherwise it could have become an enemy.

The primary necessity of the Regime was to schedule the different policies based on the race, the social status, the economics, all of them altogether would have formed an imperialistic policy.

The colonisation was portrayed as an advantage for both parties. For the motherland it was perceived as a source of richness that would have helped to distribute the wellness, meanwhile, for the colonised it was an opportunity to modernise.

The term colonialism in this case was substituted by the term imperialism, because the two territories were linked not only by a common administrative system but also spiritually.

The aim of the fascist colony was to be present in the territory and to enhance the capacities of it, however, the racial mixing was seen as a loss of prestige.

In this way, the indigenous would have been elevated, remaining underneath the Italians (Sangiorgi, 1938: 5-14).²⁹

This discourse permits us to comprehend that the colony represented a territory to which the Regime cared, however, the indigenous did not have the same relevance.

As explicitly mentioned, the ethnicity should remain divided, for this reason an incorporation of the indigenous in the Regime was never envisaged.

Another thematic addressed in the volume of *L'Africa Italiana* of January 1940 is about the concept of race.

This article emphasises the pyramidal and racial vision of the Regime, and even though it is concentrated on the Oriental Africa, it is possible to glean information that may also be useful for our case study. In fact, the racial separation was assured by ad-hoc measures for the demographic and sanitary control, supported by pseudoscientific theories.

As mentioned earlier, the fascist vision was not to exterminate the indigenous people, nor, simultaneously, to assimilate them.

According to the fascist needs, the indigenous did not have to mistake kindness for weakness, for this reason, severity was the solution.

The Government was interested in studying the traditions, religions and customs to better manage the colony, still maintaining the distance (Rossetti, 1940:1-4).³⁰

Following the Decree of the 19th of June 1939, the *meticcio* was considered as a crime, the reasons were attributed to biological argumentations regarding the possibility of physical and psychological damage.

The colonial discourse spread the information that mixed races would have brought to the end of the nations (Ilardi, 1940: 7-9).³¹

Italian women were used as the tool to avoid promiscuity between races, for this reason, women were brought to the colony to preserve the white race.

Compared to *LIBIA* the concept of *meticcio* and race is particularly evident and emphasised.

For this reason, it is safe to affirm that *L'Africa Italiana* better portray the Government viewpoint, meanwhile, in *LIBIA* the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised is almost never mentioned or analysed.

To avoid promiscuity, women were sent to the colonies to procreate new Italian citizens.

²⁹ Sangiorgi, G.M. (1938). La potenza dell'impero è nella colonizzazione demografica. *L'Africa Italiana*, pp. 5-24.

³⁰ Rossetti, C. (1940). Noi e gli indigeni. *L'Africa Italiana*, pp. 1-4.

³¹ Ilardi, S. (1940). La disciplina giuridica del prestigio di razza e del meticcio. *L'Africa italiana*, pp. 7-9.

Before the departure they were prepared for the colonial life that comprehended some courses regarding health education, agricultural education and politics.

The first role that they were invested in was to be mother, however, they should have also been supportive wives and able to manage the difficulties in the colony

For this reason, the camps to educate them were composed by tents, usually in isolated places, far from the cities. The spiritual and physical resistance was an important part of this experience, in fact, the camps could be perceived as military ones (Dorato, 1940:25-33).³²



Figure 13: Morning flag-raising ceremony, *L'Africa Italiana*, 1940: 27

At the same time, also female university students had their role in the colonisation process. In fact, they had to study the role of women in the colony and, in general, comprehend the indigenous and their habits. However, it was highlighted that they should not have been invested emotionally in these studies, but at the same time, avoid the snobbery that could have damaged the civilisation process.

In the colony, they organised several events such as “Ludi universitari della Libia” that united sport with culture.

These events brought a positive outcome for the tourism sector.

³² Dorato, M. (1940). I campi precoloniali ed i coloni. *L'Africa Italiana*, pp. 25-33.

In this case, *L'Africa Italiana* and *LIBIA* report the same propagandistic discourse regarding the role of women in the colony (Cioccodicola, 1940: 19-37).³³

The problematic about the Libyan territory is also mentioned in the journal *L'Africa Italiana*.

In the volume of 1939, the thematic of the Sahara Desert is addressed.

In this article, it is mentioned the difficulty in conquering the territory due to the Senussi's resistance.

One of the objectives after the conquest was of building new villages in the territory that initially were defined as not productive, but the expansion to the desert was necessary to complete the colonisation process, especially to portray the domain at an international level. In the territory, new expeditions were launched to find mineral sources and renewable energies to develop the industrial sector (Pace, 1939:1-4).³⁴

Additionally, the article describes the ethnicity complexity of the territory due to the presence of several tribes such as Tuareg, Tebu, Arabs and other African ethnicities (Corso, 1939:19-22³⁵).

The principal Oasis mentioned in the area are Cufra, an archipelago of oases, Gat and Murzuch, pivotal territories for the commercial development. To assure the development of these territories, several projects were planned for the area such as the Trans-Harian railway, air routes, and the conversion of caravan routes into safe passageways.

These infrastructural ameliorations were planned to connect the Mediterranean and Central Africa (Grosso, 1939: 23-26).³⁶

This article had the aim to be used as a demonstration of the colonial policies that the Regime planned for the Desert.

The final article mentioned for the purpose of this thesis refers to the solutions to the touristic problem implemented by Balbo, a recurrent topic mentioned in the magazine *LIBIA*.

The urbanistic and touristic development transformed the Libyan cities, in fact the Arab architecture, present in Mosques and the Roman archaeological monuments, requalified by the Regime; composed a new architectural style. This new style, created according to the vision of Balbo, was called Mediterranean- African. This architecture blended several ethnicities, creating a new, harmonious vision of the city (Bonfiglio, 1939:34-37).³⁷

³³ Cioccodicola, M. (1940). Le fasciste universitarie per l'Impero, *L'Africa Italiana*, pp.35-37.

³⁴ Pace, B. (1939). Civiltà Italiana nel Sahara, *L'Africa Italiana*, pp. 1-4.

³⁵ Corso, R. (1939). Popolazioni del nostro Sahara. *L'Africa Italiana*, pp. 19-22.

³⁶ Grosso, P. (1939). Il Sahara libico e la sua economia. *L'Africa Italiana*, pp. 23-26.

³⁷ Bonfiglio, E. (1939). Tripoli: Armonia di tre architetture. *L'Africa Italiana*, pp. 34-37.

According to the article, the pillars on which the modernisation was based were provided by ETAL³⁸ that had to promote and manage the touristic sector, the valorisation of the archaeological heritage rebuilding the works already mentioned, the development of an hotel chain, and the urban regeneration (Ornato, 1939:29-32).³⁹

The two famous infrastructures were the luxurious *Hotel Uddan*, designed by the architect Florestano Di Fausto, at the centre of Dhara district; and the *Hotel Mehari*, modern with 230 rooms, both managed by ETAL.

Also, in Benghazi new constructions were done, such as the *Grand Hotel* in Bernice or the *Lungomare Mussolini* covered by trees. Meanwhile, in Derna and Misurata, new villages for the demographic colonisation were built, and new hotel inaugurated.

In this process, propaganda was the fundamental element to promote the colony (Valori, 1939:37-40).⁴⁰

In this case, the information reported by this article are congruent to the information delivered by the magazine *LIBIA*.



Figure 14: Pictures of Hotel Uddan, *L'Africa Italiana*, 1939:40.

³⁸ Ente Turistico Alberghiero della Libia, founded in 1935.

³⁹ Ornato, C. Z. (1939). La soluzione del problema turistico in Libia. *L'Africa Italiana*, pp. 29-32.

⁴⁰ Valori, F. (1939). La nuova edilizia nelle province di Bengasi, Derna e Misurata. *L'Africa Italiana*, pp. 37-40.

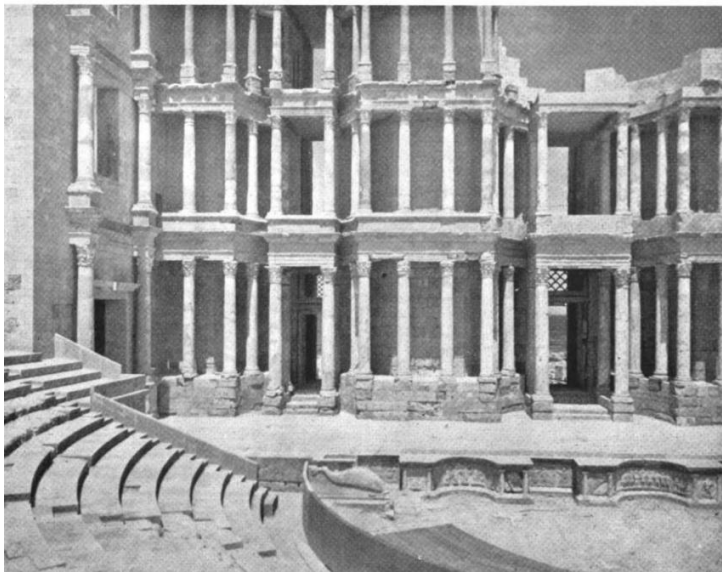


Figure 15: Reconstruction of the Sabratha Theatre, : *L'Africa Italiana*, 1939:40.

The magazine *LIBIA* was not subject of many studies, for this reason, in this thesis the information delivered by the magazine will be evaluated. The main thematic concerning the development of the colony have already been mentioned, however, in the following subchapters an in-depth analysis of the articles present in the journal *LIBIA* from 1937 until 1940 will be accomplished, through the lenses of the contemporary historiography.

3.3 Tourism and architecture

The tourism sector in Europe developed at the end of the 19th century. Initially, to meet the expectations of the voyagers the local culture was modified according to the tastes of the tourists.

This process, called staged authenticity, consisted of creating an ad-hoc culture that could be appreciated by the tourist of the modern world, not representing the real local culture (Ilacqua, 2026: 1-2).

In Libya, tourism was a necessary tool to modernise the country and demonstrate the Fascist power.

During fascism, tourism in the colonies was a powerful instrument used by the regime to increase its popularity and legacy, moreover, it is intrinsically connected to the imperialistic aspiration and the civilising mission, both parts of the fascist rhetoric.

In fact, as expressed by Pascoli in 1911, the conquest of Libya was the return to a legitimate territory (Malia Hom, 2012: 286).

In the Libyan colony, even before the fascist regime, a form of tourism was already present. Indeed, the Touring Club Italiano (TCI) promoted an excursion in the spring of 1914 to visit the infrastructure that the colony possessed.

During these trips, the participants included technicians, farmers, hotel managers, and other figures who could identify and promote potential tourist attractions (Capuzzo, 2016: 6-7). The initial investments in the tourist sector of Libya were implemented by the Governor Volpi.

Libya was not the only territory in which Governor Volpi attempted a modernisation process, in fact, his entrepreneur abilities were pivotal for the development of Venice.

He promoted the distribution of the electricity and new industries at Porto Marghera, moreover at Lido di Venezia, Volpi promoted several initiatives such as aeronautic and motorboats competitions. In 1927, the event Schneider Cup ⁴¹occurred and the Hotel Excelsior was the central place of the competition, since it hosted international figures (Bobbo, 2014:127-131). To modernise the Libyan territory and draw the attention, the Roman archaeological cities present in the colony were requalified, and more excavations were realised. This link between Italy and Libya, promoted by the common ancient history of the Roman Empire, was pivotal in promoting the tourist aspect (Capuzzo, 2016: 4-15)

The concept of Roman identity was used as the basis for the legitimization of the Fascist power in the colony, moreover, the presence of Italians was portrayed as a pacific penetration in the area through the tourism sector. The guided tours to the Ancient Roman ruins demonstrated the continuity with the past and reproduced the concept of *Italiani brava gente* (Malia Hom, 2012: 288).

In 1923, to popularise tourism in the Libyan colony, a tourist guide was sponsored by the TCI. The guide was composed of two volumes dedicated respectively to Cyrenaica and Tripolitania; the aim was not solely to expose the commercial possibilities of the area, but also to promote a new type of tourism. The tourism industry attempted to promote Libya as an adventurous and exotic experience, far from European comfort.

The guide recommended autumn as the best season to visit the colony, departing from the ports of Naples or Syracuse with the Special passport for Libya.

This touristic instrument was not only for travellers and workers who intended to visit the colony, but also pivotal to educate the Italian population of their colonies abroad (Capuzzo, 2016: 8-13).

⁴¹ International competition founded in 1911, the initial objective was to encourage the technological progress in the aviation field.

The development continued with the other Governors present in the colony – De Bono and Badoglio. Indeed, in 1929, new accommodations and entertainment spaces were built, such as theatres, restaurants and cafes. Moreover, ad hoc excursions were planned from the hotel directly to the points of tourist interest, such as Leptis Magna and Sabratha (Capuzzo, 2016: 16).

The indigenous art wanted to be preserved, however it needed to follow strict rules, thus, the Regime did not want to keep the Europeans far from Libyans but to control their interaction.

For this reason, several events promoted by the Regime were tailor-made for the tourists and did not represent a real local culture.

The role of ETAL, founded in 1935 by Balbo was essential, in fact since it managed the touristic sector, some of the spectacles were promoted by this organisation.

In fact, ad-hoc performances were created to entertain tourists during their leisure trip and what was presented had to respect the anthropological studies about the colony.

In fact, in the 1930s, anthropologies gathered information regarding the local population and according to this information, tried to understand what the tourists could experience and what they were expecting (McLaren, 2004:75-80).

The ability to promote the colony and render it appealing to the Italian population reflected the ability of the regime to build a new imperialistic identity.

In 1935, with Italo Balbo, the tourist program was extended. It encompassed the Hebraic Quarter, beautifully decorated during festivities, and other cities of Fezzan, such as the Oasis of Murzuch and Ghadames, famous for their white houses that created a contrast with the landscape.

In 1937, another initiative, inaugurated by Balbo and Mussolini, was the cruise to admire the Libyan Littoral. Other luxurious cruises were planned to demonstrate the investment of the Regime in the colony (Capuzzo, 2016: 18-22).

The principal architectural sites built by fascists identified as the continuation of the Roman identity were Arae Philaenorum and the Littoral route (Malia Hom, 2012:291).

To compare the historiographical aspect with the primary source, the volume of *LIBIA* of the 1st of March 1937 will be analysed, in fact, this volume widely encompasses the topic of Roman ruins and new investment.

On the cover of the volume, it is possible to notice some ruins, probably associated with the archaeological discoveries made in the region connected with the Ancient Roman Empire, which conquered Tripolitania in 46 BC and Cyrenaica in 74 BC.

The first two pages of the magazine list the transport connections from Rome to other destinations, including Tripoli, Sirte and Benghazi.

In this volume, until this point, the first image that is conveyed to the reader is about the Italian presence in Libya, not only during Fascism but also during the Roman Empire.

Following this section, the next one presents an image of the bust of Mussolini, sculptured by the artist Ruggero Michahelles. His image inside this volume was probably chosen because, in 1937, Mussolini visited Libya after a ten-year interval to inaugurate the new Littoral route.

The second section, presented by Balbo, is dedicated to the Littoral route and its project. According to Balbo's perspective, transport connections were a demonstration of modernity and civilization. The construction of infrastructure was also associated with the ancient Roman Empire, famous for its architecture and constructions.

In addition, Balbo represented this mission as an even greater accomplishment because, following his opinion, nobody in the past attempted to build a 1.822 km route in 4.510.000 days.

To accomplish this, Italian and indigenous workers cooperated, led by almost 50 firms that were employed in this project (Balbo, 1937:3-9).⁴²

In the volume *LIBIA* of July 1938, the Littoral Route was described by Marcel Gandolphe, French professor at the High School Carnot in Tunis and President of the Commission of Tourism of the Tunis Automobile Club.

Gandolphe travelled from Tunis to Egypt through the Littoral Route; the first aspect of which he was impressed by was the architectural renovation of Sabratha, celebrating the civilisation that the Roman Empire brought to the African soil. Tripoli was described as the perfect location for tourists, especially because of the *lungomare*, in which a lot of sculptures were present.

Gandolphe was particularly impressed by the new construction in the city that were not present when he visited the last time in 1931. Moreover, he described this colonisation as intelligent, due to all the changes to render the soil fertile and the landscape filled with new constructions. He stated as follows, « La Libye est aussi le plus bel exemple d'un effort constant et formidable vers une colonisation intelligente ⁴³ » (Gandolphe, 1938 :22)⁴⁴.

The testimony provided by his writings allows to have a more comprehensive image of the impact that the renovation had at the time.

⁴² Balbo, I. (1937). *La Litoranea Opera Romana*. LIBIA, pp. 3-9.

⁴³ Libya is the beautiful example of a constant and great effort towards an intelligent type of colonisation.

⁴⁴ Gandolphe, M. (1938). *La Litoranea Libica descritta da un francese*. LIBIA, pp. 22.

Continuing with the description of the 1937 volume, to assess the presence of the Fascist Regime in the middle of the Littoral, in the Bay of Ras Lanuf, the Triumphal Arch was constructed. This arc represents the foundation of the Empire.

This position is strategic, as it is not far from the burial site of the Carthaginian brothers Fileni, famous for having fought to defend their lands four centuries before Christ in a battle between Greeks and Carthaginians. This event was illustrated by Sallust, a Politician and Historian of the First Roman Republic. According to his writings, reported by *LIBIA*, this battle could have been the birth of the Libyan ethnicity.

The story of the two brothers was an inspiration for the construction of the Arc because of their resilience and strength in dying for their homeland, a concept appreciated and shared by the Regime (Caputo, 1937:10-15).⁴⁵

The story of the two brothers is reported in another volume of *LIBIA* of July 1938. Indeed, there is an article describing their gesture.

In fact, near the Triumphal Arch, another construction is visible in the desert: the sarcophagus of the two brothers, also known as Arae Philaenorum. Balbo desired to restore this monument since the sacrifice for the homeland is an act highly admired and honoured by the Regime (Pomilo, 1938:14).⁴⁶

Another structure restored was the Roman Sabratha theatre, and for the inauguration attended by the Duce, *LIBIA* reported the intention of the government to perform a tragedy. Following the article, a tragedy better represents the religious and mythic thought of the great thinkers (Gardenghi, 1937:17-18).⁴⁷

For the inauguration, the symphonies of Sophocles' verses of Andrea Gabrieli were chosen by Balbo to impress the Duce. The music that narrates the tragedy was drafted by Orsatto Giustiniani.

The theatre representation of *Edipo Re* by Andrea Gabrieli portrayed the richness and superiority of Italian culture; for this reason, chosen for the inauguration (Luizzi, 1937:19-21).⁴⁸

As it is possible to acknowledge, the information reported in these articles connect the past of Libya to the one of Italy, however, the predominance of the latter is evident. The ability and knowledge of Italians are highlighted in each article as a demonstration of superiority.

⁴⁵ Caputo, G. (1937). Area Philaenorum e Sistemazio e Restauro dell'Arco di Marco Aurelio. *LIBIA*, pp. 10-15.

⁴⁶ Pomilo, E. (1938). Le tombe dei fratelli Fileni. *LIBIA*, p. 14.

⁴⁷ Gardenghi, P. (1937). Il risorto Teatro Romano di Sabratha. *LIBIA*, pp. 17-18.

⁴⁸ Luizzi, F. (1937). Dopo 350 anni riecheggiano a Sabratha le mirabili melodie del grande musicista cinquecentesco Andrea Gabrieli. *LIBIA*, pp. 17-18.

The colonial presence of Italy in Libya was justified by the presence of Roman ruins in the territory, this element was essential to establish a continuity and superiority (Capresi, 2012:39-40; 48-49).

The history was transformed in politics and as a model to follow for the new fascist men.

This case is an example on one of the totalitarian features of the regime, the sacralisation of the past, imposing new rituals and narratives to the masses (Nelis, 2007: 414).

In the article regarding the village of Socna, the old capital of Giofra Oasis inhabited by the Berber populations, there is a clear contrast between how it was during the control of Sef-En-Naser and how it was reconstructed during the Italian's control.

This article was written by the journalist Francesco Corò, and it was based on his experience in visiting Socna.

Indeed, the village before the Italians was described as a ruined place in which the vegetation was ravaged. In the last paragraph, there is a glorification of the Italian effort appreciated especially by the population; however, this article was written from the Italian perspective, and it is not possible to be certain of the Barbar population's thoughts regarding this.

Another aspect that is reported in the article was the experience of Clapperton, a Scottish explorer who visited the village in 1823. According to his writings reported by the Italian journalist, Socna had certain customs and traditions that disappeared through time, and the population seemed affluent during that period. This idea was built on the description of the events reported by the explorer (Corò, 1937:24-27).⁴⁹

Another topic encompassed was the exhibition in Tripoli in 1937, a special event. It not only represented all the efforts and architectural renovations in Libya but also emphasised the new conquest of Ethiopia.

For this reason, this event was pivotal for the Fascist Regime to share its capacities and its colonies. Indeed, it represented the new Empire, and the principal aim was to demonstrate what the colonies could offer to the Italian population, such as a labour force and a renewed imperialistic power portrayed at an international level.

This exhibition was an additional tool to raise the colonial consciousness for Italians, and it fulfilled its role as a promoter of tourism (Melchiori, 1937:28-31).⁵⁰

To conclude this volume of *LIBIA*, there is an article dedicated to the tourists. The intended message to convey is that the colony was well organised and the tourist was always cared

⁴⁹ Corò, F. (1937). Socna la capitale spodestata dell'Oasi di Giofra. *LIBIA*, pp. 24-27.

⁵⁰ Melchiori, A. (1937). La prima mostra coloniale dell'impero. *LIBIA*, pp. 28-31.

for; for this reason, it was portrayed as the perfect destination for leisure and relaxation. Indeed, the description of the day as a tourist in one of the villages is dreamy and romantic, emphasising the atmosphere of the sea and the desert. This article aimed to persuade that Libya was a desirable tourist destination, not different from the south of Italy, but way more exotic (Marchetti, 1937:38-40).⁵¹

After having analysed the content of this volume of 1937, it is possible to assess that several topics were covered. Most of them reported the history of the Roman Empire that is shared by Libya and Italy and the perception of the renewed colony from different points of view. Moreover, the effort of the regime is highlighted in each article; in fact, there is a clear contrast between how the territory was treated before the arrival of the Italians and how it was transformed afterwards, especially during the Fascist Regime.

The archaeological discoveries that were used to legitimate the Fascist power were not the only tool used. In fact, also the urbanistic architecture was used to establish the presence of fascists in the territory.

Thus, a new style was developed called Libyan rationalism, this aesthetic is different from the Moorish one since it mixes the European with the local architecture, especially inspired by the Roman ruins and the landscape. White is the preferred colour, using light and shadow, in fact the villages were reproduced with this style (Capresi, 2012: 44-46).

The most prominent architect of the Regime was Di Fausto; his ability was to build infrastructures even in desertic places.

His technique was based on creating a continuity between the landscape and the infrastructure, his style was not particular decorated, and it reflected more the climate-related needs.

Another peculiarity about his style is that it was applicable for several areas, since it was very simple.

Di Fausto will be mentioned also in the demographic section of this chapter, since he designed the majority of the villages built for the intensive colonisation of the colony (McLaren, 2004:84-85).

⁵¹ Marchetti, U. (1937). *Saper viaggiare il Libia*. LIBIA, pp. 38-40.

3.4 Demographic colonisation

The Demographic colonisation process was one of the most discussed topics inside of the magazine *LIBIA*.

In fact, it was one of the tools used by the Regime to gain consensus among its citizens and abroad, moreover, it was a strategy to demonstrate its imperial authority.

In this section, the impact of the demographic colonisation of Libya will be discussed, considering the rhetoric used by the Fascist Government in the journal and the historiographical studies regarding this matter.

The demographic colonisation was attempted several times before 1938. Indeed, the first governor to attempt to populate Libya was Governor Volpi, between 1922 and 1926. The possibility of seizing the unused lands was permitted by Islamic law, and, after many years of war, a considerable amount of the population had escaped or died.

For this reason, Volpi attempted a form of private, capitalist colonisation; this method did not have the desired results since the soil was not very fertile and there were no services for the installed population.

Afterwards, Governor De Bono planned a five-year plan to inhabit the region of Tripolitania. Private capitals were not sufficient; for this reason, the intervention of the state was mandatory, however he desired that the lands were cultivated only by Italians, not considering the indigenous.

The arrival of Balbo changed the approach, the installed families received a check equal to the 30% of the total cost of the farm, the house and the land. The remaining part was paid by the colonisers during the years of their permanence (Capresi, 2012:36-38).

The volume analysed is a double edition for October and November 1938.

The main focus of this edition of *LIBIA* is the demographic colonisation, correlated to the first mass migration of *Ventimila* and the change of Libya's status from colony to 19th region of the Kingdom of Italy.

The first pages of the journal reported several advertisements about the Mondadori Library and the books published at the time. The primary objective was likely to promote a fascist culture and expand the knowledge of the colonies throughout the Empire.

The first article, "*La Libia XIXa Regione d'Italia*", reports the events that led to the final decision to change the status of Libya. After sixteen years of the Italian presence in the region, the internal situation changed significantly under every aspect: from the spiritual to

the economic one; for this reason, the Grand Council declared the decision to issue a Legislative Decree.

On the 26th of October, in the main square of Tripoli, the decision was announced to the “Italiani della metropoli, italiani mussulmani della Libia⁵²”.

The discourse of Balbo was, “Il DUCE ha mantenuto la promessa: questa notte il Gran Consiglio del Fascismo ha proclamato che le quattro province della Libia entrano a far parte del territorio nazionale. La vecchia colonia scompare: sorge la diciannovesima Regione d’Italia, la Libia⁵³” (Balbo, 1938:2-3).⁵⁴

The new plan of demographic colonisation, written by Italo Balbo, was the topic of the second article of the journal.

The principal objective of this plan was to strengthen the productivity of the colony and include it as part of Italy. This concrete action evidenced the separation between the first years of fascism, in which the colony was still to be conquered, and the 17th year of the Regime, in which the investments and efforts led to this result.

The article briefly encompasses the historical moments that led to the conquest of the colony.

The first one is about the battles in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, and how the land acquisition by the State had the objective to control the redistribution to Italian farmers that could develop the agricultural sector.

The second period is characterised by Governor De Bono and his capacities in managing the difficult situation in Libya.

The creation of agricultural villages was extremely difficult due to the lack of knowledge of the territory, the scarcity of capital and technological techniques.

This situation changed drastically in 1929 with the emergence of medium and large agricultural companies; moreover, a new organisational system was implemented in 1937 by allocating land to Italian families and providing them with technical and economic assistance.

Most of the land was owned by the State, managed by institutional organisations such as Ente di colonizzazione, I.N.F.P. S⁵⁵., and A.N.T. E⁵⁶.

⁵² Italians of the metropole, Muslim Italians of Libya.

⁵³ The Duce maintained his promise, this evening the Gran Consiglio del Fascismo proclaimed that the four provinces of Libya become part of the national territory. The old colony disappears – Libya, the 19th region of Italy is born.

⁵⁴ Balbo, I. (1938). La Libia XIXa Regione d’Italia. LIBIA, p.2.

⁵⁵ Istituto Nazionale Fascista della Previdenza Sociale

⁵⁶ Azienda Nazionale Terrei Eritrei

Each of them possessed a certain number of hectares that was distributed among families. These organisations had specific duties: to prepare the lands, to build routes and waterworks, to build houses and to organise services for the colonisers. Initially, the duty of the families was to cultivate the land granted by the state. After having respected the conditions imposed by the state, the colonising family could become the owners.

Most of the villages were in Tripolitania and the Green Gebel, where there were all the necessary services, from schools to churches, to create a long-term community.

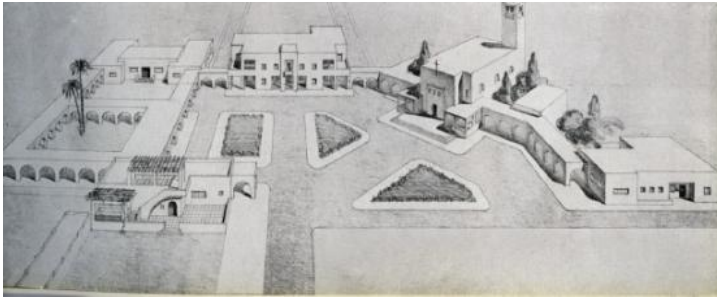


Figure 16: Rural Centre "Giordani", LIBIA, 1938:36.

This picture, reported in the journal, shows an example of a rural village called *Giordani* present in the surroundings of Tripoli. The architect Di Segni (1938) designed this image.

The plan of the demographic colonisation implemented by the Duce had as its objective Libya's food self-sufficiency and the resolution of the unemployment and overpopulation in Italy (Capresi, 2012:36). As previously stated, the organisations had an important role in the accomplishment of this plan; indeed, the preparation to welcome new citizens involved a huge number of workers.

The urban structure of these villages was a tool of propaganda and legitimation of power. In fact, these centres were divided following a specific dynamic: the square was the control centre with the church, municipality and the house of fascio that attested the presence of the fascist organisation and communicated directly to the settlers. This specific characteristics of the villages were the symbol of the Italian civilisation.

The buildings around the main square were often wallpapers to be photographed and promulgated.

Moreover, they demonstrated the regime's segregation and control of the indigenous population, in fact, in the regulatory plans of the Paris Law 1931, the European population must have been divided from the indigenous one (Capresi, 2012: 40-42; 54-57).

The new rural centres were present in the four provinces of Libya: the villages *Bianchi*, *Giordani*, *Olivetti*, in the surroundings of Tripoli; *Breviglieri*, *Giorda* and *Crispi* in the province of Misurata; *Baracca*, *Oberdan*, *D'Annunzio*, *Maddalena* nearby Benghazi and, finally, *Razza*, *Beda Littoria*, *Luigi di Savoia*, *Berta* and *Battisti* in the province of Derna.

These villages were already present or expanded to welcome the new colonising families; the main concern was concentrated in the Gebel area, since it seemed the most profitable. This project was only the first step towards a bigger plan that imagined the whole region inhabited and cultivated.

Until now, the principal focus of the article has been concentrated on the Italian families; however, these provinces were also inhabited by the local population.

To assure the well-being of the indigenous, the fascist government decided that the better plan would have been to create a confined land where they could have continued their lifestyle. In fact, most of the indigenous people present in Cyrenaica were nomads and made their living from pastoralism.

According to the article, this solution has been chosen due to the differences in mentality between the nomadic Arabs, especially those of Cyrenaica, and the Italians. Indeed, nomads were portrayed as not being prone to invest their currency in lands.

For this reason, the process of granting autonomous villages to the Arab population required more effort and time.

Another problem emphasised is the creation of large estates; indeed, this could have prevented other families from possessing their own land. For this reason, another purpose was to divide the estates into smaller portions to grant, to the new families introduced by the demographic plan, their own piece of land (Balbo, 1938:2-14).⁵⁷

As it is possible to state, this article by Balbo desired to emphasise the objectives achieved, but it also shows the future purposes to finalise the demographic plan. Most of the pages were concentrated on the Italian population; meanwhile, the indigenous people were mentioned briefly towards the end of the article. Moreover, it is possible to notice that the actions already implemented concerned only the Italian families; for this reason, it is feasible to attest the importance that the Regime attributed to the local population, clearly in second place.

One of the problems that the fascist Government attempted to solve immediately once pacified Libya was the water system, since it was an essential tool to modernize the colony. The building of wells was pivotal to the life of inhabitants to improve their hygiene and the agricultural system.

⁵⁷ Balbo, I. (1938). Il nuovo piano di colonizzazione demografica della Libia. LIBIA, pp. 2-14.

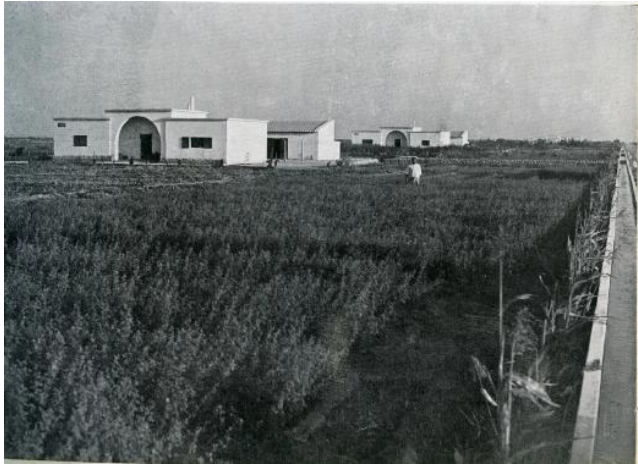


Figure 17: newly built houses in the village Crispi", LIBIA, 1938:17

As it is possible to state, the tourism sector was not the only investment made by the Fascist government, indeed, it was of pivotal importance creating a space where the Italian population could develop throughout the time.

However, also in this case, tourism is central, since also the villages constructed for the demographic colonisation became attractions.

The construction of wells and infrastructure desired also to demonstrate the improvement of the lands abandoned by the Ottomans (Capresi, 2012:42).

Another article present in the volume of 1938 is a clear example of propaganda; indeed, it persuaded the reader of the limitless opportunities for farmers in the colony.

According to the position of the land, the colonising families received a specific retribution. As an example, in the Gebel region, since it was easier to cultivate, especially cereals, the ownership was disposed of after five years of paid taxes.

Meantime, in Tripolitania and Misurata, depending on the irrigation options available, the families gained ownership after ten or five years; in this phase, the institutional organisation should recollect the invested sum partially.

Cosimo Manni, the President of Ente di colonizzazione della Libia, is the writer of this article, and he considered as an example other family that in 1933 transferred to Libya and after a few years they gained their own property, to ensure the positive outcome of this experience.

In this article, several drawings are present showing the configuration of the villages. The main centre evolved around the church and the main square; the architecture of the villages was very similar to one another. Moreover, some pictures show the process of construction

of the church and the agricultural works to prepare the soil for the arrival of the new families. (Manni, 1938:21-25).⁵⁸

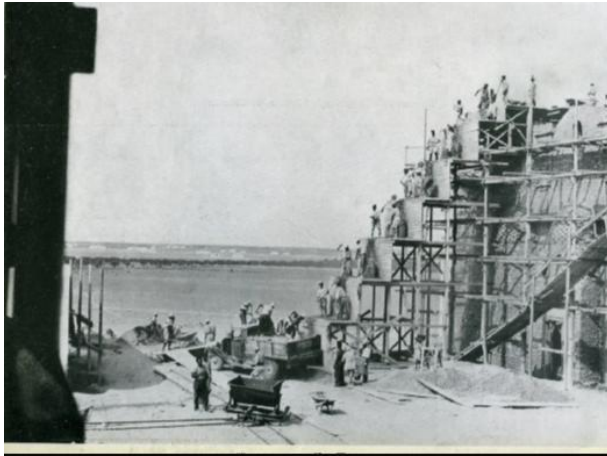


Figure 18: The construction of the Church in the village, LIBIA, 1938:26.

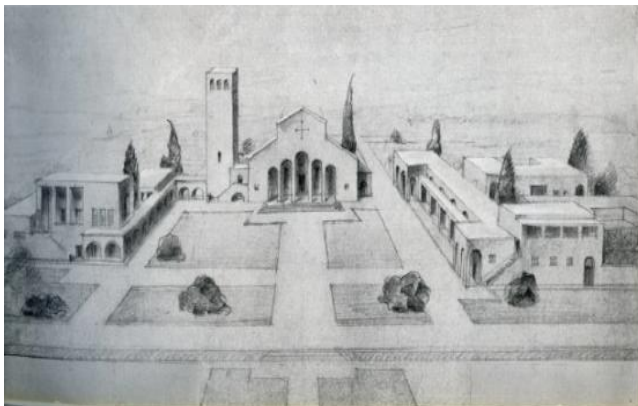


Figure 19: Rural centre of Maddalena, in Barce province of Benghazi. Designed by Di Fausto, LIBIA, 1938:23.

Some testimonials attest the actual experience that colonisers lived in going to Libya, an example reported by Massaretti (2014) is about Cason, a Friulian farmer, that described in his diary the experience as life-changing in a positive way.

His objective was to work and sustain its family, and the welcoming that he received in arriving in the village *D'Annunzio* surprised him.

He was a simple person that lived a poor life and the facilities that the regime predisposed to the colonisers were even more modern than those they had been using in Italy.

This testimony became part of the propagandistic rhetoric of the Regime.

⁵⁸ Manni, C. (1938). Il sicuro avvenire dei contadini in Libia. LIBIA, pp. 21-25.

In this case the gesture sponsored by the Regime in the journal *LIBIA* were supported by the experience of Cason, however the choice that the Fascist Government made in picking someone that was part of a lower social class must be acknowledged.

In fact, Cason was a simple farmer which the only intent was to work as he was used to and accept the bare minimum that he did not possess in Italy; he was not interested in demonstrating any superiority or modernity.

In order to move the Italian population to the colony, the fascist government had to create a liveable space for the population, the article of May 1939 summarised the investments in the hydraulic system made by the Regime until that period. In fact, water was considered as a crucial element to complete the demographic colonisation and the agricultural development.

The experiment of Balbo consisted of drilling in the proximity of the villages in the coastal area; however, the main issue was correlated to the internal desertic zone.

The Arabic and Roman wells in the Fezzan zone were renovated and new ones were built, for example in the village of Ghat, the construction of a well brought water at a drinking trough in the centre. This strategy marked an increase of the population and new harvests.

In Cyrenaica and Marmarica water cisterns were excavated in the rock to provide water for the livestock during the transhumance.

In total about 2.300 well, cisterns and drinking troughs were built, not including hydraulic constructions for the demographic colonisation.

In the article, it was repeated the capacity of the Italian workforce in creating a colony that could be an example for other countries (*LIBIA*, 1939: 2-10).⁵⁹

Another infrastructure built was the sanatorium in Porta Benito, Tripoli. It was the first healthcare facility built in Libya in the Littoral proximity. This service of assistance was not only for the Italians but also for the indigenous, in fact three separated departments were present dedicated to Muslims, jews and Italians.

The sanatorium had hygiene and sanitary equipment to assist the patients during their period of covalence, including recreational rooms with radio broadcasts and film screenings. An external area was divided according to the genre and ethnicity (*LIBIA*, 1939: 32).⁶⁰

From this article, it is not possible to grasp certain information, for example if the patients had to possess certain requirements to be hosted in the structure or whether a payment was required.

⁵⁹ *LIBIA* (1939). Migliaia di pozzi, di sorgenti e di cisterne costruiti o riparati in tutta la Libia, pp. 2-10.

⁶⁰ *LIBIA* (1939). Un modernissimo ospedale sanatoriale inaugurato a Tripoli, pp. 32.

For this reason, it is not possible to assess if this right was attributed to all the population present in the colony or restricted according to certain criteria, however, the separation according to the ethnicity is remarked.

To conclude this section of 1939 mainly dedicated to social investments, the thesis reports an article of Stefano Guia, in the last section of the journal.

Until 1937, the social welfare in Libya comprehended only certain assurances such as disability, elderly and unemployment. However, in Italy there were already present insurance against tuberculosis for settlers and smallholders.

After 1937, the objective was to render the colony as a par with Italy, indeed, the institutes of anti-trachoma in Benghazi and Tripoli were fully equipped and helped people without insurance.

Additionally, the maternity clinic in Tripoli received a considerable number of women who were in need (Guia, 1939:19).⁶¹

In the volume of 1940, dedicated to the death of Balbo, it is present an article about the aspiration of the Governor regarding the future of the intensive colonisation.

The strategy adopted by Balbo, after several years of attempts, was for the Regime the decisive one.

The article reported the opinion of Professor Maugini, agrarian technician of the Agricultural Institute of Italian Africa, which emphasised the success of this policy in the long term, counterbalancing the international critics.

The success of colonisers' settlement had to be especially attributed to the state aid in the agricultural sector that was the principal sustainment of Libya. The investments in this sector were pivotal to ensure the colony's self-sufficiency.

In 1938, in *Nuova Antologia*, Balbo declared that according to the statistics, the population in the colony would increase.

Additionally, the demographic colonisation was strictly connected to the civilising mission towards the Arab population, in fact, the new policies implemented by Balbo such as schools and healthcare organisations, would increase the standards of living.

The possibility to accomplish any sort of colonisation was correlated to the discovery of water and the building of water resources. The infrastructural construction disposed by Balbo rendered Libya a fertile territory for colonisation and development (Gardenghi, 1940: 4-9).⁶²

⁶¹ Guia, S. (1939). La previdenza sociale in Libia. LIBIA, pp. 19.

⁶² Gardenghi, P. (1940). Il testamento di Balbo. LIBIA, pp. 4-9.

Armando Maugini, a tropical agronomist working at the Overseas Agricultural Institute, wrote an article reporting Balbo's ideas and aspirations regarding the intensive demographic colonisation of the colony. This article comprehends the opinion of the Governor on this matter and the future aspirations of the colony after his death.

One of the principal pieces of information that the article desired to deliver can be summarised in this passage:

La rigogliosa espansione umana in Libia è la prova più convincente della rinascita e dello sviluppo del bastione dell'Impero. Alla rinascita e allo sviluppo sono stati chiamati con diversi ordini di provvedimenti e di istituzioni anche i musulmani. È questa l'originalità più commentate della politica italiana iniziata sotto il Governo di Balbo. Con la creazione delle quattro province e l'annessione della Libia all'Italia, si creò per i musulmani la possibilità di divenire cittadini italiani: la Libia cessava di essere una colonia venendo a far parte del territorio metropolitano e si apriva così una nuova epoca che ha già dato i frutti di civiltà e di benessere indiscutibili. Con la nuova politica musulmana l'Italia offriva al mondo anche un esempio della sua forza civilizzatrice.⁶³

From the beginning of the article, the author described the Governor as attentive towards the agrarian situation in Libya, in fact, he desired to collect all the information of the territory and consequently the adversities that Italy had to face.

Being that Libya had to become a touristic destination and an extension of Italy, it was necessary to develop the country, however, the method of this development was still uncertain since there was a division between who desired a private colonisation and who desired a state-funded rural settlement.

Maugini, part of this process, reported not only the actions of Balbo in addressing the problem, but also his ideas and concerns. Indeed, the main concerns reported were the relationship between the colonisers and the organisations; which were the state obligations in this process; which were the most productive lands for cultivation according to the climatic conditions that always changed.

⁶³ The rapid population growth in Libya is the most convincing evidence of the rebirth and development of the Empire. Muslims, too, have been included into this rebirth and development through a range of policies and institutions. This is the most widely discussed aspect of the Italian policy initiated under Balbo's government. With the creation of the four provinces and the annexation of Libya to Italy, Muslims were given the opportunity to become Italian citizens: Libya ceased to be a colony and became part of the metropolitan territory, thus opening a new era which has already produced the fruits of indisputable civilisation and prosperity. Through its new policy towards Muslims, Italy also offered the world an example of its civilising mission.

The organisations that had to manage these processes of colonisations were the *Ente per la Colonizzazione della Libia* and *L'Istituto Nazionale Fascista per la Previdenza Sociale*.

The funds for this process were divided between the State and the Organisations, and meanwhile the villages were established, in Italy the families were chosen according to specific criteria.

The arrangements for the transfer were pivotal, in fact, the colonisers arriving in Libya had to immediately receive the house and the means for living.

These requirements were congruent with Balbo's perspective, since he believed that colonisation was linked to workers' rights, which were not always guaranteed at the rural families in Italy. This affirmation can be linked to the experience of Cason, that preferred his standards of living in Libya compared to the ones in Italy.

Moreover, as already mention the rhetoric behind the settlement was that Italy possessed an abundant workforce that needed to find employment and Libya was the suitable choice.

Towards the end of this article, the author exposed the question regarding the future of the colony: "Will the systems of intensive demographic colonisation actually achieve the desired results?".

The process started shortly before Balbo's death and he knew the problems that were necessary to face, however, the capacity of continuing the work already done depended on who would take charge of the project. This indefinite answer was correlated to the fact that colonisation is a complex phenomenon constantly changing and it requires many elements to be in balance and to function.

In this case, after the death of Balbo, the Organisations were the main entities in charge of the enforcement of the State's laws and to assure the productivity and discipline of the workforce (Mangini, 1940: 33-38).⁶⁴

To conclude, this section is dedicated to the positive impact that Balbo had on the colony, and the effort put in its development to host the Italian population and to reinforce the control of the state.

In these articles, it is possible to grasp uncertainty about the future of the colony since Governor Balbo had the time to lay the foundations for development, but not the time to be able to continue with this enterprise.

⁶⁴ Mangini, A. (1940). La colonizzazione demografica intensiva. LIBIA, pp.33-38.



Figure 20: Tripoli- L'Arco di Marco Aurelio, *LIBIA*, 1940:45.



Figure 21: Cesareo, Cirene, *LIBIA*, 1940:44.

This process of demographic colonisation promoted by the Regime, was also studied by scholars, however, after having analysed some of the articles present in *LIBIA* regarding this topic, it is also necessary to attest the truthfulness of the information delivered.

According to the article of Massaretti (2014) the principal element that rendered the demographic colonisation important and useful to the regime was the propaganda behind of it.

In fact, the migration was portrayed as an epic moment, almost as a religious event. This strategy is usually applied by the totalitarian regime that desire to substitute the religious domain to become the subject of adoration of the society.

The pictures shared by the magazine were created ad hoc, in fact, some actors and photographers were hired to capture the moment.

Mass media controlled the information delivered through the Ministry of the popular culture and the principal means of communication were as an example newsreel *LUCE*, radio, newspapers and magazines such as *LIBIA*.

The images in this process were pivotal, and the main source of information delivered by the Regime. This strategy permitted to not spread much information but to show a pre-packaged image of the colonisation.

The principal objective was to render this venture a shared and desirable experience.

The magazine *LIBIA*, as stated in the article analysed, share the information about the Italian villages, not mentioning the Arab ones.

The names of the Italian villages are taken by laic figures important for the Regime and as the pictures shows they resemble the Italian cities, with the fountain at the centre of the square and the houses around.

These villages had to demonstrate the modernity of Italy, for this reason each house possessed a proper cabinet and shower.

The villages for the indigenous demonstrated a different style of construction more in line with the Arab aesthetic, these villages had as the main objective to settle nomadic populations.

If the colony initially was perceived as an exotic and adventurous space, far from the European comfort (Capuzzo, 2016: 8); this concept modified with the demographic colonisation, because the unproductive spaces became a territory of commercial purpose.

For this reason, the colony ceases to be a space of experience to become an area managed by the State (Massaretti, 2014: 2-12).

The scholar reports the same concern of Mangini, in fact the possible outcome of this experiment was uncertain after the death of Balbo. Nowadays, it is possible to attest that after his death and with the beginning of the Second World War it was not possible to continue this experience.

3.5 Race and citizenship

The belief regarding the superiority of races widespread even before the seizure of power of the Fascist Regime.

Indeed, according to De Napoli (2013), between the 18th and 19th century the phenomenon of Social Darwinism spread and for this reason the European civilised nations felt the right to conquer and subjugate the unmodernised populations.

This concept during fascism became more articulated, in fact racism was not a solely biological concept but, it was connected also to the spiritual domain.

The narrative that spread in Italy during the Fascist Regime attributed to the Italians the role of civiliser morally superior.

In the volume of Spadaro (2013) the perception that Italians had towards the colony is analysed.

In fact, the scholar demonstrated through the analysis of coloniser's families photo albums that the Italians even though they lived in the colony, shared a few moments with the indigenous.

Especially during the 1930s, the subjects of the pictures were captured on camera in public places such as streets, squares, however, the local population was almost never visible.

For this reason, it can be depicted that the background was of secondary importance and to remark the distance with the local population.

The representation of the Libyan population was confined to specific situations, such as during trips in Oasis or archaeological sites, since they were an integral part of the exotic experience.

Thus, during official ceremonies or events the indigenous population was not captured on camera.

In these pictures the name of the local, that could have been a guide, or an interpreter was never mentioned, so, even though there are pictures that testify the contact between the two cultures, the distance with them still wanted to be maintained.

In fact, as previously stated, pictures were a private memory and, not mentioning the name of the local with whom the photo was taken, was a clear signal that there was not the willingness to remember the interaction with them but only the experience.

The analysis carried out by Spadaro (2013) confirms that the stranger was perceived by Italian as "inferior".

However, the narrative present in the volume LIBIA affirms a different reality.

Meanwhile in Italy the textbooks had as objective to demonstrate the difference between Italians and indigenous, taking as an example *L'uomo. Quale differenza!*, in Libya the government desired to demonstrate their respect for the Arab culture.

An article particularly interesting, mentioned in the volume of *LIBIA* of October-November 1938, was dedicated to the VIII edition of the Volta's Congress ⁶⁵ that focused on Africa, especially considering Libya, the principal colony of the Empire.

According to the discourse, African ethnology was divided into two schools of thought: historicists and functionalists. The first one focused its studies on the past and on the culture, while the second one focused on the habits of the population. These two disciplines blended render possible the overall comprehension of the ethnicity.

For the functionalists, African populations could have benefited from European civilization; at the same time, Europeans could be positively influenced by another culture.

Indeed, as an example reported, the Roman Empire left a positive influence on the African population.

Initially, the colonisation process of the African Continent was deeply interconnected with moral and religious concepts of the Catholic tradition. Consequently, these values failed with the local cultures.

On the contrary, the Fascist interest in the African Continent was considered "functional" since the main objective, conducted especially by Balbo, was to create Catholic Italian and Muslim Italian citizens, on condition that both were part of the Fascist organism.

As it is possible to state, the religion was not an obstacle for the Regime; indeed, if the Libyan population had the will to respect the central power and to be part of a productive mechanism, there was no obligation to follow Christian morality.

Towards the end of the article, there is a glorification of the policies that the Regime was applying in the colony:

La relazione Balbo è il più vivido documento della politica sociale fascista in Africa. Quello che la Libia sta compiendo nei riguardi dei nativi, con le scuole, con l'istituzione della Gioventù Araba del Littorio, con le opere pubbliche ed igienistiche, con le missioni sanitarie, con la protezione multiforme del lavoro indigeno, con la grande trasformazione agricola che sta per fare d'una terra

⁶⁵ The Volta's Congress was instituted in 1930; it held international conventions in which prominent figures were invited to discuss several topics, from science to geopolitics and art.

semidesertica uno dei paesi più fecondi e salubri dell'Africa tutta e del mondo⁶⁶ [...] (Giovanetti, 1938: 29-30).⁶⁷

In this case, the Regime attempted to demonstrate itself as interested in respecting the rights of the Libyan population and their customs.

However, this vision is distant from the one promoted to the Italian population, in fact, as previously established in the articles of *L'Africa Italiana* the ad-hoc measure against the indigenous prevented integration.

Even if the Regime at the Volta's Congress portrayed itself as able to respect the Muslims tradition and customs, the formulation of new rights for the indigenous present in the colonial Libya is intrinsically connected to the concept of race.

According to De Napoli (2013) the differentiation between a citizen and the subject of the nation is based on the impossibility of the indigenous in assimilating other cultures.

This distinction is demonstrated at the end of *LIBIA* of 1938, in which it is transposed the entire discourse that Balbo presented to the VIII edition of the Volta's Congress ⁶⁸ that focused on Africa, this speech is the in-depth explanation of the article already mentioned.

The discourse is divided into several sections, each of them considering one aspect of the Arab's life in Libya after the advent of fascism.

From the beginning, Italy declared itself as an Islamic Power, since it aimed at pacifying Libya and creating a favourable atmosphere for the population. The indigenous population, from the Italian perspective, was divided into two sections based on the territory: the Southern Zone of the Sahara was populated by black people with different facial features and connotations; meanwhile, the Coast of Libya was populated by Arabs and Berbers perceived as Mediterranean. In the first case the policies adopted were few, since the Fascist Government did not believe in the assimilation, while, in the second case, due to the similarity based on a common aesthetic, the Italian Government believed that it was possible to educate them according to the fascist culture.

Even though formally the indigenous were recognised as citizens following the Statute of 1919, not everyone was identified as able in assimilating the Italian culture.

⁶⁶ Balbo's report is the most vivid document of the Italian fascist social politics in Africa. What Libya is doing for the natives, with schools, with the institution of the Arab Youth Corps, with the public works and sanitary projects and missions, with the many-shaped indigenous' work, with the huge agricultural transformation that is about to render a semi desertic zone one of the most flourishing countries of Africa and of the world.

⁶⁷ Giovanetti, E. (1938). *L'Africa ed il Convegno Volta*. LIBIA, pp. 29-30.

⁶⁸ The Volta's Congress was instituted in 1930; it held international conventions in which prominent figures were invited to discuss several topics, from science to geopolitics and art.

The rest of the speech is based on the decisions that the Government implemented in the colony, starting from the political perspective. In fact, there was a common policy based on the duties, discipline and the economic well-being of the indigenous; meanwhile, for the inhabitants of the coastal part of the colony, the fascist policy aimed at an active participation of the population in terms of politics and society.

In fact, the controlled economy permitted capable indigenous people to participate in regulating the workforce's price and the controlled system of supply and demand.

Agriculture and pastoralism were the principal economic activities for the natives; for this reason, the Italian Government invested in livestock control, ameliorating the agricultural technology with the construction of wells, preventing the natural events such as drought by moving the livestock and providing rest areas for them along the route.

Initially, the procedure that should have been implemented was based on the Bartolini's code that redistributed the administration of the colony among Italians and indigenous. However, the strict control of the regime did not render it possible.

Another topic of interest was the administration of the justice system. According to the law of the 4th of December 1937, the Quranic justice was administered by Sharia courts, defined as similar to our civilised system.

Moreover, in the discourse, the contrast between how the juridical system was under the Turkic control and the Italian one is evident. Indeed, it is mentioned that before the Italian conquest the electrical and water systems were not present; meanwhile, with the new regime, there was an attentive health and hygiene monitoring.

Additionally, the educational system was part of the regime plan for the colony; in fact, the desire was to create a cohesive society and to reach this objective, it was necessary to educate the population.

In this case, the policy of Nallino in respecting the local traditions was implemented, thus, various schools were established, such as the School of Indigenous Crafts and Arts; furthermore, other schools for women were institutionalised, focusing more on healthcare, which was essential above all for safeguarding the Arab families and raising their social status (Del Boca, 1988: 354-360).

The report also highlights the establishment of a secondary school specialising in Islamic culture, organised into years of study that made the curriculum increasingly specialised, permitting people to be educated in both Islamic law and doctrine.

In fact, the main objective was to establish direct collaboration with the Government.

Additionally, Balbo admits that certain Islamic doctrines were altered to bring the culture and the population closer to our own, such as by prohibiting marriages with girls under the age of fifteen. Furthermore, the GAL (Arab Youth Corps) was established, which provided propaganda training on behalf of the regime.

The participation in the Fascist Regime was planned during childhood through school, during adolescence through participation in the GAL, and finally either at universities or during military service.

From this speech at the Volta's Congress, it emerged that the Regime desired to demonstrate the positive changes implemented in the Libyan colony (Balbo, 1938: 3-7).⁶⁹

Probably, since the magazine *LIBIA* was a propagandistic tool, this discourse was prepared to remind the population of the positive acts of the regime for the Muslim Libyans, to attest the greatness of the Empire.

It is essential to remember that this perspective represents the propagandistic strategy of the Regime, meanwhile the historiography highlights the distance that Fascism maintained during its colonisation.

The magazine *LIBIA* of January 1939 begins with an article dedicated to the second plan of the demographic colonisation.

In the initial part of the article, it presents a summary of the demographic colonisation process, from the proposal of Balbo in 1938 with the subsequent approval of Mussolini.

The first part of this process was defined as successful since a considerable number of families had the opportunity to install themselves in the colony.

The second part of the article is dedicated to the expansion of this project, in fact the second wave of migration was planned to be broader in terms of geographical area, with the construction of five new villages between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica; and colonising families.

In the article, there is a clear reference to the international press that minimises the fascist commitment towards the indigenous population in the colony. To counter these accusations, the Regime used this article to present its plans regarding the construction of new villages dedicated to the Libyan families and their employment in the agricultural sector.

Moreover, connected to this theme, the government expressed again his proximity to Libyan culture and the investments to render the colony as modern as the other European countries. Additionally, it mentioned the return of about 30.000 Libyan from Egypt and Tunis, which

⁶⁹ Balbo, I. (1938). La politica sociale fascista verso gli arabi della Libia nella relazione di S. E. Balbo al Convegno Volta. *LIBIA*, pp. 3-7.

was portrayed as a clear indication of the preferences of the Arab populations to be subject to Italian rule rather than, for example, the French one.

This article is a further example of the fascist method of colonisation that had to be displayed internationally, to demonstrate the superiority of Italian culture.

As expressed previously in the thesis, Tunis was a territory claimed by Italians but granted under the French protectorate in 1881, this decision had always been rejected by the Italian Government.

The following article of this edition of 1939 was dedicated to the colony stolen from Italy - Tunis.

At an international level, Italy was proving itself with the conquest of Libya.

The article of Pio Gardenghi presented a clear report of the policy that France was adopting towards the Italians present in Tunis.

According to the statistics of 1939, the Italians inhabitants of Tunis were almost 120.000, installed even before the protectorate of France.

For this reason, the colony should have been entrusted to Italy, additionally, the protectorate conferred to France was claimed by the Italian government to be illegal. In fact, the Treaty Bardo agreed between the Bey of Tunis and France permitted the presence of the European country until the resolution of the controversy with the Krumiri tribe, which was threatening the Tunisian population (Gardenghi, 1939: 3-4).⁷⁰

This report towards France demonstrated that Italy was responsible for its citizens, even if they were not present in the territory and it had the international authority to condemn this behaviour.

Additionally, in the article there is a clear recall for the Italian population, affirming that Italy was ready to guard their rights and that its fellow citizens could return to their homeland because conditions were improving.

Through the administration of the Libyan colony, Italy was demonstrating its ability and its willingness to be an example at an international level.

To gain an in-depth understanding of Gardenghi's article, the next one is related to the topic of civil reform in Libya.

As previously stated, during the Volta's Congress, Balbo distinguished the Libyan Sahara from the Coast, in fact the Arab and Berber population of the coast were considered like the Mediterranean population and for this reason able to elevate themselves morally and economically.

⁷⁰ Gardenghi, P. (1939). *La storia cammina. LIBIA*, p. 3-4.

The Decree-law of 1939 provided that the colony's territory would become part of the metropolis; consequently, the people's status was also elevated.

According to the article, this transformation was possible thanks to certain conditions, such as the ancient roman roots of Libya, a reason of proximity strongly highlighted by the Regime. Moreover, the Decree-law was the demonstration that Italy had the ability to find a solution that would have pleased both the citizens of Italy and the inhabitants of the colony. The elevation of the Status provided by the Decree consisted of creating a special Italian citizenship.

In the article the positive aspects are enlisted as follows: the rights to bring weapons, the possibility of subscribing to the Fascist Party in the Libyan section, the access to the military career in the Libyan section and to have directive functions within trade unions.

However, these rights were applicable only in Libya or in the African territories and not elsewhere. Moreover, it was clarified that the roles attributed to the indigenous were no higher than those of the metropolis; consequently, a native of Libya would never have enjoyed any status or standing comparable to that of a citizen of the metropolis. (Ambrosini, 1939: 5-12).⁷¹

The Decree on the special citizenship was sponsored by Balbo also abroad. According to an article present in the volume of May 1939, during the visit of Balbo in Egypt, the Governor reaffirmed the contentment of the Libyan citizens and the interest of the Regime to preserve and increase the Arab population. In fact, the demographic colonisation of Italians was portrayed as a positive outcome for Libyans, since new villages were built for them. The moral and social elevation was a point particularly highlighted from Balbo.

In this article, strictly correlated to the previous one, it is possible to notice the pride that the regime displayed for having granted these rights to Libyan citizens:

Il Maresciallo Balbo ha illustrato dapprima il valore e le caratteristiche della speciale cittadinanza italiana concessa ai musulmani della Libia, i quali si sono dimostrati pienamente riconoscenti di questa originale disposizione e legge che li eleva ad un grado di superiore dignità sociale col rispetto assoluto dello statuto personale e quindi con assoluta loro tranquillità di coscienza.⁷² (*LIBIA*, 1939: 18-19)⁷³.

⁷¹ Ambrosini, G. (1939). Ragioni e carattere della grande riforma civile in Libia. *LIBIA*, pp. 5-12.

⁷² First, the Marshal Balbo illustrated the value and the characteristics of the Italian Special Citizenship granted to the Muslims of Libya, who demonstrated deeply grateful of this original disposition and law that elevate them to a higher social status with the absolute respect of the Personal Statute, and for this reason, with a completely clear conscience.

⁷³ *LIBIA* (1939). Libia ed Egitto pp. 18-19.

However, the rights were restricted both geographically and internally, in fact, Libyans could only participate in activities planned for them and within a defined area.

Additionally, these acts promoted by the regime in these articles did not mention that the principal objective of the Decree-law of 1939 was to confirm the separation between the Metropolitan citizens and the ones of the colony. The law decree repealed the Personal Statute that granted the rights of the indigenous regarding their religion and private life (civil rights) in support of obtaining citizenship. For this reason, the access to the Italian citizenship was unfeasible (Renucci, 2005: 1-17).

This measure does not correspond to the rhetoric used by the magazine *LIBIA*, in fact, the interest of the government was to portray itself as the suitable coloniser for a Muslim colony especially at an international lever, however the acceptance of the cultural and religious aspect was never implemented.

Even if in 1935 Balbo implemented private institutes for Arabs, where it was possible to study their language and religion, this was a political strategy, firstly to maintain the Libyan population in the territory and prevent them to go to study in other colonies such as Egypt; secondly, the consensus of the Arab population was essential, especially after all the years of resistance (Mustafa, 2018: 1-19).

Correlated to this theme, in the volume dedicated to the death of Balbo of 1940, it is written an article dedicated Islamic politics. This article has the objective to resume the gesture of the Governor in the colony towards the Arab population.

According to the article, after the reconquest of Libya, it was necessary to determine which was the policy to adopt, in fact it is highlighted that, it was not possible to erase the contrast between Italians and indigenous during the early years of the Italian presence in the region. Moreover, the fascist objective was to create an innovative model of colonisation, not like the other European powers.

The article encompasses the several phases of Balbo's policies towards Muslims.

In December 1934, Balbo became the Governor of Libya, and his intent was to demonstrate the willingness of Italians in helping the Arab population, especially after the Senussi uprising. His strategy consisted of emphasising the qualities and similarities that the Libyan population had such as being excellent farmers, obedient and respectful towards the government and the religious authorities.

In 1936, with the arrival of Mussolini, Balbo desired to portray the indigenous as faithful companions for the Italians, especially during the war in East Africa and, if in the past they had been contrary to the Italian domain, they comprehended the advantages of it.

Moreover, the article repeats the juridical advantages after the Decree of 9th of January of 1939, that consisted of annexing the 4 Libyan provinces, excluding the Sahara Desert, to the Kingdom of Italy. Another juridical advantage reported was the Libyan special citizenship, in this case it is written that it did not include the Jews population, this probably due to the racial laws emitted between the late 1930s and the 1940s.

It is attested that Balbo desired to reconcile the necessities and rights of the metropolitan Italians and the ones of the indigenous Muslims. For this reason, one of the fundamental pillars of his policy was to maintain the Muslim personal and inheritance law based on the Islamic religion (Ambrosini, 1940: 30-32).⁷⁴ However, this prevented the Libyan population to have the same rights as the Italians, indeed, the Special Citizenship was valid just in the Libyan territory or the other African colonies.

This renowned perspective that Balbo adopted might have been a strategy to obtain more resources for the colony, demonstrating that it was a suitable investment and that in the future great things could have been achieved.

This article summarises what already expressed in the other articles of the magazine, and as stated by the historians these measures convey only a partial truth.

In conclusion, what is proposed by the regime in the magazine *LIBIA* describe the measures implemented in the colony according to what was suitable for the Regime, meanwhile, other aspects highlighted by the historiography are hidden.

The indigenous, especially their consensus was essential to maintain the façade of the good coloniser and portray abroad the Fascist Regime as capable of controlling another country. However, these measures that should have helped the local population to be part of Italy as soon as were implemented, they were subject to restrictions.

In this case, the historiography demonstrated a discrepancy between the information delivered by the magazine and the facts.

⁷⁴ Ambrosini, G. (1940). La politica islamica. *LIBIA*, pp. 30-32.

3.6 Women in the colonies

Mussolini on several occasions expressed his thoughts regarding the duties and expectations of the Regime towards women.

His opinion can be perceived in his discourse of May 15th, 1925, when the fascist women demanded the administrative vote.

Indeed, he criticised the fact that women were increasingly abandoning their domestic duties to pursue careers such as jurisprudence or medicine.

Furthermore, he made no secret of his hostility towards feminism, which, in his view, attributed qualities to women that they did not possess. From this perspective, women's roles were strictly predetermined by the Regime and that even on occasions such as summer camps in the colony, these roles were to be reproduced, likely also to educate the indigenous populations of the colony to adhere to a very specific standard of how women should behave.

Additionally, in his discourse, there is a tribute to Italian women, who have always asked for little and have always been very dutiful in their roles as mothers and wives (Mussolini, 1925).

The right to the administrative vote requested by fascist women was given in 1925, just under specific conditions: up to 25 years old, able to write and read; and only a small portion of them possessed these characteristics. Moreover, the next year, the right to vote was abolished; for this reason, it was a right that could never be enforced.

However, the vision of the Regime towards women changed during the years.

Initially, the role that women were invested in was of a domestic, wife and mother, necessary for the augmentation of the Italian population. For this reason, women that were actively present in the fascist party were removed from the political life.

After the outbreak of the Ethiopian War in 1936, the role of women changed according to the acquisition of new territories.

The scope of this reshaping of the women's role is due to the necessity of preserving the Italian race and avoid promiscuity with indigenous (Cagnolati, 2023: 207-214) (De Grazia, 1993:204).

According to the principles of Giovanni Gentile, women could not exceed in the scholastic field, since their imperfection was in their spirits, for this reason, several numbers of Decrees were published in order to dismiss women from important positions in schools but also public administration.

According to the Decree Law of the 5th of December 1938, women had to face a discriminatory legislation that prevented them from continuing their careers or being hired and their positions were subsequently filled by men.

However, even after this legislation, the augmentation of the population and the pressure of the families, augmented women's subscription to schools (De Grazia, 1993:210-213;231).

The article by Aroldo Canella discusses the role of women under fascism, also considering the activities prepared for them in the Libyan colony.

In 1938, a summer camp was organised in the Oasis of Tripoli, Sidi-el-Hani. This place was divided into three sections: Campo Roma, Campo Padova and Campo Milano; and chosen due to its proximity to the central areas, which were essential for food and tourist transportation.

The activities were mainly domestic, such as how to cook, clean, hygiene, first aid and the history of Libya; also, their physical education was specifically for women.

These types of camps were mainly educational; indeed, in the article, the biopolitical role of the woman as a wife and a mother is emphasised (Canella, 1938:38-41).⁷⁵



Figure 22: Fascist woman cleaning her tent, LIBIA, 1938.

The colonial camps provided specific courses to educate women to the difficulties of the colonies' life.

Initially, these activities were organised in Italy, afterwards Libya was the first attempt to the colonial life, additionally, the camps presented a military education since practices such as the flag-raising ceremony and salute to the Duce were present.

The book that explained the formation in the camp was called “Nozioni coloniali per le organizzazioni femminili del partito nazionale⁷⁶”, divided in four sections. The first one was

⁷⁵ Canella, A. (1938). *La Libia e la donna Fascista*. LIBIA, pp. 38-41.

⁷⁶ Colonialist notions for women's organisations of the National party.

dedicated to the history of the colonies, in which the expansionist objective of Italy was emphasised, especially from the demographic perspective; secondly the geographical and economical aspects of the colonies were described to enlist the natural resources and the infrastructural projects.

Thirdly, the defence of the race was another subject of study, taking as references pseudoscientific theories, specified in the second chapter of the thesis.

Lastly, the hygiene and healthcare were essential for the life in the colony, especially due to all the infectious disease, these skills were also necessary to promote the civilising mission (Cagnolati, 2023: 217-228).

Another article connected to the role of women is present in the volume of September 1937 dedicated to Arab Feminism.

The definition that the Regime attributed was: “Il ‘femminismo arabo’ deve invece essere inteso come un sano movimento di elevazione della donna araba, diretto a svilupparne e perfezionarne le doti intellettuali, spirituali, morali ed a migliorare nei limiti del possibile le condizioni di vita, mettendola sempre più in grado di adempiere ai suoi doveri⁷⁷”.

Indeed, the definition of Feminism was strictly connected to the idea that Fascism had about women, therefore, the role of the Arab woman was necessarily confined to the domestic sphere.

Initially, the description of the Arab women in the books were captivating and erotic, however, this colonial literature was far from the reality. There were the Bedouin women that had more freedom due to their traditions, but the other Arab women had few contacts with the outside world.

One of the main objectives of the fascist politics was to educate women from an early age, for this reason, schools and craft courses were established.

Moreover, another important aspect was correlated to the hygienic conditions. Indeed, a lot of children died at an early age due to infections. To circumvent the problem, polygamy became an established practice in Arab culture, however, it was rejected by the Christian culture.

During fascism, even though Arab women had to respect their domestic sphere and desire a clean and beautiful house, a European fashion trend of that time imposed on them, they needed to continue their education even after the age of ten or twelve, when they were withdrawn from school to be arranged in marriage.

⁷⁷ Arab Feminism must be intended as a healthy movement concerning the elevation of the Arab women, with the objective of develop and perfecting intellectual, spiritual, moral capabilities and to ameliorate as far as possible their conditions of life, rendering them able to accomplish their duties.

The role of the Italian women consisted of approaching Arab women and helping them to continue their education, for example through books, which were selected by the Fascist Regime (Valori, 1937:23-28).⁷⁸

The summer camp was an educational and propagandistic tool; for this reason, the university students and children needed to participate in these organised activities in the colony. Indeed, as reported in the magazine, Libya also hosted in 1938 sports camps for children of Derna and Benghazi.

Derna hosted the children of Italian colonisers of the Gebel region, a territory that was claimed as in great expansion.

Meanwhile, in the mobile camp of Benghazi, the university students participated in these camps for their political and sports training, visiting also historical sites.

Other organised activities are also reported in the periodical, such as car races (*LIBIA*, 1938: 42-45).⁷⁹

For the graduated women, fascism promoted an active participation in the colonies, in fact, the scientific degrees such as chemistry, infrastructure, medicine and much more were an essential contribute to the development of the territory and infrastructures, moreover, they were the demonstration of modernity (Cagnolati, 2023: 228).

To conclude this section, the perception of the role of the woman under the Fascist perspective changed during the years, especially after the acquisition of the overseas' territories.

However, the principal role was of sustainment of the man, in fact in the colonies they were needed mainly to avoid promiscuity with local women, for this reason, their role was limited to the necessities of the regime.

Arab women did not have freedom because of their origins and because of the regime's dictates regarding the role they were expected to play in society.

Also in this case, specific roles were attributed to the participants in the colony, forming the perfect reality for the Regime.

These articles demonstrate that the role of women was essential for promoting the patriotic concept of *Madrepatria* in the Regime. The word *Patria* connect the present population to their ancestors, meanwhile the word *Madrepatria* reinforce this concept connecting the territory to the responsibilities of women towards their nation.

⁷⁸ Valori, F. (1937). *Femminismo Arabo*. *LIBIA* pp. 23-28.

⁷⁹ *LIBIA* (1938). *Colonie estive sport e campi nella Libia Orientale e Straordinario incremento del turismo in Libia*. Pp. 42-25.

Procreation is a central concept and reinforce itself if connected to the necessities of the Regime to build a strong population for the Empire (Cordin, 2002: 23-26).

The Fascist propaganda mentioned the willingness of women in participating to these activities for the colonies, demonstrating their loyalty to the Regime, however, this loyalty was desired or imposed?

This question was tackled by scholars, in fact, one feature of the authoritarian nature of the Regime was transforming the society and rendering the citizens active participant.

However, this feature contradicts the strict mindset that fascism had towards the feminine figure that was portrayed as static and keen to sacrifice for others.

This perception changed according to the difficulties that the Regime had, especially during the periods of War. In this case, women were essential for the colonisation process and should have been active participants.

Still, in the remote parts of Italy, especially in the South, women were not participant to the public life and were ignoring the necessities of the Regime. For this reason, their loyalty was not a conscious choice but a habit to accept without questioning.

Acknowledging this problematic, fascism attempted to promote the participation of women in the party, even paying them (Dittrich-johansen, 2002: 125-145).

To conclude, the role of women is not constant during the Fascist period, but it was essential especially regarding their participation in the colonies to preserve the Italian ethnicity.

As it is possible to state, their well-being was not considered at all, indeed their biopolitical role was the one that mattered for the Regime.

To conclude, this third chapter encompasses the investment in the colony, made especially during the period of Italo Balbo as the Governor of Libya.

The main thematics highlighted - tourism and architecture; race; women; demographic colonisation - were presented by the Regime through propagandistic media. For the thesis, the propagandistic magazine *LIBIA* was analysed.

The central message delivered was that the Fascist Government was able to manage the colony, highlighting the positive aspects such as the presence of Roman ruins or the proximity of the indigenous with the mediterranean culture.

Indeed, the Regime proclaimed itself as the bearer of the sword of Islam, demonstrating the profound respect of the local's culture.

However, this interpretation has been challenged by historiography. Scholars argue that the alleged cultural ties between ancient Roman Italy and Libya served primarily as a

justification for colonial expansion, allowing the imperial conquest to be reframed as a process of “peaceful penetration” rather than an act of military domination.

Moreover, as demonstrated by scholars, the interest towards the indigenous was minimal, based on the necessities of the Fascist plans.

The demographic colonisation process changed the perspective from which the colony was seen and became officially part of the Empire. The new investments in the hydraulic system and residencies were especially for the Italian colonisers.

Even if propaganda spread the information that also Arabs benefitted from this process, the studies demonstrated that the Regime desired to maintain a distance between Italians and locals, not allowing the integration of the latter through the building of separated areas.

In this process of segregation, women owned a pivotal role in preventing racial mixing.

Although they were excluded from the public life, after the Ethiopian war, women became the central tool of the racial policies. For this reason, they were sent to colonies to prevent men from promiscuous conduct with local women.

While the role of women evolved throughout the Fascist period, scholars have noted that the perception of them remained fundamentally unchanged. They were valued primarily for their function in serving the *Madrepatria* and as a tool to accomplish state objectives, rather than being recognized as individuals with agency and autonomy.

After twenty years of conflict, integration proved difficult to be achieved, and Fascist policies in the colony ultimately highlighted the distance between Italy and Libya, despite propaganda portraying a much closer relationship. Although the regime sought to emphasize the proximity and unity of the two societies, the period of Italian rule was too brief to produce a substantial and lasting impact.

CONCLUSION

The thesis encompassed the Italian colonial presence in Libya since its harbour in the late nineteenth century until its institutional consolidation under fascism, analysing the propagandistic, ideological and racial dimensions of this colonial venture that has been minimized in Italian collective memory. Across three chapters, the study has sought to demonstrate that the Italian presence in Libya was not a pacific penetration, but an imperialistic occupation.

In fact, it was neither a civilized mission nor an act of modernization, but a violent process of domination shaped by nationalist ambitions, racial ideology and systematic propaganda.

The first chapter focuses on the military actions and achievements in Libya. It begins by examining the reasons behind the conquest, including unemployment and the large-scale emigration of the Italian population abroad.

In 1911, Giolitti announced the invasion of Libya, declaring war to the Ottoman Empire. The Italian government did not anticipate that, even after defeating the Turkic army, the Libyan resistance would resist so long. In fact, the conquest of Libya was finally declared in 1932, after 21 years of war.

To dismantle the local resistance, the fascist government adopted violent and strict policies towards the indigenous population, using concentration camps as a tool to gain control over the area.

Afterwards, this cruel strategy adopted by Governor Graziani will be presented as the only effective method for purifying the Libyans from the influence of the Ottoman Empire.

These episodes for a long time have been minimized, or even ignored by the Italian memory, for this reason it is still pivotal to highlight the gap between the rhetoric of peaceful penetration and the reality of colonial violence.

The second chapter attempts to examine the ideological framework behind this occupation and why the Italian colonialism was sustained. The nature of the Regime is highlighted, reviling its totalitarian feature, according to this vision several policies were adopted towards the Italians and the indigenous population. Since childhood, Italians were educated to differentiate themselves from the African population, using as a ground pseudoscientific theory formulated by anthropologist of the time that visited the colony, as an example Cipriani.

Simultaneously, the policies adopted by the regime towards the Libyans excluded them to be part of the Empire as citizens, however, the rhetoric adopted by the Regime was to proclaim itself as the bearer of the sword of Islam as a demonstration of cultural respect. This aspect is contradictory, since the indigenous were portrayed as culturally and juridically inferior.

Additionally, in this chapter is reported the myth of Italians as good colonizers, justifying in this way the actions undertaken.

The third chapter analyses the periodical *LIBIA*, used as a propagandistic tool to describe the Libyan colony at a national and international level.

This primary source offers an understanding of how the colony was portrayed and which principal investments were planned.

Italo Balbo, the founder of the periodical had a vision of how the colony could have been included in the Italian Empire, however this outcome needed an incredible number of resources.

His plan, as testified by the magazine was to install Italians in the colony, and render it productive place, in fact even if the principal sector of investment was the touristic sector, also the agricultural one was relevant.

The principal intervention in the colony had the objective to render Libya appealing for tourists, for this reason the restauration of the roman ruins and the building of new infrastructure were promoted.

However, to render the territory habitable for the Italians new modern villages were constructed and investments in hydraulic system and the agricultural sector were made.

In the periodical, the presence of indigenous is not often mentioned. In fact, the articles dedicated to them had the objective to demonstrate the Italian superiority and ability in managing the colony.

The position of women is also mentioned; they were invested with a biopolitical function to preserve the “Italian race”, which was regarded as an instrument of the colonial project.

Even though the periodical *LIBIA* promoted an idyllic depiction of life in the colony, the efforts implemented were still insufficient.

Libya was proclaimed as the nineteenth region of the Empire in 1939, however the treatment reserved to the locals demonstrated otherwise. After 21 years of battles, the presence of Italians on the region was still too little to change the perception that the indigenous had towards the occupation.

Moreover, the respect to the Libyan culture was a façade since the population was treated as racially inferior, preventing the integration.

To conclude, the invasion of 1911 and the discrepancies between Italians and Libyans created a hostile climate in the colony. The image shared by the Regime was a staged representation to convince the national and international audience of the control that the fascist government exercised over the colony. However, this portrayal differed a lot from the actual conditions in the colony.

As scholars demonstrated, the reality behind this narrative attests the propagandistic ability of the Regime but not the efficient nature of their politics.

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SUMMARY

L'impresa italiana in Libia rappresenta un importante momento della storia coloniale dell'Italia.

Dopo l'Unificazione italiana la necessità di possedere una colonia divenne uno degli obiettivi principali della politica nazionale. Ciò fu dovuto sia dalle crescenti pressioni del movimento nazionalista, sia dalla volontà di trovare una soluzione per i problemi sociali ed economici del paese, tra cui l'emigrazione di massa verso l'estero e la carenza di opportunità lavorative.

Inoltre, la costruzione di un impero coloniale era un elemento essenziale per consentire all'Italia di affermarsi come potenza imperiale e di porsi sullo stesso piano delle altre nazioni europee, già impegnate nel processo di espansione verso i territori africani.

Questa tesi si propone di ricostruire l'occupazione della Libia concentrandosi sull'analisi delle fonti primarie al fine di valutare se, come sostenuto dalla propaganda fascista, la colonia fosse integrata nell'impero o se le ricostruzioni storiografiche riportino una realtà più articolata.

Il primo capitolo si concentra sulla storia fattuale, dall'inizio della presenza italiana in Libia nel diciannovesimo secolo fino alla sua conquista avvenuta durante il periodo Fascista.

Difatti, dopo la dichiarazione di guerra formulata da Giolitti nei confronti dell'Impero Ottomano nel 1911, la conquista non fu semplice.

Inizialmente, si pensò ad una guerra veloce ed invece, l'esercito italiano si ritrovò a combattere diverse cruenti battaglie.

Oltre ai soldati dell'Impero Ottomano, l'Italia si ritrovò a dover affrontare anche la resistenza libica, specialmente nei territori interni e desertici, difficili da raggiungere.

Difatti, anche dopo il trattato di pace di Ouchy firmato dai rappresentanti diplomatici nel 1912, la resistenza libica rese difficile il mantenimento del potere. Il rappresentante della resistenza fu Omar al-Mukhtar, che riuscì a guidare la guerriglia grazie alla conoscenza del territorio.

Una volta che il regime fascista prese il potere anche le politiche nella colonia iniziarono a cambiare, difatti, la soluzione che il governo fascista adottò fu quella di instaurare una forte repressione nei confronti degli indigeni.

Essi furono portati in campi di concentramento dove dovettero affrontare la violenza dei soldati italiani e le difficili condizioni di vita.

Nel 1931, nel campo di concentramento di Soluch, ci fu l'esecuzione del leader al-Mukhtar, ponendo così fine alla resistenza.

Dopo questo episodio, nel gennaio 1932 fu annunciata la riconquista della Libia da parte del Regime Fascista.

Il secondo capitolo di questa tesi comprende tematiche centrali sulle quali il regime fascista legittimò il suo potere nel territorio libico.

Uno dei motivi per i quali si desiderò l'espansione coloniale fu quello di risolvere problemi sociali ed economici che portarono ad una emigrazione di massa verso l'estero della popolazione italiana.

Secondo l'ideologia fascista, l'Italia doveva diventare una potenza imperiale e non poteva permettersi la perdita dei propri cittadini, inoltre, essendo una nazione moderna, aveva il dovere di civilizzare le altre nazioni definite arretrate.

Al fine di costruire questo concetto di potenza imperiale, il regime fascista basò le sue politiche sulla differenziazione di razza.

Specialmente durante il periodo Fascista, lo studio della razza divenne centrale al fine di giustificare la superiorità italiana rispetto a quella dei coloni.

I bambini vennero educati sin da subito a differenziarsi, specialmente esteticamente, dalle popolazioni indigene.

I diritti e doveri dei libici vennero formulati proprio in base a queste differenziazioni razziali, difatti, ad essi fu conferita una cittadinanza inferiore a quella metropolitana e qualsiasi diritto era limitato al territorio africano ed alla sezione dedicata solo ai libici.

La propaganda coloniale aveva come obiettivo principale quello di sviluppare negli italiani una coscienza coloniale e di attirare visitatori verso i territori dell'oltremare, per questa ragione le colonie erano spesso descritte come luoghi esotici e suggestivi.

Il terzo capitolo ha come obiettivo quello di analizzare la rivista LIBIA, istituita da Italo Balbo nel 1935, al fine di evidenziare le discrepanze tra la narrazione del regime e la recente storiografia.

Il periodico veniva pubblicato con cadenza mensile ed esso riportava tutto ciò che avveniva in colonia: le riscoperte archeologiche delle rovine romane, gli investimenti infrastrutturali, la vita di colonia, le nuove strutture turistiche ed altri eventi sponsorizzati dal regime.

L'obiettivo di questo periodico era di comunicare i progress compiuti nella colonia e le grandi gesta del regime sia alla propria nazione che all'estero. Difatti, uno degli obiettivi principali era quello di dimostrare la propria supremazia a livello internazionale.

In questa tesi, le principali tematiche evidenziate sono: il turismo e l'architettura, la colonizzazione demografica, la razza e la cittadinanza ed il ruolo della donna nella colonia. Il turismo nella colonia era una delle principali attrattive, inizialmente negli anni '20 esso era ancora spartano, mentre, dagli anni '30 si assiste ad una progressiva modernizzazione delle strutture turistiche, hotel di lusso vengono costruiti e molte iniziative vengono sponsorizzate.

Una delle principali attrazioni era la crociera che costeggiava la Via del Littorio, costruita per volontà di Balbo ed inaugurata da Mussolini nel 1937 come simbolo di una nuova Era. Inoltre, un'altra attrazione turistica era la visita ai siti archeologici romani, che avevano anche l'obiettivo di dimostrare il passato comune tra Italia e Libia sotto l'Impero Romano. In questo contesto, il turismo e l'architettura vennero utilizzati come strumenti di propaganda per legittimare la 'pacifica penetrazione' fascista.

Nel 1938 il processo di colonizzazione demografica iniziò ed alcune famiglie di italiani precedentemente scelte furono installate nella colonia.

I villaggi costruiti avevano tutti i comfort necessari e si presentavano come strutture moderne.

Anche per gli arabi vennero costruiti dei villaggi, soprattutto per limitare il nomadismo, condizione specialmente presente nelle zone desertiche.

Gli articoli presenti nella rivista LIBIA promuovono frequentemente l'idea che la presenza italiana abbia migliorato le condizioni di vita della popolazione locale. Eppure, tale rappresentazione non è congrua alla storiografia. Infatti, l'interesse nei confronti delle popolazioni libiche era funzionale alla costruzione dell'immagine del buon colonizzatore. Nella pratica, le politiche adottate dal regime continuavano ad essere razziste, fondate sulla segregazione e sulla separazione tra colonizzato e colonizzatore.

Per preservare la separazione tra le due etnie, la donna divenne parte integrante di questo progetto contro il meticciato.

Secondo la visione biopolitica del regime, la donna aveva la responsabilità non solo di contribuire alla crescita demografica della nazione ma anche quella di limitare le interazioni tra uomini italiani e donne indigene, prevenendo così la nascita di figli meticci.

Al fine di preparare le donne alla vita di colonia vennero istituiti dei campi coloniali che avevano come obiettivo quello di educarle a sopportare le difficoltà che avrebbero potuto incontrare, come ad esempio scarse condizioni igieniche.

Per concludere, dall'invasione del 1911 alla successiva occupazione fascista, il clima in Libia non era pacifico. Pur facendo parte dell'Impero italiano, ciò che venne promosso dal

regime fascista fu frutto di un'abile strategia di propaganda che idealizzava la realtà ed i risultati delle politiche coloniali.

Di conseguenza, la colonia si configurò come un palcoscenico tramite cui il regime intendeva dimostrare e consolidare la propria immagine di potenza imperiale.