

Fascist Empire : Forging Italian Fascism through Imperialism and African Colonization :
1922-1936

By Nicholas Priolo

HIST 4360
Dr. Neill
April 5 2022

Introduction

Rome is often called ‘The Eternal City’ because Romans believed no matter what misfortunes fell upon them, Rome would continue to exist. Mussolini in his ascension to power and introduction of Fascism to the world looked to the Roman Empire as inspiration for a 20th century Italy. Months before Mussolini’s March on Rome in October of 1922, he would use the symbolic day of April 21, the birthday of Rome, to write an article in his *Il Popolo d’Italia* newspaper titled “Past and Future”. In this article Mussolini writes “Rome is our starting point and reference; it is our symbol, or if you will, our Myth. We dream of a Roman Italy—that is, an Italy wise, strong, disciplined, and imperial. Much of that immortal spirit of Rome is raised anew in Fascism”.¹ By 1922, the scramble for Africa had been completed by European nations and the imperial Italy that Mussolini dreamt of had little room to manoeuvre in. Italian colonization is most famously remembered for the conquest of Abyssinia, one of the last African areas not under European influence in 1937. Yet, upon Mussolini’s rise to power, the Fascist regime had inherited Liberal Italy’s colonies consisting of land in the Horn of Africa and the provinces of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. From 1922 to 1934, the Italian regime would enact a roman peace in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania uniting them to form Italian Libya. Also known as the pacification of Libya, this brutal campaign saw an estimated 100,000 people relocated to concentration camps, with 83,000 disappearing. Of the 83,000 people who disappeared 60,000-70,000 are thought to have died under the Fascist regime’s policies.²

Three of the generals who oversaw Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia, (Emilio De Bono, Rodolfo Graziani, and Pietro Badoglio) had been instrumental in the genocide of Libyans

¹ Mussolini , Benito. “Past and Future.” *Biblioteca Fascista*. Accessed March 14, 2022. <http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/past-and-future.html>.

² Ahmida, A.A. (2020). *Genocide in Libya: Shar, a Hidden Colonial History* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003031772> pg. 3

and pacification of the Italian colonies in northern Africa. The *Impero Italiano* never reached the size of the Roman Empire but to much Fascist delight, the doctrine of *Mare Nostrum* had taken shape with total Italian control of Libya. Mussolini in looking to Rome as a reference point was successful by controlling lands once held by the Romans in North Africa but the Romans had never been to Ethiopia, the target of 1930s Fascist expansion. Historians have noted a change in Fascist rhetoric and Mussolini's rule between the Decennale, first ten years of Fascist rule and the Ventennio, twenty years of being in power. This division of Fascist rule falls in line with Italian colonization, the pacification of Libya taking part in the first 10 years while the invasion of Ethiopia is in the second decade of power.

The popular Fascist propaganda phrase "*Il Duce ha sempre ragione*" emphasizes the flexibility Mussolini had in defining and developing Fascist doctrine and ideology. In 1932 Mussolini, with the help of Giovanni Gentile published the definition of Fascism, in it he wrote "If every age has its own characteristic doctrine, there are a thousand signs which point to Fascism as the characteristic doctrine of our time".³ *Il Duce* was *ragione* in that Fascism was the doctrine of his time and would come to define much of the interwar period and World War Two. Yet, it was also created by him and for him in his time and the actions taken by his regime are fundamental in understanding how Fascist ideology actively developed over a 20 year span. Thus, this paper will argue that Italian colonization in Africa during the Interwar Period was vital in carrying out Italian Fascist doctrine and keeping Fascism popular in Italy.

Literature on Italian Fascism and Colonialism

This paper situates itself within the context of both Italian Fascism and Italian colonization. Although Italian colonization took place during the Fascist rule most scholars have until recently kept the two topics separate while also tending to focus more on Italian

³ Mussolini, Benito. "What Is Fascism, 1932." Internet history sourcebooks. Accessed March 14, 2022. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/mussolini-fascism.asp>.

Fascism than Italian colonialism. The drastically different levels of attention scholars have placed on these two topics derives from the lack of public debate in Italy regarding its colonial past.⁴ After the fall of Fascism and end of World War Two most Italian scholars took an anti-Fascist stance to play down Italy's role in the Holocaust along with the other war crimes of the axis powers. This popular belief in Italy about the limited role of the Fascist regime has led to the myth that historians have coined the phrase *Italiani brava gente* (Italians are good people)⁵. This form of historical revisionism produced by Italian scholars has persisted ever since in the Italian narrative only to have recently been challenged. In a 2012 report by the Italian-German Historical Commission it states "Così come oggi non può sopravvivere in Germania il mito del corretto comportamento della Wehrmacht sul suolo italiano, altrettanto inaccettabile è la sopravvivenza del mito degli "italiani brava gente" in riferimento alla Seconda guerra mondiale"⁶. This translates to, just as the myth of the German army acting correctly on Italian soil does not survive in Germany, the myth of Italians were good people in World War Two is equally unacceptable.

Italian society in distancing themselves from the Fascist regime has also led to the neglect of analyzing Italian colonization as Italians have kept tight control of the archival information. In 1952, the Italian government commissioned the *Comitato per la documentazione dell'Opera dell'Italia in Africa* to document Italian activities in Africa. This committee of 24 scholars, mostly former governors and geographers of the colonies, took

⁴ Ghiglione, Giorgio. "As Europe Reckons with Racism, Italy Still Won't Confront Its Colonial Past." *Foreign Policy*, July 30, 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/30/as-europe-reckons-with-racism-italy-still-wont-confront-its-colonial-past/>.

⁵ Mingo, Christopher. *Hidden in Plain Sight : Italian Concentration Camps in Cyrenaica 1930-1933*. (Columbia University, 2021) p.8

⁶ Caprara, Maurizio. "'Italiani Brava Gente' Un Mito Da Sfatare Al Pari Della Wehrmacht." *Corriere della Sera*. *Corriere della Sera*, December 20, 2012. https://www.corriere.it/cultura/12_dicembre_20/caprara-italiani-brava-gente_9750095c-4aa7-11e2-bd66-a2d11be54edf.shtml.

until 1984 to complete 40 volumes, most of which ended up being hagiographies⁷ that glorified the officials who composed the documents. By the 1960's and early 1970's, two Italian historians Angelo del Boca and Giorgio Rochat began to write about Italy's invasion of Ethiopia and the suppression of Libyan resistance. As soon as they published their work they received backlash from the Italian academic world. In a 2006 interview, del Boca recalls how his work in the 1960's was received disastrously by the political world and that until the 1980's historiography on European colonization was approached as "the battle of civilization".⁸ In the same interview, del Boca notes how the archive of foreign ministry was inaccessible for years and that the state still makes it hard to investigate colonialism.⁹ In 1986, as a master's student Ali Ahmida travelled to Rome to conduct research about Libya in the archives. Within a week of being in Rome, Ahmida was told he could no longer research because he was of Libyan origin and that Italian scholars were barred from Libyan archives so the same applied for Libyans in Italian archives.¹⁰ However, that was a lie and shows to a greater extent the length and complicity that the Italian government has gone to, to silence its colonial past. Although scholars are now tackling Italian colonialism, much work is still to be done to counteract the decades of deafening silence and to reconcile Italian society with its colonial past.

Fascism since its inception has been the subject of vast amounts of scholarship. With Hitler's rise to power in 1933 and build up to War, Mussolini's Fascism would have to compete with the aspects of fascism found in Nazi ideology. The dictatorships of Mussolini and Hitler both rested on fascist principles leading scholars to attempt to create

⁷ Ghiglione, Giorgio. "As Europe Reckons with Racism, Italy Still Won't Confront Its Colonial Past."

⁸ Ginori, Anais. "Foibe, Gas e Rimozione: Gli Italiani in Etiopia." eddyburg, May 23, 2006.

⁹ Ginori, Anais. "Foibe, Gas e Rimozione: Gli Italiani in Etiopia." eddyburg, May 23, 2006.

¹⁰ Ahmida, A.A. (2020). *Genocide in Libya: Shar, a Hidden Colonial History* (1st ed.).

Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003031772> pg. 18

a generic definition of fascism. However, this generic definition strips fascism of its national and nationalistic characteristics that makes it possible to thrive in a given society. R.J.B. Bosworth, a leading historian and expert on Italian Fascism deliberately varies in his use of capitalizing fascism.¹¹ Bosworth argues that capitalized Fascism represents the original form of Fascism in Italy, while lower case fascism encompasses all other forms of fascism, a method in which this paper has and will continue to follow. Although generic definitions of fascism are troubled they still provide valuable information in outlining basic components of fascist ideology. Robert Paxton in his book *The Anatomy of Fascism* writes:

Fascism may be defined as a form of political behaviour marked by... compensatory cults of unity, energy and purity in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.¹² This definition contains characteristics exhibited by Mussolini's regime that are central to Fascist doctrine, especially the point of external expansion. Over the years many dictatorships have been classified as fascist but unlike in the Italian or German case, those regimes have rarely sought expansion. Two historians, Aristotle Kallis and MacGregor Knox have published books comparing Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, where they evaluate and attribute expansionism as the guiding factor for both domestic and foreign policy under the fascist regimes. With Kallis going as far as to claim "the unique expression of expansionism as both thought and action under the two regimes sets them apart from other quasi-fascist cases".¹³

¹¹ Bosworth, R. J. B. *Mussolini and the Eclipse of Italian Fascism: From Dictatorship to Populism*. Yale University Press, 2021 pg.3

¹² Paxton, Robert O. *The Anatomy of Fascism*. Vintage Books, 2005. pg.218

¹³ Aristotle A. Kallis, *Fascist Ideology: Territory and Expansionism in Italy and Germany, 1922-1945* (Routledge, 2000), pg.5

Scholars in studying Fascism have also noted that much continuity exists between the Liberal regime and institutions that existed and operated before Mussolini's rise to power. Knox argues that national myths and sentiment from Italian unification gave rise to the aspirations of the PNF and smoothed their road to power.¹⁴ Going further, Kallis points to the survival of nationalist ideology through the Great War and the war itself as providing new opportunities in which "fascism could effectively manipulate and radicalise... for future expansion".¹⁵ Italy's unification in 1861 made it a 'late-comer' to the acquisition of territory by European powers at a time where "territory became a sine qua non for the political ascendancy of states".¹⁶ This in addition to numerous other factors including a poor economy, left Italy to be labelled the 'Least of the Great Powers', a label not known to Mussolini but would come to be challenged by his attempted revival of the Roman Empire through Fascist doctrine.

In an effort to understand how Italian colonization in Africa influenced Fascist doctrine and was used to keep Fascism popular it is important to again examine continuity with Liberal Italy and to question the reasons for expansion into Ethiopia. To do this, this paper will be divided into three parts. Part one will focus on continuity with Liberal Italy, making the Italian Empire and Fascist ideology. Part two will examine the effect that pacifying Libya had on Fascist doctrine, while part three will investigate the reasoning for war with Ethiopia in 1935. The sources used for this paper will comprise of speeches and writing by Mussolini, correspondence and letters by the three generals (Emilio De Bono, Rodolfo Graziani and Pietro Badoglio) and newspapers both foreign and Italian covering Italian activities in Africa. Approaching Italian colonialism from an overhead view leaves no

¹⁴ Knox, MacGregor. *Common Destiny: Dictatorship, Foreign Policy, and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. pg.50

¹⁵ Aristotle A. Kallis, *Fascist Ideology* pg,26

¹⁶ Aristotle A. Kallis, *Fascist Ideology: pg.13*

room for the voice of the victims but allows for the investigation to focus on how Mussolini and other elites reacted to and acted through Italian colonization in Africa.

Looking to North Africa : Ritornando dove già fummo

Just as Italian society has neglected Fascism and its actions from their national discourse, they similarly neglect the colonization practices of the liberal regime that preceded Mussolini's dictatorship. Italian incursion into Africa began in the late 19th century and is mostly remembered for the disastrous Battle of Adwa that saw Italian defeat at the hands of the Ethiopians. However, as acquiring territory was synonymous with having a great empire, the Italians would in 1911, land an invasion force in north Africa to capture Libya from the Ottoman Empire¹⁷. By 1912, the Italians would best the Ottomans and take control of the coastal areas of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica but would then encounter resistance from anti-colonial forces organized by the Senussi people. This would be the situation that Mussolini would find 10 years later in 1922 when he took power. Mussolini thus inherited an empire from his liberal predecessors, but looked to reimagine the Italian Empire as a revival of the Roman Empire.

To reshape Italy into a new version of the Roman empire, Mussolini would introduce the cult of Romanità (Romaness) and would advocate foreign policy based on *Mare Nostrum* (Our sea). *Mare Nostrum* was a Roman name for the Mediterranean sea as their empire stretched across its waters. After Italian unification in 1861, many Italian nationalists attempted to revive the term as they envisioned a unified Italy as a reincarnation of the Roman Empire¹⁸. Here again it becomes evident that there is a continuity between liberal Italy and Fascist Italy, as Mussolini adopted the *Mare Nostrum* principle into his Fascist doctrine. With *Mare Nostrum* being a cornerstone of Fascism, the importance of colonizing Africa for

¹⁷ Mingo, Christopher. *Hidden in Plain Sight : Italian Concentration Camps in Cyrenaica 1930-1933*. (Columbia University, 2021) p.13

¹⁸ Lowe, C. J. *Italian Foreign Policy, 1870-1940*. Routledge, 2010. p.34

Italian Fascism is self-evident as control of African lands was necessary to see *Mare Nostrum* realized. Yet, in the case of Libya when *Romanità* and the speeches of Mussolini are evaluated it becomes clear that colonizing north Africa served a bigger purpose for Fascism than simply fulfilling the idea of *Mare Nostrum*.

With heavy emphasis on *Romanità*, Mussolini more often than not would reference Rome in his speeches. In Mussolini's first speech in Tripoli on April 11, 1926 directed to the Arab population he says "By obeying the august Sovereign of Italy, you will be protected by its just laws. His Majesty the King and the Italian government, which I have the honor of presiding over, desire that this land—which is filled with so many immortal remains of Rome—return to being rich, prosperous and happy."¹⁹ In this short speech, Mussolini conveys a strong message to the native population. He directly says that the Italian government desires the land with Roman ruins return to being prosperous, through its incorporation into the Italian Empire. In a second speech from the same day directed towards Italian Fascists Mussolini says "I intend this to be, as in fact it is, an affirmation of the strength of the Italian people (*cheers*), a manifestation of the power of the people who from Rome repeat their own origin and bring the triumphal and immortal Littorio of Rome to the banks of the African sea. It is destiny which pushes us toward this land. No one can stop our destiny and above all no one can break our unshakable will."²⁰ In this speech, Mussolini

again references Rome but more importantly he claims it is destiny that is driving the Italians into the coast of north Africa. In the third speech given by Mussolini on his tour of Tripoli he says "It is not without significance that my first official tour has been across waters that once belonged to Rome and that now return to the sovereignty of Rome, and that I feel around me

¹⁹ Mussolini, Benito. "First Speech in Tripoli, April 11, 1926.in " Biblioteca Fascista. Accessed February 25, 2022. <http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/first-speech-in-tripoli-april-11-1926.html>.

²⁰ Mussolini, Benito. "Second Speech in Tripoli, April 11, 1926." Biblioteca Fascista. Accessed February 26, 2022. <http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/second-speech-in-tripoli-april-11-1926.html>.

the vibrant vigor of the Italian people, a compact nation of soldiers, colonists, and pioneers”²¹. Here, Mussolini invokes the connection to the Romans by implying that his first official tour was purposely planned for north Africa as these important lands had finally returned to Italian control.

These three speeches were all given to different groups of people but all reference Rome and the importance of north Africa being under the sovereignty of Italy. In his first speech, Mussolini had implied that his government wanted to make the colony rich and happy however, not much was accomplished by the Italians in the colonial sphere during the 1920's ²². With Italian settlement not taking off in Libya and resources not being extensively exploited from the colony, it suggests that the colonization of Libya was done for other reasons than monetary benefit that is so often connected to colonization. The other perspective for colonization was that great powers in the scramble for Africa also seemingly does not fit Mussolini's narrative as he claims it is destiny and the reacquiring of Roman lands. Yet, how much of Italian colonization was destiny rather than the planning of the Fascist party is debatable. Heavily interested in gaining control of Libya, Mussolini and the Fascists called it *Quarta Sponda* or Italy's Fourth shore suggesting it was a part of Italy rather than one of its colonies. However, this only applied to the northern coastal areas of Libya whereas the southern portion, still technically called Italian Libya, would have been considered the colonial part of the Libyan lands. Thus, it becomes clear that for Mussolini and the Fascists colonizing Libya was about incorporating the land as a part of Greater Italy. This also shows how Mussolini exploited the Roman connection to north Africa to serve the

²¹ Mussolini, Benito. "Third Speech in Tripoli, April 11, 1926." Biblioteca Fascista. Accessed February 26, 2022. <http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/third-speech-in-tripoli-april-11-1926.html>.

²² De Grand, Alexander. "Mussolini's Follies: Fascism in Its Imperial and Racist Phase, 1935-1940." *Contemporary European History* 13, no. 2 (2004): 127-47. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20081201>. p.130

Romanità aspect of his Fascist doctrine by returning to where Romans had once been and to give a sign to the Italian people that Fascism was accomplishing what it had set out to do.

Pax Romana: Pacifying Libya

Just as the reasoning for colonizing north Africa was key to carrying out Fascist doctrine, so too was the policy that the Fascist enacted in order to pacify Libya. The process of pacifying Libya is a brutal story that saw roughly 100,000 people deported to concentration camps.²³ However, rather than retell this story, this paper will examine how Italian actions in Libya gave the Italian army an identity that would stick with them through to their conquest of Ethiopia in 1935. In 1911, the Italian army would become the first army to use planes against civilians by dropping grenades as they flew over and in 1926 the Fascists would again use planes on civilians by dropping canisters of poisonous gas.²⁴ This latter event highlights the violent nature of Fascism and shows how the Fascist's used Libya as a testing ground to implement new military tactics that they would eventually use elsewhere.

Although shrouded in violence, the early period of colonization into Libya saw international praise that the Fascist would exploit as propaganda. To deter French and British influence in north Africa, the Italian government produced a constitution for the colony in 1919 establishing a parliament for the colonized.²⁵ A *New York Times* article praised the establishment of a parliament for "governing a people with cherished ideas of independence whose independence is not to be permitted on account of the position they hold in relation to the political, military, and industrial interests of the government trying to administer their affairs."²⁶ However, in 1923 a new rebellion would emerge and with the Fascists in power they would use whatever means possible to squash the rebellion. As the colonial policy was now

²³ Mingo, Christopher. *Hidden in Plain Sight* p.5

²⁴ Mingo, Christopher. *Hidden in Plain Sight* pg.15

²⁵ Mingo, Christopher. *Hidden in Plain Sight* pg. 13

²⁶ "ITALY LETS ARABS TRY HOME RULE; New Parliament Set Up by the Senussi Is Formally Launched. WATCHED BY NEIGHBORS," *The New York Times*, June 26,1921.

being directed by the Fascists, they turned to military action to consolidate their power in Libya. Until 1934, the Fascists did not put many resources into the colonies and most of what they did spend was on the military. In 1931 over 27.4 per cent of total expenditure by the Italian government was military expenditure.²⁷ Relying heavily on the military, highlights how the Fascists tried to maintain the empire on the cheap and that having control over the land was more important than what resources they could pull out of it.

Also in entrusting the military to carry out pacifying the land, the generals in charge of the campaign, Rodolfo Graziani and Emilio de Bono, were given a free hand with which they employed their soldiers to be as harsh as possible. Italian propaganda picked up on this and painted an image of the new Fascist man disciplining and controlling the untameable Arab. As the Italians continued their murderous campaign in Libya the French press began to speak out about what was happening there. In a speech to the Chamber of Deputies, de Bono spoke about foreign dissent saying “I will not look to substantiate legitimacy for our actions. Fascist Italy need not imitate anyone; it operates according to its own right and conscience, and does what it believes is best to safeguard its needs and protect its dignity as a colonial power.”²⁸ This statement highlights how the Fascist government was going to neglect the worry of other countries and continue to pursue the policy of their choice within their colonies. In 1932, Pietro Badoglio declared peace in Cyrenaica officially marking an end to the conflict and the establishment of Italian Libya through the unification of Cyrenaica and Tripolitana. The 10 years of fighting would see the Italian army adapt to the violent and destructive principles that are so fundamental to Fascist doctrine.

Fascist War: Invading Ethiopia

²⁷ De Grand, Alexander. “Mussolini’s Follies: Fascism in Its Imperial and Racist Phase, 1935 p.132

²⁸ “Biagio Pace / Deputati / Camera Dei Deputati - Portale Storico,” <https://storia.camera.it/deputato/biagio-pace-18891113/componentiorgani#nav>.

For as violent and horrific as the Libyan campaign was, the entire 10 years coincidentally occurred in the first decade of Fascist rule. Historians have noted that there is a difference between the first and second decades of Fascist control, with the second decade signifying a turning point to where the regime embraces all of its violent characteristics. R.J Bosworth agrees with this assessment in his book *Mussolini and the Eclipse of Fascism* and indicates that by 1932 there was no universal meaning for Fascism and that Mussolini still had not yet demonstrated that totalitarianism was synonymous with evil.²⁹ Yet, in 1932 when Mussolini published the definition of Fascism he opened the definition by writing Fascism “believes neither in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace. It thus repudiates the doctrine of Pacifism -- born of a renunciation of the struggle and an act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice. War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have courage to meet it.”³⁰ Here it becomes clear that Fascism looks to embrace war as central to its dogma and thus indicates a turning point where Fascism would utilize war to carry out its ideas.

Fascist Italy would opt for war in 1935 but not in Europe as it would target Ethiopia. For all of Mussolini's emphasis on Romanità, he began to take aim at territory that was well beyond what the Romans had conquered. Constantly in the minds of Italians was their 1896 defeat at the battle of Adwa. Revenge for Adwa may seem like a good reason for the Italian invasion or possibly the fact that Ethiopia was one of the only places in Africa free from European control. However, by understanding the changes occurring to Fascism and what Mussolini hoped the war would accomplish, making it clear just how important war with Ethiopia was for Fascism.

²⁹ Bosworth, R. J. B. *Mussolini and the Eclipse of Italian Fascism: From Dictatorship to Populism* pg. 70

³⁰ Mussolini, Benito. “What Is Fascism, 1932.” Internet history sourcebooks. Accessed March 14, 2022. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/mussolini-fascism.asp>.

In 1933, with the ascension of Hitler to power in Germany, Mussolini's Fascism would have to compete with Nazism for recognition as the true form of fascism. However as Bosworth notes, the Nazis did not call themselves fascist rather everyone else did.³¹ This competition with Hitler surely inspired Mussolini to harden his opinions and move into the populist phase of his rule. In this populist phase, Mussolini attempted to shape the war with Ethiopia as a popular war in which Fascism could rejuvenate itself with the Italian population. In a speech before the Italian senate on May 14, 1935 regarding the Italo-Ethiopian dispute, Mussolini said "No one can judge this most delicate matter except Italy who has in her history a dramatic, bloody and not forgotten experience in this regard. I prefer to be reprimanded tomorrow for doing too much rather than for doing too little when it is a question of the safety of our colonies and the life of even a single one of our native or metropolitan soldiers."³² Through this speech it is evident that Mussolini is pulling on nationalistic sentiment by the subtle reference to the defeat at Adwa and is using the safety of Italian soldiers as a guise to enter into war with Ethiopia. During the buildup to the war, Bosworth also notes that Italian propaganda directly attacked Ethiopia and primed Fascist Italy for war.³³

In Rome on October 2nd of 1935, Mussolini would declare war on Ethiopia. In this declaration of war Mussolini would go on to say "Never before, as at this historical hour, have the people of Italy revealed the quality of its spirit and such force of character, and it is against this people to which mankind owes its greatest conquests, this people of heroes, of poets, of saints, of navigators, of colonizers, that the world dares threaten sanctions."³⁴ This excerpt, though mostly aimed at dispelling the possibilities of sanctions from Britain and

³¹ Bosworth, R. J. B. *Mussolini and the Eclipse of Italian Fascism: From Dictatorship to Populism* pg. 131

³² Mussolini, Benito. "Speech in the Senate, May 14, 1935." *Biblioteca Fascista*. Accessed March 24, 2022. <http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/speech-in-senate-may-14-1935.html>.

³³ Bosworth, R. J. B. *Mussolini and the Eclipse of Italian Fascism: From Dictatorship to Populism* pg. 187

³⁴ Mussolini, Benito. "Speech in Rome, October 2, 1935." *Biblioteca Fascista*. Accessed March 24, 2022. <http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/speech-in-rome-october-2-1935.html>.

France, also shows Mussolini praising Italy's past and complementing his people for being united in wanting war with Ethiopia. After seven months of fighting Italian troops would enter Addis Ababa and claim victory. On May 5th of 1936, Mussolini would give a speech about the end of the war saying "it is our peace, Roman peace, which is expressed in this simple, irrevocable, definite phrase: Ethiopia is Italian! It is Italian in fact because it is occupied by our victorious armies. It is Italian in law because of the law of Rome and civilization which triumphs over barbarities."³⁵

The reference to Rome here in the case of Ethiopia is new but not surprising, as Mussolini seemingly evokes Rome whenever he gets a victory reaffirming how vital *Romanità* is to his Fascism. Four days after this speech, Mussolini would give another speech proclaiming the Italian Empire. In the speech Mussolini goes on to say "Italy has at last got her Empire, the Fascist Empire, which bears the indestructible signs of the determination and the power of the Roman Littorio, because this is the goal towards which, for fourteen years, the overflowing and disciplined energies of the young, sturdy generations of Italy were encouraged. It is an Empire of peace, because Italy wants peace for herself and for all, and decides upon warfare only when compelled to do so by imperious, uncontrollable necessities of life."³⁶ This speech does a lot in that Mussolini claims Italy only wants peace even though he defined Fascism as strictly opposing peace. Mussolini also refers to the new generation of Italians who were raised under Fascist rule, praising them for their hand in establishing the Italian Empire. Thus by selling the Ethiopian campaign as a populist war and through Italian victory Mussolini was able to revive Fascism during the 1930's and give shape to the many aspects which define the characteristics of Fascism today.

³⁵ Mussolini, Benito. "Speech in Rome, May 5, 1936." Biblioteca Fascista. Accessed March 25, 2022. <http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/speech-in-rome-may-5-1936.html>.

³⁶ Mussolini, Benito. "Speech in Rome, May 9, 1936." Biblioteca Fascista. Accessed March 24, 2022. <http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/speech-in-rome-may-9-1936.html>.

Conclusion

The benchmark of fascism lays with the actions and violence carried out during the interwar period until the deposition of Mussolini in 1943 and the collapse of Nazi Germany in 1945. However, created by Mussolini, Fascism contains uniquely Italian characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of fascism. Italian society in neglecting its Fascist past has also neglected the colonization undertaken by the regime. Historians too are guilty of this neglect by focusing heavily on Fascism within Europe. Although much work is still to be done on Italian colonization during the Fascist period, this paper has attempted to highlight the importance of African colonization for the Fascist regime. The targeting of north Africa saw the completion of Liberal Italian ideas but was vital to Fascism not only because it returned Italians to where the Romans had been but because it incorporated part of Africa into the Italian metropole. The policies and actions carried out by the Fascists while conquering Libya are also fundamental to Fascism as it was there that the Fascists developed military tactics and the violent nature they would display up until 1943. Finally, war with Ethiopia and colonization in east Africa was a key was Mussolini tried to revive the popularity of Fascism in the 1930's within Italy. As Italy reconciles with its past and historians gain greater access to Italian archives, it is hopeful that more attention will be paid to the Fascist activities in Africa.

Word Count : 4553

Works Cited

Secondary Sources

Ahmida, A.A. (2020). *Genocide in Libya: Shar, a Hidden Colonial History* (1st ed.).

Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003031772>

Aristotle A. Kallis, *Fascist Ideology: Territory and Expansionism in Italy and Germany, 1922-1945* (Routledge, 2000

Bosworth, R. J. B. *Mussolini and the Eclipse of Italian Fascism: From Dictatorship to*

Populism. Yale University Press, 2021

Caprara, Maurizio. “‘Italiani Brava Gente’ Un Mito Da Sfatare Al Pari Della Wehrmacht.”

Corriere della Sera. Corriere della Sera, December 20, 2012.

https://www.corriere.it/cultura/12_dicembre_20/caprara-italiani-brava-gente_9750095c-4aa7-11e2-bd66-a2d11be54edf.shtml.

De Grand, Alexander. “Mussolini’s Follies: Fascism in Its Imperial and Racist Phase, 1935-1940.” *Contemporary European History* 13, no. 2 (2004)

Ginori, Anais. “Foibe, Gas e Rimozione: Gli Italiani in Etiopia.” eddyburg, May 23, 2006.

Ghiglione, Giorgio. “As Europe Reckons with Racism, Italy Still Won't Confront Its Colonial Past.” *Foreign Policy*, July 30, 2020.

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/30/as-europe-reckons-with-racism-italy-still-wont-confront-its-colonial-past/>

Knox, MacGregor. *Common Destiny: Dictatorship, Foreign Policy, and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Lowe, C. J. *Italian Foreign Policy, 1870-1940*. Routledge, 2010

Mingo, Christopher. *Hidden in Plain Sight : Italian Concentration Camps in Cyrenaica 1930-1933*. (Columbia University, 2021)

Paxton, Robert O. *The Anatomy of Fascism*. Vintage Books, 2005

Primary Sources

Biagio Pace / Deputati / Camera Dei Deputati - Portale Storico,”

<https://storia.camera.it/deputato/biagio-pace-18891113/componentiorgani#na>

“ITALY LETS ARABS TRY HOME RULE; New Parliament Set Up by the Senussi Is

Formally Launched. WATCHED BY NEIGHBORS,” *The New York Times*, June

26,1921.

Mussolini, Benito. "First Speech in Tripoli, April 11, 1926.in " Biblioteca Fascista. Accessed February 25, 2022.<http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/first-speech-in-tripoli-april-11-1926.html>

Mussolini, Benito. "Past and Future." Biblioteca Fascista. Accessed March 14, 2022.
<http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/past-and-future.html>.

Mussolini, Benito. "Second Speech in Tripoli, April 11, 1926." Biblioteca Fascista. Accessed February 26, 2022.<http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/second-speech-in-tripoli-april-11-1926.html>.

Mussolini, Benito. "Speech in Rome, May 5, 1936." Biblioteca Fascista. Accessed March 25, 2022.<http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/speech-in-rome-may-5-1936.html>

Mussolini, Benito. "Speech in Rome, May 9, 1936." Biblioteca Fascista. Accessed March 24, 2022.<http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/speech-in-rome-may-9-1936.html>.

Mussolini, Benito. "Speech in Rome, October 2, 1935." Biblioteca Fascista. Accessed March 24, 2022.
<http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/speech-in-rome-october-2-1935.html>.

Mussolini, Benito. "Speech in the Senate, May 14, 1935." Biblioteca Fascista. Accessed March 24, 2022.
<http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/speech-in-senate-may-14-1935.html>.

Mussolini, Benito. "Third Speech in Tripoli, April 11, 1926." Biblioteca Fascista. Accessed February 26, 2022.
<http://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/third-speech-in-tripoli-april-11-1926.html>.

Mussolini, Benito. "What Is Fascism, 1932." Internet history sourcebooks. Accessed March

14, 2022. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/mussolini-fascism.asp>.