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The Fascist Regime in Rome conceived of millions of Italians residing abroad as part of the wider Italian nation. The Italianità - the Italian character - was considered an essential component of both Italians at home and abroad. Abroad, the new generations of children of Italian immigrants were the main target of Fascist propaganda, although the majority had never been to Italy and their links to the Italian culture were fading. Fascism tried to obtain their consent through the enrollment in paramilitary organizations – Balilla and Avanguardisti – as well as by the offer of free journeys to Italy to reside in Summer camps [SLIDE 2]. Also, government, parochial, and lay ethnic schools abroad were considered instruments to indoctrinate young Italians. According to the Fascist mindset, these schools had to be aggressive in strategic locations such as Tunisia, Malta, and Egypt. Especially in Tunisia – a French protectorate – schools taught the youngsters about the ‘inevitability’ of the country’s annexation to Italy. [SLIDE 3] Generally speaking, the instructor was conceived as a ‘pioneer,’ a ‘soldier,’ a ‘combatant,’ and a ‘missionary.’ The preservation of the Italian language was a priority and a major component of the Italian identity of Italian immigrants.

The political use of history and the role of propaganda in Fascist textbooks and curricula in Italy have been extensively studied by scholars. This essay aims to analyze the
contents, the political messages and values contained in Fascist textbooks published for Italian schools abroad.

In the early Twenties, Italian liberal governments first comprehended the necessity to publish textbooks for younger generations who were being progressively assimilated in adopted countries. In the first years of power, the Fascist regime did not radically change the contents of these textbooks. Yet, at the very beginning of the Thirties, Rome decided to establish unique State textbooks for primary schools abroad [SLIDE 4]. These books were intended to be a cornerstone of educational indoctrination of new generations both in Italy and abroad.

These textbooks promoted a political message from the first grade up to the fifth, hailing “values” of Fascist civic religion such as *Patria*, family, comradeship, sacrifice, honor, and the cult of Mussolini. [SLIDE 5]. Figurative illustrations of *Balilla* doing the Fascist salute and fierce imagines and speeches of *Il Duce* supported the writings in cheering Fascist ideology.

Besides these books, the Regime published a number of monographs intended for schools abroad. Some were specifically designed for young paramilitaries abroad, but most were monographs published by well known Italian publishers as SEI, Bemporad and Mondadori. [SLIDE 6] Authors included the historian Gioacchino Volpe and the pedagogic writer Giuseppe Fanciulli. All these books largely abused historical accuracy for political uses, and technically exploited ‘text-tales’, that is, invented stories which supported Fascist ideology. For instance, many books tell the story of ‘Mimmo’, an
imaginary young kid residing abroad, whose life stories had to provoke feelings of identification among youngsters abroad. Many pretext-tales often claimed the rhetoric of the “return to the mother land” from the countries of immigration. Imaginary kids dreamed of flying over the oceans and mountains to visit Italy, described as a happy wonderful garden for its beauties [SLIDE 7]. Therefore these stories foretold a “manifest destiny” for the youngsters’ return to Italy. Consequently, it is possible to make out a Fascist pedagogical design toward the specific ‘necessities’ of ethnic Italians abroad. Also, Italy was depicted as a warm mother, a shelter for discriminated emigrants, and a safe haven, protected by the Alps and by native soldiers. Conversely, foreign countries were described as alien lands where Italians were forced to assimilate; also, they had to take care of themselves through the establishment of a vigilant community led by the Italian consulate.

In the Liberal age and the early years of Mussolini’s power, books for schools abroad refrained from an aggressive narration. In 1924, Mussolini authorized textbooks for Italians abroad which promoted love for the mother land without offending other nationalities. These books provided a lovely picture of foreign countries where many Italians had emigrated. Brazil and Argentina, in particular, were described as lands where Italians could find easy integration and wealth. As a consequence, the immigrants could contribute to the improvement of the adopted land, as well as the mother land through the purchase of Italian goods. Also, the Italianità had NOT to be applauded in nationalistic terms.
Later, Fascism imposed its imperialism. War was described as a “sad necessity” to be waged anytime discrepancies existed among wealthy and disadvantaged countries. This militaristic ideology was linked to the concept of *Patria*, in Fascist’s ideology a fundamental reference for every Italian in the world. **[SLIDE 8]**

In books, ‘history’ was a keyword to invoke the *italianità* and keep immigrants bound to the mother land.

Two historical subjects were particularly pertinent to demonstrate the supposed superiority of Italian civilization:

1. The First World War and its supposed linkage with Fascism, and in this regard the cult of Mussolini was fundamental
2. A historical parallel between famous Italians of past centuries and emigrants who left Italy between the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In these books the First World War was consecrated as the national sacrifice, whereas combatants were exemplas of generosity and morality. Many Italians residing abroad were praised for serving in the Italian army, although – [QUOTING Volpe] “many never saw Italy, neither spoke Italian; but felt inside the voice of the [Italian] blood” [UNQUOTE].

**[SLIDE 9]** King Victor Emanuel III was pictured as a strong, brave, and wise commander-in-chief. Significantly, in one of many tale-texts, Mimmo hears amazing stories of the Italian war in a club of ex combatants and runs to his school to recount them to his teacher and classmates. Books’ rhetoric linked the First World War to the origin of
Fascism in Italy and its annihilation of Communism. Therefore, the Fascist revolution had to be considered as a natural aftermath of the war and its values.

The idea of greatness of the First World War was not invented by Fascists. Books printed during the Liberal age already presented war as national achievement. Yet, Fascism made this message a fundamental part of its ideology. In 1928, a book approached youngsters abroad declaring [QUOTE] “Italy does not ask for your life just yet, but if it should become necessary you will sacrifice yourself fighting on battle fields; to be a worthy son you must behave as a good Italian day by day and not do anything that may offend the Great Mother [UNQUOTE].”

[SLIDE 10] In Fascist textbooks, young Italians abroad liked dressing up in the balilla uniform, saluting the Italian flag, engaging in sporting activities and obeying the chiefs. The dream was to become a soldier in order to fight on behalf of the mother country and achieve war medals.

The cult of Mussolini was strictly connected to the issues of Patria and war. Generally speaking, Mussolini’s figure – rather than Fascism ideology – was the key to ensure the consent of immigrants. The majority may not have had any ideological belief in Fascist ideology, but believed Mussolini to have been the first Italian statesman to obtain respect internationally and to have taken care of their condition as Italians outside of Italy. Indeed, Fascism based much of its propaganda abroad on the cult of Il Duce. This rhetoric massively entered into books for young Italians abroad. Mussolini was the apostle and the martyr of war, as well as a son of grass-roots people, and was called by
God to save Italy from Communism and lead Italy to greatness. Even his family was instrumental for the purpose of propaganda: his mother was a lovely housewife in a poor but dignified, honest and debt free family; his father was the hard breadwinner who loved his family and culture. The image of Mussolini as emigrant in Switzerland was addressed to youngsters abroad. Like many of his country-fellows, *Il Duce* had lived the immigrant drama and suffered nostalgia for his country; furthermore, Mussolini worked hard and defended the name of Italy whenever necessary. He was pictured as the father of every child residing abroad whom he wished to bring to Italy to meet personally.

Another major historical issue in books for young Italians abroad was the parallel between prominent Italians of the past centuries and emigrants who left Italy in late 19th and early 20th century. [SLIDE 11] The aim was to demonstrate the greatness of Italy during the centuries and Italian contributions to the world civilization. In the Liberal textbooks, the idea of exporting the Italian civilization was already evident. The capacity for work of Italians was emphasized, whereas emigration was pictured as a necessity to allow the country to survive. Italians had by nature an adventurous spirit which spanned from the Ancient Roman age, through the Seafaring Republics to the Italian sailors in the Modern age. Among them, Christopher Columbus was the most important because of his discovery of the American continent. Emigrants in 19th and 20th centuries were the last expression of this spirit and they continued the role of civilizer as their ancestors had before them. Their work had been fundamental to the economic growth of countries like Tunisia, Egypt and the Americas.
Fascism widened this message. All textbooks talked about the existence of an Italian spirit to discover and challenge the unknown. Moreover, Italian civilization came where foreigners had preserved barbaric lifestyles. As a consequence, Italian emigrants were compared to the Ancient Romans or the exiled intellectuals of the Italian ‘Risorgimento.’

Again, the Italian capacity for work was particularly emphasized: for instance, Italians were said to have massively contributed to the colossal construction of the Assuan dike, in Egypt. Fascist propaganda argued this contribution was barely recognized abroad. Foreigners were not grateful to Italians but jealous. Consequently, Fascists claimed the right to purchase lands from some “wealthy and powerful countries.” In particular, Fascists pointed to France in respect of its protectorate in Tunisia, a country where Italian laborers had massively contributed to the local prosperity. Conversely, French employers sat back and enjoyed the achievements of the Italian workers. It seems clear how this narration supported Italian imperialistic ambitions in the Mediterranean basin.

In Conclusion

Fascist efforts were hardly effective. By reading some essays and exams in Italian schools abroad, forms of Fascist indoctrination are evident. For instance, in 1936 a 9-year old child in Boston [SLIDE 12] wrote about the “sacred right” of Italy to expand in the world at the expense of uncivilized Ethiopia.

However, a tiny minority of Italian children attended Italian schools abroad, and very few Avanguardisti returned to Italy to serve in Mussolini’s army. Conversely, young Italians abroad expressed loyalty to the adopted countries where they were born and had grown up; eventually, they totally supported their war efforts.