Reframing Italianness:
Circulation of Italian Fiction Films in the United States During the 1930s

by

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List of Abbreviations

ACS: Archivio Centrale dello Stato (Rome, Italy)

ASMAE: Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (Rome, Italy)

CSC: Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia

DGC: Direzione Generale per il Cinema

DGSP: Direzione Generale per i Servizi della Propaganda

FLNA: Fascist League of North America

IHRC: Immigration History Research Center (University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN)

Minculpop: Ministero della cultura popolare

PPSE: Propaganda Presso Stati Esteri

UNEP: Unione Nazionale Esportazione Pellicole

Note About the Quotation of Films

The retitling of Italian fiction films in 1930s America took circuitous paths. Italian films usually circulated across the country with their original title when the Copyright Office at the Library of Congress registered them. For such films, I first mention their Italian title and then I add their copyrighted title *in round brackets*. For the films without copyright, I first indicate their Italian title followed *in square brackets* by the title they acquired in their American distribution. This new title was either a different Italian one or a translation into English, either a literal or inventive one.

Many of the films under consideration found their way into the U.S. some years after their release in Italy. In referencing them I include both the original Italian release date and the U.S. one. For data about film distribution, I consulted trade journals, daily newspapers, and the following publications: *Catalog of Copyright Entries, Cumulative Series. Motion Pictures, 1912-1939* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, Copyright Office, 1951) and *Catalog of Copyright Entries Cumulative Series. Motion Pictures 1940-1949* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, Copyright Office, 1953).

Introduction

"Ora, finalmente, tutti in America conoscono il popolo italiano non più come elemento decorativo di paesaggi romantici, ma come un popolo ricco di patriottismo, d'operosità e d'energia, disciplinato ed equilibrato, austero e attivo."

Benito Mussolini, message to the Italians living in the United States (1926)[1]

"Gli italiani accorreranno con le loro famiglie a vedere questo capolavoro della ringiovanita industria cinematografica italiana, perché così potranno constatare personalmente il progresso che l'Italia moderna sta facendo anche in questo campo."

Review of *Lorenzino de' Medici* in *Il Progresso italo-americano* (1936)[2]

"It [the production] has no greater stature than a lavish pageant performed by an army corps and a crew of competent players to celebrate someone's birthday's—say Mussolini's. […] Worth a look if you're curious about the state of the Italian movies: under the government's thumb, if you ask us."

Frank S. Nugent, *New York Times* review of *Condottieri*[3]

The Structure and the Goals of This Research

This project takes into consideration a largely unexamined aspect of the Italian Fascist regime's foreign propaganda: the attempt to promote a Fascist conception of Italianness in the United States through *fiction* films. Contrary to what both Italian and American film scholarship has assumed for decades, Mussolini's Government supported

[1] Benito Mussolini, "Messaggio agli Italiani di America (letto da S.E. il Capo del Governo per un disco," in ASMAE, Minculpop, Box 81: Folder "Disco di S.E. il Capo del Governo al Popolo Nord Americano ed agli Italiani d'America (1928)." The folder's title indicates that Mussolini's message dates back to 1928, but the documents inside the folder set 1926 as the year of his speech.
[2] See "Al Cine Roma," *Il Progresso italo-americano*, April 18, 1936, 5. The film in question is *Lorenzino de' Medici* (*Id*., Guido Brignone, 1935), released in the U.S. in 1936.
[3] See Frank S. Nugent, "The Italians Find a Parallel Between the Black Shirts and 'Giovanni de Medici,'" *New York Times*, January 5, 1940, 21. The film in question is *Condottieri* [*Giovanni de Medici, the Leader*, Luis Trenker, 1937; released in the U.S. in 1940].

the distribution of about 130 Italian fiction films in 1930s America.[4] Through such films, the Fascist regime had a specific goal that was not that of supporting and broadcasting its actions in domestic and foreign policy. The Italian embassy in Washington and the various consulates spread throughout the country employed press releases, patriotic associations, public speakers, and LUCE newsreels and documentaries for that purpose. Rather, the *institutional* branches of the Fascist regime working in the U.S. exploited apparently a-political fiction films to promote the *overall values* of Fascist Italy, and thus to exert a form of *intellectual* propaganda.[5] Indeed, my dissertation argues that 1930s Italian fiction films, without explicitly praising the dictator Benito Mussolini and his government, largely promoted a conception of Italianness that was aligned with Fascist ideology. In this respect, I identify the mediation between "spirituality" and materialism, and the mediation between tradition and modernity, as the core beliefs of Fascist ideology during the 1930s. According to Mussolini, the Fascist nationalist regime fulfilled multiple goals by relying on such beliefs: it preserved Italy's old virtues; it embraced the industrial, economic, and technological progress; finally, it granted well-being and

[4] Specifically, film scholarship has argued that Italian films were banned from circulation in the U.S. from the mid-1930s to WWII, due to the political tensions between the Fascist regime and the U.S. Government. Some years ago—while doing archival research for a course on Italian cinema of the Fascist era (Fall 2011, Professor Giorgio Bertellini)—I realized that the scholars' assumptions were wrong and that several Italian fiction films were actually screened in U.S. theaters during the 1930s. The filmography at the end of the volume lists such films.

[5] Some basic references on Fascist propaganda in the U.S. are: John P. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View From America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); Gaetano Salvemini, *Italian Fascist Activities in the United States*, edited by Philip V. Cannistraro (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1977); Philip Cannistraro, *Blackshirts in Little Italy. Italian-Americans and Fascism 1921-1929* (West Lafayette, IN: Bordighera Press, 1999); Stefano Luconi and Guido Tintori, *L'ombra lunga del fascio: canali di propaganda fascista per gli "italiani d'America"* (Milan: M&B Publishing srl, 2004); Matteo Pretelli, *La via fascista alla democrazia americana: cultura e propaganda nelle comunità italo-americane* (Viterbo: Sette Città, 2012).

prosperity to each class.[6] The interaction between Italian films and Fascist ideology, as well as the regime's attempt to use fiction films to spread its values, define my interpretation of the concept of propaganda. My work also discusses the various and often conflicting viewing positions of 1930s American and Italian-American spectators regarding such films. Ultimately, by detailing both the extent of Fascist film propaganda and the multi-layered reception of Italian films, this research sheds new light on the fragmented and contested perception of Italianness in 1930s America, when Italy and the U.S. were driving as enemies toward a ruinous conflict.

By moving from these premises, in the following chapters I address three main issues. My first concern is the "view from above," namely the management of the Italian films' distribution by functionaries of the Fascist dictatorship, operating between Italy and the U.S. After that, my attention centers on the works, namely the Italian fiction films that reached the U.S. from the early 1930s to 1941—that is, from the rebirth of Italian cinema in the second decade of Mussolini's regime to the end of Italian film distribution in the U.S. because of World War II. Lastly, my focus takes the form of a "view from below," specifically at the level of American and Italian-American spectators and at the range of their interpretive attitudes.

To give a more detailed overview of my findings, my work first documents the regime's sustained effort to oversee the distribution of about 130 fiction films in U.S. film theaters during the 1930s and it examines this phenomenon in the context of its ambitious propaganda efforts in America. Fascist authorities wanted to make *indirect* propaganda through such films, namely to present obliquely a positive depiction of the

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[6] On the overall design of Fascist nationalism, and its totalitarioan means, see Emilio Gentile, *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista 1918-1925* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1975); Id., *Il culto del littorio: la sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1993).

"new" Italy. This was against the overt political activism pursued by local Fascist organizations in the 1920s, which had met severe criticism among Americans and forced Mussolini's regime to plan more nuanced and less explicit forms of propaganda.[7]

Throughout the 1920s and the 1930s, Fascist intellectuals used to depict Fascism as a third way between Capitalism and Communism, and more specifically as a dictatorship that was able to satisfy the needs of each class. Likewise, they argued that in Fascist society all individuals, regardless of their social status, pursued the well-being of the Italian nation rather than their personal interests. Such intellectuals deemed as "spiritual" the Italians' alleged dedication to the good of their country—as opposed to models of society like the capitalist and the communist ones, which in the Fascist perspective both relied on the material and personal interests of their citizens. In this cultural landscape Luigi Freddi, director of the Direzione Generale di Cinematografia (DGC) from 1934 to 1939, promoted a film culture that consistent with the regime's prospect of a "spiritual" reawakening. Accordingly, officials of the Fascist regime in the U.S.—most notably, Italian Ambassador in Washington Augusto Rosso (1933-1936)—considered Italian fiction films expressions of the regime's moral values. They believed that such films—although not explicitly supportive of Mussolini's actions—succeeded in conveying and promoting the regime's "spiritual achievements" inside the secular and materialist American society.[8]

With regard to 1930s Italian fiction films, I especially investigate how romantic

[7] On the political activism of pro-Fascist organizations in 1920s America, see Cannistraro, *Blackshirts in Little Italy*.

[8] The quotation comes from Augusto Rosso, "Propaganda cinematografica," dispatch of February 25, 1936, addressed to the Ministry for the Press and the Propaganda, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220, Folder "Pellicole per San Francisco." The regime's emphasis on the "spirituality" conveyed by Italian films opens the question on how that component competed with the Catholic spirituality in Italy, in the eyes of both Fascist officials and common spectators. This is an issue that deserves furher investigation.

comedies and historical films reworked the Fascist conception of Italianness. I focus on how Italian films elaborate two forms of dialectic, one between spirituality and materialism and one between tradition and modernity. In the mid-1930s, in the wake of Italy's colonial enterprise in Ethiopia (1935-36) Mussolini wanted to depict his regime as the legitimate heir of the Roman Empire.[9] For this reason, he strove to represent Fascism as the ideal bridge between Italy's glorious traditions—not only the Roman Empire, but also its deep artistic heritage and Catholicism—and Italy's embrace of modernity—which I identify as the industrial, economic, and technological progress that the Italian dictator was trying to achieve in the country. Mussolini considered this last step necessary to counteract the common prejudices about Italy's backwardness. In the regime's view, in the 1930s Italian culture had to be consistent with the synthesis between tradition and modernity that was then at the core of Fascist ideology. This shows that propaganda was historically grounded in Fascist society, and that Italian culture had to adapt to the dogma of the moment. By moving from these premises, I suggest that 1930s Italian fiction films—often considered escapist products, disconnected from the surrounding social context—largely engaged with the said dialectics by adopting a Fascist perspective. My hypothesis is that Freddi's influential institutional leadership, and more generally the regime's constant promotion of the Fascist beliefs through totalitarian means, led film companies to disseminate those beliefs in their films.[10]

Finally, I discuss the results of Fascist film propaganda in the U.S. and I contend

[9] Colonial films like *Squadrone bianco* [*The White Squadron*, Augusto Genina, 1936, released in the U.S. in 1939] explicitly suggested the link between Mussolini's dictatorship and Imperial Rome, thus accomplishing the reconciliation between tradition and modernity typical of Fascist ideology. However, in this work I focus on romantic comedies and historical films, and not on openly pro-Fascist colonial films, because I want to emphasize the fact that even films that appear less politically engaged actually dealt with key Fascist principles.

[10] On the regime's totalitarian control over Italy, see again Gentile, *Il culto del littorio*.

that the regime's promotional effort was unsuccessful. Looking both at actual reviews of Italian films by American and Italian-American journalists and—more broadly—reconstructing the reading positions of Italian-American and American spectators, I argue that Italian fiction films generated a variety of interpretations, to a large extent distant from the regime's desiderata.

From a historical perspective, the framework of this dissertation ends with Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935-36, when Americans almost entirely abandoned their previously benign consideration of Mussolini.[11] In spite of that, President Roosevelt maintained a cordial attitude with Mussolini, because the *Duce*'s leadership granted stability to Europe. Similarly, until the outbreak of WWII, American film critics kept a neutral attitude toward the Italian dictatorship in their reviews of pro-Fascist films like *Scipione l'africano* [*Scipio Africanus*, Carmine Gallone, 1937][12] and *Condottieri*. Concurrently, the same critics largely rejected the novelty that Fascism aimed to represent. They looked at Italian comedies, melodramas, and historical films through the old framework of the picturesque, which depicted Italy as the land of glorious ruins, beautiful works of art, and general backwardness. This interpretive attitude demonstrates the overall ineffectiveness of Fascist film propaganda between Americans.

With regard to the trajectory of Italian films between Italian-Americans, by looking at the distinct cultural and political constituencies of the New York City community, I argue that Italian fiction films generated four reading positions: the Fascist one; the anti-Fascist one; the Southernist one, which refers to Southern Italians who

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[11] In fact, Mussolini's reputation in the U.S. was largely positive until Italy's colonial war in Africa. Although they despised dictatorship as a form of government, Americans appreciated Mussolini's apparent ability to control Italians' impulsive temperament and to manage efficiently economy after the 1929 crisis. See Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*.

[12] Released in the U.S. in 1939.

articulated their identity through a self-conscious celebration of their folkloric customs, and not through the lens of the Fascist nationalist project;[13] the "anti-Italian" one, which regards those Italians of the second and third generations who increasingly tended to reject their ethnic identity, because they perceived it as shameful and inappropriate.[14] Such a diversity of reading positions attests that, in contrast with the regime's expectations, the perception of Italianness was highly disputed in the United States during the 1930s.

The Historiographical Framework

In *Reframing Italianness* I explore Fascist film propaganda and its results through a broad historiographical framework. First, questions of national identity and nation-building drive my interpretation of Fascist Italianness, which aimed to dismiss old prejudices about Italy's backwardness and to support the idea of a new and modern Italy, finally unified under Mussolini's rule. In studying Fascist ideology and its attempt to redefine Italianness, my project follows the insights of those scholars that in the last decades re-engaged with and analyzed Fascist values and beliefs. Particularly, starting in the 1960s and the 1970s, historians like George L. Mosse, Emilio Gentile, and Pier Giorgio Zunino articulated the contours of a Fascist and Nazi ideology and persuasively contrasted the widespread assumption that fascist governments were merely repressive and reactionary.[15] My investigation of the dialectics between spirituality and materialism,

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[13] On the concept of Southernism, see Giorgio Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema: Race, Landscape and the Picturesque* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), esp. 69-75.

[14] The first generation of Italian-Americans refers to those immigrants that arrived in the U.S. between the 1880s and the 1890s. I use the terms second and third generations to indicate their sons and grandsons, born between the 1880s and the 1920s.

[15] Some notable works are George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany From the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich* (New York: H. Fertig,

and between tradition and modernity largely relies on the findings of these and later scholars who explored the intellectual fabric of the Italian Fascist thought.[16]

Secondly, the field of cultural studies helps me to tease out the links between Italian films and their social context. In this respect, I especially take into consideration the suggestions of the Anglo-American scholarship on Italian Fascist cinema, the one that emerged in the 1980s and includes contributions by Marcia Landy, James Hay, Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Steven Ricci.[17] Such scholars examined Italian cinema in the light of a wide-ranging analysis of Italy's cultural and social life. Furthermore, one of the strands of cultural studies, reception theory, guides my exploration of the reading positions of both American and Italian-American spectators in front of Italian films. By drawing especially on the work of Janet Staiger, my intent is to reconstruct the cultural and social conditions of spectators in 1930s America and to make reliable hypothesis on their interpretations of Italian fiction films.[18]

Chapter Outline

1975); Gentile, *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista*; Id., *Il culto del littorio*; Pier Giorgio Zunino, *L'ideologia del fascismo: miti, credenze e valori nella stabilizzazione del regime* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1985). I will provide more references in the next chapters.

[16] A good introduction to the major historiographical debates on fascist political experiences is Constantin Iordachi, ed., *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives* (London-New York: Routledge, 2009).

[17] Marcia Landy, *Fascism in Film: The Italian Commercial Film, 1931-43* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986); James Hay, *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy: The Passing of the Rex* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Marcia Landy, *The Folklore of Consensus: Theatricality in Italian Cinema 1930-1943* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Steven Ricci, *Cinema and Fascism: Italian Film and Society, 1922-1943* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). Other relevant contributions are: Jacqueline Reich and Piero Garofalo, eds., *Re-Viewing Fascism: Italian Cinema, 1922-1943* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002) and Patrizia Palumbo, ed., *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

[18] See Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992); Id., *Perverse Spectators: the Practices of Film Reception* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Id., *Media Reception Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

My dissertation is divided into three parts, developed through five chapters. Part 1 consists of two chapters. In Chapter 1, I identify the circulation of about 130 Italian fiction films exhibited along with dozens of non-fiction films in the United States during the 1930s. By acting in accordance with Fascist authorities, distributors in the U.S. commonly released those films in cities with large populations of Italian-Americans: New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and others. Focusing on this map of film distribution, my study of the Italian-American community pays special attention to New York City, given that the largest and most influential Italian-American group resided there. In this respect, the screening of Italian fiction films in 1930s New York mostly took place in selected theaters of the Times Square district, including the Broadway Cine Roma, the Venice, and the Cinecittà. These theaters used to host several forms of entertainment, along with fiction and non-fiction films: comic sketches, concerts, and stage melodramas. My research gives particular attention to the Broadway Cine Roma Theatre, which opened in March 1936 and in the following years showed almost all the Italian fiction films distributed in the country. The theatre was a site of Fascist propaganda and hosted several events supportive of Mussolini's Government across the years; predictably, such political leanings met growing criticism when WWII erupted and eventually led to the theatre's closure.

In Chapter 2 I discuss the overall relation between Italy's and U.S. Governments throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, in order to insert Fascist film propaganda into the larger historical context to which it belonged. In his diplomatic and cultural relations with the U.S., the regime strove to promote its new configuration of Italianness. As stated above, Mussolini sought to contrast the widespread stereotypes about the Italian

immigrants' violence and ignorance as well as promote Italy as a modern country, ethically virtuous and devoted to social justice for each class. This chapter emphasizes the influence, in Mussolini's project, of the political thought of idealist philosopher Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944), who held various positions in the Fascist Government and in cultural institutions throughout the *ventennio*. In a text like *Origini e dottrina del fascismo* (1929), Gentile depicted Fascism as a "spiritual" enterprise to which each Italian was willing to contribute.[19] Gentile used to stress the opposition between Fascist "spirituality" and the "materialism" of both Capitalism and Communism—an opposition that constantly marked speeches and writings of Fascist intellectuals and politicians, in spite of the fact that Gentile also met severe criticism in Fascist intellectual circles.[20] The idealist imprint affected even the promotion of Fascist Italianness in the U.S., since Fascist officials—such as the mentioned Ambassador Augusto Rosso and the consul from Chicago Giuseppe Castruccio—consistently used to praise Italy's "spiritual" reawakening in their statements.

Chapter 3, which amounts to Part II, focuses on 1930s Italian cinema and more generally on Italian film culture of the time. In this chapter, I first give an overview of the major historiographical traditions on Italian cinema of the Fascist era, by embracing the one informed by cultural studies. Then, in order to better outline the context in which fiction films arose, I discuss the influence of Giovanni Gentile's idealism in 1930s Italian theoretical debate on cinema, and particularly I analyze the volume *Cinematografo* (1935) by Luigi Chiarini, director of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia (CSC)

[19] Giovanni Gentile, *Origini e dottrina del fascismo* (Rome: Libreria del Littorio, 1929).
[20] See Alessandra Tarquini, *Il Gentile dei fascisti: Gentiliani e antigentiliani nel regime fascista* (Bologna: Mulino, 2009).

from 1935 to 1943.[21] Finally, I examine romantic comedies and historical films and stress how these genres overall adhered to Fascist Italianness through recurrent stylistic and narrative solutions. Specifically, I argue that a stylistic element of historical films—the *fascistization of the picturesque*—and a narrative device typical of romantic comedies—the *fantasy of deprivation*—demonstrate the close interaction between 1930s Italian fiction films and their social context. By using the expression fascistization of the picturesque, I refer to the historical films' tendency to inject typically picturesque landscapes with a political theme—and thus to follow Mussolini's aforementioned injunction that Italy had embraced a renewed patriotism and dismissed the old picturesque stereotypes. What I call the fantasy of deprivation refers, instead, to the attitude by male and female characters of romantic comedies to favor love over money and consequently to favor "spiritual" goals over material ones. I contend that this recurrent narrative pattern is consistent with the Fascist mentality.

Finally, in Part III I discuss the reception of Italian films by American and Italian-American spectators through the examination of several primary sources. In Chapter 4, I reconstruct the historical-material conditions of American spectators by looking at the following materials: American films of the 1930s depicting Italy, or dictatorship in general; the reviews of Italian fiction films in a daily newspaper, *The New York Times*, and in two trade journals, *The Film Daily* and *Variety*. These documents largely confirm the Americans' reliance on old stereotypes and their dismissal of the Fascist conception of Italianness, which Italian films were trying to advertise.

In Chapter 5 I deal with the reading positions by Italian-Americans through a focus on the Italian-American community in New York City. Articles in pro-Fascist

[21] Luigi Chiarini, *Cinematografo*, preface by Giovanni Gentile (Rome: Cremonese, 1935).

newspapers and journals, including reviews of Italian fiction films in the *Corriere d'America* and the *Progresso italo-americano*, testify to the diffusion of Fascist values inside that community. Furthermore, the vibrant Italian-American cultural scene in New York also included several spectacles that embraced and supported main Fascist values. In this respect, I take into consideration some sketches of the well-known Neapolitan-born comedian and performer Farfariello (the stage name of Eduardo Migliaccio). The circulation of Fascist beliefs between Italian-Americans demonstrates that they could be able to decode the ideological overtones of Italian fiction films, such as the dialectic between spirituality and materialism.

Yet, the Italian-American intellectual and cultural landscape was not entirely supportive of Fascism. Anarchist and leftist publications denounced Fascism as responsible for the moral and material malaise of Italy and promoted an anti-Fascist "spiritual" regeneration, thus fighting Fascist propaganda on its own terrain. In this context, a melodramatic novel published by the leftist publisher La Strada, entitled *Cupido tra le camicie nere*, mixed love and politics by offering a counterpart of pro-Fascist Italian historical films of the time.[22] The existence of this combative attitude toward Fascism indicates that a part of Italian-American spectators could enact an anti-Fascist reading of Italian fiction films.

In the last chapter I also postulate the existence of a Southernist interpretation of Italian fiction films by looking at two stage melodramas by Italian-American author Rocco De Russo, *L'eroe della guerra italo-etiopica ovvero un delitto in famiglia* and

[22] Clara Vacirca, *Cupido tra le camicie nere* (New York: La Strada Publishing Co., 1938). The journal *La Strada*, edited by the same publisher, first serialized Vacirca's novel in 1937-1938.

Zappatore.[23] These plays remind us that many Italian-Americans preserved a nostalgic view of Italy, which likely led them to discard Italy's modernity and to appreciate the most conventional aspects of Italian films—their picturesque landscapes and melodramatic plots. Finally, by looking at articles published in the Italian-American press, I analyze how young Italian-Americans seemed to dismiss their ethnic ancestry and the ideological debates of the time, and how they embraced instead American customs. These facts suggest that the new generations of Italian-Americans rejected *both* the Fascist overtones and the stereotypical elements of Italian fiction films, thus elaborating an "anti-Italian" reading of them.

In *Reframing Italianness* I explore Mussolini's international ambitions by studying Fascist propaganda plans and the trajectory of selected cultural texts in the U.S. My ultimate goal is to demonstrate that Fascist intellectual propaganda to a large extent was unsuccessful. Indeed, Italian fiction films failed to accomplish the regime's goals and to widen the consensus on Fascist Italy in 1930s America. World War II was then destined to erode the remaining support of Mussolini and to generate a solid anti-Fascist sentiment between Americans and Italian-Americans alike.

[23] A copy of these plays is at the IHRC, De Russo, Rocco, Papers, Series 2. Plays.

Part I

Chapter 1

Fascist Indirect Propaganda Through Cinema in 1930s America

Fiction Films, Commercial Distribution, and Propaganda

The trajectory of Fascism in the U.S. originated in the early 1920s, when several Italian-American groups founded pro-Fascist political organizations named *Fasci*.[1] The first *Fascio* arose on April 30, 1921 in New York, preceding the Fascist rise to power in Italy (March on Rome, October 28, 1922). In 1925 the U.S. *Fasci* merged into the Fascist League of North America (FLNA). Yet, FLNA's overt support of Fascist Italy generated harsh criticism among American politicians and the press, which deemed foreign political activism an intolerable interference. Several diplomatic incidents ensued. In ordr to avoid them, in 1929 Mussolini ordered the dismantlement of FLNA, and in the 1930s the Italian Government sought to promote itself in America through cultural events, rather than through overt political activism.[2]

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[1] The *fascio* (from the Latin word *fascis*) is a bundle of wooden rods, to which an axe with its blade is normally attached. In ancient Rome the *fascio* was a symbol of the authority of both the kings and magistrates. Officials called lictors, whose responsibility was to protect those authoritarian figures, usually carried the *fasci*. Taking inspiration from this old symbol of power, Mussolini founded in 1919 the Italian Fasci of Combat (Fasci italiani di combattimento), which in 1921 became the National Fascist Party (Partito Nazionale Fascista).

[2] Notable works on Fascist propaganda in the U.S. are Alan Cassels, "Fascism for Export: Italy and the United States in the Twenties," *The American Historical Review* 69 (April 1964): 707-712; Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*; Salvemini, *Italian Fascist Activities in the United States*; Cannistraro, *Blackshirts in Little Italy*; Stefano Luconi, *La "diplomazia parallela:" Il regime fascista e la mobilitazione politica degli italo-americani* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2000). Specific contributions on Fascist cultural propaganda in the U.S. are: Luconi and Tintori, *L'ombra lunga del fascio*; Matteo Pretelli, 'Culture or Propaganda? Fascism and Italian Culture in the United States,' *Studi Emigrazione*, 161 (2006), pp. 171-192; Id., *La via fascista alla democrazia americana*. On the *Fasci* abroad see Emilio Gentile, 'La politica estera del partito

Representatives of the Italian dictatorship, including Count Galeazzo Ciano, who held various positions in the Fascist Government during the 1930s,[3] and the Italian Ambassador in Washington Augusto Rosso (1932-1936) repeatedly made it clear in their private dispatches of the 1930s that Americans rejected every form of foreign propaganda. According to them, the Italian regime needed to develop an "indirect propaganda" in the U.S. Ciano and Rosso stressed that Italian culture could be an

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fascista. Ideologia e organizzazione dei fasci italiani all'estero (1920-1930),' *Storia contemporanea*, 6 (December 1995), pp. 897-956; Luca De Caprariis, ''Fascism for Export'? The Rise and Eclipse of the Fasci Italiani all'Estero,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2 (April 2000), pp. 151-183; Joao Fabio Bertohna, 'I fasci all'estero,' in Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi and Emilio Franzina, eds., *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana* (Rome: Donzelli, 2002), pp. 527-533; Emilio Franzina and Matteo Sanfilippo, eds., *Il fascismo e gli emigrati. La parabola dei Fasci italiani all'estero (1920-1943)* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2003). Works that provide an overview of Fascist propaganda abroad are the following: Benedetta Garzarelli, "Fascismo e propaganda all'estero: le origini della Direzione generale per la propaganda (1933-1934)," *Studi storici* 2 (April-June 2002): 477-520; Id., *Parleremo al mondo intero: la propaganda del fascismo all'estero* (Alessandria: Edizioni Dell'Orso, 2004); Matteo Pretelli, "La risposta del fascismo agli stereotipi degli italiani all'estero," *Altreitalie* 28 (January-June 2004): 48-65; Id., "Il fascismo e l'immagine dell'Italia all'estero," *Contemporanea* 2 (April 2008): 221-241; Id., *Il fascismo e gli italiani all'estero* (Bologna: Clueb, 2010); Francesca Cavarocchi, *Avanguardie dello spirito. Il fascismo e la propaganda culturale all'estero* (Rome: Carocci, 2010). Further, there are several articles and volumes detailing Fascist propaganda in specific countries. In this respect, see Claudia Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism: Italian Fascists and Britain's Italians in the 1930s* (Oxford, UK and New York: 2003); Pierluigi Ercole, "'The Greatest Film of the Fascist Era:' The Distribution of *Camicia nera* in Britain," *Alphaville* 6 (Winter 2013), accessed August 23, 2016, http://www.alphavillejournal.com/Issue6/HTML/ ArticleErcole.html; Id., "Screening Fascism in the Free State: Italian Propaganda Films and Diplomacy in Ireland, 1934-1940," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 30, no. 4 (2014): 493-510; Mario Ivani, *Esportare il fascismo. Collaborazione di polizia e diplomazia culturale tra Italia fascista e Portogallo di Salazar (1928-1945)* (Bologna: Clueb, 2008); Stefano Santoro, *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale: Diplomazia culturale e propaganda 1918-1943* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2005); Benedetta Garzarelli, "Cinema e propaganda all'estero nel regime fascista: le proiezioni di 'Camicia nera' a Parigi, Berlino e Londra," *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica* 2 (2003): 147-165; Manuela A. Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad: Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935-1940* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); Nir Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East, 1933-40* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 2010); Arturo Marzano, *Onde fasciste: La propaganda araba di Radio Bari (1934-43)* (Rome: Carocci, 2015); Franco Savarino Roggero, *México e Italia: política y diplomacia en la época del fascismo 1922-1942* (Mexico: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2003); Orazio A. Ciccarelli, "Fascist Propaganda and the Italian Community in Peru During the Benavides Regime, 1933-39," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2 (November 1988): 361-388; Federico Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism: Ideology, Violence, and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919-1945* (Durham, N. C.: Duke Unversity Press, 2010); David Aliano, *Mussolini's National Project in Argentina* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012).

[3] Galeazzo Ciano (1903-44), Benito Mussolini's son-in-law (he married Mussolini's daughter Edda in 1930), was a diplomat in Rio de Janeiro and Shanghai between the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s. In 1933 he became Undersecretary of Press and Culture in the Press Office of the Italian government; in 1934 he was Undersecretary of Press and Propaganda in the newly-established Under-secretariat of State for Press and Propaganda; in 1935 he became the Minister of Press and Propaganda; from 1936 to 1943 he was the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

effective form of indirect propaganda, particularly in the case in which it seemed to have no connection with the Italian governmental agencies operating in the U.S. In other words, the Italian regime viewed culture as an effective form of "soft power," which was to obliquely spread Fascist beliefs.[4] The distribution of Italian fiction films was part of this plan, whose ultimate goal was to demonstrate that under Mussolini's rule Italy was an efficient and morally virtuous country—and not a country plagued by violence, ignorance and backwardness, as many Americans believed.[5]

In a 1934 private dispatch detailing Americans' discontent toward Nazi propaganda and Fascist militarism, Ambassador Rosso thus warned the Government in Rome about the opportunity of doing propaganda indirectly:

> 1) Necessità di tener conto dello stato d'animo americano, esageratamente sospettoso di qualsiasi propaganda ufficiale straniera. *Opportunità quindi che l'azione di propaganda fascista venga svolta in via indiretta,* senza far apparire l'intervento degli organi governativi italiani ed evitando di dare ad essa il carattere di propaganda politica.[6]

Rosso also suggested some appropriate forms of indirect propaganda:

> 2) *Forme utili di propaganda indiretta possono usarsi nei seguenti campi: a) penetrazione culturale* mediante divulgazione delle notizie concernenti l'organizzazione e la vita fascista negli ambienti intellettuali americani. Converrà che questa azione appaia provocata dalle richieste stesse degli ambienti americani anziché organizzata con l'intento di influenzare le correnti dell'opinione pubblica; *b) cinematografia. Importa fare una accurata scelta dei soggetti più adatti alla particolare mentalità americana; c) radio.*[7]

On November 9, 1934 Count Ciano, then Undersecretary for the Press and the

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[4] In the field of international relations 'soft power' refers to 'the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies.' The quotation is from U.S. political scientist Joseph S. Nye Jr's volume *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), x. Nye had first introduced this expression in *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).
[5] On the Americans' stereotypical perception of Italy in early 20th century, see Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*; Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema*.
[6] In Augusto Rosso, "Propaganda straniera negli Stati Uniti," dispatch of October 19, 1934, addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to the Under-secretariat of State for Press and Propaganda, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 218: Folder "Propaganda straniera negli Stati Uniti." Italics are mine.
[7] In *ibidem*. Italics are mine.

Propaganda, communicated his agreement with Rosso and listed the guidelines of Fascist cultural propaganda in the U.S.:

> Nel programma che mi sono tracciato e che intendo svolgere nei riguardi degli Stati Uniti di America ho soprattutto tenuto presenti *tutte le forme di penetrazione culturale che non appaiano come un intervento diretto di organi governativi*. […] In tale senso ho disposto che venga fatta *la propaganda cinematografica e radiofonica*; a questo scopo *ho invitato la 'Dante Alighieri'*—Società con carattere eminentemente culturale—*ad attrezzarsi per intensificare la sua azione in America*, aprendo nuove scuole, favorendo istituzioni di corsi, organizzando un periodico invio di conferenzieri, curando i contatti con gli ambienti universitari.[8]

As Rosso and Ciano's statements make clear, Fascist authorities gave cinema a relevant role in their propaganda plans. What was at that time the relation between Mussolini's regime and the Italian film industry? The Fascist dictatorship produced non-fiction films—which included both newsreels and documentaries—through the state-controlled LUCE institute. Also, after the foundation of the Direzione Generale per il Cinema (DGC) in 1934, the regime had taken a strong control over the Italian film industry, so that it could supervise the production of fiction films and censor projects that appeared inappropriate.[9] The DGC director Luigi Freddi particularly believed that Italian fiction films had to adapt to the Fascist overall intellectual mindset by not supporting in a didactic way the dictatorship.[10]

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[8] In Galeazzo Ciano, dispatch of November 9, 1934, addressed to the Italian Embassy in Washington, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 218: Folder "Propaganda straniera negli Stati Uniti." Italics are mine. The Fascist Government established the Under-secretariat of State for Press and Propaganda in 1934, replacing the Press Office with it. The Under-secretariat included the DGSP and the DGC. In 1935 the regime transformed the Under-secretariat into the Ministry of Press and Propaganda. Finally, in 1937 the Minculpop replaced the Ministry of Press and Propaganda. Each of these changes was intended to strenghten the Fascist propaganda machine.

[9] Cf. Gian Piero Brunetta, *Il cinema italiano di regime: da "La canzone dell'amore" a "Ossessione," 1929-1945* (Bari-Rome: Laterza, 2009), esp. 3-68; Orio Caldiron, ed., *Storia del cinema italiano 1934-1939* (Venice: Marsilio; Rome: Edizioni di Bianco & Nero, 2006); Alfonso Venturini, *La politica cinematografica del regime fascista* (Rome: Carocci, 2015), esp. Ch. 1, 2 and 3.

[10] Cf. the following remarks by Italian film historian Vito Zagarrio: '[Freddi] non vuole trasformare i film in semplici strumenti propagandistici del regime: più che a politicizzare apertamente il cinema, Freddi punta a superare l'improvvisazione e l'incompetenza che spesso, secondo lui, lo caratterizzano, […] nella convinzione che una propaganda indiretta sia più efficace rispetto all'aperta esaltazione del fascismo e delle

In the context just outlined, which kind of films did Rosso and Ciano consider relevant for Fascist propaganda? Which kind of exhibition sites did they deem appropriate for the screening of Italian films? These were issues shared by Italian diplomats and cultural agents in the U.S., officials of the DGC and of the Ministero della Cultura Popolare (Minculpop). The films marking Fascist propaganda in 1930s America were indeed both fiction and non-fiction films, and their screening took place in both institutional and commercial sites. Institutional sites included the Italian Embassy in Washington, the various Italian Consulates spread throughout the country, and several branches of the Dante Alighieri society and of other Italian-American associations.[11] Commercial sites were regular film theaters located in New York City, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco and in other cities with large populations of Italian-Americans.

Non-fiction films, composed of both newsreels and documentaries, commonly praised Mussolini and his policies. To a considerable extent, such films were screened in institutional venues for the Italian-American community. Yet, Fascist officials also tried to promote the release of newsreels and documentaries in commercial film theaters, because in those settings Italian non-fiction films could reach American spectators. Further, in accordance with what both Rosso and Ciano stressed about Fascist indirect propaganda, the films' presentation in commercial venues appeared to sever any disturbing association with the Italian administration. In order to reach their goals, representatives of the Fascist Government acted as intermediaries between the LUCE

sue realizzazioni.' From Vito Zagarrio, 'Schizofrenie del modello fascista,' in Caldiron, *Storia del cinema italiano 1934-1939*, 37-61. The quotation is from pp. 46-47.

[11] Italian Consulates operated in New York, New Orleans, Baltimore, Chicago, St. Louis, Cleveland, Denver, San Francisco, and in other major cities. Likewise, branches of the Dante Alighieri Society existed in New York, Chicago and other major cities.

institute and distributors in the U.S.[12]

Along with their attention to non-fiction films, Fascist authorities also believed that fiction films could be effective propaganda tools in the U.S. Accordingly, around 130 Italian fiction films arrived in the U.S. during the 1930s, and the Italian Government played a crucial role in their distribution.[13] In line with Freddi's policy, Fascist diplomats thought that fiction films offered good vehicles of indirect propaganda because they could give a positive image of Italy without pedantically promoting the Italian regime's agenda. Indeed, although a few films such as *Scipione l'Africano* and *Sotto la croce del sud* [*Under the Southern Cross*, Guido Brignone, 1938][14] were overtly propagandistic, most of the fiction films imported in the U.S. were genre films that did not convey an explicit pro-Fascist discourse. A February 1936 dispatch by Rosso clarifies the perspective of Fascist agents in the U.S. on the role of fiction films in their propaganda activity. In his message Rosso explained to the Ministry for the Press and the Propaganda which films in his view were particularly appropriate to do propaganda:

> Agli effetti della nostra propaganda, *è assolutamente da evitare [...] l'esclusivo invio di films di carattere culturale, turistico e patriottico.* [...] *Il mezzo migliore per raggiungere il pubblico americano è quello di divertirlo*: qualunque film, purché attraente, contribuirà efficacemente alla nostra opera di propaganda [...]. Già il fatto che un buon film sia di marca italiana ed aspetti della vita umana vi siano presentati sotto luci italiane o da un punto di vista italiano compie *quella forma di sottile propaganda [...] tanto più convincente quanto meno avvertita dallo spettatore*.[15]

[12] The LUCE institute (LUCE stands for L'Unione Cinematografia Educativa [Educational Film Union]) arose in 1924 and was one of the main instruments of Fascist propaganda for the entire *ventennio*. See Pierluigi Erbaggio, "*Istituto Nazionale Luce*: A National Company with an International Reach," in Giorgio Bertellini, ed., *Italian Silent Cinema: A Reader* (London: John Libbey, 2013): 221-231. See also Erbaggio's Ph.D. Dissertation, *Writing Mussolini: The Duce's American Biographies on Paper and on Screen, 1922-1936*, University of Michigan, 2016.

[13] Trade journals like *The Film Daily* and *Variety* and the entertainment section of *The New York Times* were particularly useful to identify the Italian fiction films that circulated in the U.S. during the 1930s.

[14] Released in the U.S. in 1939.

[15] In Augusto Rosso, "Propaganda cinematografica," dispatch of February 25, 1936, addressed to the Ministry for the Press and the Propaganda, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per S. Francisco di California." Italics are mine.

Rosso admitted that the most suitable propaganda films were not the "cultural, touristic and patriotic films," but those films that, instead, realized a "subtle" and indirect propaganda. At the same time, his ideal propaganda film needed to be "attractive" and able to "entertain" American spectators—indeed, Rosso especially focused on U.S. spectators. In his dispatch, Rosso particularly alluded to fiction films and listed their main goals:

> Qualunque film italiano potrà […] mostrargli la tranquilla laboriosità dei nostri contadini, le case linde e piene di luce dei nostri operai, il gusto e la discreta agiatezza che circonda l'esistenza del professionista italiano. L'igiene dei nostri ospedali, il valore dei nostri medici, l'organizzazione delle nostre industrie, la modernità dei mezzi di comunicazione, la vita sportiva dei giovani, e persino le realizzazioni spirituali del Regime, possono essere illustrate in qualsiasi film.[16]

Rosso followed Freddi's line by arguing that good propaganda films were the ones that indirectly endorsed the Fascist society. At the same time, Rosso adapted Freddi's perspective to the American context. In the same dispatch the Italian Ambassador noted:

> Il grosso pubblico in America crede tuttora sinceramente che nella vita italiana si passi dagli splendori di una corte più o meno immaginaria ai bassifondi di Napoli, che la fantasia dei registi americani gli esibisce con insistente monotonia.[17]

According to Rosso, in the U.S. Italian fiction films had also the specific goal of eradicating such widespread stereotypes about Italy.

In 1930s America, Italian fiction films were sometimes part of the institutional screenings of Italian cinema. Yet, Rosso and other Italian diplomats especially sought to distribute fiction films in commercial film theaters. Their scope was twofold: expand as much as possible the exhibition of fiction films and, again, break the association between Italian films and Mussolini's Government. They considered this last step necessary to

[16] In *ibidem*.
[17] In *ibidem*.

pursue an effective indirect propaganda through fiction films.

In order to widen the distribution of fiction films, Fascist representatives supported the collaboration between Italian film producers and distributors in the U.S., who were Italian-American businessmen or—more rarely—American companies. After 1936, a newly established Governmental institute for international film distribution, named Unione Nazionale Esportazione Pellicole (UNEP), facilitated those connections.[18] UNEP's attempt to distribute fiction films in American film theaters also depended on economic factors: the release of fiction films involved commercial agreements between Italian producers on the one hand and American distributors and exhibitors in the U.S. on the other, and those agreements pressed Italian political and cultural agencies to exclude fiction films in their institutional and free screenings.[19]

To summarize, Fascist film propaganda assumed multiple trajectories in 1930s America: it relied on both fiction and non-fiction films, on both institutional and commercial screenings. Institutional screenings to a good extent introduced only non-fiction films and involved Italian-American communities. Commercial screenings regarded both non-fiction and fiction films and involved Italian-American and, to a lesser extent, American audiences. In this scenario, representatives of the Fascist dictatorship deemed particularly relevant the commercial distribution of fiction films, because in that case films that did not elaborate explicitly Fascist values appeared in 'a-Fascist' venues

[18] The Federazione Nazionale Fascista degli Industriali dello Spettacolo sustained UNEP's creation in January 1936, in accordance with the Italian Government. See Federazione Nazionale Fascista degli Industriali dello Spettacolo, *Le industrie dello spettacolo nell'anno 1937. Relazione sull'attività della Federazione presentata al Consiglio nella seduta del 14 giugno 1938* (Rome: Arte della Stampa, 1938). See, also, Daniela Manetti, *Un'arma poderosissima. Industria cinematografica e Stato durante il fascismo 1922-1943* (Rome: Franco Angeli, 2012).

[19] In his abovementioned dispatch, Rosso also mentioned this issue by stating: "Mi preoccupo […] di immistioni dei Regi Uffici in materia che involverebbe responsabilità commerciale." In Rosso, "Propaganda cinematografica."

such as American theaters; accordingly, such films could support indirectly the Fascist dictatorship and the 'new' Italy. With regard to fiction films' commercial circulation, Fascist propaganda to a large extent sought to disguise its own advertising function in order to be more effective.

Italian Fiction Films in 1930s America: An Overview.

My research has identified the circulation in 1930s–early 1940s America of around 130 Italian fiction films, exhibited along with dozens of non-fiction films.[20] This steady distribution of Italian fiction films ceased only when the U.S. joined the Second World War as Italy's enemy, and demonstrates that the so-called 'Legge sul monopolio' of September 1938—which severely limited the circulation of American films in Italy—did *not* put an end to the American distribution of Italian films.[21] This contradicts the position long held by film historians and scholars of Fascism who, with few exceptions, have overlooked the distribution of Italian fiction films in 1930s America.[22]

As mentioned before, distributors in the U.S. commonly released Italian films in cities with large populations of Italian-Americans: New York City, Boston, Philadelphia,

[20] See the filmography.

[21] The 'Legge sul monopolio' (Regio Decreto Legge no. 1389, September 4, 1938) made the state-controlled producing and distributing company ENIC (Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche) the only responsible for the purchase, the importation and the distribution of foreign films in Italy. Most of the American film companies did not accept this new rule, which reduced their profits, and interrupted the distribution of their films in Italy. The 'Legge Alfieri' (Regio Decreto Legge no. 1061, June 16, 1938) preceded and laid the basis for the 'Legge sul monopolio,' by supporting Italian film productions through generous governmental awards. Dino Alfieri, then Minister of the Popular Culture, signed the laws under consideration. For a discussion of these laws, see Brunetta, *Il cinema italiano di regime*, 3-28; Venturini, *La politica cinematografica del regime fascista*, Ch. 5.

[22] The most documented study on this topic is an essay by Italian scholar Guido Tintori, which reconstructs significant aspects of Fascist film propaganda by detailing the correspondence among the Italian Government, Italian consular agents and distributors in the U.S. Tintori's essay, however, almost completely ignores the dictatorship's intent to distribute fiction films in the commercial circuit. See Guido Tintori, 'Tra luce e ombra: una storia della propaganda cinematografica fascista nel Nuovo Mondo,' in Luconi and Tintori, *L'ombra lunga del fascio*, 61-84.

San Francisco, and others. New York City was the most relevant site for the screening of Italian films, since the biggest and most influential Italian-American community resided there. To a large extent the screenings took place in a few theatres of the Times Square district, such as the Broadway Cine Roma theatre (or Cine Roma), located between 52th Street and 53th Street, the Venice theatre (or Venezia), located between 59th Street and Seventh Avenue, and the Cinecittà theatre, located between Eight Avenue and 44th Street. Italian-American impresarios customarily ran these theaters by offering several forms of entertainment along with the screening of Italian films: stage plays, concerts, comic sketches. Featuring popular entertainers like Neapolitan-born Eduardo Migliaccio (whose stage name was Farfariello) and sensational melodramas full of picturesque landscapes, these shows especially addressed the Italian-American audience. However, in the case of Italian fiction films, distributors also sought to attract American spectators, since they included English subtitles in their films. Given that the Italian-American community in New York is the primary object of my research, this chapter mainly focuses on the distribution of Italian films in New York City.

My list shows that the average number of Italian films released in the U.S. was quite limited between 1931 and 1935 and that it significantly increased during the years 1936-1940. The Fascist Government's more extensive support of the Italian film industry after the foundation of the DGC (1934) explains the larger distribution of Italian films in the U.S. after the mid-1930s.

With regard to the first half of the 1930s, around thirty Italian fiction films reached U.S. theaters in that period. Some of them were silent films from the 1920s: the

mythological *Maciste all'inferno* [*Maciste in Hell*, Guido Brignone, 1926][23] and *Napoli che canta* [*Naples of Song*, Roberto Roberti, 1926],[24] an example of "southern" melodrama, namely a film marked by stereotypical characters, simplistic good vs. bad contrasts, picturesque landscapes.[25] Indeed, Italian melodramatic films abundantly flowed into the U.S. during the entire 1930s; in the early 1930s, the success of *Zappatore* [*Digger*, Gustavo Serena, 1929][26] testified to the popularity of this genre between the Italian-American audience. Significantly, distributors in the U.S. assigned to *Fra Diavolo* (Mario Bonnard, 1931) the title *Romance in the Abruzzi – Fra Diavolo*:[27] such a variation meant to emphasize the film's melodramatic component—and at the same time, presumably, to invite Italian-American spectators to enjoy the depiction of a specific Italian region. Other genres were common between the Italian film imports of the early 1930s: comedies, including *Rubacuori* [*Heartbreaker*, Guido Brignone, 1931][28] and *L'eredità dello zio… Buonanima* [*The Uncle's Inheritance*, Amleto Palermi, 1934],[29] whose main actors Armando Falconi and Angelo Musco were quite popular inside Italian-American communities; musicals, which included the highly successful *La canzone dell'amore* [*The Song of Love*, Gennaro Righelli, 1930][30] and which usually replicated comedy or melodramatic formulas; propaganda films such as *Camicia nera* (Giovacchino Forzano, 1934), which was screened the same year in the U.S. by receiving

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[23] Released in the U.S. in 1931.
[24] Released in the U.S. in 1931.
[25] In the first decades of the twentieth century, American and Italian-American culture recurrently reworked the picturesque aesthetic and the conventions of southern melodramas. See Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema*.
[26] Released in the U.S. in 1932.
[27] Released in the U.S. in 1931.
[28] Released in the U.S. in 1932.
[29] Released in the U.S. in 1935.
[30] Released in the U.S. in 1931.

the emphatic title *Man of Courage*.[31]

In the second half of the 1930s the Italian films released in the U.S. were about 25 in 1936, 25 in 1937, 20 in 1938, 20 in 1939 and 25 in 1940. A few other Italian films found a distribution in 1941. In this period, Italian comedies, melodramas and musicals continued to flow in the U.S. Comedies included *Il signor Max* [*Mister Max*, Mario Camerini, 1937],[32] *Ho perduto mio marito* [*I've Lost My Husband*, Enrico Guazzoni, 1937],[33] *Trenta secondi d'amore* [*Thirty Seconds of Love*, Mario Bonnard, 1936],[34] *Ai vostri ordini, signora…* [*At Your Orders, Madame*, Mario Mattoli, 1939].[35] These films introduced to the local audience actors like Vittorio De Sica, Nino Besozzi, Enrico Viarisio, Assia Norris, Isa Miranda, making them popular inside Italian-American communities.

The practice of retitling Italian films consistenly affected their circulation in the U.S. even during the second half of the 1930s.[36] For example, *1860* became *Gesuzza, la sposa garibaldina* [*Gesuzza, the Garibaldine Bride*, Alessandro Blasetti, 1934];[37] *Treno popolare* [*Popular Train*] became *Lacrime e sorrisi* [*Tears and Smiles*, Raffaello Matarazzo, 1933];[38] *Ginevra degli Almieri* became *Amore e denaro* [*Love and Money*, Guido Brignone, 1935];[39] *Tre uomini in frac* [*Three Men in Tails*] became *L'amore che*

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[31] Released there in *Camicia nera* ("black shirt") was the typical Fascist attire. On the distribution of *Camicia nera* in Europe, see Garzarelli, "Cinema e propaganda all'estero nel regime fascista," and Ercole, "'The Greatest Film of the Fascist Era.'"
[32] Released in the U.S. in 1939.
[33] Released in the U.S. in 1939.
[34] Released in the U.S. in 1937.
[35] Released in the U.S. in 1940.
[36] Some of the films that I am going to mention are from the early 1930s. However, I include them in this list because they appeared on the U.S. screens after 1935.
[37] Released in the U.S. in 1936.
[38] Released in the U.S. in 1936.
[39] Released in the U.S. in 1937.

canta [*Singing Love*, Mario Bonnard, 1932];[40] *Pergolesi* became *Amore e dolore* [*Love and Pain*, Guido Brignone, 1932];[41] *Aldebaran* became *Patria, amore e dovere* [*Nation, Love and Duty*, Alessandro Blasetti, 1935];[42] *Vecchia guardia* [*Old Guard*] became *Piccolo eroe* [*Little Hero*, Alessandro Blasetti, 1934];[43] *Questi ragazzi* [*These Boys*] became *Trionfo dell'amore* [*The Triumph of Love*, Mario Mattoli, 1937].[44] As in the previous years, the new titles tried again to attract Italian-American communities through an emphasis on basic melodramatic ingredients. In the case of Blasetti's *1860*, a film that depicts southern patriots fighting for Italy's unification, the title *Gesuzza, la sposa garibaldina* identifies a female character with a typical southern name; this only name evoked to spectators in the U.S. countless southern melodramas of the time and their emphasis on the characters' inner sentiments in the representation of a well-known historical event.

With respect to musicals, famous opera singers were the well-advertised stars of overtly melodramatic films: Beniamino Gigli was the leading player in *Casa lontana* [*Distant House*, Johannes Meyer, 1939][45] and *Solo per te* [*Only for You,* Carmine Gallone, 1938];[46] Tito Schipa was the main attraction of *Vivere!* [*Live!*, Guido Brignone, 1937][47] and *Chi è più felice di me* [*Who Is Happier Than Me*, Guido Brignone, 1938].[48] In the case of this last film, the opening titles alone testify to Schipa's popularity at the time, since they emphatically announce "un film di Tito Schipa."

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[40] Released in the U.S. in 1937.
[41] Released in the U.S. in 1937.
[42] Released in the U.S. in 1937.
[43] Released in the U.S. in 1937.
[44] Released in the U.S. in 1938.
[45] Released in the U.S. in 1940.
[46] Released the same year in the U.S.
[47] Released in the U.S. in 1938.
[48] Released in the U.S. in 1938.

As previously mentioned, a few propaganda films also continued to appear in the U.S.: particularly, *Condottieri*, *Scipione l'africano*, *Il grande appello* [*The Last Roll-Call*, Mario Camerini, 1936],[49] and *Sotto la croce del sud*. Indeed, although Rosso stressed that Fascist propaganda through fiction films had to be indirect, the Italian regime also supported the release of such propaganda films, sometimes playing a direct role in finding their American distributor. For example, as we will see in the last section of this chapter, in 1937 the Minculpop extensively dealt with one of the major American film companies, the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, for the international distribution of *Scipione l'africano*.

In any case, in conformity with Freddi's overall policy about the propaganda role of fictions films, and more specifically with Rosso's demands to the Italian Government from Washington, 'patriotic films' represented a minimum part of the Italian fiction films released in 1930s U.S.[50] The majority of them were genre films that did not didactically praise Fascism and whose primary function—in the regime's view—was to entertain spectators and to pursue a form of indirect propaganda by showing Italy's achievements and its overall well-being.[51]

Institutional Screenings of Italian Films

In 1930s and early 1940s America, the Fascist Government organized screenings of both non-fiction and fiction films in Italian diplomatic venues (the Embassy in Washington D.C. and the many Consulates spread across the country), Italian-American institutions (including the Italy-America Society and the Italian Library of Information in

[49] Released in the U.S. in 1939.
[50] Cf. Rosso, "Propaganda cinematografica."
[51] *Ibidem*.

New York City), and Italian language schools. Usually, the DGC and the Minculpop sent the films to the Embassy in Washington by diplomatic pouch, and then the Embassy took care of the films' distribution in consulates, cultural institutions, and schools. As Tintori notes, in the second half of the 1930s the Embassy developed a "double circuit" system: the prints first circulated in some cities on the East Coast and then they were sent to the Midwest and the West Coast, before being returned to the Embassy.[52]

The Fascist Government-controlled circulation of Italian films raised several issues. Such films arrived in the U.S. by diplomatic pouch and for educational purposes, thus not being subjected to the payment of tax duties and to the registration of their copyright.[53] As a result of it, Italian films were destined to free screenings. However, the Italian-American associations organizing free screenings commonly experienced financial difficulties, since they could not make profits from that activity. Also, the placement of fiction films in free screenings created frictions between the Italian Government and Italian producers, who were trying to place their works in commercial venues.

At the same time, the Fascist regime also succeeded in distributing Italian films in commercial theaters. This generated again controversies, since those films had arrived in the U.S. by diplomatic pouch and were not to be offered to paying spectators. The penetration of Italian films in commercial venues was due to the lack of integrity by both Fascist officials and unscrupulous Italian distributors, who pursued distinct goals. By promoting illegal screenings of Italian films in regular theaters, the Fascist agencies in the U.S. sought to expand the films' distribution as much as possible, as well as to sever any

[52] Tintori, "Tra luce e ombra."
[53] Indeed, the Copyright Office at the Library of Congress recorded only a few Italian fiction films. See the "Note about the quotation of films" (p. ix) and the filmography at the end of the volume.

association between Italian cultural works and Mussolini. Concurrently, some Italian entrepreneurs aspired to make profits by placing in commercial theatres films that they had received for free from the Italian Embassy. I dedicate the following pages to these issues by first examining institutional screenings of Italian films in Italian-American institutions and Italian-language schools, and then taking into consideration commercial screenings managed by various Italian-American distributors (specifically, a businessman named Umberto Finestauri and two companies, Nuovo Mondo and Esperia) and exhibitors (in this respect, I particularly focus on the New York City-based theatre Broadway Cine Roma).

In New York two notable institutions that hosted film screenings—and that even distributed Italian films to other cultural organizations and schools—were the Italy-America Society (a business association created in 1918) and the Italian Library of Information (established in 1938). Formally these institutions were information centers about Italian history and culture; however, their actual function was to promote Fascist Italy and to counteract anti-Fascist activities.[54] With reference to their film propaganda, Alberto Garabelli, secretary of the Italy-America Society during the 1930s, was the main curator for the film screenings of both the Italy-America Society and the Italian Library

[54] Director of the Italian Library of Information was Ugo Veniero D'Annunzio, the son of poet and novelist Gabriele. D'Annunzio had previously worked for another information center, the Unione Italiana d'America (created in 1935 and also located in New York), which also pursued propagandistic goals. The correspondence of the time between D'Annunzio and the Italian Government makes clear that both the Unione Italiana d'America and the Italian Library of Information aimed to support Fascism. For example, in 1937 D'Annunzio thus explained to Fulvio Suvich (Italian Ambassador in Washington from 1936 to 1938) his goal of doing indirect propaganda through Italian information centers: "Il concetto fondamentale è […] che la propaganda – per essere efficace – <u>deve essere somministrata per vie indirette</u>: i servizi che si rendono, le informazioni che si danno creano contatti d'ogni sorta e spesso utili, una più equa comprensione del nostro punto di vista, un atteggiamento mentale più benevole [sic]; l'ho potuto constatare nell'attività che svolsi durante la campagna Etiopica." In Ugo Veniero D'Annunzio, "'Italian Information Center,'" letter of March 31, 1937, addressed to Fulvio Suvich, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 219: Folder "Unione Italiana di New York." Emphasis is in the text.

of Information.[55]

Institutional screenings often introduced only LUCE newsreels and documentaries. Such screenings were meant to appeal to Italian-American communities by showing Italy's natural and artistic beauties. At the same time, they could also be explicitly propagandistic, as they customarily sustained Mussolini's actions during the most relevant events of the period, including the Ethiopian war of 1935-1936 and the Italian involvement in WWII. They also showcased the results of the dictatorship's long-term policies in fields such as welfare, public education, health care assistance, building of new infrastructures, preservation of the artistic Italian heritage. To quote an example, a 1935 publication by the Italy-America Society, titled *Moving Pictures of Italy: Available for Free Distribution*, listed films as diverse as *New Aspects of Rome*, *Transatlantic Flight of Balbo and His Squadron*, *Popular Songs of Abruzzi*, *Sicilian Sunshine*, *Il Duce at Forlì*, *The Maternity and Child Welfare Foundation*, *Florence*, *Venice*, *New Public Works*.[56] A report by Garabelli of June 1935 listed the institutions that rented these films from the Italy-America-Society. They included the Italian Historical Society of Staten Island (New York), the Italian World Veterans in the U.S. located in Providence (Rhode Island), a branch of the Dante Alighieri Society in New York City, the Pennsylvania University (Philadelphia, PA), and the Henry Snider High School (Jersey City, New Jersey).[57]

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[55] See the dispatches between Alberto Garabelli and representatives of the Italian Government in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 227: Folder "Italy-America Society New York."

[56] See *Moving Pictures of Italy: Available for Free Distribution*, a publication by the Italy-America Society (The Waldorf-Astoria, New York, NY), in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 219: Folder "Pellicole per l'Italy-America Society."

[57] See Garabelli's undated report "Rapporto sulla distribuzione delle pellicole dell'Istituto 'Luce' nel mese di giugno 1935," attached to Augusto Rosso, "Propaganda cinematografica," dispatch of June 27, 1935, addressed to the Under-secretariat of State for Press and Propaganda and to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 219: Folder "Pellicole per l'Italy-America Society."

Although institutional screenings largely presented non-fiction films, representatives of the Italian Government often sought to insert fiction films in their screenings. Italian authorities knew that narrative films made their cinema programs more attractive for the Italian-American audience, but they also considered fiction films appropriate propagandistic tools. We saw that Rosso explicitly suggested to the Government in Rome to send not only "patriotic" films to the U.S., but also works that in his view, by "entertaining" both Italian and Italian-American audience, could showcase the overall well-being of contemporary Italy and thus serve as form of indirect propaganda.[58]

In this context, functionaries of the Italian Government in the U.S. labeled as propaganda all the fiction films screened in institutional settings, even when the films were not explicitly propagandistic. For example, a 1935 dispatch by Ottavio De Peppo, at the time propaganda director at the Direzione Generale per i Servizi della Propagana (DGSP), listed six "sound films, destined to serve as propaganda between Italian communities in the United States" and those films were all fiction, including not only overt pro-Fascist works such as *1860* and *L'armata azzurra* [*The Blue Fleet*, Gennaro Righelli, 1932][59] but also comedies apparently devoid of ideological overtones such as *Tempo massimo* [*Full Speed*, Mario Mattoli, 1934].[60] Another dispatch, whose title was also "Propaganda cinematografica," mentioned the arrival in the U.S. of fiction and non-fiction films and again included both a comedy by Camerini, *Figaro e la sua gran*

[58] Cf. Rosso, "Propaganda cinematografica."
[59] Released in the U.S. in 1937.
[60] Released in the U.S. in 1936. See Ottavio De Peppo, "Propaganda cinematografica," dispatch of August 12, 1935, addressed to the Italian Embassy in Washington, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 219: Folder "Pellicole in itinerario Stati Uniti."

giornata [*Figaro and His Great Day*, 1931][61] and pro-Fascist works such as the newsreel *Viaggio di S. M. il Re in Somalia*.[62]

School settings too provided another form of institutional screenings that combined non-fiction and fiction films. For example, during the school year 1936-1937 the Italian Vice-Consulate in Newark (New Jersey) organized several screenings in the state's local schools that offered Italian language courses, and such screenings regularly presented fiction and non-fiction films: for example, one program introduced *L'armata azzurra*, *Operaio italiano in regime fascista*, and *Aspetti dell'avanzata italiana in A. O.* [Africa Orientale].[63] A 1938 report by the Italian Ambassador in Washington Fulvio Suvich (1936-1938) again demonstrates that institutional screenings could mix non-fiction and fiction films; in fact, in his dispatch Suvich mentioned the films that the Embassy was sending across the country at that time and the list included *1860*, *Terra madre* [*Mother Earth*, Alessandro Blasetti, 1931],[64] *L'armata azzurra*, *Vecchia guardia*, *Pompei*, *Littoria*, *Giotto*, *Viaggio del Fuhrer in Italia*, *D'Annunzio nella luce dell'immortalità*.[65]

Showing fiction films in free screenings regularly raised controversies between Italian authorities and film producers. Dino Alfieri, Undersecretary at the Ministry of Press and Propaganda from 1935 to 1937, detailed those controversies in a 1935 dispatch. Alfieri wished the "sfruttamento commerciale" of recent Italian films, but at the same

[61] Released in the U.S. in 1933.
[62] "Propaganda cinematografica," dispatch of October 29, 1935, sent from the DGSP to the Italian Embassy in Washington, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 219: Folder "Pellicole in itinerario Stati Uniti."
[63] See Giuseppe De Martini (an executive at the Italian Vice-Consulate in Newark), "La situazione scolastica nello stato di New Jersey all'inizio dell'anno scolastico 1936-37," report of November 20, 1936, addressed to the Italian Consulate in New York, in Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (hereafter ASMAE), Archivio Scuole 1936-1947, Box 117: Folder "New York 1936-1937."
[64] Released the same year in the U.S.
[65] Fulvio Suvich, "Pellicole cinematografiche," dispatch of July 19, 1938, addressed to the Minculpop, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 223: Folder "Pellicole per gli Stati Uniti."

time he was conscious that the exploitation of fiction films in regular theaters could prevent them from being presented in free screenings:

> La produzione cinematografica italiana va rapidamente migliorando, tanto che le pellicole di recentissima edizione possono veramente considerarsi pregevoli; ciò ha reso possibile alle competenti autorità e all'industria cinematografica di condurre, con fondate speranze di successo, trattative per lo *sfruttamento commerciale di tali nuove pellicole anche negli Stati Uniti*; *questi favorevoli sviluppi, implicano tuttavia difficoltà nei riguardi dei circuiti di propaganda, in quanto è comprensibile che i produttori siano riluttanti a consentire la circolazione gratuita di un film nuovissimo* proprio tra quegli italiani all'estero sui quali più appunto essi contano come pubblico pagante.[66]

Eventually, in spite of the "competition" between institutional and commercial screenings of Italian films, the Italian administration actually sought to rely on both, planning to continue institutional screenings and to facilitate a more extensive presence of fiction films in the commercial circuit. In the same dispatch, Alfieri noted:

> Comunque, se si giungerà ad assicurare al film italiano una larga diffusione, in codesto paese, con ciò sarà già fatta una buona propaganda. Tenuto conto però che i circuiti di cui trattasi devono inoltre servire, a molti effetti, come mezzo di coesione fra le nostre comunità, *si cercherà in ogni caso di assicurarne il buon funzionamento inviando costà quante più pellicole recenti sia possibile, compatibilmente con le esigenze del loro sfruttamento commerciale.*[67]

In the regime's view, the commercial distribution of Italian fiction and non-fiction films was a good propagandistic tool because it could reach a wider audience, both American and Italian-American, and because it broke any direct link between Italian films and the Italian Government. In the case of fiction films, their distribution in regular theaters satisfied the film producers' economic interests and represented a particularly appropriate form of indirect propaganda, in the sense that Rosso explained it. The following pages detail the commercial penetration of Italian films in the American market

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[66] In Dino Alfieri, "Propaganda cinematografica," dispatch of November 29, 1935, addressed to the Italian Embassy in Washington, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 219: Folder "Pellicole in itinerario Stati Uniti."
[67] In *ibidem*.

focusing first on the regime's deals with Italian-American distributors and then on its deals with American distributors.

An Italian-American Distributor: Umberto Finestauri

In the mid-1930s, Italian businessman Umberto Finestauri capitalized on the lack of reliable distribution networks for Italian films in the U.S. and succeeded in becoming an important partner of the Italian Government for the films' distribution of films in the U.S.[68] Based in New York City, Finestauri tried to distribute Italian fiction and non-fiction films in New York State and in other locations of the West Coast. His collaboration with the Italian Government lasted from 1934 to 1936 and it constantly provoked controversy, because Finestauri often resorted to unlawful practices in his activities. In particular, on several occasions Finestauri tried to release in commercial venues films that he had received from Italian diplomatic agencies. This procedure was not correct because, as we know, the Italian Embassy imported prints from Italy by diplomatic pouch and had to use them for free screenings. On the other side, in this particular situation even Italian consular agents acted in a contradictory way, since they sometimes seemed to accept Finestauri's questionable practices in order to expand the distribution of Italian films.

Finestauri first contacted the Press Office of the Italian Government in Fall 1934, by announcing his goal of improving Fascist film propaganda in the U.S. In his first message to the Press Office, Finestauri presented himself as the director of the Italian-

[68] Documents on Finestauri are in the Folder "Pellicole per il Comm. Umberto Finestauri," in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220.

American journal *Il Grido della Stirpe* and asked to buy LUCE films.[69] Only a few days later, in his second message to the Italian Government, Finestauri offered new credentials and had a different request; in fact, this time he presented himself as the agent of a certain Cinema Productions, Inc. and claimed that he was planning to sell LUCE films in the U.S. Thus, in this case Finestauri's goal was to receive prints for free, rather than buying them, and to take a percentage on the films' sales in the U.S.[70] After receiving the first request by Finestauri, the Under-secretariat of State for Press and Propaganda[71] did not fulfil it, since the Italian consulate in New York had reviewed Finestauri's references and had discovered that he was not the director of *Il Grido della Stirpe*.[72] Even Luigi Freddi, director of the DGC from 1934 to 1939, "non ritiene che sia il caso di dare seguito alle richieste del Finestauri, sul quale non si hanno informazioni sufficienti a dare affidamento di serietà."[73] A few weeks later, after having successfully purchased from LUCE a documentary on Mussolini's visit to Puglia, Finestauri requested again to Italian authorities more supplies of films for his propaganda; this time, he emphatically introduced himself as a *Grand'ufficiale e luogotenente Generale per America del Nord Celeste Reale militare ordine nostra Signora della Mercede*. The Italian Government once again was skeptical about granting Finestauri's requests, due to the previous

[69] Umberto Finestauri, "Propaganda Giornali Luce a New York," dispatch of October 23, 1934, addressed to Ottavio De Peppo, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per il Comm. Umberto Finestauri."

[70] Umberto Finestauri, dispatch of November 3, 1934, addressed to Ottavio De Peppo, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per il Comm. Umberto Finestauri."

[71] The Under-secretariat took care of the correspondence with Finestauri because it had recently replaced the Press Office.

[72] Ciano had requested information about Finestauri to the Italian consulate in New York. See Galeazzo Ciano's telegram of October 30, 1934 in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per il Comm. Umberto Finestauri." Antonio Grossardi, an official of the Italian consulate in New York, replied to Ciano: see his dispatches of November 1 and November 2 in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per il Comm. Umberto Finestauri."

[73] From a hand-written and un-authored note of the Under-secretariat of State for Press and Propaganda, dated November 3, 1934, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per il Comm. Umberto Finestauri."

correspondence with him and to the man's dubious credentials.[74] However, by March 1935 the situation had changed.

That spring Finestauri was able to organize in New York some successful screenings of the aforementioned documentary about Mussolini in Puglia, retitled *Madre Italia*, and this persuaded the Under-secretariat of State for Press and Propaganda to send him the newsreels *Viaggio di S. M. il Re in Eritrea*, *Manovre navali 1932*, and *Vedette della patria*.[75] Finestauri edited together these films into a single one, entitled *Fiamme di Guerra in Abissinia* [*Flames of War in Abissinia*] in spite of the fact that his montage contained only brief excerpts from the African war. Also, although the works that he had received through the Embassy were destined for free screenings, Finestauri began to distribute *Fiamme di Guerra* in commercial venues such as the Venice Theatre in the New York's Times Square district. An April 1935 letter by Finestauri to the DGSP makes clear that his aspiration was to prolong this illegal and lucrative mode of operation.[76] In fact, in this letter Finestauri explicitly stated that he intended to obtain more films through the Italian embassy because this prevented him from paying the custom fees and even the transportation expenses:

> Attendo per fare questo [Finestauri is referring to his propaganda activities] una sua risposta che mi dica su che materiale io posso contare, se mi è libera la scelta nel catalogo dell'Istituto Luce, e s'è possibile avere detti films per tramite del Consolato, verrei in tale guisa ad economizzare le spese non indifferenti del trasporto e della dogana dovendone sostenere molte altre per il lancio dei films.[77]

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[74] See Antonio Grossardi, "Umberto Finestauri," dispatch of January 22, 1935, and Ciano's reply of January 23 in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per il Comm. Umberto Finestauri."

[75] See Ottavio De Peppo, "Signor Umberto Finestauri – Propaganda cinematografica," dispatch of March 20, 1935, addressed to the Italian Embassy in Washington and to the Italian consulate in New York, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per il Comm. Umberto Finestauri."

[76] Umberto Finestauri, letter of April 15, 1935, addressed to the DGSP, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per il Comm. Umberto Finestauri."

[77] In *ibidem*.

In his message Finestauri requested both fiction and non-fiction films from the DGSP. After receiving this letter, De Peppo invited the consulate in New York to warn Finestauri

> che l'importazione in franchigia attraverso le RR. Rappresentanze di pellicole destinate, fosse pure in forma larvata, a uno sfruttamento commerciale, non è consentita; […] che i film a soggetto sono prodotti industriali che questo Sottosegretariato non può fornire se non per rappresentazioni private e gratuite.[78]

De Peppo's dispatch demonstrates that inside the Italian Government there were functionaries who continually questioned the nature of Finestauri's activities. Other exponents of the Italian Government, however, seemed to support Finestauri's unscrupulous methods. In particular, Pier Pasquale Spinelli, Italian consul in New York, praised Finestauri in May of 1935. Writing about his role in the distribution of Italian films, Spinelli noted:

> Il Finestauri ha potuto svolgere tale azione entrando in contatto con ambienti e persone che non è agevole e spesso inopportuno raggiungere con i tramiti consueti. […] Ritengo che l'opera svolta dal Finestauri sia stata abbastanza buona e potrà esserlo anche in seguito a condizione che egli la svolga a titolo personale negli stessi ambienti e negli stessi centri con i quali egli è stato finora in contatto. […] Mi permetto esprimere parere a che gli venga facilitata la sua opera mediante la concessione di altre pellicole.[79]

The "places" to which Spinelli was referring were commercial theaters in New York, Washington, Philadelphia and Boston. Although in his message he also complained about the "spettacoli di infima qualità" that often accompanied the films' screenings in such theaters, Spinelli considered positive the release of Italian films in commercial venues, since the Italian Government could not deal directly with those venues. Indeed, the message by the New York consul was effective, because the Under-secretariat of

[78] In Ottavio De Peppo, "Signor Umberto Finestauri – Propaganda cinematografica," dispatch of May 2, 1935, addressed to the Italian consulate in New York, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per il Comm. Umberto Finestauri."
[79] In Pier Pasquale Spinelli, "Finestauri Umberto," dispatch of May 22, 1935, addressed to the Under-secretariat of State for Press and Propaganda, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per il Comm. Umberto Finestauri."

State for Press and Propaganda sent to Finestauri more non-fiction films: *Val d'Intelvi – Esercitazioni di carri armati e cavalleria. Partenza di truppe per l'A. O.*, *Viaggio di S. M. il Re in Somalia*, *Viaggio di S. A. R. il Principe di Piemonte in Tripolitania*, and others.[80] However, by following Spinelli's suggestions and extending its collaboration with Finestauri the Italian Government implicitly accepted the fact that its partner in the U.S. could introduce in commercial theaters films that had arrived in the country by diplomatic pouch. Ultimately, the Italian Government preferred to overlook the nature of Finestauri's activity because Finestauri helped to expand the distribution of Italian films in the country.

Two dispatches of late 1935 by the newly appointed Italian consul in New York, Gaetano Vecchiotti, confirm the contradictory attitude of the Italian Government toward Finestauri's unlawful practices. In his first dispatch, dated November 20, 1935, Vecchiotti stated:

> Purché svolta esclusivamente a titolo personale, l'attività del Finestauri riesce senza dubbio utile: e a mio subordinato avviso, potrebbe essergli facilitata col fargli pervenire nei prossimi invii di attualità, soggetti di argomento coloniale che presentino un certo interesse.[81]

In this message Vecchiotti seemed to maintain his predecessor's position by sustaining Finestauri's work. Although he certainly knew about Finestauri's unreliability, Vecchiotti also aimed to preserve the collaboration with him in order to maintain a wide distribution of Italian films. However, one month later Vecchiotti changed his opinion and warned one unmentioned functionary at the DGSP about the opportunity of dealing with Finestauri:

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[80] See Ottavio De Peppo, "Umberto Finestauri – Invio di films," dispatch of September 11, 1935, addressed to the Italian consulate in New York, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per il Comm. Umberto Finestauri."

[81] In Gaetano Vecchiotti, "Finestauri U.," dispatch of November 20, 1935, addressed to the DGSP, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per il Comm. Umberto Finestauri."

> Mi è stato […] riferito che o dal Finestauri o da persone con cui egli è in contatto, talune delle pellicole L.U.C.E. a lui affidate vengono cedute a pagamento e proiettate a scopo speculativo. […] Ritengo che il continuare ad affidare al Finestauri pellicole in franchigia potrebbe far sorgere incidenti e imbarazzi.[82]

Vecchiotti also suggested the possible solutions to this problem:

> Ho l'onore pertanto di sottomettere alla S.V.Illma l'oppotunità o di inviare in avvenire al Finestauri il materiale L.U.C.E. per via ordinaria, con relativo pagamento dell'imposta doganale, e controllo della censura: o di sospendere del tutto l'invio, in vista di una riorganizzazione della propaganda cinematografica negli Stati Uniti su più vaste e sicure basi.[83]

Facing renewed criticism, Finestauri tried once again to defend his actions and to boast of his accomplishments. Not surprisingly, he presented himself with a new qualification, specifically as the president of a firm called Piedmont American Films Exchange, Inc.[84] However, this was the last attempt by Finestauri to lure Italian authorities; in fact, following Vecchiotti's suggestion, in the course of 1936 the Italian Government began to re-organize film propaganda in the U.S. and to look for new and more reliable partners. Eventually, the Ministry of Press and Propaganda found an arrangement with a company called Nuovo Mondo Motion Pictures.

Nuovo Mondo Motion Pictures: Strenghtening the Fascist Penetration in the American Film Market.

The Italian Government aimed to revitalize its film propaganda in the U.S. by breaking any connection with businessmen like Finestauri, whose activity could damage

[82] In Gaetano Vecchiotti, "Finestauri U.," dispatch of December 27, 1935, addressed to the DGSP, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per il Comm. Umberto Finestauri."
[83] In *ibidem*.
[84] Umberto Finestauri, letter of March 3, 1936, addressed to the DGSP, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per il Comm. Umberto Finestauri." Actually, the fascinating list of Finestauri's disguises is even longer, since in his correspondence with the Italian Government he also introduced himself as "Commendatore" and as "the Sole Agent for U.S., Canada and Mexico" of a certain Consorzio Autori Produzione film Italiani. See Augusto Rosso, "Finestauri Umberto," dispatch of December 31, 1935, addressed to the Ministry for Press and Propaganda, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per il Comm. Umberto Finestauri."

Italy's reputation. The regime needed to find distributors who could regularly pay the expenses for the commercial release of Italian fiction and non-fiction films in the U.S. In this context, during the second half of the 1930s the two most relevant partners of the Italian Government were first Nuovo Mondo Motion Pictures and then Esperia Film Distributing Company, both based in New York City. Head of Nuovo Mondo was Joe Brandt (1882-1939), an influential figure of the Hollywood film industry since the 1910s.[85] Beyond Brandt, the executives of Nuovo Mondo and Esperia were members of the Italian-American community; indeed, the Italian Government preferred to deal with people of Italian descent because it considered them more inclined to follow its propaganda plans.

A November 1936 dispatch by Dino Alfieri, then Undersecretary at the Ministry of Press and Propaganda, illustrates the new directions of Fascist film propaganda and particularly the agreement stipulated by the Italian Government with Nuovo Mondo. The dispatch in question, addressed to the Italian Embassy in Washington, makes clear that the Ministry of Press and Propaganda closely monitored the contacts between Italian film producers and Nuovo Mondo:

> La Nuovo Mondo ha stretto i suoi rapporti d'affari con i produttori italiani di pellicole cinematografiche sotto l'auspicio di questo Ministero ed attraverso trattative alle quali questo Ministero ha preso parte diretta. L'esito dei primi mesi di gestione e la nuova situazione amministrativa, […] nonché gli impegni che di fronte alla "Nuovo Mondo" hanno preso i produttori italiani, rendono evidente la necessità di appoggiare in tutti i modi tale iniziativa che esce dallo stretto ambito commerciale per entrare in quello di una vasta propaganda d'italianità negli Stati

[85] Joe Brandt, originally a lawyer turned publicist (for journals like *Billboard* and the *Dramatic Mirror*), first entered film industry as an employee of Carl Laemmle and during most of the 1910s served as one of the managers of the Universal Film Corporation. After a brief experience with the National Film Corporation of America between 1919 and 1920 (for which he also worked as a screenwriter), in the summer of 1920 Brandt founded with Jack Cohn and Harry Cohn the C.B.C. (Cohn-Brandt-Cohn), destined to become later the Columbia Pictures Corporation. Brandt left Columbia in 1932 and continued to work in the film industry by holding several positions, including the management of Nuovo Mondo. On Brandt's career, see Bernard F. Dick, *The Merchant Prince of Poverty Row: Harry Cohn of Columbia Pictures* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1993): 16-57.

Uniti d'America.[86]

In the same dispatch, Alfieri proposed to eliminate institutional screenings and to give to Nuovo Mondo the entire responsibility of Fascist film propaganda in the commercial circuit:

> Questo Ministero resta del parere […] che l'unica iniziativa cinematografica degna di appoggio sia […] la "Nuovo Mondo". […] Comunico che è allo studio presso questo Ministero la opportunità di sopprimere i circuiti di propaganda di film italiani negli Stati Uniti d'America attraverso le Autorità Consolari e le Associazioni italiane. In tal modo i film italiani tanto spettacolari che documentari sarebbero presentati unicamente dalla 'Nuovo Mondo.'[87]

Alfieri's plan was consistent with multiple goals that the Italian administration was pursuing: exploiting for propaganda both fiction and non-fiction films, reaching a wider audience through the commercial theaters, supporting the financial interests of Italian film producers, discontinuing the potentially disturbing connection between Italian cinema and the Italian dictatorship. However, in spite of Alfieri's remarks the Italian Government did not really dismiss institutional screenings in the following years. Although in the second half of the 1930s the Italian Government more forcefully pursued the distribution of Italian films in commercial screenings, institutional and commercial screenings of Italian films continued to coexist until 1941.[88] This happened especially because, as I shall explain at length further, Nuovo Mondo and other partners of the Italian Government never really managed to secure a stable circulation of fiction and non-fiction films in American commercial theaters, thus forcing the regime to maintain different forms of film propaganda.

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[86] In Dino Alfieri, dispatch of November 10, 1936, addressed to the Italian Embassy in Washington, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per il Comm. Umberto Finestauri."
[87] In *ibidem*.
[88] For this reason, the aforementioned Alfieri dispatch suggesting that the Italian Government intended to do film propaganda through both institutional and commercial screenings reflects more accurately the actual policy that the regime followed in doing film propaganda in the U.S. See Alfieri, "Propaganda cinematografica."

As Alfieri's dispatch already makes clear, Nuovo Mondo initially seemed a very reliable company to the Italian Government. The LUCE president, Barone Paulucci di Calboli, wrote to the DGSP that

> la Nuovo Mondo Motion Pictures, 1270 Sixth Avenue, di New York, sembra dare le migliori garanzie finanziarie e morali: vi sono nel suo consiglio direttivo e di amministrazione i nomi dei più autorevoli rappresentanti del nostro paese negli Stati Uniti.[89]

Nuovo Mondo began its activities in 1936 by signing an agreement with the UNEP for the distribution of Italian films in the U.S.[90] Italian authorities deemed Nuovo Mondo an appropriate partner not only as a film distributor but also as an exhibitor, since the company owned a number of film theaters. A note of April 1936 by Francesco Cottafavi, a representative of the DGSP, praised Nuovo Mondo by stressing that

> Due sono i sistemi adottati da questa società: 1° = Gestione di teatri in proprio per sola programmazione di films italiani nei centri più importanti degli Stati Uniti, del Canadà e del Centro America; 2° = Circuito di noleggio delle pellicole nel maggior numero di teatri in questi tre Stati. Attualmente i contratti di noleggio dovrebbero svolgersi su di un circuito di oltre 220 teatri.[91]

The concentration in Nuovo Mondo of both distribution and exhibition roles considerably strengthened the penetration of the Italian Government in the American film market. Indeed, in this scenario the Italian regime controlled production, distribution and exhibition of Italian fiction and non-fiction films in the U.S. First, the Fascist dictatorship produced non-fiction films through the LUCE institute and supervised the production of

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[89] In Barone Paulucci di Calboli, "Proposte Nuovo Mondo Pictures di New York," dispatch of May 2, 1936, addressed to the DGSP, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per il 'Nuovo Mondo' di New York."

[90] An un-authored dispatch of the Ministry of Press and Propaganda, titled "Appunto per il Ministero degli Affari Esteri" and dated August 25, 1936 (in ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Stati Uniti, Box 43: Folder "Nuovo Mondo Pictures, inc: finanziamento") mentions the deal between Nuovo Mondo and UNEP. See also the articles "Joe Brandt releasing 15-20 Italian Features in U. S.," *The Film Daily*, January 15, 1936: 1 and 11; "Luporini handling details of Brandt's Italian Deal," *The Film Daily*, February 27, 1936: 2.

[91] In Francesco Cottafavi, "Promemoria per l'Ufficio del Ministero per la Stampa e la Propaganda," April 28, 1936, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per il 'Nuovo Mondo' di New York."

fiction films through the DGC.[92] Further, the Italian Government mediated among Italian producers, the UNEP and Nuovo Mondo, in order to regulate the distribution and exhibition of Italian films in the U.S. In such a context, the Nuovo Mondo theatre that most of all satisfied the propaganda's goals in the second half of the 1930s was the aforementioned Broadway Cine Roma in New York City.

An Italian-American Film Theatre: the Broadway Cine Roma (New York City).

The Broadway Cine Roma was a theatre located in the Times Square district of New York City, between the 52th and the 53th streets, and it could host around 1200 spectators (see Fig 1).[93]

Fig. 1. Cine Roma's exterior, New York City, 1938. Photo by George Mann. Courtesy of the George Mann Archive.

[92] See Ch.3 for a more comprehensive discussion of this issue. Some preliminary bibliographic references are: Vito Zagarrio, "Schizofrenie del modello fascista," in Caldiron, *Storia del cinema italiano*, 37-61; Venturini, *La politica cinematografica del regime fascista*.
[93] See "29 B'way Houses Can Accommodate 2,306,556 Weekly," *The Film Daily*, 14 February 1938: 5.

The first manager of the Cine Roma was a member of the Italian-American community named Giovanni Mazzavini.[94] The theater opened in March 1936, receiving a considerable support from pro-Fascist Italian-American newspapers and journals, which repeatedly deemed the Italian fiction and non-fiction films screened at the Cine Roma as expressions of the "new Italy," of "modern Italy."[95] By making explicit the propagandistic nature of the theater *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* noted: "l'Impresa si è obbligata a proiettare soltanto films italiani che abbiano l'approvazione per l'esportazione del Ministero Italiano Propaganda e Cinematografia."[96]

The Cine Roma screenings rapidly became popular for the Italian-American community of New York and probably, to some extent, they were also able to attract American spectators.[97] In August 1936 the consul in New York Vecchiotti informed the DGC about the success of Italian films at the Cine Roma; however, in the same message he also made clear that, in spite of that success, the financial situation of Nuovo Mondo

[94] See "Italian Theater Opens on Broadway March 26," *The Film Daily*, 20 March 1936: 1 and 4. This article Americanizes Mazzavini's first name as John. See also "Nobile iniziativa del Cine-Roma per la lingua italiana," *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, April 1, 1936: 11. In addition to mentioning Mazzavini, this article informs that the Cine-Roma was starting to give tickets for free to the Italian language schools of the city.

[95] See "Al Cine Roma," *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, April 18, 1936: 5. Referring to the film *Lorenzino de' Medici*, this article states: "Gli italiani accorreranno con le loro famiglie a vedere questo capolavoro della ringiovanita industria cinematografica italiana, perché così potranno constatare personalmente il progresso che l'Italia moderna sta facendo anche in questo campo." Articles that replicate the same argument are, for example: "La Canzone del Sole e gli artisti del Metropolitan," *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, May 7, 1936: 5; "Seconda Settimana di 'La Cieca di Sorrento,'" *Corriere d'America*, August 9, 1936: 4-S. The pro-Fascist cultural journal *Atlantica* (New York) also praised Italian cinema in nationalist terms, by defining it "an art distinctively Italian and modern" and adding: "This revival [the renewed quality of Italian films] began a few years ago, and the results are now apparent in the quality of the Italian films imported into this country. The nature of the pictures brought during the past few months to the Cine-Roma Theatre at Broadway and 52nd Street in New York has been such to attract unusually favorable comment in the regular reviews published in the New York daily press." This quotation comes from "The Italian Cinema," *Atlantica*, Vol. 18, no. 4 (July 15, 1936): 95.

[96] "Al Cine Roma," *Il Progresso italo-americano*, March 21, 1936: 5.

[97] *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* sometimes reported that even American spectators enjoyed Italian films at the Cine-Roma. See, for example, "Un nuovo successo della 'Nuovo Mondo Motion Pictures'," *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, April 19, 1936: 6-S. This article refers to the screening of *Lorenzino de' Medici*. *Atlantica* also alluded to the heterogeneous composition of the Cine Roma's audience by emphasizing the "widespread popular support on the part of Italo-American and other theatregoers." See "The Italian Cinema," *Atlantica*, Vol. 18, no. 4 (July 15, 1936): 95.

was indeed bad and that Francesco Cottafavi from the DGSP had gone to New York trying to solve the situation:

> Trasmetto notizie fornitemi Cottafavi, che informa situazione "Nuovo Mondo Pictures" molto migliore di quanto appariva. Per facilitare soluzione della crisi presidenza assunta Conte Facchetti. Cinematografo Roma pesa parecchio su 'Nuovo Mondo' ma sua funzione propaganda è indispensabile: oltre 200000 persone hanno già frequentato cinematografo in tre mesi.[98]

As Vecchiotti's message suggests, in summer 1936 a certain Conte Facchetti, whose full name was Alfonso Facchetti-Guglia, had become the new president of Nuovo Mondo. A *Film Daily* article of the time stressed that Joe Brandt had approved this change.[99]

An October 1936 dispatch by Vecchiotti, sent to Ambassador Suvich, lists the further steps that the new board of Nuovo Mondo and the Italian Government were planning to address Nuovo Mondo's financial problems.[100] In his message Vecchiotti indicated that the DGSP emissary Cottafavi agreed with Facchetti-Guglia and Brandt trying to improve Nuovo Mondo and Cine Roma's financial stability by separating them. This plan consisted essentially of three steps: new management had to take charge of the Cine Roma; Nuovo Mondo would only take care of film distribution, by preserving its collaboration with the UNEP; and a new society, tentatively called Cine-Lux, was to become responsible for the exhibition of Nuovo Mondo films, its main task being the opening in the country of more Cine Roma theaters. The deal implied that the Cine Roma, Nuovo Mondo and Cine-Lux would have all acted in accordance with the regime.

In the same dispatch Vecchiotti also added that Guglia had created a Committee,

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[98] In Gaetano Vecchiotti, "Nuovo Mondo Pictures," dispatch of August 11, 1936, addressed to the DGC, in ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Stati Uniti, Box 43: Folder "Nuovo Mondo Pictures, inc: finanziamento."
[99] See "Count Facchetti-Guglia Named Nuovo Mondo Head," *The Film Daily*, 5 November 1936: 1.
[100] Gaetano Vecchiotti, "Nuovo Mondo Pictures Inc," dispatch of October 31, 1936, addressed to the Italian Embassy in Washington, in ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Stati Uniti, Box 43: Folder "Nuovo Mondo Pictures, inc: finanziamento."

composed of some Italian businessmen living in New York, whose first goal was the formation of the Cine-Lux. The Committee planned to share the Cine-Lux's stocks between the Committee members and any Italian-American who was willing to buy some stocks. Thus, Cine-Lux's aspiration to open several Cine Roma theatres relied on the Italian-Americans' financial contribution. With regard to this, Vecchiotti stressed in his message that Italian-Americans buying Cine-Lux stocks had to perceive that society uniquely as a commercial enterprise, *which had no connection with the activity of the Italian government*. In other words, the Committee had to dissuade Italian-Americans that the screening of Italian films in Cine-Lux theaters was "un'iniziativa di carattere ufficiale" or "una forma di sottoscrizione coloniale."[101]

In the end, the Italian Government failed to accomplish Vecchiotti's ambitious plan. The documents of the Italian dictatorship do not further mention the Cine-Lux and the attempt to create more Cine Roma theatres around the country. On the other hand, at the beginning of 1937 Nuovo Mondo and Cine Roma were still in association and their activity seemed to have gained some new strength, given that Nuovo Mondo announced the distribution of more Italian films.[102] However, a June 1937 report by Ambassador Suvich makes clear that after a few months the financial situation of Nuovo Mondo and Cine Roma was once again critical.[103] Since various issues had constantly affected Nuovo Mondo, in the same report Suvich asked for its dismissal and for the creation of a new society. The Italian Ambassador hoped to find a new partner for the distribution and the exhibition of Italian films, which could abandon those unlawful practices that even

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[101] In *ibidem*.
[102] See "26 Italian Pix for Nuovo Mondo in Deal," *The Film Daily*, 23 January 1937: 1 and 3.
[103] Fulvio Suvich, "Nuovo Mondo Pictures Inc.," dispatch of June 10, 1937, addressed to the Minculpop, in ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Stati Uniti, Box 43: Folder "Nuovo Mondo Pictures, inc: finanziamenti."

Nuovo Mondo had eventually exploited. In fact, Suvich had found out that—although Vecchiotti and other consular agents had tried to prevent it—Guglia requested financial support from Italian-Americans by suggesting that the Italian Government officially backed Nuovo Mondo's activity.[104]

Eventually, in August 1937 Nuovo Mondo went bankrupt and out of business.[105] On the other side, Cine Roma was able to go on. By the end of 1937 the Broadway theatre had new managers: they were Pietro Garofalo and two more individuals named Messina and Di Graziano. Garofalo also managed a distribution company, called Cine-Lux (not related to the previous one with the same name), which replaced Nuovo Mondo and perpetauted strategies that created embarrassment to Italian consular agents. Even Garofalo used to sell stocks to Italian-Americans by convincing them that the Fascist regime sustained his distribution company.[106] This fact soon led Garofalo to stop his activity as a distributor, but it did not prevent him from running the Cine Roma for some more years. In the meantime, in 1939 a new and more reliable distributor of Italian films arose, the New York-based Esperia Film Distributing Company, which for a couple of years revived Fascist film propaganda in the U.S.

A New Distributor: Esperia Film Distributing Company

Esperia was the main distributor of Italian fiction and non-fiction films in the U.S. from 1939 to 1941. Its president was a lawyer called Francesco Macaluso, another

[104] See *ibidem*.

[105] On Nuovo Mondo failure see "Nuovo Mondo Schedules Filed in Federal Court," *The Film Daily*, October 11, 1937: 2; see also Gaetano Vecchiotti, "Fallimento 'Nuovo Mondo' (Films)," dispatch of January 13, 1938, addressed to the Minculpop, in ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Stati Uniti, Box 52: Folder "Nuovo Mondo Pictures."

[106] See ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Stati Uniti, Box 62: Folder "Signor Garofalo – Cine Lux."

controversial figure of the Italian-American community of the 1920s and the 1930s.

In the early 1920s Macaluso was the director of the Boston-based Italian-American newspaper *Giovinezza* [Youth] and a member of the local Fascio; however, his reputation was not very good, since a dispatch of September 1923 from the Italian consulate in Boston described him as an "ex socialista, ex repubblicano, sempre ed oggi ancora opportunista, senza professione fissa, ambizioso all'eccesso, di dubbia moralità, noto ed assai malvisto in colonia."[107] Later in the 1920s Macaluso had certainly improved his reputation, since he held secretarial duties in the FLNA. In the early 1930s he was the director of a pro-Fascist Italian-American newspaper published in New York City, called again *Giovinezza*.

As a promoter of Italian cinema, Macaluso first contacted the DGSP in early 1939, claiming that he was the only and legitimate distributor in the U.S. of both LUCE and ENIC (Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche) films.[108] The ENIC was a production and distribution company that emerged in 1935 as a branch of the Istituto Luce. The DGSP came to know that Macaluso's statements were not true.[109] Still, Macaluso somewhat succeeded in securing from the Italian Government the rights to distribute fiction films and LUCE newsreels in the U.S.

In March 1939 Esperia began to release several Italian fiction films in the country, including the colonial film *Squadrone bianco*, *The Life of Giuseppe Verdi* (*Giuseppe*

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[107] From the dispatch of September 28, 1923 by the Italian consulate in Boston, addressed to the Ambassador in Washington Gelasio Caetani, in ACS, Minculpop, Gabinetto, Reports con docc. dal 1921 (1926-1944), Box 7 (reports 71 and 71A): Folder n. 4. On Macaluso's activities in the U.S. see Cannistraro, *Blackshirts in Little Italy*, 20-21, 47, 52, 62, 66, 83, 91.

[108] See the dispatch from the DGSP of March 16, 1939, addressed to the LUCE and the ENIC, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 227: Folder "Modern Film Distributing Company."

[109] See "Avv. Macaluso – New York," dispatch from the ENIC of March 29, 1939, addressed to the Minculpop, and "Avv. Francesco Macaluso," dispatch from LUCE of March 21, 1939, addressed to the Minculpop, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 227: Folder "Modern Film Distributing Company."

Verdi, Carmine Gallone, 1938),[110] *Nobody's Land* (*Terra di nessuno*, Mario Baffico, 1939),[111] *Between Two Worlds* (*Una donna tra due mondi*, Goffredo Alessandrini and Arthur Maria Rabenalt, 1936),[112] *Un'avventura di Salvator Rosa* [*An Adventure of Salvator Rosa*, Alessandro Blasetti, 1939].[113] Often Esperia distributed Italian films with English subtitles; also, Macaluso's company had its own trademark in the films' opening credits: an airplane whose contrails pictured in the sky the name of the company (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 3). In 1939 Macaluso also started to distribute Luce newsreels; a year later, he also requested documentaries to the Minculpop.[114] However, at that time an Italian-American called Pio Sterbini held the rights to distribute documentaries in the U.S., and Esperia had to wait January 1941 to replace Sterbini and to finally receive documentaries.[115]

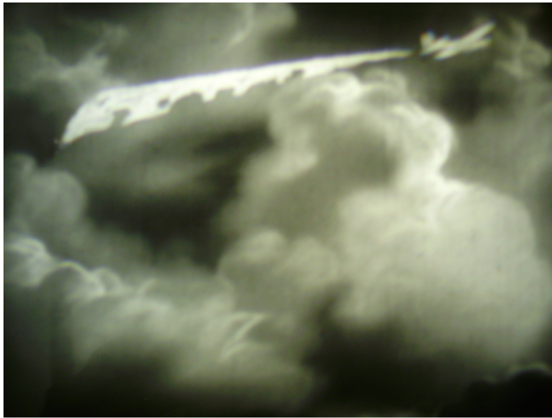

Fig. 2. Esperia's opening title. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division (Washington, D.C.).

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[110] Released in the U.S. in 1940.
[111] Released in the U.S. in 1940.
[112] Released in the U.S. in 1940.
[113] Released in the U.S. in 1940.
[114] See Alessandro Pavolini (then minister of the Minculpop), "Invio pellicole e documentari negli Stati Uniti," dispatch of September 20, 1940, addressed to the Italian Embassy in Washington, in ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Stati Uniti, Box 70: Folder "Proiezione Giornali Luce negli Stati Uniti."
[115] See the undated and un-authored report from Luce titled "Rapporti tra l'Istituto Nazionale Luce con gli Stati Uniti," in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 227: Folder "New York = Esperia Film." The report certainly dates back to the last months of 1940.
With regard to the correspondence between the Italian Government and Esperia during both 1940 and 1941, other references are in the Folder "Proiezioni giornali Luce negli S. U. A.," in ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Stati Uniti, Box 78.

Fig. 3. Esperia's opening title. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division (Washington, D.C.).

After Mussolini's war declaration against Great Bretain and France on June 10, 1940, Esperia's film distribution met with several complications, since the shipment of films from Italy to the U.S. became difficult. As Tintori exhaustively explains in his essay, Italian authorities had to ship films by avoiding air flights that passed through British territories like Trinidad and the Bermuda islands, because British authorities could confiscate the Italian prints.[116] The Italian Government solved this problem by sending the prints first by plane to Lisbon and then by ship to the U.S.[117] However, this solution was particularly time consuming, because the Portuguese Government requested Italian diplomats to fill multiple documents in order to grant the shipments.[118] As a result, the Italian Government began to ship films to the U.S. through the Linee Aeree Trancontinentali Italiane (Lati). In this case, the films first arrived in Rio De Janeiro (Brazil), and then they moved to New York through an air route called "Condor" or

[116] Tintori, "Tra luce e ombra."
[117] See Ascanio Colonna (Ambassador in Washington from 1939 to 1941), dispatch of September 25, 1940, addressed to the Minculpop, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 227: Folder "New York = Esperia Film."
[118] See the letter from the carrier Cipolli e Zanetti to the Istituto Luce, dated November 22, 1940, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 227: Folder "New York = Esperia Film."

through similar routes.[119] Sending films through the Lati was very expensive; however, due to the necessity of intensifying propaganda in a very delicate moment, the Minculpop decided to adopt this solution in the first months of 1941.[120]

Notwithstanding these initiatives, none of the mentioned shipping routes gave good results to Fascist authorities. Often the newsreels and documentaries did not reach their destination, due to several factors: bureaucratic issues, losses or damages during the journey, or the intervention of British authorities. Furthermore, U.S. authorities could confiscate the films when they finally arrived in New York.[121] Despite the multiple shipping issues that it had to face, Esperia remained the most important film distributor for the Italian Government after the outbreak of war, especially because—as I will explain in the next section—the American film distributors used to re-edit LUCE films in an anti-Fascist perspective.

When they were able to reach the U.S., Esperia fiction and non-fiction films screened at the Cine Roma, which continued its activities through 1941.[122] Overall, in spite of the various concerns that it raised over the years, the Cine Roma Theatre was the most relevant outcome of Fascist film propaganda in 1930s U.S. In the regime's view, the Cine Roma's commercial nature increased the effectiveness of film propaganda because

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[119] See the dispatch sent from the DGSP to the Istituto Luce on March 16, 1941, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 227: Folder "New York = Esperia Film."

[120] See the "Appunto per S. E. il Ministro" by the DGSP, dated January 25, 1941 and addressed to the Minculpop, and the aforementioned dispatch sent from the DGSP to the Istituto Luce on March 16, 1941, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 227: Folder "New York = Esperia Film."

[121] A document summarizing the main issues about the shipping of films in the U.S. is the dispatch from the DGSP "Invio documentari di guerra negli Stati Uniti," dated August 19, 1941 and addressed to the Press and Propaganda Office in Rome, which is in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 224: Folder "Pellicole – Apparecchi Cinesonori." Other references to the shipping issues are in ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Stati Uniti, Box 78: Folder "Cinematografia: Proiezioni giornali Luce negli S. U. A."

[122] At the beginning of 1940 the Cine Roma moved to a different Manhattan theatre, located in 49th street. The first Italian movie in this new location was *The Matchmaker* [*Il paraninfo*, A. Palermi, 1934] (see Harry T. Smith, "At the Cine Roma," *New York Times*, January 23, 1940: 24). After a few months, the Cine Roma returned to its previous location until its closure.

it succeeded in breaking the link between Italian films and the Fascist Government. Fascists thought that Cine Roma's spectators could perceive Italian newsreels and documentaries as an impartial presentation of Mussolini's Italy—rather than as a form of propaganda by a foreign government—and that spectators could also assimilate the propaganda through fiction films. Indeed, in the view of Ambassador Rosso, fiction films realized an indirect propaganda because they mostly offered a positive image of present-day Italy without being explicitly ideological.[123]

In spite of the regime's convictions, Cine Roma's association with Fascism was obvious to observers in the U.S. and provoked the theatre's closure during 1941, a few months before the eruption of the hostilities between U.S. and Italy (December 1941).[124] Several newspapers and journals of the time, both pro-Fascist and anti-Fascist, discussed Cine Roma's connection with the Italian administration. For example, various articles published in the pro-Fascist journal *Il Mondo* (New York) stressed Pietro Garofalo's public support of the regime after Italy's involvement in the conflict in 1940;[125] an article published in *Look* (New York) by Girolamo Valenti, an anti-Fascist and anti-Communist Italian journalist and labor leader, attacked Cine Roma, along with other pro-Fascist agencies operating in the U.S.;[126] and a well-informed report published by the Los Angeles Jewish Community Committee denounced Fascist propaganda in the U.S. and also included the section "Fascismo Says It with Movies."[127]

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[123] Cf. Rosso, "Propaganda cinematografica."
[124] The last reference that I found on the Cine Roma Theatre is in "Screen News Here and in Hollywood," *New York Times*, April 19, 1941: 20. This article mentions the screening of *Manon Lescaut* [Carmine Gallone, 1940].
[125] See, for example, "Fascist Agent Boasts of U.S. Embargo Violations," *Il Mondo*, January 1940: 3-4; "Captain Garofalo accuses Italian-Americans of cowardice," *Il Mondo*, July 1940: 7.
[126] See Girolamo Valenti, "Italian Fascist Propaganda in the U. S.," *Look*, December 17, 1940: 36-37.
[127] See "Italian-American subversivism parallels U. S. Nazi plotting," *News Letter* (published by News Research Service, Inc.), Vol. 5, No. 141, April 23, 1941: 1-8.

The Alternative Route: The Italian Government's Deals With American Film Companies.

In planning film propaganda in the U.S. the Fascist Government followed several paths: the distribution of both fiction and non-fiction films, the exhibition of such films in both institutional and commercial sites, the collaboration with Italian-American distributors and exhibitors. One more aspect marked Fascist film propaganda in the U.S. During the 1930s and early 1940s the Italian Government also sought to distribute Italian films in commercial theaters by selling their rights to American film companies. The regime aimed once again to do propaganda in "a-Fascist" settings and to favor the commercial exploitation of Italian films. However, the agreements with U.S. distributors were mostly unsuccessful.

With regard to fiction films, the Italian Government's attempt to secure the U.S. distribution of the colonial film *Scipione l'africano* is particularly significant. The regime dedicated many efforts in this initiative because *Scipione l'africano* —the first film to be produced in the Cinecittà studios, which Mussolini had inaugurated in April 1937—celebrated Fascism by drawing a comparison between Imperial Rome and present-day Italy. If the regime especially aimed to do indirect propaganda through fiction films, in the case of *Scipione l'africano* its goal was to promote explicitly Fascism.

At the beginning of 1937 the Italian embassy in Washington and the DGC began a long negotiation with the film studio Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) for the American distribution of *Scipione l'africano*.[128] In order to define an agreement, Ambassador

[128] The ENIC—the producing and distributing branch of the LUCE Institute—was *Scipione*'s producer and originally was to take care of the film's distribution in Italy and abroad. However, representatives of the Ministry of Press and Propaganda deemed particularly remarkable the propagandistic function of Gallone's film and for this reason they managed to deal personally its distribution.

Suvich met in Washington Will Hays, then president of the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), and the DGC director Freddi made the first contact with MGM.[129] In the early stages of the negotiation, the Italian Government accepted MGM's ambitious request to be the only distributor of *Scipione l'africano* in the world. Both Freddi and Alfieri—Minister of the Popular Culture from May 1937—agreed to such demand since they thought that MGM could guarantee the largest distribution to Gallone's propaganda film.[130]

However, complications soon emerged. MGM requested to see *Scipione l'africano* in advance, before acquiring the distribution rights. The Italian Government was inclined to not accept this new demand and to break its agreement with the American company.[131] Soon after MGM exerted more pressures on the Italian Government. In that period the Fascist administration was denying the release of some American films in Italy due to their stereotypical depiction of Italy, and was also raising the tax fees for dubbing American films in Italian.[132] Both MGM and Hays made clear to representatives of the Italian Government that such issues jeopardized the deal with MGM for the international

[129] See Fulvio Suvich, "Film 'Scipione l'Africano'," dispatch of January 4, 1937, addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome; Luigi Freddi, report of January 27, 1937, addressed to Emanuele Grazzi (an official at the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs); Fulvio Suvich, "Film 'Scipione l'Africano'," report of February 24, 1937, addressed to both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Press and Propaganda. Each of the mentioned reports is in ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Stati Uniti, Box 43: Folder "Sig.Hays = Regolamentazione importazioni cinematografiche = Trattative film 'Scipione l'africano;'"

[130] See Dino Alfieri, undated report addressed to the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; L. Freddi, report of March 13, 1937, addressed to Emanuele Grazzi; D. Alfieri, letter to Laudy L. Lawrence (MGM representative in Europe), attached to Freddi's dispatch of March 23, 1937, addressed to Emanuele Grazzi. Both the reports are in ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Stati Uniti, Box 43: Folder "Sig.Hays = Regolamentazione importazioni cinematografiche = Trattative film 'Scipione l'africano.'"

[131] See Dino Alfieri, dispatch of May 24, 1937, addressed to the Italian Embassy in Washington, in ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Stati Uniti, Box 43: Folder "Sig.Hays = Regolamentazione importazioni cinematografiche = Trattative film 'Scipione l'africano.'"

[132] Fascist officials believed that U.S. films like *A Woman Rebels* (Mark Sandrich, 1936), *Star of Midnight* (Stephen Roberts, 1935), *The Last Days of Pompeii* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1935) mistreated Italy by depicting it as the country of either indolent or violent people. See a note by L. Freddi, dated May 14, 1937, in ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Stati Uniti, Box 43: Folder "Sig.Hays = Regolamentazione importazioni cinematografiche = Trattative film 'Scipione l'africano.'"

release of *Scipione l'africano*.[133] The Italian Government perceived these pressures as a sort of blackmail and eventually broke the deal with the American company.[134] Finally, it was left to Esperia to distribute *Scipione l'africano* in the U.S. in 1939.

The Italian dictatorship's attempt to sell Italian non-fiction films to American distributors was as problematic as the attempt to sell *Scipione l'africano* to MGM. In the former case, the regime was able to find distributors for its newsreels and documentaries, but American companies soon started to re-edit Italian films by altering their pro-Fascist discourse.

In 1938 the Ministry of Popular Culture made a deal with the advertising agency Hamilton Wright in order to arrange the American distribution of non-fiction films.[135] At the time Hamilton Wright was specialized in helping foreign governments to improve their reputation in the U.S.[136] However, the enactment by the Department of State of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA, 1938) likely limited Hamilton Wright's actions, since it limited the action of the U.S. organizations working for foreign governments.[137] In any case, whether that was the result of Wright's work or not, at the turn of the 1940s LUCE dealt with several American companies for the release of English-spoken Italian newsreels: they were Hearst Metrotone News, Universal, Fox Movietone, Pathe News,

[133] See *ibidem*.
[134] See Dino Alfieri, dispatch of May 24, 1937, addressed to the Italian Embassy in Washington, in ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Stati Uniti, Box 43: Folder "Sig.Hays = Regolamentazione importazioni cinematografiche = Trattative film 'Scipione l'africano.'"
[135] The deal determined that Hamilton Wright had to use several tools to promote Fascism: newspaper articles, conferences, non-fiction films, and others. See ACS, Minculpop, Reports, Box 8: Report 81 "Hamilton Wright."
[136] On the history of Hamilton Wright, see Scott M. Cutlip, *The Unseen Power: Public Relations. A History* (Hillsdale, NJ and Hove, UK: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1994), particularly Ch. 4 "The Hamilton Wright Organization – The First International Agency" (73-91).
[137] See *The Foreign Agents Registration Act* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977).

Paramount.[138]

As anticipated, American distributors and exhibitors often altered Italian newsreels in order to criticize Fascism. This phenomenon especially took place after the outbreak of war in Europe and angered Italian authorities, so that they broke their agreement with most of the American partners. Some dispatches from November 1940 by Alessandro Pavolini, then head of the Minculpop, and Augusto Fantechi, then LUCE's president, reveal that the Italian Government at that time had suspended the distribution of LUCE newsreels to both Paramount and Pathé News and that it was going to stop its agreement with Fox Movietone and Universal News.[139]

By the end of 1940 the Minculpop and LUCE maintained only their collaboration with Metrotone. Metrotone had never edited LUCE films in the previous years, presumably because the tycoon William Randolph Hearst, a Fascist sympathizer, ruled it.[140] In January 1941 Pavolini asked the Italian Embassy in Washington to verify if Metrotone kept the LUCE films in their original version.[141] The Italian Government suffered a new disappointment: MGM, which was the actual distributor of Metrotone newsreels in U.S. theaters, had also begun to adopt an anti-Fascist policy and to alter Italian non-fiction films.[142] Eventually, Italian authorities could only rely on Macaluso's Esperia for the U.S. distribution of propaganda films. All these distribution efforts ceased

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[138] The list of these companies is in the previously mentioned un-authored and undated LUCE report "Rapporti tra l'Istituto Nazionale Luce con gli Stati Uniti."

[139] See Alessandro Pavolini and Augusto Fantechi's reports in ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Stati Uniti, Box 78: Folder "Proiezioni giornali Luce negli S. U. A."

[140] See Alessandro Pavolini, dispatch of November 19, 1940, addressed to Augusto Fantechi, and Fantechi's reply to Pavolini, dated November 21, 1940, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 227: Folder "New York = Esperia Film." On the connection between Hearst and Fascism see again Erbaggio's Ph.D. Dissertation, *Writing Mussolini*.

[141] See Alessandro Pavolini, dispatch of January 16, 1941, addressed to the Italian Embassy in Washington, in ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Stati Uniti, Box 78: Folder "Proiezioni giornali Luce negli S. U. A."

[142] See the un-authored and untitled report attached to the March 17, 1941 dispatch by Ottaviano Armando Koch (at the time director of the DGSP), in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 227: Folder "New York = Esperia Film."

in December 1941, when U.S. and Italy became war enemies and Italian diplomatic activities in the country stopped.

The historical survey of this chapter leaves now the space to an analysis of the ideological goals that the Italian regime pursued in 1930s America through fiction films. What kind of values did Fascist officials seek to promote in the U.S. through romantic comedies and historical melodramas? Such an investigation shall help me to connect the selectiveness of Italian film distribution in the U.S. with the regime's propagandistic mission.

Chapter 2
The Intellectual History of Fascist Film Propaganda

Fra i problemi che il Duce ha posto all'ordine del giorno della Nazione
vi è quello della propaganda del libro, di ogni forma d'arte,
di ogni manifestazione alta e degna dello *spirito italiano*.

Dispatch from a publisher addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1928[1]

Dal 1929 ad oggi il fascismo da fenomeno italiano è diventato fenomeno universale.

Benito Mussolini, public speech in Rome, March 18, 1934[2]

L'igiene dei nostri ospedali, il valore dei nostri medici, l'organizzazione delle nostre industrie, la modernità dei mezzi di comunicazione, la vita sportiva dei giovani, e persino le *realizzazioni spirituali* del Regime, possono essere illustrate in qualsiasi film.

Augusto Rosso, Italian Ambassador in Washington, private dispatch, 1936[3]

Fascist Values Across the Atlantic

This chapter identifies and examines the beliefs that the Fascist dictatorship aimed to broadcast in 1930s America through fiction films. It argues that Mussolini's Government sought to promote through such films its plan for a moral regeneration.

In order to explore the intellectual history of Fascist film propaganda, some preliminary notes about the overall trajectory of Fascism are necessary. In the course of the *ventennio* Fascism never became a homogenous entity that relied on a common

[1] Dispatch from A. P. E. (Anonima Propaganda Editoriale), sent to Dino Grandi (then Under-secretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), August 1928, 1. The dispatch is in ASMAE, Minculpop, Box 68: Folder "Propaganda italiana all'estero." Italics are mine.
[2] In Benito Mussolini, *Il discorso del Duce alla seconda assemblea quinquennale del regime* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1934).
[3] In Augusto Rosso, "Propaganda cinematografica," dispatch of February 25, 1936, addressed to the Ministry for the Press and the Propaganda, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per S. Francisco di California." Italics are mine.

doctrine, being instead divided into various constituencies. As Italian historian Renzo De Felice first recognized, the main factions that marked the experience of Fascism in Italy were the movement and the regime: the first identified with revolutionary activists—mainly belonging to new and emergent sectors of the middle class—who aspired to create a morally renewed state, whose authority could preserve the Fascists' energy and willingness; the second identified instead with the more reactionary and conservative component of Fascist supporters.[4] Idealist philosopher Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944) and politician Giuseppe Bottai (1895-1959) arguably were the most prominent exponents of the Fascist *movement*;[5] by signing the laws that accelerated Italy's transformation into a repressive dictatorship, politician and jurist Alfredo Rocco (1875-1935) was in the 1920s the most influential representative of the Fascist *regime*.[6]

In the context of this intellectual framework, my project seeks to revise the canonical assumption that the Fascist regime superseded the Fascist movement.[7] Certainly, throughout the 1930s the regime prevailed over the movement, whose forces

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[4] Renzo De Felice (1929-1996) was at the same time the major and the most controversial Italian scholar of Fascism. From the 1960s to the 1990s he wrote a monumental, multi-volume biography of Mussolini (the first volume was *Mussolini il rivoluzionario 1883-1920*, Turin: Einaudi, 1965). In the fourth volume, *Mussolini il duce I: Gli anni del consenso 1929-1936* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), De Felice emphasized the large consensus of the Fascist dictatorship between Italians. This argument opened new perspectives on the Fascist era, by breaking the then-prevalent interpretation of Fascism as a repressive dictatorship, imposed to all Italians from above. De Felice introduced the distinction between Fascist movement and Fascist regime in R. De Felice, *Intervista sul fascismo*, edited by Michael A Ledeen (Bari-Rome: Laterza, 1975). On that distinction see also Emilio Gentile, *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista (1918-1925)* (Bari-Rome: Laterza, 1975), especially the Ch. "Il mito dello stato nuovo," 397-490; Id., *Il mito dello stato nuovo dall'antigiolittismo al fascismo* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1982), especially the Ch. "Il mito dello stato nuovo fascista," 231-261.

[5] On Gentile's support of Fascism, see Gabriele Turi, *Giovanni Gentile: una biografia* (Florence: Giunti, 1995); Alessandra Tarquini, *Il Gentile dei fascisti: Gentiliani e antigentiliani nel regime fascista* (Bologna: Mulino, 2009). Bibliographic references on Bottai include: Giordano Bruno Guerri, *Giuseppe Bottai, un fascista critico* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976); Monica Galfré, *Giuseppe Bottai: un intellettuale fascista* (Florence: Giunti, 2000).

[6] See Rocco D'Alfonso, *Costruire lo Stato forte. Politica, diritto, economia in Alfredo Rocco* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2004); Saverio Battente, *Alfredo Rocco: dal nazionalismo al fascismo 1907-1935* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2005); Emilio Gentile, Fulco Lanchester, Alessandra Tarquini, eds., *Alfredo Rocco: dalla crisi del parlamentarismo alla costruzione dello Stato nuovo* (Rome: Carocci, 2010).

[7] The same De Felice made popular this interpretation through his volume *Intervista sul fascismo*.

had marked the first years of Fascism, and exponents of the movement used to blame Mussolini for turning the revolutionary roots of early Fascism into a merely repressive government. However, it is incorrect to state that throughout the 1930s the regime completely replaced the movement. As Italian historian Emilio Gentile has clarified, the Fascist totalitarian means sought to shape a new man, namely a soldier ready to dismiss his material wealth and to die for his country.[8] Accordingly, the revolutionary component of the Fascist movement was at the very core of the totalitarian project of the Fascist regime. Similarly, my examination of Fascist film propaganda attests that the regime exploited the intellectual realm of the Fascist movement for its propaganda purposes. In this chapter I contend that the Italian regime wanted to use fiction films to spread in the U.S. values of the Fascist movement, the ones that allegedly supported the totalitarian state. More specifically, in doing propaganda through fiction films Mussolini's dictatorship meant to convey beliefs characteristic of Giovanni Gentile's idealist thought, especially the project for Italy's moral elevation.[9]

Through my approach I shall critique the familiar and well-known position articulated in 1972 by John P. Diggins, according to whom Italian-Americans largely

[8] See Gentile, *Il culto del littorio*. Gentile—one of the most influential scholars of Fascism—started to examine Fascism's ideological roots in the early 1970s. See Emilio Gentile, "Alcune considerazioni sull'ideologia fascista," *Storia contemporanea*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (March 1974), 115-125; Id., *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista (1918-1925)*. Gentile was a student of Renzo De Felice, and his rediscovery of the "positive" component of Fascist ideology relied upon De Felice's new interpretive model of Fascism. At the same time, Gentile took inspiration from German historian George L. Mosse (1918-99), who in the 1960s had begun to analyze the cultural and ideological consistency of Nazism in *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964) and in *Nazi Culture: Intellectual, Cultural and Social Life in the Third Reich* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966). In the following decades Mosse continued his investigation of Nazism and Fascism in landmark volumes such as *The Nationalization of the Masses* and *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality* (New York: H. Fertig, 1980). In *Il culto del littorio* Gentile studied Fascism as a political religion by detailing the ritual aspects of Mussolini's regime, such as public rallies and mass demonstrations, and he particularly kept as a reference point Mosse's analysis of the sacralization of politics in Nazi Germany in *The Nationalization of the Masses*.

[9] In *Storia della cultura fascista* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), Alessandra Tarquini gives an overview of Fascist culture, ideology, and their connections.

appreciated Mussolini not because they consciously embraced Fascist beliefs, but because the Duce had given international prestige to their country of origin.[10] Instead I show that during the 1930s the Fascist dictatorship exploited culture to make Italian immigrants quite knowledgeable and appreciative of the distinct values of Fascist ideology, which I identify with the core principles of the Fascist movement. Italian immigrants reinforced their patriotic loyalty and enthusiasm during the interwar years because of their sense of belonging to the Fascist culture.

In order to develop my argument, I first examine the diplomatic relations between the Italian and the U.S. Governments during the 1920s and the 1930s. The U.S. Government, and Americans in general, commonly associated Fascism with its repressive constituency, namely with the regime, and blamed its anti-democratic means. However, they maintained for a long time a positive attitude toward Mussolini, even after 1935 Italy's invasion of Ethiopia. This mainly was due to the desire to preserve commercial agreements with Italy and to the mutual anti-Communism. President Roosevelt expressed growing dissatisfaction with the Italian dictatorship only in the latter part of the 1930s, as the new world conflict erupted. Eventually, the diplomatic relation between the two countries fell apart when the U.S. entered the war against the Axis Alliance.[11]

Secondly, in the context of this multi-faceted relation, I take into consideration how Fascist cultural propaganda relied upon lectures, conferences, radio programs, film screenings, and other media to pursue two goals: communicate Fascist policies by praising the actions of the Italian regime in both domestic and foreign affairs; promote in

[10] See Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*.
[11] For an overall discussion of the American perception of dictatorship in the interwar period, see Benjamin L. Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, & American Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy, 1920s-1950s* (Chapell Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

a more general perspective Fascist Italianness, that is to try to spread the beliefs that were at the core of Fascist ideology. Scholars of Fascist cultural propaganda in the U.S. have mainly focused on the first of such goals, the trumpeting of Fascist actual political accomplishments—to which even LUCE newsreels and documentaries contributed. They have almost completely ignored the second goal by assuming—in line with Diggins' aforementioned interpretation—that the core values of Fascist ideology did not circulate in the U.S. and thus that Italian-Americans ignored them.[12] Instead, the Italian Government deliberately exploited fiction films to spread a notion of Fascist Italianness in the U.S., in the sense of a reconciliation of tradition and modernity, past moral wisdom and modern material progress. Fascist diplomats considered the American distribution of Italian fiction films an opportunity to spread Fascist moral values by avoiding overt propaganda.[13] Such diplomats used to define "spiritual" their goal of accomplishing ethical goals, in accordance with the political thought of Giovanni Gentile. The idealist philosopher, who supported Fascism up until the establishment of the Republic of Salò in 1943, conceived the project of Italy's moral re-weakening by recovering the ideals of 19th century nationalists such as Giuseppe Mazzini, Vincenzo Gioberti, and Antonio Rosmini.[14]

[12] On Fascist cultural propaganda in the United States, see Garzarelli, *Parleremo al mondo intero*; Luconi and Tintori, *L'ombra lunga del fascio*; Pretelli, "Culture or Propaganda? Fascism and Italian Culture in the United States;" Id., *Il fascismo e gli italiani all'estero*; Cavarocchi, *Avanguardie dello spirito*; Pretelli, *La via fascista alla democrazia americana*.

[13] For a discussion of Fascist indirect propaganda through culture in 1930s America, see Ch. 1.

[14] See Gentile, *Origini e dottrina del fascismo*. Cf. Balbino Giuliano, *Misticismo e cultura fascista: Discorso tenuto alla Scuola di Mistica Fascista Italico Mussolini* (Milan: Off. Graf. Federazione Ital. Biblioteche Popolari, 1932). In this volume Giuliano developed a Gentilian theory of Fascism by elaborating the dialectic between spirituality and materialism. The book is composed of sections eloquently titled "The Fall of Materialism" ("Il crollo del materialismo") and "Free and Creative Spirituality" ("Libera spiritualità creatrice").

Political and Diplomatic Relations Between Fascist Italy and the U.S.

Diplomatic relations between Fascist Italy and the U.S. remained good until the mid-1930s, in spite of ideological differences between the two countries. A common anti-Communist stance and the economic exchanges favored the collaboration between Italy and U.S. Governments in those years. The relations became tense when Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, since on that occasion Americans started to openly criticize the Italian dictatorship's imperialism. However, President Roosevelt and his cabinet soon downplayed the tension by maintaining a cordial attitude toward Mussolini. This decision depended on diplomatic considerations: Roosevelt intended to maintain the anti-Communist coalition in Europe and at the same time he thought that Mussolini could be useful to contain Hitler's ambitions and preserve peace in Europe. Finally, the relations between Fascism and America deteriorated and broke down in the course of WWII, when Italy and the U.S. became war enemies.[15]

After his rise to power in 1922, Mussolini looked for international recognition, and in this context he immediately gave great attention to the U.S. One of his first initiatives as Italy's Prime Minister was a visit to the U.S. Ambassador in Rome, Richard W. Child. Mussolini's decision to meet Child, along with his declaration of loyalty and friendship to the American country, testifies to his early attempt to establish good

[15] Bibliographic references on the diplomatic relations between Fascist Italy and the U.S. include: Jordan Laylon Wayne, *America's Mussolini: The United States and Italy, 1919-1936*, PhD diss. (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virgina, 1972); Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*; Daria Frezza, "I rapporti Italia-Usa nel periodo fascista," *Studi storici*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1974), 184-194; Gian Giacomo Migone, *Gli Stati Uniti e il fascismo: Alle origini dell'egemonia americana in Italia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1980); Claudia Damiani, *Mussolini e gli Stati Uniti, 1922-1935* (Bologna: Cappelli Editore, 1980); David F. Schmitz, *The United States and Fascist Italy, 1922-1940* (Chapell Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Cannistraro, *Blackshirts in Little Italy*; Enzo Collotti, *Fascismo e politica di potenza. Politica estera, 1922-1939* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 2000); Michele Abbate, ed., *L'Italia fascista tra Europa e Stati Uniti d'America* (Civita Castellana: Ce. Fa. S. S., Centro falisco di studi storici, 2002); Luisa Ducci, Stefano Luconi, Matteo Pretelli, *Le relazioni tra Italia e Stati Uniti. Dal Risorgimento alle conseguenze dell'11 settembre* (Rome: Carocci, 2012).

relations with the U.S. Indeed, at the time the Italians' perception of the most powerful country across the Atlantic was contradictory: President Woodrow Wilson's opposition to the Italian aspirations in the course of the so-called Adriatic question, which took place in the aftermath of WWI, had alienated American sympathies from many Italians.[16] In spite of it, Mussolini desired to meet as soon as possible the American approval not only to acquire diplomatic prestige internationally, but also to gain economic advantages and foster positive response among Italians abroad.

With regard to economic ambitions, Mussolini needed the support of the U.S. to stabilize the *lira* in particular and promote Italy's financial wellbeing in general. Italy had to pay $2.5 billions to the U.S. for war debts and it was unable to accomplish that obligation in a short period of time. Mussolini hoped to find some solution to defer the payment, and he also aspired to get loans from the U.S. in order to regulate Italy's economy. This complex situation led in 1925 to a settlement between the Italian Government and Andrew W. Mellon, the American Secretary of the Treasury, according to which the U.S. Government agreed to reduce Italy's war debts and to spread their payment over a period of 62 years. At the same time, the J. P. Morgan Bank & Co. loaned $100 millions to Italy, satisfying both Mussolini and those American financiers who planned to make investments in Italy. During the 1920s, in the course of such

[16] At the end of World War I a controversy arose between Italy and Yugoslavia over the control of the Adriatic port of Fiume (known in Croatia as Rijeka). Although the secret Treaty of London (April 26, 1915) had assigned Fiume to Yugoslavia, Italians claimed it at the Paris Peace Conference on the principle of self-determination. By ignoring the suburb of Susak, in which the majority of people was Yugoslav, Italians stressed that the rest of Fiume had 22,488 Italians against 13,351 Yugoslavs. On Sept. 12. 1919, Italian nationalist poet Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938), who had mobilized a group of men near Trieste, occupied Fiume and proclaimed himself the "commandant" of the "Reggenza Italiana del Carnaro." The Italian Government, however, on concluding the Treaty of Rapallo (Nov. 12, 1920) with Yugoslavia, resolved to remove D'Annunzio from Fiume and to turn the territory into an independent state, the Free State of Fiume. In the course of the complex negotiations regarding Fiume, President Wilson often contrasted the Italian requests, becoming unpopular with Italians.

delicate negotiations, Mussolini constantly tried to engage a productive dialogue with both the Republican Presidents and American bankers and financiers, whose activity in that decade laid the foundations for U.S. economic hegemony over Europe.[17]

With respect to the ethnic issue, in the early 1920s Italian immigration in the U.S. raised some conflicts between the two countries, since Mussolini expressed his disappointment regarding the American Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924. Those Acts regulated the foreign access in the U.S. by severely limiting immigration from southern Europe.[18] Mussolini complained about those new rules because at that time he considered emigration a positive factor for Italy; he thought that Italians could find job opportunities across the Atlantic and send their money at home, helping Italy's financial stability. Later, in 1926, the regime changed its perspective on Italian emigration by strongly opposing it. Mussolini's new goal was to exploit fully his country's human resources. The Italian dictator began to view colonialism as the most adequate form of Italian expansion abroad.

In spite of the controversy about the Immigration Acts, in the course of the 1920s Mussolini carefully met American demands and expectations regarding the limits of Italian diplomatic agencies in the U.S and of Italian-Americans in general. First, in November 1922, he replaced the much criticized Italian Ambassador in Washington, Vittorio Rolando Ricci, who had inappropriately stated that Italian immigrants had to be more loyal to their native country than to their host one. In his place Mussolini appointed

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[17] Republican Presidents of the era were Warren G. Harding (1921-1923), Calvin Coolidge (1923-1929), and Herbert Hoover (1929-1933). On the economic relation between the two countries, see Migone, *Gli Stati Uniti e il fascismo*; Schmitz, *The United States and Fascist Italy.*

[18] See Reed Ueda, ed., *A Companion to American Immigration* (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2006); James Ciment, John Radzilowski, eds., *American Immigration: an Encyclopedia of Political, Social, and Cultural Change* (Armonk, NY: Sharp Reference, 2014).

Gelasio Caetani, an ardent nationalist who had lived in the U.S. for many years, as the new Italian Ambassador (1922-25).[19]

Secondly, a related and even more pressing issue that Mussolini faced was American criticism toward the presence of active Fascist supporters in the U.S. Indeed, since his rise to power Mussolini had been able to revive the loyalty of many Italian immigrants in the U.S. toward their mother country. As a result, in the early 1920s several Italian-American *Fasci* were operative and they acted in connection with the National Fascist Party (*Partito Nazionale Fascista*, PNF)—rather than with the local Italian consular agents. Giuseppe Bastianini, secretary of the PNF at the time, was the main supporter of this close tie between the Party and the *Fasci* abroad. This strategy soon raised problems in the U.S. because the *Fasci*'s political activism generated diplomatic incidents. Sometimes the *Fasci* exerted acts of violence and made public demonstrations that alarmed Americans. Accordingly, in 1923 Mussolini decided to manage the *Fasci* through the mediation of local Italian diplomats and for that purpose he created the Fascist Central Council (FCC). However, this organism encountered several difficulties in trying to unify and regulate the American *Fasci*. This led Mussolini to establish in 1925 a new institution, the Fascist League of North America (FLNA), through which the Italian Government again aimed to control the initiatives of Fascist sympathizers in the U.S. Eventually, this attempt was also unsuccessful: during the entire 1920s, American politicians and the American press continued to perceive pro-Fascist rallies and demonstrations as inacceptable forms of foreign propaganda. In a clear attempt to downplay the diplomatic tension, in 1928 Mussolini reinforced the dependence

[19] Giacomo De Martino (1925-32), Augusto Rosso (1933-36), Fulvio Suvich (1936-38) and Ascanio Colonna (1939-1941) were the other Italian Ambassadors in the U.S. during the Fascist era.

of the *Fasci* abroad on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, thus breaking their direct connection with the PNF in Italy. A year later, he dismantled the FLNA.[20] From that moment, the Fascist regime began to plan an indirect propaganda through culture in the U.S.

In such a changeable scenario, a large part of the Italian-American community continued to support Fascist Italy throughout the 1920s and the 1930s. Indeed, Mussolini also pursued specific political goals from nurturing the immigrants' attachment to Italy. As Italian historian Stefano Luconi demonstrated, the Duce wanted to use the Italian-Americans' electoral weight to influence the U.S. Government so that its foreign policy could be favorable to Italy.[21]

As Mussolini was consistently trying to deepen Italy's friendship with the U.S., his realpolitik attitude repeatedly clashed with the intellectual prejudices of many Fascists toward the American society. During both the 1920s and the 1930s, exponents of the Fascist movement viewed the U.S. in negative terms and strongly emphasized the opposition between Fascist ideology and the *laissez-faire* capitalism typical of liberal democracy. As I elaborate below, in Italy Fascists defined Fascist ideology and its values in terms of a moral regeneration that aspired to establish the country's greatness and unity. In the context of that plan, they criticized the materialism of capitalist society.[22]

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[20] On the trajectory of the FLNA, see Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, and Cannistraro, *Blackshirts in Little Italy*. On the *Fasci* abroad see Gentile, "La politica estera del partito fascista. Ideologia e organizzazione dei fasci italiani all'estero (1920-1930);" De Caprariis, "'Fascism for Export'? The Rise and Eclipse of the Fasci Italiani all'Estero;" Bertohna, "I fasci all'estero;" Franzina and Sanfilippo, *Il fascismo e gli emigrati. La parabola dei Fasci italiani all'estero (1920-1943)*; Pretelli, *Il fascismo e gli italiani all'estero*.

[21] See Luconi, *La "diplomazia parallela*;*"* Id., *From Paesani to White Ethnics: the Italian Experience in Philadelphia* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001); Id., *Little Italies e New Deal: La coalizione rooseveltiana e il voto italo-americano a Filadelfia e Pittsburgh* (Rome: FrancoAngeli, 2002).

[22] On this issue, see Emilio Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity: Nationalism, Futurism and Fascism* (Westport, CT, and London: Praeger, 2003), esp. the Ch. "Impending Modernity: Fascism and the

Particularly, they contrasted the modernity of materialist societies with Italy's notable traditions—its great artistic heritage, the newly-fangled myth of the Roman Empire, and the Catholic religion. Fascist intellectuals sought to mediate between modernity and tradition in order to embrace in an ethical way the technological and infrastructural progress of the time. The theoretical goals of revolutionary Fascists and the dictator's practice took divergent paths: although several Fascists used to critique the U.S. democracy as a greedy society indifferent to moral goals, the economic and diplomatic considerations described above were stronger than this ideological barrier and they helped to stabilize the friendship between Italy and the U.S. until WWII. Only in the course of WWII did the ideological contrast between Italy and the U.S. come under the spotlight. At that time, by recovering the roots of the early Fascist movement Mussolini explicitly planned to overwhelm those societies of the western world that he deemed "plutocratic"—namely, materialist and morally weak.

With regard to the American attitude toward Fascist Italy, that attitude mirrored that of Mussolini: in fact, until WWII and in spite of the Ethiopian crisis the U.S. fostered their friendship with Italy by downplaying the ideological divide. Certainly Americans disapproved dictatorship as a form of government, but even in this case realpolitik convictions prevailed over the divergence between democracy and Fascism. Many Americans accepted and for a long time held Mussolini in high esteem due again to a combination of diplomatic, economic and ethnic considerations.

First, American anti-Communism crucially invigorated their positive response to the designation of Mussolini as Italy's Prime Minister in 1922. Americans believed that the Italian workers' strikes of the so-called "red biennium" ("biennio rosso," 1919-20)

Ambivalent Image of the United States," 161-179.

heralded the potential rise to power of anarchist or leftist forces in postwar Italy. Americans were relieved when Mussolini became Italy's leader, because the Fascist Government certainly prevented the possibility of a Communist revolution in that country.

With respect to the economic issue, American financiers and bankers were as eager to alleviate the negative situation of Italian economy as Mussolini was. In fact, the growth of Italian economy could broaden the range of the American investments in Europe. The aforementioned settlements of 1925, which concerned both the reduction of the Italian war debt and J.P. Morgan's $100 million loan to Italy, were the main steps that Mussolini and the U.S. presidents undertook during the 1920s in order to sustain Italy's financial prosperity.

At the same time, the ethnic issue intervened even in the Americans' perception of Fascist Italy. As the influential work by Diggins clarified, in the first decades of the twentieth century Americans conceived Italy as both an Arcadia-like place, full of beautiful landscapes and great works of art, and a country plagued by ignorant and violent people.[23] Mussolini's leadership significantly altered Americans' view of Italy. Although they rejected dictatorship, Americans began to see Mussolini's managerial capacity as the right medicine to contain Italians and keep their violent nature under control.[24] Furthermore, some conservative Americans—dissatisfied with both Wilson's idealism and 1920s Republican Presidents' isolationism—thought that Mussolini's policies to some extent could be useful even to the U.S. Particularly, they esteemed the Italian dictator's nationalist and imperialist goals, which reminded them of the aggressive

[23] Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 5-21.
[24] *Ivi*, 22-57.

politics of President Theodore Roosevelt. This widespread support of Mussolini led Americans to project American virtues on the Italian dictator: in fact, they used to emphasize Mussolini's social climbing from humble origins, his managerial virtues, his self-reliance.[25] In sum, as Americans recognized their distance from both dictatorship and the Italians' "savage" temperament, they justified their appreciation of Mussolini by Americanizing him.

Even in this case, not all Americans admired Fascist Italy. In the early 1920s some actions by Mussolini, pertaining to both domestic and foreign policy, worried part of the Americans about the Italian dictatorship. The first of these events was the so-called Corfù incident, which took place in 1923. On August 27, 1923 unidentified Greek assailants killed an international committee that was doing a preliminary review of the borders between Greece and Albania, in view of a potential revision of those borders. The committee was mainly composed of Italian functionaries, including Italian General Enrico Tellini, and their death provoked a bellicose reaction by Mussolini. The Italian dictator requested to the Greek Government to apologize formally for the deadly ambush. However, the Greek Government did not meet Mussolini's request, and as a result Mussolini attacked and took control of the small Greek island of Corfù. This aggression led the Conference of Ambassadors to settle the dispute by largely acquiescing to the Italian requests, rather than the Greek ones.[26] After the Corfù incident, Americans became concerned about the military ambitions of Italian dictatorship. In regard to Italy's domestic policy, the assassination of Italian Socialist politician Enrico Matteotti by some

[25] Diggins, "Mussolini and America: Hero-Worship, Charisma, and the 'Vulgar Talent,'" *Historian*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (August 1966): 559-585; Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 58-73.
[26] The Conference of Ambassadors was an organization of the WWI Allies that arose in Paris after the end of the war, in January 1920. The Conference later became part of the League of Nations as one of its governing bodies.

unidentified Fascists in 1924 also raised apprehension between Americans about Mussolini's dictatorial means. In spite of it, up until the Ethiopian war of mid-1930s Americans largely continued to accept and sustain Mussolini because of his anti-Communism, his "American" virtues, his handling of the economy.

The appreciation of Mussolini by many Americans intensified at the turn of the 1930s, when the global economic crisis erupted and also affected the Italy-U.S. relations. From the Italian perspective, the economic crisis tested the effectiveness of both the capitalist and Fascist models, and proved that the Fascist organization of society was stronger and more reliable. Regime propaganda boasted of the success of its economic policies and particularly of its corporate measures. Fascists sustained that the corporate state could balance state control and economic freedom, preventing or in any case surviving negative financial outcomes as the one arose in 1929. In this context, even many Americans—including members of the Hoover administration, journalists, and commentators—began to see the Fascist corporate economy not only as a viable alternative to Capitalism, but also, once again, as a valid safeguard against the spread of Communism. They valued Mussolini for his alleged ability to reconcile economy with moral principles, thereby ensuring social order within Italy in such a troubled moment.[27] This positive attitude toward Mussolini remained constant even if at the turn of the 1930s Italy—as a consequence of the economic crisis—had difficulties in paying its war debts. Indeed, in 1931 Hoover postponed by one year the war debt payment due by Italy (and by other European countries).

With Roosevelt's election as American President in fall 1932, the relations

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[27] Cf. the praise of Mussolini's economic policy in the article "The Obstructionist Policy of France and the Leadership of Italy," *Financial Chronicle*, Vol. 134, April 16, 1932: 2786-2788.

between Italy and the U.S. continued to be positive. Roosevelt expressed sincere appreciation toward Mussolini and considered him a moderate and influential politician who could safeguard peace in Europe. Roosevelt's perception of Mussolini also depended on economic issues and particularly, again, on the good reputation of the Italian corporate plans. Indeed, at that time Fascist corporatism became even more popular in the U.S., since many American and Italian commentators began to draw comparisons between Roosevelt's New Deal and the Fascist "third way" between Capitalism and Communism.[28]

Between 1935 and 1936 Italy's conquest of Ethiopia significantly challenged the stability of the relations between Italy and the U.S.[29] Americans had long accepted Mussolini's dictatorial methods, but they were much less inclined to approve the Duce's imperialist ambitions.[30] However, Roosevelt and his cabinet soon downplayed any

[28] Consider, for example, the activity of Luigi Villari (1876-1959), a pro-Fascist Italian historian who had held diplomatic positions in the U.S. during the 1900s. In the early 1930s Villari used to lecture on Fascist corporatism in several American cities. In a series of five lectures on Fascist Italy held in Des Moines, Iowa between February 6 and March 10, 1934, Villari focused his fourth lecture on "The Corporate State." In the course of that talk, Villari recounted the conflicts between leftist labor unions and capital in pre-Fascist Italy and praised Fascist corporatism for solving those tensions and granting the reconciliation between employers and workers. Villari described the structure of Fascist corporatism, particularly the inclusion of the whole Italian productive forces in specific Corporations and the role of the National Council of Corporations, a body under Government control, as supervisor of any dispute that could occur between capital and labor. As Villari summarized in his memo for the lecture: "Today the corporations, each of which will group employers and workers in some brunch of economic life to conciliate conflicting interests, are under the supervision of government representatives on behalf of the consumers, i.e., the nation as a whole." At the end of his memo Villari explicitly suggested the comparison between Mussolini's corporatism and Roosevelt's New Deal: "Both are attempts to correct the excesses of individualism and to bring together the various classes and interests of the population on a basis of collaboration." The memo and other documents about Villari's lectures are in ACS, Minculpop, Ufficio Nupie, Box 37: Folder "Villari Luigi."

[29] See Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, & American Public Culture*, 77-93. Alpers also mentions the strong opposition to the Fascist war by the African American community—indeed, the Ethiopian war marked the first mass mobilization of that community on a foreign policy issue.

[30] At the outbreak of the Ethiopian conflict, the Italian regime launched in the U.S. the so-called Bergamaschi mission in order to defend Mussolini's highly criticized enterprise and to recover popularity. In fall 1935 Bernardo Bergamaschi—functionary of the Ministry for the Press and the Propaganda—toured the U.S. and studied a new plan for Fascist propaganda. In his 35-pages final report, Bergamaschi listed his own detailed suggestions to revive Fascist propaganda in the U.S. through media like radio, press and cinema. Bergamaschi's report once again recommended to avoid direct propaganda and to do indirect

tension with Italy due to multiple factors.

First, Roosevelt continued to think that Mussolini could play a relevant role in granting peace to Europe and particularly in containing Hitler's military ambitions. Accordingly, the U.S. did not want to impose harsh sanctions on Italy because this could prevent Mussolini from cooperating with international leaders and at the same time strengthen his link with Hitler. Even specific economic concerns affected, once again, this strategy. In fact, in spite of the delicate diplomatic situation, the American Government agreed in preserving most of the economic exchanges between American companies and Italy because it did not want to damage the financial interests of those companies. In this respect, as Mussolini himself later admitted, if the U.S. had stopped exporting oil to Italy the dictator would have interrupted soon his military operations in Africa.[31] Further, Roosevelt and his aides were actually afraid of an Italian defeat in Africa. In their view, the loss in Africa could force Mussolini to start a new conflict in Europe, in the attempt to recover his prestige there. Alternatively, the defeat could throw Italy in chaos and potentially favor the emergence of leftist political constituencies.

In the years following the proclamation of the Fascist Empire (May 1936)—a proclamation that the U.S. never formally recognized—Roosevelt insisted on considering Mussolini necessary to maintain peace in Europe and to contain both Communism and Nazism. The U.S. Government implicitly sustained the Fascist effort in the Spain War (1936-1939), by pursuing once again anti-Communist goals. Then, as a new conflict in

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propaganda through culture. See ACS, Minculpop, "Reports, con docc. dal 1921" (1926-1944), Box 9: Folder "Missione Bergamaschi in U.S. 1935" (Report No. 101).

[31] The League of Nations operated in a similar way: it stopped the export of certain goods to Italy (weapons, capitals, a few raw materials), but it did not cut the export of oil. Both France and England did not want to exacerbate Mussolini, since they also saw him as a relevant agent to preserve equilibrium and peace in Europe.

Europe became more and more concrete and finally erupted in 1939, Roosevelt exploited several efforts in trying to stop Hitler through the mediation of Mussolini. This strategy lasted until June 1940, when Italy entered the war in support of Nazi Germany and the opposition between totalitarian and democratic forces definitely took shape. At that point, the fate of the relations between Italy and the U.S. was compromised; the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor of December 7, 1941 finally led the U.S. into the conflict against Italy.

Fascist Ideology: The Creation of the New Italy

In 1930s America, the Fascist regime defended its domestic and foreign policy through cultural events such as conferences, lectures, and screenings of LUCE non-fiction films. Fascist officials sought to disguise the propagandistic nature of those events in two ways—by denial and dis-association. First, they claimed that those events constituted an objective presentation of Mussolini's accomplishments, and not a dishonest indoctrination.[32] Further, they tried to erase any connection between propaganda works and Mussolini's regime by placing such works in public venues. For example, the Italian Government attempted to distribute newsreels and documentaries in commercial and "a-Fascist" film theaters, so as to conceal the films' explicit pro-Fascist stance.

Unlike newsreels and documentaries, Italian fiction films did not aim to promote in the U.S. specific, short-term policies of the Fascist Government. In the view of

[32] At the time Americans thought that any form of propaganda aimed to gain consensus by deceiving people. For this reason, Ambassador Rosso tried to persuade them that Italian propaganda was not "an underhand, deceitful act, which seeks to have accepted as true the things that are false," but an act that only aimed "to explain and clarify the significance of certain ideas, the development of certain theories and the reality of certain facts." See "Rosso Praises Italo-American Trade Project," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 5, 1935.

Ambassador Augusto Rosso, they had to indirectly convey the overall values of Fascist Italianness.[33] In order to better investigate the propaganda role of fiction films, I shall now focus in a more detailed way on the definition of Fascist ideology.

Although until the 1970s scholars commonly identified the overall experience of Fascism with the regime, namely with the dictatorship's repressive and reactionary actions, Fascist ideology included a "positive" component. In fact, representatives of the Fascist movement elaborated a set of values that aimed to transform Italian people and the whole society.[34] In the aftermath of the Great War, the emergent Fascist movement theorized the decadence of the rational myth of progress of the Enlightenment era, and gradually defined an ideology that run against both Capitalism and Marxism.[35] From a general perspective, Fascists wanted to fight any form of materialism and promote a spiritual regeneration for Italy. In their view, only a dictatorial and nationalist form of government could reach that goal and create the new man for the new Italy.

The Fascist project of a spiritual revolution relied on the idea that individuals of all classes should elevate, in their role as Italian citizens, the accomplishments of their nation above their personal goals. All the Italians had to contribute to the country's unity, rather than pursuing their own individual interests. Fascists thought that such a unity—along with the nationalist pride that it implied—could raise the country's moral strength, and thus contrast the political and social fragmentation that had dominated pre-unified Italy and liberal Italy. Fascists believed that the Risorgimento era had appropriately advocated the need for Italy's unity and moral uplift, and that liberal Italy had then failed

[33] See my preliminary discussion of Rosso's position in Ch. 1.
[34] See Gentile, "Alcune considerazioni sull'ideologia fascista;" Id., *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista*.
[35] On the progressive definition of fascist ideology in the course of the 1920s, see Zunino, *L'ideologia del fascismo*.

to accomplish those ideals. According to them, liberal Italy had become prey of materialism, so that personal interests had prevailed over the interests of the nation.

Fascism wanted to contrast both capitalist and communist materialism by aspiring to be a third way between them. In the same way that they did for liberal Italy, Fascists criticized capitalist societies for being individualist, morally empty, obsessed by the desire for wealth and material goods. From another direction, Fascists also criticized Communism for being unable to place ethics above materialism. In their view, class warfare and conflicts between the state and labor unions were always inevitable in communist societies. In this context, Mussolini deemed corporatism the better form of government because in his perspective the corporate state—in contrast with both Capitalism and Communism—avoided class warfare and provided each class with what it really needed.

Operating within this intellectual framework, Mussolini also thought that his ethical and corporate state could both preserve Italy's notable traditions—its great artistic heritage, the myth of the Roman Empire, and the Catholic religion—and as such adequately embrace modernity, namely the technological, architectural and infrastructural progress. The Italian dictator considered this last step necessary in order to contrast the stereotype about Italy's backwardness.

Fascism called for an anthropological revolution in Italy, whose main effect—as Emilio Gentile has clarified—was the attempt to create a totalitarian state in which citizens could perceive Mussolini's mission as their new religion.[36] In the Fascist view, all Italians had to adhere to the new civil religion and become Fascists just like they had been asked to behave like devout Catholics. Duce's dictatorship aimed to assure the

[36] See Gentile, *Il culto del littorio*.

equivalence between Italy and Fascism, so that it could label as non-Italian any person of Italian origin that professed anti-Fascism.

While explaining the totalitarian nature of Fascist dictatorship and refusing the reductionist view of Fascism as a purely reactionary regime, Emilio Gentile has demonstrated how the Fascist movement sought to drive the dictatorship's executive apparatus and to create a new man for a new Italy. In his perspective, Fascist Government was not simply a violent entity that repressed working class forces and defended the interests of the bourgeois class—as Marxist interpretations of Fascism for a long time had proposed.[37] The Fascist dictatorship wanted Italians to be soldiers ready to fight and to die for the Fascist cause at any moment.

What was the result of this totalitarian project? Was the Fascist movement really able to make concrete its anthropological revolution through the regime's policies? The answer is negative. First, in spite of the fact that values of the Fascist movement continued to affect the Fascist totalitarian project and Fascist propaganda during the

[37] In the course of the 1920s and the 1930s the Communist Third International popularized the Marxist interpretation of Fascism. During the Seventh World Congress of the International (Moscow, 1935), Bulgarian politician Georgi Dimitrov (1882-1949) stated: "Fascism is an open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, the most chauvinistic, the most imperialistic elements of the financial capital" (in G. Dimitrov, *Selected Works*, Vol. 2 [Sofia: Sofia Press, 1972]). In the postwar Italian historiographical debate, scholars like Paolo Alatri and Guido Quazza perpetuated the Marxist view of Fascism (see Paolo Alatri, *Le origini del fascismo* [Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1956]; Guido Quazza, ed., *Fascismo e società italiana* [Turin: Einaudi, 1973]). During the 1920s and 1930s some notable interpretations from the Italian left supported the view of Fascism as a reactionary and class-biased dictatorship, but they also tended to recognize the participation of masses to Fascism. At the clandestine congress of the Italian Communist Party in Lione in 1926, intellectual and politician Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) mentioned the "social basis" that supported Fascism and that, in his perspective, belonged to new sectors of the bourgeois class (see Antonio Gramsci, *Tesi di Lione: Resoconto dei lavori del III Congresso del P.C.D'I. Lione, 26 gennaio 1926* [Milan: Cooperativa editrice distributrice proletaria, 1972]). In his lectures on Fascism held in Moscow in 1935, Italian Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti (1893-1964) similarly tried to investigate the involvement of the masses in the Italian regime's life. Particularly, he described Fascism as a "regime reazionario di massa" (a copy of the lectures is in Palmiro Togliatti, *Sul fascismo*, edited by Giuseppe Vacca [Bari-Rome: Laterza, 2014]). In other words, both Gramsci and Togliatti suggested the balance between force and consensus that marked the Fascist experience in Italy. In the course of the 1970s, De Felice developed the study of this issue in the volume *Mussolini il duce I: Gli anni del consenso 1929-1936*, and paved the way to Emilio Gentile's groundbreaking examination of Fascism.

1930s, the progressive consolidation of the dictatorship led the regime's forces to mitigate and attenuate the movement's prospected anthropological revolution. For example, the 1929 Lateran Pacts, which regulated the relations between the Catholic Church and the Italian State and recognized the sovereignty of the Holy See in the State of Vatican City, were expressions of the more conservative Fascist forces and disappointed exponents of the Fascist movement, including Giovanni Gentile. The Fascist movement wanted Fascism to be the new religion for Italy and saw Mussolini's signing of the Pact as a betrayal.

A 1930 volume by politician and journalist Lando Ferretti (1895-1977), entitled *Esempi e idee per l'italiano nuovo*, demonstrates the tension between movement and regime in the years of the Lateran Pacts.[38] In the volume Ferretti first embraced the criticism of the U.S. that was characteristic of the Fascist movement, as this passage shows:

> C'è una civiltà occidentale, la civiltà meccanica, americanizzante, la civiltà delle macchine. Questa è una civiltà che ha una sua filosofia, secondo la quale il progresso è continuo e fatale. A questa civiltà *occidentale, meccanica, ammalata, unilaterale, insensibile,* l'Italia ha dato e dà un poderoso contributo.[39]

Then, Ferretti offered a solution to the materialism of the western world that was more consistent with the regime's goals of the time. Particularly, Ferretti's text evoked the atmosphere of reconciliation between State and Church by stating that in Italy the triad God, country, family ("Dio, patria, famiglia") corrected the negative aspects of modernity. According to Ferretti, Catholic religion had to play a relevant role in the Fascist state. This second passage summarizes the author's viewpoint:

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[38] Lando Ferretti, *Esempi e idee per l'italiano nuovo* (Rome: Libreria del Littorio, 1930). Ferretti specialized in sport issues, and was even director of Mussolini's Press Office from 1928 to 1932. This volume is the transcript of a speech given in Milan on March 22, 1929 on the occasion of the plebiscitary elections of that year.
[39] In *ivi*, 273. Italics are mine.

> "L'Italia di Mussolini oppone a questa civiltà meccanica una sua etica e una sua politica. […] Là sovvertono i valori della vita e il duce ha detto: 'No! I valori eterni sono indistruttibili. Ricostruiamo su solidi pilastri l'eterno edificio.' *Ed ecco la famiglia che non si nega, ed ecco la patria che non si nega se si vuole giungere alla umanità e se si vuole che su tutto e su tutti nei secoli futuri splenda la benedizione di Dio*."[40]

In addition to the overall preponderance of the regime over the movement, the results of the Fascist totalitarian project were disappointing because—as Australian historian Richard J. B. Bosworth stressed—many Italians supported Mussolini for their particular and local interests, and not for their loyalty to the Fascist spiritual regeneration. In other words, several Italians limited the outcome of the Mussolini's goal to create a new Italy because they adapted the dictator's ambitions to their own personal advantages.[41] Rather than confuting Emilio Gentile's findings on the totalitarian nature of the Italian dictatorship, Bosworth complemented Gentile's studies by demonstrating how the Fascist desire to start a new civilization was far from being accomplished in the everyday life of Italian people. My dissertation develops Gentile and Bosworth's complementary interpretations of Fascism by looking at the U.S. context: the study of the distribution and of the reception of Italian fiction films in the U.S. aims to clarify both the working of the propaganda machine of the Fascist totalitarian state and the alternative trajectories that Fascist ideology undertook as it got in touch with American and Italian-American constituencies.

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[40] In *ivi*, 274-275. Italics are mine.

[41] See Richard Bosworth, *Mussolini's Italy: Life Under the Dictatorship* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

Giovanni Gentile: the Fascist State as a "creazione tutta spirituale"[42]

The philosopher Giovanni Gentile supported Fascism from its rise to power in 1922 to its epilogue in Salò and in that period of time he held prestigious political and cultural positions: he was Minister of the Education from 1922 to 1924—a period in which he realized a reform of the school-system that for decades had a large impact on Italian education; he was director of the Scuola Normale in Pisa from 1932 to 1943; he was the editor of the Italian Encyclopedia (1929-1937), a project in which he involved even anti-Fascist intellectuals;[43] he became director of the Accademia d'Italia in Florence in 1943, after the declaration of his loyalty to the Fascist Republic of Salò.[44]

Along with Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), Gentile was the most important exponent of the Italian idealist philosophy of early twentieth-century. The key component of his philosophical thought is a doctrine named Actual Idealism (*attualismo*), which relies on the idea that reality and the act of thinking are equivalent. In other words, according to Gentile thought and action are strictly interrelated: the intellectual endeavor is never abstract and is always connected to the activity of doing; conversely, the entire physical reality is a product of the mind.

Gentile's *attualismo* took its origins from a reinterpretation of Marx's notion of praxis. In the course of the 19th century Marx had developed the idea that individuals can

[42] Giovanni Gentile, "Origini e dottrina del fascismo" (1929), in Costanzo Casucci, ed., *Il Fascismo. Antologia di scritti critici* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1961), 15-50. The expression is from p. 24. Further references to Gentile's text are from this edition.
[43] Industrialist Giovanni Treccani (1877-1961) was the Encyclopedia's publisher. In order to launch this project, in 1925 Treccani created the Istituto Giovanni Treccani, which later became the Istituto di Enciclopedia italiana.
[44] On the overall relationship between Giovanni Gentile and Fascism, see Aldo Lo Schiavo, *La filosofia politica di Giovanni Gentile* (Rome: Armando, 1971); Id., *Introduzione a Gentile* (Bari-Rome: Laterza, 1974); Gentile, *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista*, especially the Ch. "Il mito dello stato nuovo:" 397-490; Giuseppe Calandra, *Gentile e il fascismo* (Bari-Rome: Laterza, 1987); Augusto Del Noce *Giovanni Gentile: Per una interpretazione filosofica della storia contemporanea* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990); Gentile, *Il culto del littorio*; Alessandro Amato, *L'etica oltre lo Stato: Filosofia e politica in Giovanni Gentile* (Milan-Udine: Mimesis, 2011).

exist only inside a given society and that their praxis affects the historical process. In Marx's view, such a process was to provoke the rise to power of the working class, as a result of the class conflict arose after the industrial revolution. Gentile "Hegelized" Marx by conceiving the individuals' praxis not as the expression of materialistic social issues, such as the class conflict; rather, he conceived that praxis as the manifestation of a transcendental ethical dimension. In other words, if thought necessarily leads to action, this action connects the empirical reality to the Hegelian realm of the spirit. Gentile reconciled the opposition between unity and multiplicity, namely between the spirit—which is absolute, universal and united—and the empirical subjects—which are multiple and diverse—by postulating that each empirical subject was to suppress his particular concerns and to become the earthly manifestation of the universal spirit.

If Gentile had reworked the Marxist notion of *praxis* by Hegelizing it and re-conducing it to a spiritual realm, at the same time his *attualismo* was not devoid of political connotations. By looking at politics in religious terms, Gentile conceived the state as a superior spiritual entity, to which all the empirical subjects have to give their own contribution. He named this form of government the "ethical state" ("stato etico"). In Gentile's view, the Italian Risorgimento was an appropriate example of this ethical process: in that period Italians had abandoned their personal concerns and they had devoted themselves to a common goal, namely their country's unity. In developing such ideas, Gentile recovered the aspirations of 19th century Italian nationalists like Giuseppe Mazzini, Vincenzo Gioberti, and Antonio Rosmini. The idealist philosopher first elaborated this religious view of politics during the 1910s, by supporting the war effort as Italy's chance to recover the ideals of 19th century nationalism. In the 1929 essay *Origini*

e dottrina del fascismo Gentile defined the war as “la soluzione di una profonda crisi spirituale.”[45] In his perspective, the war had demonstrated the “ragione morale”[46] of the interventionists and, on the other side, the moral weakness of the non-interventionists.

> Crearla […] davvero questa nazione, come soltanto è possibile che sorga ogni realtà spirituale: con uno sforzo, attraverso il sacrificio. Che era ciò invece che spaventava gli altri, i savi, i positivi, che pensavano al rischio mortale a cui la guerra avrebbe esposta questa Nazione giovane, non provatasi mai in una guerra nazionale, non sufficientemente preparata a una tale prova, né moralmente né materialmente.[47]

After the end of the war, Gentile positively viewed the Fascist nationalist project, because it represented for him Italy’s new occasion to reinforce its unity and to undertake a spiritual path. In the same *Origini e dottrina del fascismo* Gentile celebrated the fascist state as a “creazione tutta spirituale”[48] by contrasting it to the “vita prosaica, borghese, materialistica”[49] of liberal Italy. By stressing the opposition between “materialist” individuals, who care only about their personal affairs, and individuals who instead care about the strength of their country, Gentile meant to emphasize the Fascists’ ability to overcome the deficiencies of liberal Italy and to open a new era for the country. In line with the main principles of his *attualismo*, Gentile believed that under Fascist rule Italians could participate at the country’s larger spiritual project through their activity in the family, in the school, in the workplace, in political and social organizations. Ultimately, in the philosopher’s view Italians had to exploit their individual will to universalize themselves and to become part of the state’s ethical mission. For this reason, Gentile sustained that the state is *in interior homine* (“inside people”), rather than being *inter homines* (“among people”).

[45] Gentile, “Origini e dottrina del fascismo,” 15.
[46] *Ivi*, 17.
[47] In *ivi*, 17.
[48] *Ivi*, 44.
[49] *Ivi*, 26.

Gentile's attack against materialism fostered the recurrent criticism against the bourgeois class made by Fascist supporters during the *ventennio*. Even the Fascists' perception of the U.S. as a greedy country relied on the contrast between spirituality and materialism that is at the core of Gentile's political philosophy.[50]

Further, Gentile contributed to the regime's conception of the corporate state as the most appropriate form of state of Fascist Italy. In the same *Origini e dottrina del fascismo* the philosopher from Castelvetrano eulogized corporatism for guaranteeing a mediation between capital and labor, and thus for helping classes to avoid conflicts and to focus on the country's moral goal.[51]

Gentile also aimed to reconcile the dictatorial nature of Fascism with individual freedom. How could a totalitarian state coexist with liberty? Indeed, Gentile thought that Italians had experienced an illusory freedom under the governments of the liberal era and that only the Fascist regime could grant them authentic freedom. In his view, in the liberal period individuals had always lived in contrast with their government, being slaves of their selfish needs. Such individualism and such dependence on material wealth had undermined the people's freedom and autonomy. On the other side, Gentile believed that the Fascist regime gave real freedom because it was able to connect the ethical life of each individual with the spiritual process of the entire country. This achievement could free individuals from their immediate concerns and let them enjoy a communion with their government, which demanded respect and obedience by assuming the responsibility of preserving the right direction for the country. In other words, Gentile thought that in

[50] For a criticism of materialism from an idealist perspective, see Mario Palmieri, *The Philosophy of Fascism* (Chicago: The Fortune Press/The Dante Alighieri Society, 1936), esp. Ch. II "Fascist Idealism and Modern Materialism," 41-53.
[51] See the section "Lo stato corporativo" in Gentile, "Origini e dottrina del fascismo," 46-47.

liberal governments individuals sought freedom by acting *against* the state; on the contrary, in the Fascist regime individuals could find freedom *inside* the state by recognizing the state's benefits and their own as equivalent.[52]

Gentile's *attualismo* was expression of the revolutionary component of Fascism. The philosopher and his followers proudly professed themselves as Fascists and tried to dominate the Fascist intellectual discourse in order to drive the regime's decisions. However, since Fascism was a heterogeneous phenomenon, constantly in tension between the regime and the movement, the Fascist intellectual mindset did not identify in its entirety with Actual Idealism. Indeed, Gentile met several opponents throughout the *ventennio*.[53]

Italian historian Alessandra Tarquini has demonstrated that the Fascist Party often clashed with Gentile, although they both shared the plan for the construction of a totalitarian state.[54] Frictions arose because Gentile contended the superiority of the Fascist State over the Fascist Party. The philosopher thought that the Party's sole existence maintained the partisan logic of pre-Fascist Italy and that all Italians had to coalesce around the State, rather than around particular political formations. In her volume Tarquini also makes clear that some specific factions repeatedly tried to contrast

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[52] In 1932 anti-Fascist activist and liberal socialist Carlo Rosselli (1899-1937) dismissed Gentile's view of Fascism, and more generally the nature of Fascist dictatorship, through the following words: "Il carattere supremamente ripugnante della dittatura moderna fascista non consiste nell'impiego della forza e nella soppressione delle libertà […], ma nella fabbrica del consenso, nel servilismo attivo che essa pretende dai sudditi. […] Io ti asservisco e tu devi dirmi che accetti liberamente di essere schiavo, devi proclamarti, gentilianamente, di essere schiavo libero." From a note by Rosselli, quoted in Nicola Tranfaglia, "Carlo Rosselli e l'antifascismo," in *Giustizia e libertà nella lotta antifascista e nella storia d'Italia: attualità dei fratelli Rosselli a quaranta anni dal loro sacrificio*, edited by the Istituto storico della resistenza in Toscana (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1978), 192. Like in the case of Gramsci and Togliatti, Rosselli's text demonstrates that in the 1920s and the 1930s the Italian left questioned the balance between force and consensus that characterized Fascism—a point that in the postwar era Italian Marxist historiography mostly neglected by deeming Fascism a merely repressive government.
[53] See Gentile, *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista*, 406.
[54] See Tarquini, *Il Gentile dei fascisti*.

Gentile's cultural hegemony. The first one emerged in the 1920s and was, predictably, the conservative component of Fascists, the one linked to Rocco and Farinacci, which considered Fascism in reactionary terms and abruptly dismissed Gentile's theoretical speculations.[55] Catholic intellectuals also opposed Gentile since the early 1920s. Although Gentile's 1923 reform of school had given space to Catholic religion in Italian schools, they thought that the philosopher's religious conception of politics dismissed the prominence of Catholicism in Italian society.[56] Like early reactionary Fascists, 1930s critics of Gentile also saw action—rather than theoretical speculation—as the right tool to build the Fascist state. Such critics were young Fascists, who belonged to different blocs of the Fascist ideological spectrum, and theorists of Fascism, who also were expressions of diverse sectors of Fascist thought.[57] It should be added that even Giuseppe Bottai, who in the 1920s had shared with Gentile the call for the Fascist anthropological revolution, moved beyond Gentile during the 1930s. As the Minister of National Education, in 1939 Bottai promoted a school reform that aimed to revise Gentile's reform of 1923 by making stronger the bond between culture and politics.

All these controversies testify to the complexity and the diversity of the Fascist cultural landscape.[58] However, at the time they did not diminish the overall relevance of Gentile in Mussolini's Italy. His conception of an ethical and corporate state, as well as his attack against materialism, maintained a large and constant impact in the cultural

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[55] Some representatives of this faction were Curzio Suckert (later Curzio Malaparte), Ardengo Soffici, Giuseppe Brunati, Telesio Interlandi.

[56] Catholics expressed their discontent toward Gentile through journals like the *Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica*, *Vita e pensiero*, *Studium*, *La civiltà cattolica*.

[57] The group of young Fascists included philosophers and psychoanalysis scholars writing in the journal *Il Saggiatore*, reactionary Fascists writing in the journal *Il secolo fascista*, Catholic intellectuals who spoke through the journal *La Sapienza*. Anti-Gentilian theorists of Fascism were the Catholic Francesco Orestano, the corporatist Ugo Spirito, and others.

[58] See, again, Tarquini, *Storia della cultura fascista*.

discourse of the *ventennio*.[59] My discussion of 1930s Italian fiction films in the next section, and more generally in the next chapters, aims to demonstrate this point.

Spreading Fascist Italianness Through Culture

The regime conceived Italian fiction films as viable tools to promote Fascist Italianness in the U.S. This propaganda goal was part of the spiritual expansion of Fascism abroad, which the regime prospected during the 1930s. Indeed, between the 1920s and the 1930s Mussolini changed his attitude toward the role of Fascism in the international scenario.

In the course of the 1920s, Mussolini repeatedly deemed Fascism an Italian phenomenon and thought that Fascism could not spread abroad. He believed that Fascism was the appropriate medicine to cure the instability of postwar Italy, to fight the spread of Communism in the country and to cultivate Italians' dormant nationalism. Yet, within a few years the Italian dictator had elaborated a different perspective on this issue. In 1934, in the course of a public gathering in Rome, he declared: "Dal 1929 ad oggi il fascismo da fenomeno italiano è diventato fenomeno universale."[60] Why did Mussolini alter his opinion? The economic crisis especially took him to consider Fascism the better solution not only for Italy, but also for other countries. As explained above, according to Mussolini Italy's handling of the economic crisis testified to the efficiency of the Fascist third way between Capitalism and Communism. This assumption led him in the 1930s to

[59] Cf. the entry on Fascism that Mussolini authored and Gentile partially ghostwrote for the Italian Encyclopedia (Benito Mussolini, "Fascismo," in *Enciclopedia italiana*, Vol. XIV [Rome: Treccani, 1932], 847-884). Mussolini wrote the section "Dottrina politica e sociale," as Gentile composed the section "Idee fondamentali," in which he summarized the basic concepts of his doctrine of Fascism. The English edition of this encyclopedia entry was Benito Mussolini, *The Doctrine of Fascism* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1935).
[60] From a speech by Mussolini at the Seconda Assemblea Quinquennale del Regime in Rome, March 18, 1934.

sustain that Fascism had to protect European countries from the inadequacy of both Capitalism and Communism through the creation of an "Internazionale fascista."[61]

In line with Mussolini's aspirations, between 1933 and 1934 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared a detailed presentation of the Fascist Movements operating abroad.[62] Count Quinto Mazzolini, at the time Italian consul in Jerusalem, wrote the preface of this report by stating through an idealist lexicon that "lo spirito del Fascismo ha dilagato in maniera manifesta in tutto il mondo."[63] The report mentioned some minor Fascist movements in the U.S., the most notable of which was the Silver Legion of America founded in 1933 by fascist leader and agitator William Dudley Pelley and based in Asheville, North Carolina. The necessity of avoiding overt propaganda in 1930 U.S. forced the Italian regime to not publicly support movements like these and to promote its values and its policies through culture.

Private dispatches and public speeches by Fascist political and cultural agents in the U.S. confirm the regime's goal to spread Fascist ideology in that country during the 1930s. The idealist lexicon once again marked such statements. In a February 1933 private dispatch, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Piero Parini invoked the "controllo spirituale e anche politico delle comunità italiane," as he expressed his skepticism about the acquisition of the Italian-American journal *Il Corriere d'America* by the influential businessman Generoso Pope.[64] Parini further developed his perspective on the Italian-

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[61] See Marco Cuzzi, *L'internazionale delle camicie nere* (Milan: Mursia, 2005); Id., *Antieuropa: Il fascismo universale di Mussolini* (Milan: M&B, 2007).
[62] See the report *Movimenti Fascisti Esteri*, edited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in ACS, Minculpop, Report, con docc. dal 1921 (1926-1944), Box 9: Report 99.
[63] Quinto Mazzolini, "Prefazione," in *ivi*, 1-3. The quotation is from p. 1.
[64] See Piero Parini, "Pro memoria per S.E. il Capo del Governo," dispatch of Feb. 3, 1933, addressed to Benito Mussolini, in ASMAE, Minculpop, Box 231: Folder "Corriere d'America Portfolio." Generoso Pope (1891-1950) was an Italian-American businessman and newspaper editor, who in the 1930s published the two most relevant Italian-American newspapers, the mentioned *Il Corriere d'America* and *Il Progresso*

Americans' spiritual goals in the course of a visit in the U.S. in 1934. On that occasion he addressed Italian-Americans by emphasizing their ability to overcome the limitations of modern materialism through their moral values:

> Non è vero che la civiltà stia nel colletto bianco e nelle unghie rosate; la civiltà sta nella capacità d'amore e nella chiarezza della mente. […] Voi comprendete l'America nella sua vera essenza, all'infuori e al disopra [sic] della vicenda quotidiana e del luccicare caleidoscopico del progresso meccanico e materialistico. Vi è un'America che pensa, riflette, studia e che ha riserve morali e di carattere preziose.[65]

By stating that U.S. had "moral resources," in this case Parini diplomatically conceded that Americans could eventually look beyond their pragmatic and personal interests. However, this appears to be only a rhetorical strategy, which meant to stress the Italian-Americans' peculiar capacity to conduct a life in which the "white collar" and the "pink nails" were not the main components.

The reference to Italy's spiritual merits appeared even in the communications between the writer and journalist Giulio Antonio Borgese (1882-1952) and the Fascist Government.[66] Borgese, author of the novels *Rubé* (1921) and *I vivi e i morti* (1923), left Italy for the U.S. in 1931, starting to work as a professor at the University of California in Berkeley and later moving at the Smith College in Northampton (Massachusetts) and at the University of Chicago. Borgese began to openly profess anti-Fascism during his stay in the U.S. Yet, in 1932 he still maintained contacts with the Fascist Government, which had helped him to move in the U.S. By doing at that time a report about his teaching activity, Borgese mentioned the necessity of the "propaganda dei nostri valori

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Italo-Americano, along with other newspapers. In spite of Parini's doubts, Pope staunchly promoted the Fascist cause in the U.S. until U.S. and Italy became war enemies in 1941.

[65] Radio message by the Minister of Foreign Affairs P. Parini to Italian-Americans. The transcription of the message is in *Il Grido della Stirpe*, February 17, 1934, 1.

[66] See the folder "Prof. G. A. Borgese negli Stati Uniti," in ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Paese Stati Uniti, Box 12.

spirituali."[67] Although Borgese was deceiving the Italian regime and planning to fight Fascism from the U.S., his mention of Italy's spiritual values testifies once more to the pervasiveness of the idealist imprint in the Fascist discourse. Indeed, even American supporters of Fascism used to adopt the same lexicon. In the 1920s, the president of Columbia University Nicholas Murray Butler, a vigorous supporter of Fascism, favored the creation of the Italian cultural institute Casa Italiana (1927) inside the campus of his university and informed Mussolini about this event through the following telegram:

> Contribuzione curatori Università Columbia assicura costruzione dotazione casa cultura italiana New York stop Questa fausta notizia comunico doverosamente all'eccellenza vostra che in patria e all'estero dirige e ispira *ricostruzione spirituale* popolo italiano."[68]

In the regime's view, the Casa Italiana had to use its cultural activities in order to defend the Fascist cause—like the Italian Library of Information did in the same New York.[69] As we know, culture occupied a primary role in the promotion of Fascist Italianness in 1930s America. The Italian regime linked even the distribution of Italian fiction films in the U.S. to the propaganda of Italian moral virtues. Some private dispatches by Italian functionaries in the U.S. clarify this aspect.

In a 1935 dispatch to Ambassador Rosso, the consul from Chicago Giuseppe Castruccio sustained that Italian films aptly demonstrated the "positive" component of

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[67] From a letter by Giulio Antonio Borgese of June 3, 1932, addressed to Ambassador in Washington Giacomo De Martino, in ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Paese Stati Uniti, Box 12, Folder "Prof. G. A. Borgese negli Stati Uniti."

[68] In ACS, Minculpop, Reports (1922-1945), Box 7 (Reports n. 71 and 71A, "Rapporti dell'Ambasciata italiana a Washington"): Folder "Casa di Cultura Italiana a New York." Italics are mine.

[69] Journalist and writer Giuseppe Prezzolini directed the Casa Italiana from 1930 to 1940. On the Casa Italiana's activities, see "Casa Italiana 1924-57," Microfilm collection, at the Center for Migration Studies in New York City. Secondary sources, discussing the connections between the Casa Italiana and Fascism, include: Daria Frezza, "Propaganda fascista e comunità italiane in USA: la Casa Italiana della Columbia University," *Studi Storici*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (October-December, 1970), 661-697; Giuseppe Prezzolini, *The Case of the Casa Italiana* (New York: American Institute of Italian Studies, 1976); Olga Ragusa, *Gli anni americani di Giuseppe Prezzolini: il Dipartimento d'italiano e la Casa Italiana della Columbia University* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2001); Stephen H. Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower: Complicity and Conflict on American Campuses* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 89-93.

Fascist ideology.[70] The dispatch recounted the screening at the International House of the University of Chicago of *Casta diva* [Carmine Gallone, 1935], a film reconstructing the life of Italian composer Vincenzo Bellini (1801-35).[71] In his dispatch, Castruccio explained that the International House was a University building that hosted international students and screened non-American films on a daily basis. Castruccio also stressed that the University environment was largely leftist and that the regime needed to try to intensify its propaganda there though films and lectures. In Castruccio's words,

> E' finora molto diffuso il pregiudizio che il Fascismo è una forma di dittatura crudele, assolutista, reazionario [sic], che impedisce la libertà del pensiero e della espansione naturale dell'uomo; trattandosi di un ambiente studentesco universitario, la propaganda è più che mai necessaria, perchè quei giovani saranno tra qualche anno gli esponenti dell'opinione pubblica americana.[72]

Castruccio aimed to discredit the common accusation that Mussolini's dictatorship was reactionary and oppressive. In his message he suggested that Fascism indeed granted both "libertà del pensiero" and the "espansione naturale dell'uomo." By using such words, Castruccio made reference to basic concepts of Giovanni Gentile's political thought: respectively, the coexistence of dictatorship and individual freedom under Fascism, and the connection of each Italian with the larger spiritual process of the country. In the same message Castruccio deemed *Casta diva* as "un capolavoro di spiritualità" and thus emphasized the propaganda role of Italian films in that academic context. The consul implied that the portrait of a great Italian from the past was functional to enlighten the moral virtues of present-day Italy and to fight the recurrent prejudices against Fascism.

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[70] Giuseppe Castruccio, "Commemorazione Centenario Belliniano alla International House," dispatch of July 10, 1935, addressed to Ambassador Augusto Rosso in Washington, in ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-45, Stati Uniti, Box 26: Folder "Commemorazione di Bellini."
[71] Released in U.S. theatres in 1937.
[72] In *ivi*, 2-3.

An already mentioned private dispatch by Italian Ambassador Augusto Rosso similarly insisted on the Italian films' ability to depict basic Fascist values. The dispatch in question is the one—dated February 25, 1936—in which Rosso stressed that Italian films had to praise indirectly Fascist Italy. Rosso thus explained the goals that the screening of Italian films in the U.S. had to accomplish:

> Qualunque film italiano potrà mostrargli [Rossi is referring here to American spectators] la tranquilla laboriosità dei nostri contadini, le case linde e piene di luce dei nostri operai, il gusto e la discreta agiatezza che circonda l'esistenza del professionista italiano. L'igiene dei nostri ospedali, il valore dei nostri medici, l'organizzazione delle nostre industrie, la modernità dei mezzi di comunicazione, la vita sportiva dei giovani, e persino le realizzazioni spirituali del Regime, possono essere illustrate in qualsiasi film.[73]

By specifying that "persino le realizzazioni spirituali del Regime possono essere illustrate in qualsiasi film," in this message Rosso particularly alluded to Fascist corporatism and to its apparent ability to satisfy the needs of every class: the mention to farmers, workers, and professionals covered the entire social spectrum, which in the propaganda's view was equally enjoying the Fascist ethical mission. In other words, according to Rosso even Italian films could show to spectators in the U.S. that Italy's third way between Capitalism and Communism was not a violent dictatorship, but a viable solution to the economic and ideological uncertainties of the time.

Rosso and Castruccio's emphasis on the spirituality of Italian fiction films opens up the question whether such films actually conveyed the beliefs of Fascist Italy, and, if so, how effectively or to what degree. In other words, what was the interaction between Italian films and the social and cultural context of their production? The following chapter discusses the range of connections between the cultural works under examinations and the intellectual pillars of 1930s Fascist Italy.

[73] In Rosso, "Propaganda cinematografica."

Part II

Chapter 3

Reframing Fascist Italianness in 1930s Italian Cinema

Black Telephones: 1930s Italian Fiction Films and Fascist Ideology

In the course of the 1920s, in spite of the fact that Italians increasingly enjoyed the film medium, Italian cinema faced a deep crisis. After the country's dramatic involvement in the Great War, the national film industry was unable to attain financial stability and to revitalize film production.[1] The Cines film company, headed by a charismatic figure, Stefano Pittaluga, put forth the strongest effort to improve this situation. However, Pittaluga's untimely death in 1931 limited the results of Cines' intervention in the fragmented landscape of Italian cinema. At the same time, in its first decade the Fascist Government did very little to help the Italian film industry and to reinvigorate the production of fiction films. The major initiative of Mussolini's administration at that time pertained to the nationalization of the LUCE institute in 1924 and to the realization of non-fiction films. LUCE rapidly became a relevant tool of Fascist propaganda by producing newsreels and documentaries that used to praise openly Mussolini's policies.[2] The Fascist Government finally supported the re-birth of Italian film industry in the early 1930s. The inauguration of the Venice Film Festival in 1932, the establishment of the Direzione Generale per la Cinematografia (DGC) in 1934, the

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[1] For a recent critical examination of 1920s Italian cinema, see Leonardo Quaresima, ed., *Storia del cinema italiano*, Vol. IV: 1924-1933 (Venice: Marsilio; Rome: Edizioni di Bianco e Nero, 2014).

[2] See Ernesto G. Laura, *La grande Aquila: Storia dell'Istituto Luce* (Rome: Ente dello Spettacolo Editore, 2000); Pierluigi Erbaggio, "*Istituto Nazionale Luce*: A National Company with an International Reach," in *Italian Silent Cinema: A Reader*, ed. Giorgio Bertellini (London: John Libbey, 2013), 221-231.

foundation of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia (CSC) in 1935, legislative measures aimed to sustain film production, the opening of the new Cinecittà studios in 1937: all these initiatives testify to the regime's attention toward Italian cinema. In this context, film companies eventually succeeded in strengthening the production of fiction films.[3]

What was the connection between those fiction films and Fascist Italy? My chapter specifically focuses on this issue and argues that two popular genres of 1930s Italian cinema—romantic comedies and historical films—engaged in a profound, albeit never obvious way with basic values of the Fascist intellectual mindset: the synthesis between tradition and modernity, and the one between moral and material values.[4] In the following pages I approach the relevance of these tensions by introducing the major historiographical debates on 1930s Italian fiction cinema, and finally contending that the field of cultural studies is particularly useful to investigate the links between films and their social context. My conclusive argument—to which the remaining sections of this chapter are dedicated—is that romantic comedies and historical films boldly supported

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[3] Between 1933 and 1938 an average number of 30-40 Italian films were screened each year in Italian theaters. From 1939 to 1943 the number of Italian films largely increased, due to the absence of American films and to a new legislation that further reinforced Italian producers. General assessments of 1930s Italian cinema are in Brunetta, *Il cinema italiano di regime*, and Caldiron, *Storia del cinema italiano*, Vol. V: 1934-1939.

[4] As discussed in the previous chapter, these values were particularly important for Mussolini during the 1930s: in his view, the African war demonstrated the continuity between the Roman Empire and the Fascist dictatorship, and the economic crisis attested the efficacy of the Fascist third way between capitalism and communism. The colonial genre, focused on Italy's conquest of Ethiopia, is also relevant to study the ideological overtones of 1930s Italian fictional cinema. Colonial films like *Il grande appello* adhered to Mussolini's rhetoric of the time by implying that the Fascist adventure in Africa followed the path of the Roman Empire (for a recent reconsideration of Italian colonial cinema, see Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015]). Since colonial films directly dealt with the regime's war effort in Africa, their re-elaboration of main Fascist beliefs, such as the synthesis between tradition and modernity, is not surprising. In my dissertation I have decided to focus on romantic comedies and historical films because such films mixed politics and entertainment in a more allusive and indirect way, thus testifying to the subtlety of Fascist propaganda through culture and better fulfilling Luigi Freddi's policy that I am going to detail below.

the Fascist conception of Italianness, although they did not explicitly praise the dictator Benito Mussolini and his government. In other words, such films *indirectly* performed a role of propaganda, both in Italy and abroad.

1930s Italian fiction films very rarely contained references to Mussolini's regime and to present-day events. Apart from a few exceptions, including colonial films like *Il grande appello* and *Sotto la croce del sud*, 1930s Italian cinema seemed to avoid the representation of Fascism and favor instead merely escapist films. Comedies characterized by touristic and picturesque landscapes, songs, and innocuous romantic affairs became particularly relevant at the time, thanks especially to director Mario Camerini and to his successful partnership with the emergent star Vittorio De Sica.[5] Similarly, comedies set in distant locations, most notably Hungary, abounded on Italian screens throughout the 1930s.[6] Both during the regime's heyday and in the postwar era, the seemingly a-political nature of 1930s Italian fiction films received a variety of critical interpretations.

First, the reactions by Fascist intellectuals and politicians were divided into two contrasting positions—one that requested a more politicized cinema, and the other that instead demanded indirect propaganda through fiction films. Indeed, for the entire *ventennio* Fascist intellectual circles constantly debated whether cultural propaganda had to be direct or indirect.[7]

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[5] Throughout the 1930s Camerini directed De Sica in five films: *Gli uomini che mascalzoni…* [*Men, What Scoundrels!*, 1932; I was not able to locate the year of the American release for this film], *Darò un milione* [*I'll Give a Million*, 1935; released in the U.S. in 1937], *Ma non è una cosa seria!* [*Le sorprese di un matrimonio*, 1936; released in the U.S. in 1939], *Il signor Max* [*Mr. Max*, 1937; released in the U.S. in 1939], and *I grandi magazzini* [*Department Stores*, 1939; not released in the U.S.].
[6] The most famous of the "Hungarian comedies" was *Mille lire al mese* [*A Thousand Dollars a Month*, Max Neufeld, 1939], not distributed in the U.S.
[7] For an overview of this issue, see Vito Zagarrio, *Cinema e fascismo: Film, modelli, immaginari* (Venice: Marsilio, 2004), particularly the Ch. "Intellettuali e politica culturale," 98-140.

On the one side, personalities like the *gerarca* Roberto Farinacci, a representative of the most repressive and reactionary side of Fascism, promoted the necessity of a strictly Fascist art, whose goal was to sustain Mussolini's regime in a didactic way.[8] By adhering to this position, a cohort of Fascist intellectuals blamed the lack of political engagement in Italian cinema on the films' trivial subjects.[9]

Instead, proponents of the second position believed that the regime had to exploit Italians' leisure time to promote the Fascist thought in an unobtrusive way. According to this constituency, Italian culture had to assimilate the atmosphere of Fascist Italy by adapting artistic traditions of the past to the regime's overall moral and intellectual ethos.[10] This second position eventually prevailed over the previous one. For example—as Victoria de Grazia persuasively demonstrated in *The Culture of Consent*—the many activities of the national recreational club Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro (OND) sought to promote obliquely Fascist beliefs.[11] Accordingly, several Fascist commentators argued that even cinema had to avoid the plain representation of Fascist Italy and to do indirect

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[8] See Giuseppe Pardini, *Roberto Farinacci, ovvero della rivoluzione fascista* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2007); Lorenzo Santoro, *Roberto Farinacci e il Partito Nazionale Fascista 1923-1926* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2008).

[9] See, for example, the following journal articles: Corrado Pavolini (1898-1980; writer, critic, radio and theatre director, brother of the Fascist politician Alessandro [1903-1945]), "Fonti d'ispirazione," *L'Orto* 1 (April 1937); Id., "Cinematografo: Nuove terre," *L'Orto* 2 (May 1937); Ferrante Azzali, "Il cinema e la società italiana," *Critica fascista* 20 (1938). Throughout the 1930s-early 1940s several intellectuals not aligned with the regime also criticized Italian fiction films as frivolous and insignificant. Particularly, the majority of the critics working for the journal *Cinema*, directed by Mussolini's son Vittorio (1916-97), implicitly embraced anti-Fascist positions by demanding a cinema more adherent to the reality of the time; in that way, such critics—including the future directors Luchino Visconti, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Giuseppe De Santis—laid the basis for the emergence of neorealism a few years later. See Giuseppe De Santis and Mario Alicata, "Ancora di Verga e del cinema italiano," *Cinema* 130 (1941), 314-315; Stefania Parigi, *Neorealismo: Il nuovo cinema del dopoguerra* (Venice: Marsilio, 2014).

[10] A debate on the journal *Critica fascista* in 1926 first sustained this interpretation of the relationship between Fascism and culture. Intellectuals like Curzio Malaparte, Anton Giulio Bragaglia Massimo Bontempelli participated to this debate. See *Critica fascista* 22 (1926) and 23 (1926). The director of *Critica Fascista* was Giuseppe Bottai, who held multiple positions in the Fascist Government in the course of the *ventennio*: Minister of the Corporations, Governor of Rome, Governor of Addis Abeba, Minister of Education.

[11] See Victoria De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

propaganda through entertainment.[12] As discussed in the previous chapters, Italian Ambassador in the U.S. Augusto Rosso (1933-1936) embraced this position.[13]

Most importantly, Luigi Freddi—DGC director from 1934 to 1939, and certainly the most relevant personality of the Fascist film landscape throughout the 1930s—advocated the political function of apparently escapist fiction films.[14] As a result, in the second half of the 1930s Italian films to a large extent tried to convey indirect propaganda and to educate individuals through core Fascist values, such as the prominence of moral principles over materialism, thus exploiting fiction films to fortify the regime's hegemony over all Italian classes.[15] In order to reach this goal, Freddi took as a model the Hollywood film industry and planned a state-controlled production of films, according to which the regime monitored the making of films from their early stages to their distribution.[16] The DGC had the power to approve screenplays consistent with the regime's mentality and to censor projects that could be ideologically problematic—as well as, more generally, to promote the economic growth of Italian film

[12] Cf. what the Fascist critic Enrico Roma stated in 1932: "Film di palese propaganda o troppo francamente moraleggianti forse non incontererebbero il favore del pubblico" (in Enrico Roma, "Ostacoli alla nostra vittoria," *Comoedia*, Vol. 14, No. 5, May-June 1932).

[13] Cf. my discussion, in Ch. 1 and 2, of Augusto Rosso, "Propaganda cinematografica," dispatch of February 25, 1936, addressed to the Ministry for the Press and the Propaganda, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per S. Francisco di California."

[14] See Luigi Freddi, "Arte per il popolo," in Direzione Generale per la Cinematografia, *40 Anniversario della cinematografia (1895-1935)* (Rome: Sottosegretariato di Stato per la Stampa e la Propaganda, 1935), 35. Vinicio Araldi also called for indirect propaganda in *Cinema arma del nostro tempo* (Milan: La Prora, 1939), especially in the section "Il cinema è civiltà," 193-201. Jean Gili gave an overview of the different Fascist positions on fiction films in *L'Italie de Mussolini et son cinema* (Paris: Henri Veyrier, 1985), especially in the Ch. "Cinéma de propaganda ou cinéma d'évasion," 89-102.

[15] Antonio Gramsci gave an influential definition of the notion of hegemony. In his view, in a given society a political party needs to create consensus through hegemony. Intellectuals play a major role in this process, since they have to shape a "national-popular" culture aimed to generate that consensus. Gramsci conceived the national-popular culture as the manifestation of the basic beliefs that support the existence of a state and the bond between people—he did not conceive it as a dogmatic imposition from above. Eventually, Gramsci believed that, through such an exploitation of culture, a party is able to rule a state by mediating between force and consensus. See Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere*, 4 vols., ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi, 1975).

[16] In 1933, Freddi went to Hollywood as a reporter for the newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia* and there he could look closely at the organization of the American film industry.

companies.[17]

In the public discourse around cinema, Fascists repeatedly linked this medium to their alleged spiritual revolution. For example, in a speech addressed to the Italian Senate on May 22, 1936 Galeazzo Ciano, then Minister of Press and Propaganda, embraced Freddi's line by explaining that the government did not want to do overt propaganda through cinema and that Italian films had to convey "i motivi della vita fisica e spirituale del popolo."[18] In a 1937 speech to the Italian Senate, Dino Alfieri, then Undersecretary at the Ministry of Press and Propaganda, also stressed that mass media had to be Fascist by avoiding explicit propaganda. Further, Alfieri echoed Giovanni Gentile's political thought by recommending that cinema was to offer a "nutrimento spirituale" to Italian people.[19]

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[17] Cf. Vito Zagarrio, "Schizofrenie del modello fascista," in Caldiron, *Storia del cinema italiano*, 37-61. The quotation is from pp. 46-47.

[18] See Galeazzo Ciano, *Il Ministero per la Stampa e la Propaganda: Discorso pronunciato al Senato il 22 maggio 1936* (Rome: Novissima, 1936).

[19] See Dino Alfieri, *Discorso pronunciato al senato del Regno dall'on. Dino Alfieri ministro per la stampa e la propaganda: seduta del 21 maggio 1937* (Rome: Novissima, 1937). Indeed, even as he seemed to follow Freddi's overall guidelines, Alfieri contributed to Freddi's demise from the DGC in 1939 and to the establishment of a different relationship between state and cinema. Alfieri abandoned Freddi's totalitarian plans by loosening the regime's control over the production of films, and only maintained strong the government's authority to censor unsuitable films. At the same time, in 1938 Alfieri strengthened the power of Italian producers through two laws. The first one was the 'Legge Alfieri' (Regio Decreto Legge no. 1061, June 16, 1938), which supported Italian film productions through generous governmental awards. The second one was the 'Legge sul monopolio' (Regio Decreto Legge no. 1389, September 4, 1938), which made the state-controlled producing and distributing company ENIC (Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche) the only responsible for the purchase, the importation and the distribution of foreign films in Italy. Most of the American film companies did not accept this new rule, which reduced their profits, and interrupted the distribution of their films in Italy, ultimately favoring Italian producers. For all these reasons, film historians deemed Alfieri's initiatives as a victory for Italian producers. See Jean Gili, *Stato fascista e cinematografia: repressione e promozione* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1981); Brunetta, *Il cinema italiano di regime*; Id., *Il ruggito del leone: Hollywood alla conquista dei sogni nell'Italia di Mussolini* (Venice: Marsilio, 2013); Venturini, *La politica cinematografica del regime fascista*. Thus, if we can distinguish a Freddi era and an Alfieri era in Italian cinema of the 1930s-early 1940s, my dissertation covers the Freddi era, since the Italian films that arrived in the U.S. were mostly produced by 1938-1939, when Freddi's policies to a great extent still prevailed. Indeed, Freddi's convictions about indirect propaganda through fiction films resurfaced even during the wartime era. For example, a 1942 article in *Cinema* still promoted them by stressing again the ethical goals that Italian films had to accomplish: "Fatta la distinzione tra film politico e film a funzione politica, sia stato considerato che *qualunque buon film spettacolare, purché rispondente alla condizione di essere morale*, quale ad esempio *Avanti c'è posto*,

After the end of the war and until early 1970s, a critical interpretation prevailed about the lack of overt propaganda in most 1930s Italian fiction films. According to this interpretation, Italian films were narcotics that the Fascist regime exploited to distract people from the reality of the dictatorship. Film scholar and director Carlo Lizzani was one of the first critics to dismiss 1930s–early 1940s Italian fiction films as daydreams and wish fulfillments, which had no connection with the actual conditions of Mussolini's Italy. In his 1953 volume *Storia del cinema italiano* Lizzani thus criticized Italian cinema of the Fascist era:

> Non un fotogramma, oggi, può essere rimpianto o ricordato, dei cento e cento film prodotti dal '38 al '43 sulla falsariga del camerinismo [a reference to Mario Camerini's comedies], della *pochade*, della commedia ungherese. Essi potrebbero essere riassunti in un freddo elenco di luoghi comuni, in un ricettario squallido e monotono.

Lizzani particularly attacked the apparent distance between such films and the troubling historical context in which they appeared:

> Sembra impossibile pensare che negli anni in cui il mondo veniva attraversato da tante sciagure, potessero nascere e moltiplicarsi quei film così assenti e vuoti, quei film così privi di ogni pur minimo aggancio con la realtà di una nazione.[20]

Film historians began to use the expression "white telephones cinema" ("cinema dei telefoni bianchi") in order to criticize the frivolousness of 1930s Italian films.[21]

In 1974, a conference on Italian cinema of the Fascist era, organized by the Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema in Pesaro, invited several film scholars to

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possa nelle attuali circostanze, in quanto ciò è conseguente al risultato di divagare sanamente il pubblico, essere attribuito alla categoria dei *film a funzione politica*" (Alfredo Algardi, "Le manifestazioni passoridottistiche a Udine," *Cinema*, n. 156, 25 December 1942. Italics are mine).

[20] Carlo Lizzani, *Il cinema italiano* (Florence: Parenti Editore, 1953), 91. Mario Gromo similarly dismissed Italian cinema of the Fascist era in *Cinema italiano (1903-1953)* (Verona: Mondadori, 1954), 55-94.

[21] This expression meant to condemn the films' depiction of wealthy characters engaged in ordinary activities, such as having long conversations through white telephones. See, for example, its use in Claudio Carabba, *Il cinema del ventennio nero* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1974), esp. in the section "La musica del cuore," 29-51.

reconsider their view of 1930s fiction films.[22] However, this renewed interest led most of the critics to maintain the negative qualification of "white telephones cinema" and the idea that at the time Italian films were stolidly escapist. In case film scholars from that generation proposed that Italian fiction films of the 1930s could have some link with the social context of the time, they argued that those films elaborated an oblique criticism of the regime.[23]

Since the 1980s, scholars like Marcia Landy, James Hay, Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Jacqueline Reich, Piero Garofalo, and Steven Ricci have adopted new historiographical and theoretical approaches in order to examine Italian cinema of the Fascist era.[24] Particularly, they have connected Italian films to their social and cultural context by taking into consideration both the "rediscovery" of Fascist ideology by historians like George L. Mosse and Emilio Gentile and the tools offered by cultural studies and reception theory. This has resulted in the recognition of a deeper interaction between Italian films and Fascist society: to name an example, Hay's analysis of the myths of

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[22] Other retrospectives and conferences took place in Pesaro in the following years. The proceedings of this intense scholarly activity are in Riccardo Redi, ed., *Cinema italiano sotto il fascismo* (Venice: Marsilio, 1979).

[23] For example, according to Adriano Aprà 1930s comedies by Mario Camerini criticized the regime through metaphors, as they explicitly avoided any reference to the reality of the time. See Adriano Aprà, "Mario Camerini: dalla realtà alla metafora," in Caldiron, *Storia del cinema italiano*, 225-235. In the 1970s Francesco Savio (1923-76), son of the previously mentioned Corrado Pavolini and nephew of the Fascist *gerarca* Alessandro Pavolini, occupied an almost unique position in the renewed critical interest toward 1930s Italian cinema. Savio championed an aesthetic reevaluation of 1930s Italian fiction films, and at the same time opposed the ideas that those films were pro-Fascist narcotics or that they elaborated a veiled anti-Fascist discourse. In other words, as he appreciated the overall aesthetic quality of 1930s Italian films, Savio thought that the regime was neither able to create a cinema devoted to its goals, nor its directors able to indirectly criticize the dictatorship through films. See Francesco Savio, *Ma l'amore no: realismo, formalismo, propaganda e telefoni bianchi nel cinema italiano di regime (1930-1943)* (Milan: Sonzogno, 1975). See also Francesco Savio, *Cinecittà anni Trenta: Parlano 116 protagonisti del secondo cinema italiano (1930-1943)*, 3 vols., ed. Tullio Kezich (Rome: Bulzoni, 1979), a posthumous work that includes Savio's numerous interviews with actors, directors and professionals of 1930s Italian cinema.

[24] See Landy, *Fascism in Film*; Hay, *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy*; Landy, *The Folklore of Consensus*; Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*; Reich and Garofalo, *Re-Viewing Fascism*; Ricci, *Cinema and Fascism*.

strapaese (the rural life) and *stracittà* (the urban life) in Fascist culture has given crucial insights to study the depiction of tradition and modernity in 1930s Italian films.[25]

By embracing this last historiographical approach, I contend that most 1930s Italian fiction films are neither escapist daydreams imposed from the regime nor are escapist films with some hidden anti-Fascist positions. To be more explicit, I suggest that 1930s Italian fiction films are *not* escapist, and that they rework the main values of the public sphere of the time: the dialectic between tradition and modernity, and the one between moral and material values. My following assumption is that historians from the revisionist era of Fascist film studies, the one informed by cultural studies and reception theory, have overlooked the overall influence of Giovanni Gentile's idealism over 1930s Italian cinema. By emphasizing the relevance of this intellectual imprint, I further propose that Italian films of that time largely follow Ciano's abovementioned injunction to convey the "spiritual life" of Italian people, thus supporting the regime's propaganda on the moral virtues of Mussolini's Italy.

In order to develop my argument, in the following pages I first discuss how in his volume *Cinematografo* (1935) Luigi Chiarini draws on Giovanni Gentile's thought to conceive an idealist *and* Fascist cinema.[26] Chiarini was the author of several publications on cinema, the director of the CSC from 1935 to 1943, one of the founders of the journal *Bianco e Nero* in 1937, and a film director in the 1940s.[27] Since he was such a prominent

[25] Hay, *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy*, esp. 99-149.
[26] Luigi Chiarini, *Cinematografo*, preface by Giovanni Gentile (Rome: Cremonese, 1935).
[27] Other writings by Chiarini from the 1930s include: Luigi Chiarini and Umberto Barbaro, eds., *L'attore: Saggio di antologia critica* (Rome: Edizioni di Bianco e Nero, 1938); Id., *Problemi del film* (Rome: Edizioni di Bianco e Nero, 1939); Luigi Chiarini, *Cinque capitoli sul film* (Rome: Edizioni italiane, 1941). Umberto Barbaro (1902-59) was also a relevant film critic and scholar of the Fascist era (and beyond), whose speculation embraced Marxist and anti-idealist positions. As my chapter wants to prove, the presence of alternative trajectories in the theoretical debate on cinema did not diminish the overall relevance of the idealist influence over 1930s Italian cinema.

and influential figure at the time, *Cinematografo* testifies to the relevance of Gentile in 1930s Italian film landscape and paves the way to my analysis of the interaction between Italian fiction films and idealist thought.

I take into consideration two genres of 1930s Italian cinema for that analysis: romantic comedies and historical films. On the one side, historical films such as *Il dottor Antonio* [*Doctor Antonio*, Enrico Guazzoni, 1937][28] attest to the Italian films' overall allegiance to the regime's ethos by interpreting Italy's past through the Fascist lens. Indeed, they depict patriots from the Risorgimento as precursors of the citizen-soldier promoted by Fascism.[29] Stylistically, Guazzoni's film operates a *fascistization of the picturesque* by incorporating in the same frame old and new, spectacular views and the patriots' political commitment. The goals of this practice were to dismiss the widespread prejudices about Italy's backwardness and to show how the moral virtues of tradition and the political ardor moving toward modernity equally contributed to the country's progress.

My scope is also to demonstrate that apparently escapist comedies such as *Darò un milione* and *Partire* [*Cuore napoletano*, Amleto Palermi, 1938][30] closely deal with key Fascist values, especially with the regime's emphasis on the superiority of moral values over the material ones. Particularly, I argue that a recurrent narrative pattern of romantic comedies—what I call a *fantasy of deprivation*, namely a character's willingness to sacrifice money in order to fulfill his/her love story—adhered to the Fascist intellectual mindset of the time. In other words, I suggest that both the fascistization of the

[28] Released the same year in the U.S.
[29] On the Fascist model of the citizen-soldier, ready to sacrifice his life for the country, see Gentile, *Il culto del littorio*.
[30] Released in the U.S. in 1940.

picturesque aesthetic in historical films and the dialectic between love and money in romantic comedies were consistent with the Fascist contention that the regime was leading Italy into modernity in an ethical way. The patriots of *Il dottor Antonio* more obviously appear as representative of the Fascist new man; however, even the romantic characters of Camerini's comedies are heroes of Fascist times. Ultimately, in spite of their actual color on the screen, the telephones of 1930s Italian cinema metaphorically represent the black color of the Fascist shirts.

The Theoretical Debate on Cinema: Luigi Chiarini's Idealism

In the 1930s, in spite of its various opponents, Giovanni Gentile's idealism continued to affect the Italian cultural landscape, including the theoretical discourse about cinema.[31] More generally, the idealist philosophy of both Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile strongly influenced the debate on cinema of that time.[32] Accordingly, in their writings several 1930s Italian film theorists propose that the artist's "intuition," "spirit," and "sentiment" are the true creators of films, rather than the films' mechanical and material component. Such thinkers emphasize the relevance of the "intuizione-espressione" in the film-making process and at the same time discredit the ordinary objectivity of film's technique—indeed, a goal shared in early 20th century Italian culture by a famous Luigi Pirandello's novel, first published with the title *Si gira*… (1916) and

[31] On Gentile's controversial position in the Italian culture of the 1930s, see the section *Giovanni Gentile: the Fascist State as a "creazione tutta spirituale"* in Chapter 2.

[32] On 1930s Italian film theories, see Gian Piero Brunetta, *Intellettuali cinema e propaganda tra le due guerre* (Bologna: Casa Editrice Pàtron, 1973); Monica Dall'Asta, "Teoriche del cinema ed estetica neoidealista," in Quaresima, *Storia del cinema italiano*, 494-508; Ruggero Eugeni, "Il dibattito teorico," in Caldiron, *Storia del cinema italiano*, 521-536. Other contributions to the study of Italian film theories include: Francesco Casetti, *Theories of Cinema 1945-1995* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999); Roberto De Gaetano, *Teorie del cinema in Italia* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2005); Giorgio Bertellini, "Italian Film Theories," in *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies*, ed. Gaetana Marrone et al. (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), 722-728.

later renamed *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio operatore* (1925).[33]

According to literary critic Giacomo Debenedetti, the technical component inevitably affects the production of films and initially determines a "passaggio dallo spirito alla materia."[34] Yet, De Benedetti argues that film directors' creativity rapidly produces the inverse process, the one moving "dalla materia allo spirito:"

> Non appena l'obbiettivo, da tutte le condizioni fantastiche creategli dal poeta [the film director], ha materialmente restituito alcuni metri di immutabile pellicola, si produce il passaggio inverso: dalla materia allo spirito.[35]

De Benedetti then adds that editing is cinema's most artistic device, since it helps film directors to further pursue a "spiritualizzazione della materia."[36]

By embracing similar positions, in a volume entitled *Cinematografo* (1935) Luigi Chiarini offers a Gentilian and Fascist-inflected conception of cinema. In the next paragraphs I address Chiarini's argument in three steps: first, I analyze the nature of his idealist view of cinema; secondly, I focus on the Fascist goals that he assigns to Italian cinema; finally, I consider Chiarini's criticism of contemporary Italian cinema and his call for films more consistent with the Fascist mentality. Throughout my discussion, I also contextualize Chiarini's thought into the larger debate on cinema that was taking place in Italy at the time.

With regard to the first point, Giovanni Gentile himself addresses Chiarini's idealist conception of cinema in his introduction to the volume. Gentile first blames "il prevalere e il sempre maggiore acuirsi dell'interesse degli studiosi del cinema sulla sua

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[33] Luigi Pirandello, *Si gira*... (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1916); Id., *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio operatore* (Florence: R. Bemporad & figlio, 1925). The first American edition was *Shoot! (Si gira) The Notebooks of Serafino Gubbio, Cinematograph Operator* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1926).
[34] Giacomo Debenedetti, "Risorse del cinema [Frammenti di una conferenza]," *Il Convegno* no. 6, 25 June 1931, republished as "Risorse del cinema" in Giacomo Debenedetti, *Al cinema* (Venice: Marsilio, 1983), 23-42. The quote is from p. 27.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., 29.

tecnica."[37] In contrast with this attitude, Gentile states that film spectators should perceive the "principio" that creates films, namely "il senso immediato di quella umanità che attraverso il meccanismo si svelava in forme determinate e viventi."[38] Similarly, Gentile praises the "spirito" that, "come coscienza del tutto," supersedes the creation of films, and the humanity of the films' characters:

> L'uomo che egli [the spectator] vede, è lì innanzi ai suoi occhi, vivo, non nello schermo, ma nel mondo; vivo della sua vita, della sua passione, oltre la quale nulla dev'esservi.[39]

By following Gentile's insights, in his text Chiarini develops the idea that the artist's sentiment is able to inject a human component in the film's technique:

> E' falso ed erroneo credere che al cinematografo la tecnica sia tutto: prima di ogni cosa ci vuole un uomo con una personalità e sensibilità che abbia dentro al petto e nel cervello sentimenti e idee da esprimere.[40]

Chiarini believes that all the people working for a film strive to overcome the limitations of technique and to convey "sentimenti" and "idee." In his view, this process leads films to reach the unity between form and content that Gentile (and Croce) deem as the necessary result of the activity of the spirit. Like Debenedetti, Chiarini contends that editing gives to cinema the possibility of fully exploiting its potential.[41]

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[37] Chiarini, *Cinematografo*, 3.
[38] Ibid., 4.
[39] Ibid., 4-5.
[40] Ibid., 17.
[41] In his discussion of cinema's idealist goals, Chiarini also interestingly argues that filmmakers can benefit from the adaptation on the screen of literary works that possess great moral and aesthetic values, like Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*). According to the Italian theorist, in that case a director needs to use the film's technique to preserve the book's human and spiritual greatness. Yet, Chiarini also underlines that a film director can potentially make a bad film version of *I promessi sposi*: this happens if he "non ha sentito la grandiosità del mondo spirituale" of Manzoni's novel (see Chiarini, *Cinematografo*, 64). By encouraging cinema's fidelity to literature, Chiarini run against the idea the cinema has to differentiate itself from other arts, including literature. This idea was very common during the 1930s, when the introduction of sound in films and the widespread perception that cinema copied reality or theatre led many critics and film theorists to believe that films had to demonstrate their specificity and uniqueness. For example, in *Film as Art* German scholar Rudolph Arnheim (1904-2007) stated that cinema had to exploit its own stylistic devices to negate its apparent realism and attest that films were not just an impersonal representation of reality (Rudolph Arnheim, *Film as Art* [Berkeley: University of California

As Chiarini develops his idealist framework, he also assigns a specific political goal to Italian cinema—an aspect that Gentile does not consider in his introduction to the volume.[42] Chiarini postulates that Italian cinema has to align itself with the driving principles of its nation—as much as Soviet cinema expressed a national character by relying on its pre-eminently Russian literary and theatrical tradition, and as much as American cinema had the rhythm of jazz and produced formulaic films, which resembled the mass-produced goods of the American society.[43] In other words, in Chiarini's view the films' sensibility and humanity need to be adherent to the main values of the nation in which such films originate. In a passage Chiarini writes:

> Il problema non è di fare un film, ma di dire qualcosa attraverso i 2500 metri di pellicola, *interpretando aspirazioni, sentimenti, passioni di un popolo*.[44]

In another passage, Chiarini notes that each state has the responsibility of giving an "educazione morale" to the masses through cinema:

> Bisogna dire che incombe il dovere ad ogni Stato, che si preoccupi veramente dell'educazione morale delle masse, di indirizzare il cinematografo secondo la propria etica.[45]

In other parts of his volume, Chiarini explicitly links Italian cinema to the Fascist nationalist project. For example, in a section called "Il problema etico" he praises the "cinematografia politica" by specifying:

Press, 1957], first published in 1932). Chiarini's perspective on the relationship between literature and cinema surprisingly anticipated an influential argument of French film theorist André Bazin (1918-58), according to which cinema should be respectful of great novels and find a filmic equivalent for them. See André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005; first ed. 1967), especially the essay "*Le Journal d'un cure de campagne* and the Stylistics of Robert Bresson," 125-143.

[42] More generally, in his philosophical thought Gentile does not assign overt ideological goals to Italian art. See Giovanni Gentile, *La filosofia dell'arte* (Milan: F.lli Treves, 1931). For an overview of Gentile's conception of art, see Alessandro Vegetti, "La filosofia dell'arte di Giovanni Gentile," ACME – Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università degli Studi di Milano, vol. LXV, no. 2 (May-August 2012): 273-281.

[43] Ibid., 39.

[44] Ibid. (italics are mine).

[45] Ibid., 12-13.

> Noi oggi chiedendo una cinematografia fascista (e lo stesso avviene per tutte le arti) chiediamo film che esprimano lo spirito del nostro popolo così come è stato forgiato dal Fascismo.[46]

Further, in a section dedicated to the films' subjects, Chiarini blames the ordinary greediness of many producers and solicits the emergence of a new generation of producers, able to promote the "espansione spirituale" of Fascist Italy:

> Si tratta di sbarazzare il terreno dai mercanti sostituendoli con industriali fascisti. […] Con l'impulso animatore dello Stato fascista, […] essi potranno dare all'Italia un nuovo prestigio artistico, e, quindi, una potente arma di espansione spirituale e un'industria fiorente.[47]

At the end of his book, Chiarini again highlights the connection between Italian cinema and Fascism by making a relevant clarification. He stresses that Fascist films are not only the ones most overtly propagandistic, but also the ones that convey the overall ethical values of Fascist Italy:

> Cinematografia fascista significa per me cinematografia politica: dunque *non solo quella più propriamente di propaganda, ma tutta la cinematografia* giacché per noi fascisti non è neppure pensabile un'opera dello spirito che non sia politica.[48]

Chiarini thus followed Freddi's policy, the one that advocated the necessity of doing indirect propaganda through fiction films.

Finally, in his volume Chiarini recognizes that a truly "Fascist-idealist" cinema has yet to come and expresses his criticism of the current Italian cinema. Chiarini criticizes both the "commediole piccanti e insignificanti che si sono girate in questi ultimi anni"[49] and "i film tipo *Segretaria privata*" [*Private Secretary*, Guido Brignone, 1931], which "anche se non sono in alcun modo scollacciati, hanno un'amoralità fondamentale e

[46] Ibid., 50.
[47] Ibid., 66-67.
[48] Ibid., 116-117.
[49] Ibid., 48.

nociva che li vizia."[50] Chiarini also criticizes Italian historical films of the time as products that, in spite of their spectacular nature, are not capable of reconstructing the spiritual life of the past.[51] At the same time, Chiarini admits that comedies can be valuable by avoiding immoral subjects, as in the case of Lubitsch films, and historical films can be educational by avoiding superficial reconstructions of the past. As such these genres can acquire a spiritual strength.[52]

Chiarini's disappointment toward Italian cinema of his day paralleled Freddi's attempt to create a more appropriate cinema for the Fascist era. The ways in which historical films and romantic comedies actually engaged with the goals set by Chiarini and Freddi deserve now a careful investigation.

Historical Films: The Fascistization of the Picturesque

Several scholars have debated how the tension between images of traditional Italy—mainly represented by the Catholic heritage, great works of art, picturesque and touristic views—and modernity—epitomized by technological and architectural novelties—strongly affects 1930s Italian films.[53] Overall, such scholars have agreed on the films' attempt to mediate and find a common ground between Italy of the past and Italy of the present—a compromise that was largely consistent with the regime's ideological goals. For example, according to Ruth Ben Ghiat, films such as *Terra madre* and *Gli uomini che mascalzoni…* warn against an a-critical embrace of modernity and balance the pitfalls of modernity with a representation of popular traditions and family

[50] Ibid., 49.
[51] Ibid., 80-86.
[52] Ibid., 64 and 85-86.
[53] See, especially, Landy, *Fascism in Film*; Hay, *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy*; Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*.

values.[54]

Despite considerable scholarly analysis of the tension between tradition and modernity in 1930s Italian fiction films, much remains to be said. From a stylistic perspective, an iconographic motif deserves particular attention. This motif relates to how 1930s Italian fiction films rework the picturesque aesthetic in the attempt to bridge tradition and modernity, old and new Italy. In order to approach this issue, we first need to remember that at the beginning of the twentieth century both in Italy and abroad the picturesque aesthetic was a major visual index of Italy's presumed backwardness. Indeed, at that time the picturesque commonly defined the experience of foreigners and tourists in Mediterranean Europe, especially Italy:

> In widely circulating paintings, prints, and illustrations of Italy, the violent wilderness of volcanoes became a charming spectacle of primeval force; a ruin-dotted countryside appeared as a mythical and pastoral heaven; and notoriously vicious bandits, or *banditti*, came into view as romantic and colorful outlaws.[55]

In spite of being, ultimately, a romanticized representation of the Italian landscape and people, between the eighteenth century and early twentieth century, the picturesque rapidly popularized the idea of Italy as an aesthetically pleasant but decadent country, where ignorance and violence prevailed among people.

Several Italian films of the Fascist era try to dismiss the negative stereotypes associated with picturesque views. They oftentimes show *traditional* picturesque landscapes and at the same time they *fascistize* them, by making references to either the political fervor or the modernity of the new Italy. This procedure is common in other cultural products of the time, such as newspaper illustrations, postcards, and touristic

[54] Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 80-86.
[55] Giorgio Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema: Race, Landscape and the Picturesque* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 4.

guides. The analysis of this visual motif in the media landscape of the Fascist era is largely absent; my project seeks to fill this gap by taking into consideration the fascistization of the picturesque in 1930s fiction films and in pro-Fascist Italian-American publications (for this last point, see Chapter 5). The goal of the fascistization of the picturesque was to demonstrate that Italy had finally abandoned its alleged backwardness and reconciled its old heritage with the regime's novelty and modernity. With regard to Italian fiction cinema, historical films offer compelling examples of this aesthetic and ideological strategy.

1930s Italian films belonging to the historical genre reconstruct different periods of the past—the Roman Empire, the Renaissance, the Risorgimento—and they usually support the dominant values of Fascist Italy by creating a parallel between past and present.[56] My analysis centers here on the films representing the Risorgimento era. From a narrative perspective, these films recount the fights of nationalists pursuing the dream of Italy's unification, and commonly include a romantic plotline. The coexistence of both adventurous and romantic narrative lines echo the double plot line characteristic of Classical Hollywood Cinema—one focused on heterosexual romance and the other focused on a goal of a different kind: a mission to accomplish, a battle to win, a professional success to pursue, and others.[57] In the case of 1930s Italian historical films,

[56] Indeed, the Roman Empire appears only in one film, *Scipione l'africano*. Instead, the films that are set in the Reinassance and the Risorgimento are numerous. For example, the Reinassance appears in *Condottieri* and the Risorgimento in *Re burlone* (*Id.*, Enrico Guazzoni, 1935; released in the U.S. in 1936), as well as in other films mentioned throughout this chapter. With regard to historical parallels, in the case of *Condottieri* Trenker makes an analogy between the soldier Giovanni de' Medici, or Giovanni delle Bande Nere (1498-1526), and Mussolini by portraying Giovanni as a charismatic leader who aims to expel foreigners from Italy and to create a unified state. The scholars who studied historical films of the Fascist era have repeatedly stressed the parallelism between past and present that such films elaborate. See, for example, Landy, *Fascism in Film*, 175-229; Hay, *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy*, 150-180.
[57] On Classical Hollywood Cinema and its narrative strategies, see David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York:

the young patriots' romantic involvements and chivalrous attitudes mean to further emphasize their virtues. The films' plot makes clear that these characters are not pursuing selfish and material interests; rather, they dedicate themselves to Italy's cause as well as to the happiness of their female companions. These narrative elements are very much consistent with the Fascist promotion of the figure of the citizen-soldier ready to sacrifice his life for the good of his country.[58] Indeed, the protagonists of historical films recall Giovanni Gentile's depiction of Fascist Italy as a unified and homogeneous entity, to which each individual should give his/her own contribution.[59] With regard, instead, to their style, historical films often elaborate the fascistization of the picturesque presented above. My analysis of the exploitation of this aesthetic practice specifically focuses on the film *Il dottor Antonio* (1937) by Enrico Guazzoni.

Il dottor Antonio—based on an English-language novel (1855) by the Italian patriot Giovanni Ruffini—introduces the nationalists' fights for Italy's unification during the revolutionary revolts of 1848. Guazzoni again depicts the Risorgimento era as a forerunner of Fascist nationalism, by filling the film's melodramatic double plotline with a Fascist subtext. The plot is centered on the love story between a young aristocratic British woman, Lucy, and a doctor named Antonio, who is an ardent nationalist. In a brief span of time Lucy's affection for Antonio takes her to support his political goals.

Guazzoni's film starts by showing a typically picturesque landscape of Italy. In fact, the opening titles sequence shows a ship in front of a spectacular rock, over which a building is visible (the plot reveals later that the building in question is a prison) (see Fig.

Columbia University Press, 1985); David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

[58] See again Gentile, *Il culto del littorio*.

[59] See Gentile, *Origini e dottrina del fascismo*.

4). The rest of the film negates, through both its *narrative* and *style*, stereotypes commonly associated with such a picturesque landscape. My attention first focuses on some elements from the narrative that testify to the film's deliberate attempt to deconstruct the image of Italy as a country entrenched in its own past.

Fig. 4. *Il dottor Antonio*.

At the beginning of the film, Lucy is travelling with her father through the seacoast of Liguria. Due to an accident that occurred to their coach, Lucy gets injured and is forced to rest in a house where her future fiancée Antonio takes care of her. During Lucy's stay at the house, Antonio attends a clandestine meeting with other patriots. This meeting demonstrates that a forceful political activism lies behind the attractive views of Liguria's landscape. In the course of the meeting, one of the activists declares the goals of the nationalist group:

> Il pensiero deve essere seguito dall'azione. Andando invece avanti di questo passo noi ci addormentiamo. Tutta la gioventù italiana non aspetta che un cenno: se non si profitta di questo stato d'animo… […] Bisogna muoversi. Il punto debole è Parma: rovesciamoci tutti su Parma per vincere o per morire!

These words evoke some core values of Fascist propaganda—the correlation

between thought and action, the celebration of youth and energy, the willingness to sacrifice—and thus reinterpret Italy's past through a Fascist lens. A speech by Antonio follows such words, by strengthening the parallelism between 19th century nationalists and Fascism. Antonio states that revolutionary groups do not have to rely anymore on violent uprisings, since they need instead to find a prince able to lead the insurgents and to give stability to the country. The Fascist cult of a dictatorial figure is evident in Antonio's discourse, which overall suggests that nationalist fighters have to abandon the stage of the *movement* and embrace the one of the *regime*.

Antonio contradicts the stereotype of Italians as lazy individuals through his energy and boldness. A further scene explicitly puts in contrast the new conception of Italy that Antonio is carrying forward and old picturesque prejudices. In this scene Lucy's father—although she is already in love with Antonio—is trying to marry her to an old English aristocrat named Lord Cleverton. In her first meeting with the Lord, Lucy states that a husband and his wife should have the same political ideals, and then asks him:

> Cosa ne pensa dell'Italia?

Mr. Cleverton's reply offers in a few words a stereotypical image of Italy, focused on its climate, landscapes and typical leisure activities:

> Mio Dio… un clima dolce, magnifici panorami, Napoli col vulcano, Venezia con le gondole. Vorreste forse stabilirvi in Italia?

Lucy's further reply to Mr. Cleverton sets a contrast between the man's conventional and passé view of Italy and Lucy's conception of an active and politically engaged country:

> Voglio dare tutta la mia attività personale, le mie sostanze, e magari quelle di mio marito, alla causa dell'indipendenza italiana.

By rejecting her belongings and being available to donate them to Italy's political cause, Lucy becomes a prototype of Fascist heroine and enacts a "fantasy of deprivation," which at that time was also characteristic of Italian romantic comedies.

Guazzoni then stylistically enacts a fascistization of the picturesque to further suggest that Lucy's combative attitude has replaced the idyllic and yet static conception of Italy conveyed by both the opening title sequence and Lord Cleverton's words. Particularly, Guazzoni exploits long shots to put in relation in the same frame elements that represent the old Italy and elements that are instead indicators of the new Italy. This happens at least two times in the course of the film.

Both these circumstances occur when Antonio and Lucy have moved to the south of Italy in order to fight against Ferdinand II, King of Naples, who opposes the nationalists' efforts. In the first case, one long shot exploits deep staging to show in the background the sea during the sunset and in the foreground a group of nationalists singing a patriotic song (see Fig. 5).[60] Guazzoni's use of deep staging is functional to evoke common picturesque stereotypes—the sea in the South of Italy during the sunset, which immediately suggests love songs and innocent romantic affairs—and *at the same time* to negate those stereotypes by inserting in the foreground people who are fighting to lead the country into a better future. Through this shot Guazzoni does not dismiss the beauty of Italy's natural scenery, but he *also* offers a political paradigm that relies on the ideal of a strong and united nation. Long shot and deep staging are the stylistic tools through which this scene of *Il dottor Antonio* aims to prove that Italy is not only the site of "un clima dolce" and of "magnifici panorami."

[60] Deep staging is a strategy that consists in placing characters and/or objects on different planes. Directors have often used it to create dramatic interactions between different elements in the same image.

Fig. 5 *Il dottor Antonio*.

The second example that I want to mention takes place toward the ending of the film. Authorities of the Kingdom of Naples have put Antonio and other nationalist fighters in prison. The prison is located at the peak of a rock, the one that we saw at the very beginning of the film. Lucy, now encouraged by her father, wants to help Antonio to escape from prison by using her family's ship—again, the presence of this ship is a reminder of the film's first image. Lucy's plan is to take Antonio on the ship, as soon as he is able to leave the prison. Antonio's escape from the prison eventually takes place and the film ends with his comrades, still in prison, enthusiastically singing Mameli's nationalist hymn. In the course of this final part of the film, a shot shows in the background the beautiful rock where the prison is located and in the foreground, on her family's boat, Lucy striving for Antonio's liberation and for the continuation of his political mission (see Fig. 6). Through this shot Guazzoni "corrects" the ordinary picturesque image placed in the film's opening sequence and exploits again a long shot and deep staging to combine Italy's natural beauty with its renewed political vitality.

Fig. 6 *Il dottor Antonio*.

Other historical films of the time rework the picturesque aesthetic in similar ways. One of these is *Campo di maggio* [*One Hundred Days of Napoleon*, Giovacchino Forzano, 1935][61] by director and actor Giovacchino Forzano, who ardently supported Fascism through his theatrical and film production and also authored *Camicia nera*, the film celebrating the regime's first decade.[62] Indeed, Mussolini himself co-authored the theatrical piece by Forzano *Campo di maggio*, from which the film derived.[63] *Campo di maggio* draws a parallelism between Napoleone Bonaparte and Mussolini, depicting the last one hundred days of the French politician and soldier.[64] The film contends that the French Parliament prevented Napoleone from acting freely and ultimately provoked the end of the empire. This plot echoes the Fascist glorification of a dictator acting without

[61] Released in the U.S. in 1936.
[62] Today only an incomplete copy of *Campo di maggio* survives, viewable at the Cineteca di Bologna (Italy).
[63] Giovacchino Forzano, *Campo di maggio: dramma in tre atti* (Florence: Barbera, 1931).
[64] Mussolini co-authored two other plays with Forzano, *Villafranca* (1932) and *Cesare* (1939), which also created parallelism between historical figures of the past, respectively Camillo Benso di Cavour and Giulio Cesare, and Mussolini. See Giovacchino Forzano, *Villafranca: dramma in tre atti e nove quadri* (Florence: Barbera, 1932); Id. *Mussolini autore drammatico: Campo di Maggio; Villafranca; Cesare* (Florence: Barbera, 1954).

the pressure of his country's parliamentary branches. One scene of the film takes place in front of the sea at the Elba island. The shot composing this scene shows in the foreground Napoleone (seen from the back) dreaming the conquest of Rome and in the background a picturesque landscape of the idyllic Tuscan sea. Even in this case, Forzano exploits deep staging to fascistize a typically picturesque image: in the film's perspective, Napoleone's speech foreshadows Mussolini's destiny as ruler of Rome and Italy.

Romantic Comedies: Fantasies of Deprivation

Whereas the dialectic between love and politics dominates historical films, the dialectic between love and money dominates romantic comedies.[65] The young patriots of *Il dottor Antonio* demonstrate the purity of their souls through both their love affairs and their dedication to Italy's political cause. The protagonists of romantic comedies face a different challenge, although their ultimate goal still relates to the moral sphere: such characters constantly deal with money and with the goods of the emergent consumer society, and in that context they need to demonstrate that love prevails over money, namely that their sentiments are more important than the pursuit of material interests.[66]

Indeed, the following narrative pattern was recurrent in 1930s Italian romantic comedies: both men and women dismiss wealth and financial security, as they look for the true love of their life. In order to pursue their romantic aspirations, the protagonists of romantic comedies are even willing to disregard their substances and to become poor—and thus to accomplish what I call a *fantasy of deprivation*. In other words, these

[65] On 1930s Italian comedies, see Landy, *Fascism in Film*, 230-275; Hay, *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy*, 37-63 and 99-131; Landy, *The Folklore of Consensus*, 45-106; Zagarrio, *Cinema e fascismo*, 75-88; David Bruni, *Commedia anni Trenta* (Milan: Il Castoro, 2013).
[66] On the emergence of consumerism in 1930s Italy, see David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

characters accept to be *materially poor*, as long as they are *spiritually rich*. This narrative was very consistent with the Fascist intellectual mindset of the time. Although the characters of romantic comedies do not immediately fight for their nation as the patriots in *Il dottor Antonio*, they pose the spiritual component of their life over the material one, as it was expected from Fascist heroes. My investigation of these issues specifically focuses on two comedies, *Darò un milione* and *Partire*.

Darò un milione—also presented in the U.S. with the title *Milionario per un giorno*—is one of the five 1930s comedies by Mario Camerini starring Vittorio De Sica. De Sica plays the role of a millionaire, aptly named Mr. Gold. The film, set in France, starts by showing him in his luxurious boat (see Fig. 7) and a tramp attempting to commit suicide in the sea. As the tramp chased by a dog comically jumps into the water, Mr. Gold also does that, apparently because he dislikes the placid atmosphere in his ship and looks for excitement in the town in front of him. In the meanwhile, inside the boat, aristocratic friends of Mr. Gold listen to news coming from a radio and engage themselves in frivolous conversations.

Fig. 7. *Darò un milione*.

The boat and its passengers suggest modernity, elegance and prosperity. Camerini

dedicates close-ups to both the radio and the smokestack on the deck, which contribute to emphasize the ship’s modernity (see Fig. 8 and Fig. 9). Such close-ups are not at all surprising. In fact, in Italian films of the Fascist era, directors frequently used close-ups to introduce objects representing technological progress: trains, ships, telephones, and cars. Beyond *Darò un milione*, modernity erupts through this sort of “futurist” inserts in films like *Napoli d’altri tempi* [*Naples of Other Times*, Amleto Palermi, 1937], *Castelli in aria* [*Castles in the Air*, Augusto Genina, 1939], and many others.[67]

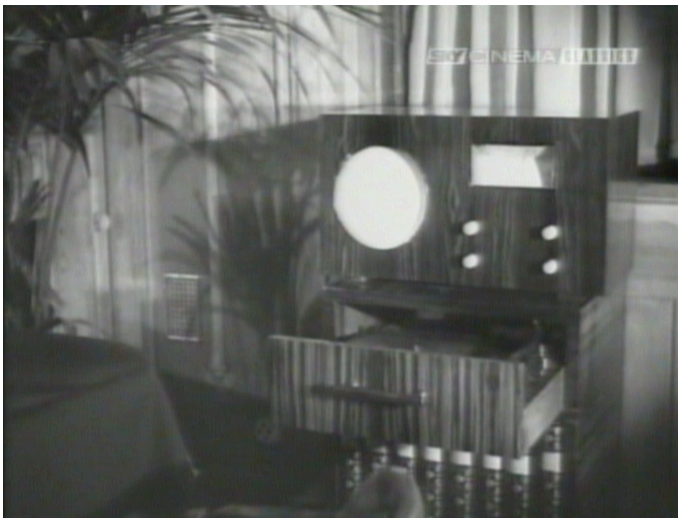

Fig. 8. *Darò un milione*.

Fig. 9. *Darò un milione*.

[67] Both *Napoli d’altri tempi* and *Castelli in aria* were not released in the U.S.

An element forcefully contrasts with the relaxed atmosphere in the boat: Mr. Gold's loneliness on the deck and his annoyed look beyond the horizon. Why is Mr. Gold disappointed in that apparently idyllic and comforting setting? Why does he jump into the water and abandon his friends? The meeting between Mr. Gold and the tramp gives an answer to these questions.

Mr. Gold swims until he reaches the tramp and helps him to get out of the water. A few moments later, in front of a fire, Mr. Gold tries to understand the reasons behind the man's attempted suicide. The tramp emphatically states: "Crisi." Mr. Gold's immediate reply is: "Crisi spirituale?" The other man replies: "No, crisi finanziaria" (see Fig. 10). This brief dialogue evokes the dialectic between spirituality and materialism that is at the center of the film—as well as at the center of the cultural discourse in Fascist Italy. The poor tramp envies Mr. Gold's status as a millionaire, but Mr. Gold gives to him a very desolate depiction of his life. The rich man states that the condition of a tramp is actually good since other people judge him for what he is, and not for his belongings. He adds that a millionaire conducts instead an unsatisfactory life, because he never knows if other people act kindly with him only because he is wealthy. In short, this initial scene makes clear that, as the tramp is spiritually rich and economically poor, Mr. Gold is economically rich, but spiritually poor—arguably, the most unfortunate condition for the main character of a film made in Fascist Italy. Spectators can now fully understand why Mr. Gold looked annoyed on the deck of his boat and why he jumped into the water.

In order to be judged for what he really is, and not for what he possesses, Mr. Gold decides to disguise as a tramp—namely he accepts to be poor and to realize his own cathartic fantasy of deprivation. As he transforms himself into a tramp, Mr. Gold

promises to donate one million to the person who will demonstrate kindness toward him. In other words, Mr. Gold is ready to give a material reward to someone capable of showing his/her moral qualities. In the film's perspective, this is the only way to reconcile love and money.

Fig. 10. *Darò un milione*.

However, Mr. Gold's search is very disappointing, because greedy and opportunistic characters try to take advantage of the situation: journalists, who want to exploit Mr. Gold's promise to donate a million to sell more copies; bourgeois people, who start to treat kindly beggars on the street in the hope of meeting Mr. Gold and receiving the million; a policeman, who releases Mr. Gold from prison for the same reason (police had arrested Mr. Gold because he had helped a group of stray dogs to escape from their cage); the managers of a circus, a husband and a wife, who offer to numerous tramps an abundant lunch by hoping that one of their guests is Mr. Gold.

Only Anna, a beautiful blonde girl working in the circus, seems to deserve the million, since she repeatedly acts in an altruistic way toward Mr. Gold. She first meets

him in a park, while searching for her dog, and then she invites him to the circus for the lunch offered by his manager. Anna feels sympathy for Mr. Gold, and helps him to be comfortable at the circus. However, something she (mistakenly) believes is bad soon occurs. Mr. Gold accidentally listens to a conversation during which Anna tells her boss to keep him at the circus, because she has understood his true identity and wants to get the one million reward. Mr. Gold is severely disappointed and walks lonely toward a dock. As Anna arrives there and hears that Mr. Gold has decided to leave the circus, she donates to him a part of her modest earnings. Indeed, Anna has a sincere affection for Mr. Gold, and in the conversation with her manager she was perpetrating a double scheme, whose ultimate goal was to help Mr. Gold to stay at the circus and have a home. Anna's act of kindness and generosity is what Mr. Gold was looking for, and leads to the film's happy ending. Mr. Gold and Anna declare their mutual love and enjoy the transformations in their lives. Mr. Gold can go back with Anna to his ship: finally, he has cured his "spiritual crisis" after the meeting with this young woman and he can now enjoy his wealth with no worries. Conversely, Anna acquires material prosperity *because of* her ethical virtues (see Fig. 11 and Fig. 12). *Darò un milione*'s ending celebrates an ideal synthesis between love and money, moral virtue and economic business.

Partire by Amleto Palermi reworks again the dialectic between rich and poor, spirituality and materialism. Based on the play with the same title by Gherardo Gherardi, *Partire* is a romantic comedy starring Vittorio De Sica as an idle and yet generous Neapolitan young man (Paolo Veronda), who begins to work in a factory only because he has to pay a debt. Paolo's real aspiration is to leave the country and to travel abroad, having no responsibilities upon him. Paolo strongly contrasts with Anteo Diana, his

employer, a man from Milan who is only interested in doing his business and making money. Paolo and Anteo represent respectively the opposite poles of Naples and Milan. Introducing good-natured characters like Paolo, picturesque settings, a beautiful countryside and great artistic beauties, Naples is an expression of tradition and moral principles. On the other side, the pragmatic man from Milan and his efficient factory are expressions of technological modernity and materialism.

Fig. 11. *Darò un milione*.

Fig. 12. *Darò un milione*.

The film develops a synthesis between such opposite poles through the character of Paolo. In fact, in the course of the film Paolo becomes a serious and competent businessman, and at the same time he maintains his characteristic good moral values, which lead him to reject greedy materialism. Coping with opposite tensions especially means for Paolo Veronda to mediate between love and money. Indeed, Paolo engages a love story with Mr. Diana's daughter and at some point he needs to demonstrate that his affection for her is sincere through a new fantasy of deprivation. Palermi's film enacts the Fascist dialectics under examination here even through its style. In fact, in several shots Palermi shows, and often explicitly puts in relation, elements representing tradition and elements representing modernity. I am going to better explore the film's ideological overtones through an analysis of specific narrative solutions and stylistic choices.

Fig. 13. *Partire*.

At the beginning of the film, Palermi shows through a close-up the smokestacks of a ship in Naples' harbor (see Fig. 13). As I noted, "futurist" close-ups detailing some new technological device were common in 1930s Italian cinema. In *Partire*, after showing the ship's smokestacks, Palermi employs a long shot to insert the ship in a larger

image of Naples' harbor (see Fig. 14). This long shot connects several elements through deep staging: viewers can see the ship on the left side of the shot, people greeting the ship's passengers on the right side, and a typically picturesque landscape of Naples in the background. The film's main character, Paolo, is one of the persons on the dock saying goodbye to the passengers (see Fig. 14).

Fig. 14. *Partire*.

Fig. 15. *Partire*.

Another long shot at the end of this first sequence frames Paolo between a

picturesque landscape and an index of modernity. As Paolo is leaving the harbor with his friend Giovanni, who is also an idle young man interested in having only fun, the shot under consideration shows a recent construction of the harbor in the foreground, and another picturesque landscape in the background (see Fig. 16).

Fig. 16. *Partire*.

This first sequence demonstrates that even 1930s comedies rework the picturesque aesthetic in a Fascist perspective. In historical films of that time, the fascistization of the picturesque wants to demonstrate that a new political fervor is carrying Italy forward, and that Italy is not an antiquated country filled with old works of art and "savage" individuals. If the fascistization of the picturesque in historical films only implies that young patriots are leading Italy into the modernity of Fascism, comedies explicitly *modernize* the picturesque. Indeed—as in *Partire*'s first sequence—comedies often fill *traditional* picturesque views with technological devices or new architectural sites that aim to suggest the actual presence of *modernity* and progress in present-day Italy.

What is the purpose of presenting Paolo Veronda through this modernization of

the picturesque? By doing that, *Partire* introduces its main issues: will this character be able to cope with tradition and modernity, represented respectively by the landscape and the ship? Will he be able to become a reliable factory manager and to preserve his authenticity and purity? Finally, will he be able to enact a fantasy of deprivation, demonstrating that money is not important as his spiritual qualities are?

The film initially depicts as problematic the mediation between tradition and modernity through the contrast between Paolo and Anteo Diana. The first meeting between these two characters takes place in a small restaurant in the periphery of Naples. Paolo and his friend Giovanni are having there a date with two girls. Instead, Mr. Diana stops at the restaurant because he had a car accident nearby. Diana appears only interested in the money that the insurance company will provide him because of the car accident. Since Paolo is committed to have fun and Mr. Diana is instead worried about his money, this brief sequence immediately makes clear their different lifestyles. A later scene inside Mr. Diana's office heightens—again through a comedic form—the contrast between the two characters. In this scene Mr. Diana tells Paolo:

> Voi altri meridionali, voi alter [sic] napuletan siete brava gente davvero. Io sono contentissimo di trovarmi in mezzo a voi. Siete anche persone simpatiche, intelligenti, pieni di qualità. Ma… c'è sempre il mare, la luna, Margellina, Posillipo… ci vorrebbe… come dire… ci vorrebbe un po' di Milano, ecco.

Mr. Diana states that Naples would need a "little bit of Milan," by explicitly addressing the film's main narrative and ideological issue.

This second meeting in Mr. Diana's office took place because Paolo wanted to return to Mr. Diana a bag that he had left at the restaurant. Mr. Diana, looking at his bag, finds out that some money is missing. He accuses Paolo of being a thief and asks him to work in his factory in order to pay the debt. Actually, Paolo did not steal the money; Mr.

Diana fabricated this incident because—after all—he has confidence in Paolo's skills and wants to test him. Since he has started working against his will, Paolo repeatedly tries to be fired, but he is never able to reach this goal. Comically, his lazy and irresponsible attitude at work is somewhat able to increase Mr. Diana's profits.

Paolo feels no need to raise money through his job: he accepts his poverty, since he is spiritually rich. Yet, as anticipated, in the course of the film Paolo changes his personality and becomes a more responsible manager. In the typically double plot line of the film, Paolo also starts a love affair with Anna, Anteo's daughter. Anna initially seems only interested in money and business like her father, since she is ready to get married with a wealthy man. However, thanks to his rich humanity, Paolo provokes a transformation in both Anna and Mr. Diana, leading them to a process of moral uplift.

Fig. 17. *Partire*.

This set of transformations cannot take place inside Mr. Diana's factory, which showcases a typically modernist style and which Paolo perceives as a prison (see Fig. 17). Eventually, the resolution of the tensions that mark *Partire*'s plot occurs in the countryside around Naples, namely in a setting that Fascism canonically saw as an

expression of the Italians' moral virtues.

Paolo, Anna and Mr. Diana go to the countryside in order to meet the grandfather of Anna's boyfriend, whose name is Baldassarre. Baldassarre is an old man who refuses to employ new technology in his large farm. For this reason, Paolo asks to some workers to test a group of new machines in Baldassarre's fields (see Fig. 18). Once again Paolo is acting in a negligent way in the hope of being fired. As always, the result of his action is unpredictable: by looking the machines at work, Baldassarre finally understands that the new technology is helpful and greatly thanks Paolo. Old and new, tradition and modernity find a perfect synthesis in the scene showing the machines at work in the countryside. Yet, the film still has to better demonstrate that this synthesis is also consistent with a process of moral regeneration. Palermi pursues this goal through both the love story between Paolo and Anna and through Paolo's encounter with working class families.

Fig. 18. *Partire*.

Sometime after reaching the deal with Baldassarre, Paolo and Anna have the

chance to confess their mutual love and start a relationship. However, their love affair soon encounters difficulties. An employee of Mr. Diana accuses Paolo of romantically approaching Anna with the only purpose of getting her money. Due to a misunderstanding, Anna believes that this accusation is true and blames Paolo for that. Having put aside her previous materialism, Anna feels disappointed by Paolo's lucrative scheme. The young man has to prove that he is not interested in Anna's money and that his love for her is authentic. In other words, Paolo has to attest that love is more important than money, and this implies—in line with the fantasy of deprivation that I put at the center of romantic comedies—that he would even accept to remain poor and dismiss Mr. Diana's huge substances in order to satisfy his spiritual goals.

The plot further emphasizes Paolo's noble disposition by making him the agent of the reconciliation between capital and labor—a narrative trope that is coherent with the regime's propaganda on Mussolini's corporate plans. After selling new machines to Baldassarre, Paolo keeps neglecting his duties, and particularly he does not sign a contract through which a large group of working class families could receive new tools for their work. Paolo soon gets in contact with these farmers and realizes how much his lazy attitude is damaging them. For this reason, he helps them to complete a difficult job during a rainy night. Through this experience, Paolo finally becomes conscious of his responsibilities and he transforms himself into a competent factory manager. At the same time, his actions define an idyllic model of corporatism, by favoring both the bourgeois class and the working class, and they also lead Mr. Diana to be more respectful of the needs of his workers.

In the last scene of the film Paolo comments on his maturation telling Mr. Diana:

"Non abbia paura. Ora non torno più indietro. Ora posso andare da solo, ora so qual è la via giusta." Then Paolo suggests Mr. Diana to take on the right path even his friend Giovanni, who is still conducting an easy-going life: "Commendatò, quello lì è un altro: il cielo, la luna, Margellina, Posillipo. Bisogna salvarlo." "Saving" Giovanni means—as now it should be evident—to grant him the right equilibrium between spirituality and materialism and to make him a champion of that fantasy of deprivation that multiple protagonists of 1930s Italian romantic comedies enact.

The fascistization of the picturesque in historical films and the fantasy of deprivation in romantic comedies make especially clear—through their mediation between moral and material values—that Giovanni Gentile's and Luigi Chiarini's idealism contributed to the emergence and consolidation of specific narrative and stylistic patterns in 1930s Italian fiction cinema. My further move consists in studying the reception of the cultural works under consideration in 1930s America. What kind of interpretive attitudes did spectators in the U.S. activate as they watched Italian fiction films? Chapters 4 and 5 deal with this issue by investigating how American and Italian-American spectators decoded *Il dottor Antonio* (1937), *Darò un milione* (1935), *Partire* (1937), and other Italian films of that time.

Part III

Chapter 4

Reframing Old and New Italy: Americans' Film Reception

The Novelty of Fascism and the Perpetuation of Old Stereotypes

According to Janet Staiger, the main goal of reception studies is to reconstruct the spectators' historical and material conditions and then formulate hypotheses regarding their reading positions as they interact with specific films.[306] By drawing on this theoretical pattern, I argue that the relationship between American spectators and Italian films can be evaluated only in the light of the overall perception of Italianness in the U.S. Accordingly, in this chapter I first discuss how in the 1930s American cinema portrayed Fascist Italy. Then, I study the American reception of Italian films by looking at the reviews from professional critics. My analysis shows that Fascist film propaganda was unsuccessful among American critics, who either rejected the tone of propaganda in films like *Scipione l'africano* or interpreted Italian films as stereotypical representations of

[306] See Staiger, *Interpreting Films*. Further contributions by Staiger to the field of reception studies are the volumes *Perverse Spectators* and *Media Reception Studies*. Other scholarly works on film reception that I particularly took into consideration are Judith Maine, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); Richard Maltby and Melvyn Stokes, eds., *American Movie Audiences: From the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era* (London: BFI, 1999); Id., eds., *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies* (London: BFI, 1999). Staiger's *contextual* theory of reception follows the tradition of British cultural studies, which arose at the turn of the 1960s and demanded a wider examination of the cultural practices affecting the everyday life of people, especially people belonging to the lower classes. Staiger's theory of reception is distinct from both the *apparatus* and the *cognitive* ones—namely, the other two dominant theories of film reception in the last decades. Proponents of the apparatus theory of reception view film spectators as largely passive and dependent on the dominant class, which they saw as the major force behind media production. Proponents of cognitive theory, instead, by placing cognitive psychology at the center of reception studies, elaborate a model of spectator that is more active than the spectator of the apparatus theory. Like cognitive theorists, British cultural studies and Staiger aimed to deemphasize the power of the medium and to stress the spectators' active relation with a film. They did that not on a psychological ground, but on a historically informed ground.

picturesque Italy.

We know that American politics held a multifaceted perspective on Fascism throughout the 1930s. Only the outbreak of World War II and its development finally led Roosevelt to break with Mussolini.[307] Moving beyond the sphere of politics and looking at American culture, this chapter further defines the contextual framework in which Italian fiction films were released.[308] Particularly, in the first section I analyze how 1930s American films reframed Italianness under three perspectives: political, economic, and cultural.[309] The first perspective pertains to the American films' representation of fascist dictatorships, from a position of either approval or disapproval to one of open hostility toward Nazism and Fascism. Toward the end of the 1930s, American cinema explicitly counteracted Fascist film propaganda.

The second perspective regards the tension between morality and economics. Post-1929 American cinema gave voice to mainstream Americans' novel ambivalence toward capitalism and expressed interest for a social order unthreatened by massive financial speculations. A quite relevant constituency, composed of politicians, journalists, and commentators, praised Mussolini's corporate model as a viable solution to the economic crisis. In this context, Italian-American director Frank Capra's comedies, such as *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), appeared

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[307] For further details, see the section "Political and Diplomatic Relations Between Fascist Italy and the U.S." in Ch. 2.

[308] John P. Diggins analyzed other sources, with regard to the Americans' consideration of Mussolini. Particularly, he discussed how American journals overall praised Mussolini before the Ethiopian campaign, and then criticized him after it. See Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, esp. the section "American Journalists and Mussolini," 42-57.

[309] Some preliminary references to the history of 1930s American cinema are Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1994; first ed. 1975); Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (New York: Scribner, 1993); Ina Rae Hark, ed., *American Cinema of the 1930s: Themes and Variations* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

to look for an acceptable reconciliation between capital and sentiments. My goal is to discuss whether Capra—and other Hollywood directors developing similar themes—did point to Fascist corporatism as an example of a harmonic relationship between business and ethics. Specifically, I argue that Capra did not look at the Fascist model, and that instead he embraced a model of cooperation that took inspiration from the value system that American workers had shaped between the Civil War and World War I.[310] Although the Fascist propaganda on the efficacy of the regime's corporate plans did not affect American cinema, a discussion of how 1930s American films elaborated issues of business and ethics helps clarify the conditions in which American and Italian-American spectators received films like *Darò un milione* and *Partire*, which developed the Fascist perspective on the same issues.

The third perspective that I shall use in detecting American films' representation of Italianness pertains to their frequent reliance on the conventional images of Arcadia and Mulberry Street. The first referred to the idealized idea of Italy as a bucolic and artistically rich country; the second one to the association of Italians with violence and organized crime.[311] While ignoring the core values of Fascist ideology, American films still tended to depict Italians as Latin lovers and/or gangsters, although more nuanced depictions of their life in the U.S. also appeared in American cinema throughout the 1930s.[312]

How could American spectators decode Italian fiction films? Was their perception

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[310] On this issue, my main reference is Robert McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America 1929-1941* (New York: Times Books, 1984), esp. 196-223.
[311] See Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, esp. Ch. 1 "Arcadia and Mulberry Street: Two Italys in the American Mind on the Eve of Fascism," 5-21.
[312] On this topic, see Giuliana Muscio, *Piccole Italie, grandi schermi: Scambi cinematografici tra Italia e Stati Uniti* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2004); Peter Bondanella, *Hollywood Italians: Dagos, Palookas, Romeos, Wise Guys, and Sopranos* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004); Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema*.

of Italian films consistent with how American politics and culture viewed Fascist Italy or did it embrace different paths? In order to address these questions, in the last sections of the chapter I engage with the only traceable comments to Italian fiction films that are available today, the reviews by American critics. Particularly, I look at the reviews that appeared in some key publications—a daily newspaper, *The New York Times*, and two trade journals, *Variety* and *The Film Daily*.[313]

I chose *The New York Times* because of the importance of New York City in my research.[314] During the 1930s, the *New York Times* critics of Italian films usually were Harris T. Smith, Benjamin R. Crisler, and Frank T. Nugent. Bosley Crowther, who had a long career as the paper's film critic, joined the newspaper in 1940 and that year he also authored articles about some Italian films.[315] I have also examined the reviews of two trade journals, *Variety* and *The Film Daily*, in order to assess the relevance and the perception of Italian cinema in publications entirely devoted to the film medium.[316] The critics of Italian films in *Variety* were several and they usually signed their articles with a shortened version of their names (including Kauf., Heln., and Hobe.). Instead, in *The Film Daily* film reviews commonly were anonymous. In taking into consideration the reviews of these publications, I discuss the overall consistency between their perspectives and the perspectives of American politics and American cinema on Mussolini's Italy.

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[313] On the history of film criticism in the U.S., see the documentary *For the Love of the Movies: The Story of American Film Criticism* (Gerald Peary, 2009); Jerry Roberts, *The Complete History of American Film Criticism* (Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press, 2010).
[314] As explained in Chapter 1, New York City hosted the largest Italian-American community at the time and its theaters showed all the Italian fiction films distributed in the country.
[315] The website of *The New York Times* has a film section that includes all the reviews of its major critics from the past. The address is the following: http://www.nytimes.com/movies/critics/critics-picks.
[316] The weekly magazine *Variety* was born in 1905 and in the course of the following decades it has been a leading publication on cinema, music, theater, television, and technology. The daily magazine *The Film Daily* was active from 1915 to 1970 and in that timeframe it was one of the most relevant sources of information for Hollywood film industry, by offering reviews, trade news, financial insights, updates on production, distribution and exhibition of U.S. and foreign films.

Particularly, I consider the different positions that American critics assumed toward Fascism through the years, their inability to perceive the ideological overtones of films like *Il dottor Antonio* and *Partire*, and their widespread reduction of Italy to old and comfortable conventions.

The Conflicting Representation of Fascism in American Films

During the 1930s American cinema offered contrasting views of Fascism. This happened in the context of the huge popularity of the film medium throughout the U.S. Indeed, as Italian fiction films arrived at the Broadway Cine Roma in New York City and in other theaters, American films were massively screened all around the country. American film companies—the "big five," the "little three," and other independent producers—made good profits, since, in spite of the economic hardships, cinema was a favorite form of entertainment for millions of Americans.[317] The emergence of sound films at the end of the 1920s contributed to the growing success of cinema and particularly genres like the gangster and the musical.

Prior to the Ethiopian war, the American films' depiction of Fascism could demonstrate appreciation toward Mussolini's model of Fascism or denounce its totalitarian means. With regard to this last aspect, the horror genre often presented "mad" scientists of foreign nationalities and expressed through them not just America's concerns about Mussolini's dictatorship, but about European forms of dictatorship in general—

[317] The "big five" were Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Paramount Pictures, Fox Film Corporation/Twentieth Century Fox, Warner Brothers, and RKO. The "little three" were Universal Pictures, United Artists, and Columbia. Some independent companies were Republic, Monogram, Mascot, and Grand National. Scholars have intensely debated the popularity and the social implications of American cinema during the Depression era. See Sklar, *Movie-Made America*; Balio, *Grand Design*; Giuliana Muscio, *Hollywood's New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997); Saverio Giovacchini, *Hollywood Modernism: Film and Politics in the Age of the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); Hark, *American Cinema of the 1930s*.

both the communist and the fascist ones.[318] *Island of Lost Souls* (Erle C. Genton, Paramount, 1932) offers a pertinent example of such phenomenon.

Adapted from H.G. Wells' novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), this horror film centers on the genetic experiments of Dr. Moreau (Charles Laughton) in a small island. Dr. Moreau especially tries to transform beasts into humans. As the expressionistic photography by Boris Kaufman contributes to make more ominous the character of the doctor, the individuals that originated from his experiments venerate him as their master. Only after many incidents, the mass of humans/beasts is eventually able to react against Dr. Moreau and to overthrow him. Film critics have given various interpretations of the relation between the doctor and his "patients:" an allegory of the potential revolt of people against the government in Depression-stricken America;[319] an allegory of the perversion of the colonial power;[320] finally, a representation of the American preoccupation with dictatorial figures, as well as a fictional premonition of the Nazi doctor Joseph Mengele, who committed atrocious experiments on the human body in the Auschwitz concentration camp.[321] *Island of Lost Souls* probably aimed to raise all such diverse interpretations and to rework the mentioned issues. In my view, some high-angle shots showing Dr. Moreau and his slaves below him certainly evoke Nazi and Fascist non-fiction films celebrating the cult of Hitler and Mussolini and the submission of multiple individuals to a dictator's power.

As *Island of Lost Souls* reworked the anxiety shared by many Americans toward

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[318] See Franco La Polla, *Sogno e realtà americana nel cinema di Hollywood* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1987), esp. the section "Il gorilla e Margherita: lo horror film," 66-70.

[319] See Melvin E. Matthews, *Fear Itself: Horror on Screen and in Reality During the Depression and World War II* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009), 73.

[320] See Charles Higham, *Charles Laughton: an Intimate Biography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 39.

[321] See David J. Skal, "The Horrors of War," in *The Horror Film*, ed. Stephen Prince (New Brunswick, NJ and London: 2004), 70-81.

European dictatorships, an opposite tendency emerged in American cinema in the same period. In fact, in line with that part of the international community that admired Mussolini's public personality, some non-fiction productions dealt with the Italian dictator as a film star.[322] Most notably, in 1927 Mussolini appeared in William Randolph Hearst's first Fox Movietone newsreel, by addressing a speech in English to the American and Italian-American people. Further, in 1933 the film company Columbia Pictures distributed the documentary *Mussolini Speaks*, which edited material from Luce newsreels and emphasized the "American" qualities of Mussolini—his humble origins, his individualist self-reliance, his rise to power.[323]

With respect to fiction cinema, a film like *Gabriel Over the White House* (Gregory La Cava, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1933) rather surprisingly showed a President of the United States acting as a semi-Fascist dictator and refusing the cooperation with the Congress and the Senate in order to meet the requests of his citizens. As several critics noted, Mussolini was the actual reference point in the conception of Judson Hammond, the President in La Cava's film.[324] *Gabriel* echoed the Americans' approval of Mussolini by depicting the Congress and the Senate as obstacles to the President's mission to help Americans. Relying on such premises, the film shed a negative light on democracy and conversely championed an authoritarian reinforcement of the power of the President.

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[322] On Mussolini's stardom in the U.S., see Giorgio Bertellini, *The Divo and the Duce: Promoting Film Stardom and Political Leadership in 1920s America* (forthcoming); Erbaggio, *Writing Mussolini*.

[323] On the Americanization of Mussolini, see Diggins, "Mussolini and America: Hero-Worship, Charisma, and the 'Vulgar Talent;'" Id., *Mussolini and Fascism*.

[324] See, for example, Ben Urwand, *The Collaboration: Hollywood Pact with Hitler* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 99-112. Beyond this connection between La Cava's film and Mussolini, Urwand's book proposes the thesis that American film producers collaborated with Hitler by undermining the Nazi danger, a controversial idea that I am going to better discuss in a further note.

Two events occurring in the middle of the 1930s changed the way in which American film companies dealt with Fascism, and particularly they prevented American producers from planning more pro-Fascist films. First, the establishment in 1934 of the Production Code Administration (PCA)—better known as the Hays Code—set strict rules for the representation of sex, violence, and politics in films. Accordingly, the Code also forced Hollywood film companies not to embrace overtly political themes.[325] Secondly, as noted earlier, Italy's war in Ethiopia in 1935-36 significantly worsened the Americans' perception of Mussolini. The rise of Nazism in Germany also contributed to Americans' growing skepticism toward right-wing dictatorships, since—contrary to Mussolini—Hitler was never popular in the U.S. These facts made it impossible, after the biennium 1934-1935, the realization by Hollywood studios of films like *Mussolini Speaks* and *Gabriel Over the White House*.[326] This new scenario also suspended the project of a biopic of Mussolini produced by Columbia, whose head, Harry Cohn, was an ardent Fascist supporter. Mussolini himself, who intended to both write and finance the film, had proposed the project to the American producer.[327] Further, the Italian dictator had suggested that Frank Capra, who at the time was a supporter of Fascism, develop the project. Cohn continued to plan the biopic for some time, even when the Ethiopian Government—attacked by Mussolini's troops—banned Capra's films as a consequence of his involvement in that production. Eventually, the sensitivity of the topic led Cohn to abandon the project.

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[325] On the PCA and film censorship in the 1930s, see Richad Maltby, "The Production Code and the Hays Office," in *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939*, by Tino Balio (New York: Scribner, 1993), 37-72.

[326] Occasionally, independent producers made pro-Fascist films after 1935. This is the case, for example, of the documentary *The Private Life of Mussolini* (1938) by John Park and Edwin Ware Hullinger. This film put together old newsreels and new footage of Mussolini, taken at his Roman residence Villa Torlonia.

[327] See Joseph McBride, *Frank Capra: the Catastrophe of Success* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000), 241-242.

Concurrently, in spite of the unpopularity of Nazism and Fascism, after 1935 American film companies did not directly attack Fascism and Nazism. This fact seems to be consistent with the PCA's rule to not embrace openly political issues in films. Yet, it also largely depended on pragmatic economic considerations, since American studios did not want to damage their profits in Germany and Italy. Only toward the end of the decade, as the world conflict approached, did Hollywood companies finally start to make overtly anti-fascist films—such as *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (Anatole Litvak, Warner Brothers, 1939).[328]

Moral Economics: The Reconciliation of Money and Sentiments in American Films

In front of the economic crisis, many Americans believed that the nation had to grant prosperity to each individual by preventing unregulated speculations from a group of few rich "barons."[329] The Communist and Fascist doctrines offered their own solutions to that delicate situation; indeed, they both gained a growing number of followers

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[328] On the overall relationship between American cinema and right-wing dictatorships during the 1930s, see Urwand, *The Collaboration*; Thomas Doherty, *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013). *The Collaboration* suggests that Hollywood companies actively "collaborated" with Hitler by not denouncing Nazism in their films until the late-1930s. This thesis has generated a lively debate. Personally, I agree with the commentators that criticized Urwand's main assumption, and I contend that it is inappropriate to define the relationship between American film studios and the Nazi regime as a "collaboration," since the goal of Hollywood studios was not political—as Urwand implies—but merely economical. In other words, what really determined the actions of Hollywood companies was the desire to not lose their earnings in Germany. Accordingly, I would deem the policy of American producers as an example of amoral capitalism. For a criticism of *The Collaboration*, targeting especially Urwand's use of primary sources, see Johannes von Moltke, "Hollywood, Hitler, and Historiography: Film History as Cultural Critique," *Cultural Critique* 91 (2015): 167-189 (thanks to Ben Strassfeld, doctoral student at the University of Michigan, for pointing this article out to me). During my archival research in Italy, I verified that American film companies were also eager to meet the demands of the Fascist Government and particularly to re-cut their films, if this granted the distribution of such films in Italy. See ASMAE, Serie Affari Politici 1931-1945: Stati Uniti, Box 43: Folder 2 "Cinematografia (1936-37)."

[329] Throughout the last decades of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th, the opponents of big industrialists like Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and Andrew P. Mellon, used to call them "robber barons." See Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), especially the Ch. "Robber Barons and Rebels."

between Americans at that time.

American films dealt with these issues and they often represented a model of society that succeeded in reconciling capitalism and ethics. For example, comedies by Frank Capra such as *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) praised the virtues of common men and instead depicted rich bankers and financiers as villains. In the reconciliation between capital and sentiments that American directors sought, could they take inspiration from Fascist corporatism, and from its alleged ability to pursue an ideal of moral economics? The fact that Capra was of Italian origin and for a long time an admirer of Mussolini makes this question even more pertinent.

Although in the early 1930s Roosevelt himself expressed his appreciation of Fascist corporatism, the idea that corporatism could arouse the admiration of American directors is not convincing, for at least two reasons. First, Capra's most popular films were produced after 1935, when Mussolini's celebrity in the U.S. had waned. Consequently, it is unlikely that in those years Capra took Fascist corporatism as a positive example. Secondly, Americans were actually pursuing a form of moral economics derived from their own history and consisting in a redefinition of the notion of individualism.[330] From the last decades of the 19th century to the 1920s the idea of "acquisitive individualism"—associated with the laissez-faire capitalism of self-made-men businessmen—had prevailed in the American society. As Americans faced the economic collapse of the early 1930s, they began to replace that idea with a model of "ethical individualism," which aspired to reconcile competitiveness and cooperation,

[330] See McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, especially the Ch. "Moral Economics: American Values and Culture in the Great Depression," 196-223.

namely the free market and the respect for fellow workers. In other words, Americans supported a solution to the crisis that preserved their fondness for individualism and at the same time promoted a collectivist spirit. This solution relied on the value system that American workers had shaped between the Civil War and World War I.[331] By conveying skepticism about the authority and praising the resourcefulness and generosity of common men, films like *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) relied on the balance between individualism and cooperation, populism and collectivism that was typical of the New Deal era.[332]

Even the American remake of Camerini's comedy *Darò un milione*, *I'll Give a Million* (Walter Lang, Twentieth Century Fox, 1938), was consistent with the American ideal of an ethical individualism. Set in France like *Darò un milione*, Lang's film focuses on an American millionaire named Tony Newlander, who appears as a canonical example of self-made-man. Newlander decides to disguise as a tramp in order to escape from his friends and from his ex-wife, who only want to despoil him of his money. As much as this narrative essentially replicates that of Camerini's film, the two films support distinctly different sets of values. In Camerini's film, the characters rapaciously looking for the millionaire's money pave the way to Mr. Gold's spiritual regeneration after the meeting with a pure woman—a narrative pattern that adhered to the intellectual horizons

[331] Labor historian David Montgomery gave an influential contribution to the study of the culture of the American working class in the 19th century. See David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872* (New York: Knopf, 1967); Id., *Workers' Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Id., *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
[332] On this balance in Capra's films and Roosevelt's politics, see Giuliana Muscio, "Roosevelt, Arnold, and Capra, (or) the Federalist-Populist Paradox," in *Frank Capra: Authorship and the Studio System*, ed. Robert Sklar and Vito Zagarrio (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 164-189.

of the Fascist dictatorship.[333] In Lang's film, the characters trying to exploit the rich protagonist let spectators wonder to what degree a wealthy person like Newlander can help others with his hard-earned fortune. In other words, their presence problematizes the limits of ethical individualism—a narrative pattern that resonated with the climate of the American capitalist society during the Depression era.

Arcadia and Mulberry Street in American Films

As 1930s American films overall dismissed the novelty that Fascism aimed to represent, they reworked the most common images of Italy, that of Arcadia on the one hand and that of Mulberry Street and its association of Italians with violence and crime, on the other.[334]

With regard to the link between Italians and criminality, in early 1930s gangster films like *Little Caesar* (Mervyn LeRoy, Warner Bros., 1931) and *Scarface* (Howard Hawks, The Caddo Company, 1932) strengthened it by introducing, respectively, the characters of Caesar Bandello (Edward G. Robinson) and Tony Camonte (Paul Muni). The trajectory of these characters seemed to offer a distorted view of the American myth of success. Both Bandello and Camonte appear as self-made men who climb the society and get power, although their violence eventually provokes their fall. The final death of such figures bowed to moral standards of the time; however, both *Little Caesar* and *Scarface* gave a somewhat heroic stature to their protagonists, thus generating a lot of controversy.

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[333] See Ch. 3 for a more detailed discussion of the ideological implications of *Darò un milione*.

[334] For this topic, see Muscio, *Piccole Italie,* especially Ch. 2 "Da *The Italian* a Tony Soprano: Italiani e immigrati sugli schermi americani (1895-1940)," 103-171; Bondanella, *Hollywood Italians*; Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema*.

In this respect, LeRoy's and Hawks' films also provoked vibrant complaints by representatives of the Fascist Government in the U.S. for their depiction of Italians as criminals.[335] The complaints had some effect, because in later years American cinema tried to avoid the association between gangsters and Italian-Americans.[336] The Hays Code contributed to this result by asking American producers to avoid the representation of ethnic prejudices.

In Hawks' film the character of Scarface is both a gangster and an opera lover. As such, in this case the stereotypes of Arcadia and Mulberry Street coalesced into the same character. Indeed, the association between Italians, music and romanticism continued to be strong in American cinema throughout the 1930s. To name some examples, *Cynara* (King Vidor, 1932), a film about an extramarital love affair of a British lawyer, shows Naples and Venice as ideal sites of romanticism. In *Let's Sing Again* (Kurt Neumann, 1936), a boy escapes from the school to live with a poor Italian American man, played by Henry Armetta, a character-actor of Italian origin. After discovering that he is Neapolitan and that his parents are musicians, the boy finally meets his father and starts to sing with him on the stage. The Hollywood industry also hired Italian singers to play in films; for example, operatic tenor Nino Martini moved from Italy to the U.S. and throughout the

[335] ASMAE in Rome holds several documents about the criticism of American films by exponents of the Italian regime. See ASMAE, Serie Affari Politici 1931-1945: Stati Uniti, Box 5: Folder 9. See, also, in the same location, Box 8: Folder 18; Box 12: Folder 11; Box 18, Folders 12, 13, 14, 16, 17. By trying to change the situation, in the early 1930s Italian Ambassador Giacomo De Martino pressed Hollywood producers to shed a positive light on the Italian characters of their films. See ASMAE, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Box 231.

[336] However, this association remained strong in the producers' mind and sometimes it produced grotesque results. For example, in the film *The Roaring Twenties* (Raoul Walsh, Warner Bros., 1939) the name of a gangster is Nick Brown and the actor playing this character is Paul Kelly, whose origins were Irish. Both these elements avoided characterizing the gangster as Italian. However, in the film Brown eats spaghetti—an element that reestablishes the link between criminality and Italy. I took this example from Muscio, *Piccole Italie,* 157-158.

1930s acted in short films and feature films.[337]

Together with the stereotypical images analyzed so far, in the 1930s American cinema could also offer a more complex and less conventional description of Italians and particularly of Italian immigrants.[338] For example, films like *It Had to Happen* (Roy Del Ruth, Twentieth Century Fox, 1936) and *Man of the People* (Edwin Marin, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1937) introduce characters of Italian-Americans who fight against crime and start a political career to promote justice.

However, these last works had a limited popularity at the time, and most likely failed to alter the Americans' common preconceptions about Italy. Indeed, the most famous depiction of Italians in the American culture of the 1930s—one that continued to resonate even after the new rules set by the PCA in 1934—remained the character of Scarface in Hawks' film, which fortified in American spectators the well-known link between Italy and the *mafia*, as well as the link between Italy and the opera.

Early 1930s: American Critics Reframing Old Italy Through Italian Films

In the cultural context just outlined, several American journalists reviewed 1930s Italian fiction films. By taking into consideration articles from *The New York Times*, *The Film Daily*, and *Variety*, my analysis first focuses on the reviews published between 1930 and 1935 and then on those appeared in the years 1936-1941. The division of the decade into two distinct periods depends on several factors. The Fascist Government's

[337] Nino Martini (1902-76), born in Verona, started his career in Italy and Europe in the 1920s. In 1929 he moved to the U.S. to play in some short films produced by Jesse Louis Lasky, a manager of the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation. Martini was the protagonist of three films between 1935 and 1937: *Here's to Romance* (Alfred E. Green, Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company/Fox Film Corporation, 1935), *The Gay Desperado* (Rouben Mamoulian, Pickford-Lasky, 1936), and *Music for Madame* (John G. Blystone, RKO/Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company, 1937).

[338] See Muscio, *Piccole Italie, grandi schermi*, 151-170.

establishment of the DGC in 1934 led Italian fiction films of the second half of the 1930s to deal more actively with the Fascist totalitarian project.[339] The increased attention paid by the regime to the national film industry also prompted a larger distribution of Italian films in the U.S. in late 1930s—another aspect that creates a relevant difference between the two periods. Finally, 1935 marks the beginning of Italy's war in Ethiopia and thus an overall change of the Americans' attitude toward Italy, which in turn affected the interpretation of Italian films on the part of American critics.

In the first half of the 1930s Italian fiction films mostly replicated melodramatic and comedic conventions, adapted from other forms of entertainment (literature, theatre, circus, music).[340] As they reached the U.S., films like *La canzone dell'amore* and *Napoli che canta* to some extent weakened the Fascist attempt to promote the novelty of Mussolini's Italy.[341] Their representation of Italianness was consistent with the stereotypes offered by many American films in the same years. Further, such films most likely reminded spectators of the multiple stage melodramas that in the previous decades had presented to them Italian picturesque landscapes and characters.[342] Since Italian fiction films themselves perpetuated well-established stereotypes about Italy, in the early 1930s American critics unsurprisingly recognized these films' reliance on romance narratives, melodramatic plots, operatic music, and picturesque settings.

Indeed, in the period under consideration American critics typically introduced

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[339] On this issue, see Ch. 3.
[340] For an examination of the inter-textual relations of 1930s Italian cinema, see Caldiron, *Storia del cinema italiano*, Vol. V: 1934-1939; Alessandro Faccioli, ed., *Schermi di regime: Cinema italiano degli anni Trenta: la produzione e i generi* (Venice: Marsilio, 2010); Quaresima, *Storia del cinema italiano*, Vol. IV: 1924-1933.
[341] Their inadequacy in terms of propaganda certainly was one of the factors that led the Fascist regime to take care of the national film industry through the creation of the DGC.
[342] On the popularity of Italian melodramas in early 20th century America, see Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema*.

Italian films through expressions like "an Italian drama" and "a romantic film in Italian" (review of *La vecchia signora* [*The Old Lady*, Amleto Palermi, 1932] in *The New York Times*);[343] "romantic, old-fashioned melodrama" (review of *Porto* [*Il delitto di Mastrovanni*, Amleto Palermi, 1934] in *The New York Times*);[344] "very entertaining musical comedy in colorful Italian background" (review of *Figaro e la sua gran giornata* in *The Film Daily*).[345] Similarly, critics stressed "the beauty of Naples" and the presence of "some agreeable songs" (review of *Napoli che canta* in *The Film Daily*).[346] I want to devote a particular attention to two of these early 1930s reviews; one displayed appreciation of these stereotypes about Italy, the other did not.

The first review, from *The New York Times*, was for the film *Zappatore*.[347] Adapted from a 1928 song of the same title written by Libero Bovio and set to music by Ferdinando Albano, Gustavo Serena's film was one of the most popular examples of *sceneggiata napoletana*—a form of melodrama associated with the Neapolitan setting.[348] The film focuses on a young student who dissipates the money of his hard-working parents, and who is able to get a degree in law thanks only to the support of a count. All the while, the young man starts a romantic love affair with the count's daughter. The author of the review in *The New York Times*, Harris T. Smith, once again emphasized the elements that made *Zappatore* a perfect example of southern melodrama. He first introduced the film as "an Italian musical romance" by pointing out:

Almost engulfed in great waves of *old-fashioned moving picture sentiment*, an

[343] Harris T. Smith, "An Italian Drama," *The New York Times*, December 10, 1932: 19.
[344] Harris T. Smith, "At the Westminster Theatre," *The New York Times*, July 30, 1935: 16.
[345] "'Figaro e la sua gran giornata,'" *The Film Daily*, October 30, 1933: 8.
[346] "'Napoli che canta' ('Naples of Song')," *The Film Daily*, January 25, 1931: 11.
[347] Harris T. Smith, "An Italian Production," *The New York Times*, March 28, 1932: 11.
[348] Throughout the years *Zappatore* received multiple adaptations in several media. The most famous of them is the 1980 film version directed by Alfonso Brescia and played by the well-known singer-actor Mario Merola.

> interesting Italian musical film […] arrived at the Harris Theatre yesterday afternoon.[349]

After summarizing the plot, Smith also stressed the prominent role of the setting and of the songs in the film:

> In elaborating this story the director has brought to the screen *some excellent scenes of life in the provinces and in Naples itself*, backed up by *agreeable music* and capable acting.[350]

The American critic insisted on the same argument in his closing lines:

> Spectators who have seen the *beauties of Naples* will especially appreciate the *lovely views*. […] Ria Rosa, a *popular Neapolitan singer* appears on the screen in 'Sott' e Cancelle' and other songs as an additional attraction.[351]

The second review is the one published in *Variety* and focused on *La vecchia signora*, a film now lost.[352] *La vecchia signora* tells about an old woman of noble origins, Maria (Emma Gramatica), who accepts an ordinary job—selling roasted chestnuts—in order to grant her niece attendance of an expensive boarding school. The niece is unaware of the real occupation of her old relative. Once she goes to visit Maria with her future husband, the woman is somewhat able to organize a party in her old mansion and to pretend that in those years she has maintained her social status. More adventures follow, until Maria happily attends the wedding of her niece. The author of the *Variety* review, Kauf., harshly criticized Palermi's film, particularly its melodramatic nature:

> The Italians, after getting a nice start, allowed the *native sentimentality* full sway with pretty disastrous results.[353]

After summarizing the plot, Kauf. then observed:

> Most of this [is] *overdrawn* and *overacted*, but probably satisfactory from the standpoint of *lower class Latin taste*.[354]

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[349] Harris T. Smith, "An Italian Production." Italics are mine.
[350] Ibid. Italics are mine.
[351] Ibid. Italics are mine.
[352] Kauf., "La Vecchia Signora ('The Old Lady')," *Variety*, December 13, 1932: 53.
[353] Ibid. Italics are mine.
[354] Ibid. Italics are mine.

The journalist associated a “Latin taste” with the melodramatic component of the film and he deemed the same “taste” as a “lower class” element—presumably, Kauf. had as a reference point the numerous Italian-Americans of southern origin attending Italian cultural events, mostly living in modest conditions. In the following years, other American reviewers blamed the “Latin” component of Italian films, which they saw as distant from the American mentality and customs.

In spite of their different aesthetic evaluations of Italian films, both reviews confirm the American critics’ resilient association of Italy with the melodrama and the picturesque. Yet, one more aspect of American film criticism of that time deserves careful attention.

In contrast to the films mentioned so far, other Italian productions distributed in the same period in America, rather than reproducing older stereotypes, were actually in dialogue with the values of Fascist Italy. Most notably, *Terra madre* recounted the story of a young man torn between the dissipate life in the city and the virtuous life in the countryside. Through this tension between city and countryside, the plot enacted and eventually supported the Fascist dialectic between tradition and modernity. Indeed, at the end of the film the protagonist recovers his “spiritual” qualities thanks to his contact with the lifestyle of honest farmers and pure girls. American critics—either unaware of Fascist ideology or unresponsive to Fascist propaganda—failed to perceive that *Terra madre* was trying to propose a different conception of Italianness, and reviewed it by replicating the same arguments used for *Zappatore* and *La vecchia signora*. For example, *The Film Daily*’s review of *Terra madre* recognized the tension between city and countryside in the film, but it eventually deemed that tension as a pretext to show fine views of the

Italian countryside:

> This is a simple and wholesome story of Italian peasant life that will please the Italian audiences with its *faithful portrayal of scenes and customs of their native land*. […] It is an *idyllic story* of simple charm that will please generally.[355]

Even in later years, when historical films and romantic comedies were systematically trying to export to the U.S. the main beliefs of Fascist Italy, American critics kept looking at Italian films through the lens of the picturesque imagery.

After Ethiopia: An Impartial Look at the Overtly Pro-Fascist Films

Having attained the status of a film star in the U.S. by the early 1930s, Mussolini was able to elicit support even among American film critics.[356] In their reviews of Columbia's documentary *Mussolini Speaks*, American critics stressed the "American" aspects of Mussolini's persona and they overall maintained a benign consideration of the Italian dictator, further testifying to his considerable popularity in that country.[357] Even in this case, the situation changed after Italy's imperialist war in Ethiopia in 1935-36.

In the wake of that event, American film critics tended to not support the Italian dictator anymore, when they wrote about overtly pro-Fascist films such as *Il grande appello* (1936). At the same time, they did not explicitly attack the regime in their reviews. They used to mention in a few words the political component of the film under consideration, but they did not openly denounce Fascism as they discussed the film's narrative and style. This lack of overt criticism was consistent with the attitude that American politics and culture held toward Fascist Italy in the same period. Indeed, as previously discussed, in those years diplomatic considerations led Roosevelt and his

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[355] "Terra madre," *The Film Daily*, November 1, 1931: 11.
[356] See Erbaggio, *Writing Mussolini*.
[357] See, for example, Andre Seenwald, "Il Duce," *The New York Times*, March 13, 1933: 18.

cabinet to diminish any tension with Mussolini and commercial factors drove American film producers to not blame Nazism and Fascism. Eventually, film critics acted in accordance with a sentiment shared by both American politicians and film companies.

The reception of Italian colonial films by American critics best exemplifies their impartial look at Fascist propaganda. More specifically, it demonstrates that American critics—rather than discussing the films' troubling historical context—were more interested to stress if such films were suitable to the American audience for their melodramatic and spectacular nature.

The most famous colonial film—the first film to be made in the new Cinecittà studios in 1937—was *Scipione l'africano*, which apparently did not fall into the colonial genre. Carmine Gallone's work was in fact an historical film, focused on the conquest of African territories by the Roman Emperor Scipione. However, the film clearly meant to create a parallel between the colonial enterprise of Imperial Rome and the one of Fascist Italy.

By reviewing the film for *The New York Times*, Benjamin R. Crisler made it clear that he was aware of this historical connection.[358] After mentioning the role of Mussolini's son Vittorio in the production, he observed that "'Scipio Africanus' is the most ambitious Italian production since Abyssinia" and noted the similarities between the Roman salute and the Fascist salute.[359] However, the critic did not offer any further comment on the contemporary historical event inferred by the film, Italy's attack of Ethiopia, which most of the commentators around the world were harshly criticizing. Rather, as it happened for Blasetti's film *Terra madre*, Crisler seemed more concerned to

[358] Benjamin R. Crisler, "At the Squire," *The New York Times*, September 23, 1939: 22.
[359] Ibid.

connect the film to the well-known Italian melodramatic tradition:

> Being Italian, it is also more than a little *operatic*, so that there are moments in the film when one feels that it is not so much the noble days of Republican Rome that one is witnessing as *the last act of "Aida."*[360]

In a review written two years earlier from Rome, *Variety*'s critic Heln. similarly emphasized the relevance of the "highly dramatic scenes" in the film—"these spectacular features should prove its selling point in America"—and he described the film's ideological nature with a neutral tone:

> It is a prestige picture, a propaganda picture conceived immediately after Italy's campaign in Ethiopia as the best able to show *the intimate union between the grandeur of ancient Rome and the new Roman imperial venture*.[361]

The reviews of other colonial films developed the same arguments. In *The New York Times*, Harris T. Smith talked about *Sotto la croce del sud*, a film celebrating the Italians' efforts in bringing civilization in Ethiopia, by focusing on the quality of the acting and on the role of the most peculiar or dramatic scenes:

> While the acting of everybody concerned is first-rate, the chief interest of the picture consists in some *remarkable views of natives at work and play* and in a *rather horrendous man-hunt*.[362]

The same Smith, in his review of *Il grande appello*, for once seemed to engage with the film's political theme, since he explained that Camerini probably elicited the American spectators' support of the Ethiopians by showing the impressive technical superiority of the Italian army:

> The scenes of battle between Italian invaders and natives defending their country are hardly likely to be good propaganda for Fascism with persons inclined to favor the "underdog."[363]

However, in the critic's view, the American spectators' probable embrace of the

[360] Ibid. Italics are mine.
[361] Heln., "Scipio l'Africano ('Scipio, the African')," *Variety*, September 8, 1937: 19.
[362] Harris T. Smith, "At the Broadway Cine Roma," *The New York Times*, April 10, 1939: 13.
[363] Harris T. Smith, "Ethiopian War in Film," *The New York Times*, April 11, 1939: 18.

Ethiopian cause did not really depend on their awareness about the nature of the war, but on their general tendency to favor "underdog" characters. In other words, Smith again seemed interested in evaluating the effectiveness or less of the film's narrative strategies for the American spectators, and not the dramatic historical context to which the film was related.

Finally, as the war started in Europe and Italy seemed destined to join Nazi Germany, American critics started to address in a critical way pro-Fascist Italian films. One example of this tendency is the *New York Times*' review of *Condottieri*, written in January 1940.[364] In this case, the article's author, Frank S. Nugent, abandoned the previous neutrality of American critics toward pro-Fascist films and exploited irony to scorn Mussolini himself:

> We concede the handsomeness, the generosity, and the physical richness of the production. But, dramatically, it has no greater stature than a lavish pageant performed by an army corps and a crew of competent players to celebrate someone's birthday—say Mussolini's.[365]

The film depicts the Renaissance mercenary soldier Giovanni Dalle Bande Nere as a fighter for the unity of Italy, and thus as a precursor of Fascist nationalism. In his review, Nugent specifically mocked the ideological nature of this historical parallel:

> With a long-distance salute to the Blackshirts, he [Trenker] has pretended, with no historical authority at all, that this same Giovanni of the Black Hands was striving to unite Italy as a nation extending from the Alps to the sea.[366]

At the end of his review, Nugent recurred again to irony by stating that the film is

> worth a look if you're curious about the state of the Italian movies: *under the government's thumb*, if you ask us.[367]

Unfortunately, the scale and the outcome of the European conflict would have left

[364] Frank S. Nugent, "Giovanni de Medici, the Leader," *The New York Times*, January 5, 1940: 15.
[365] Ibid.
[366] Ibid.
[367] Ibid. Italics are mine.

little space for irony in the following years.

The Resilience of Stereotypes in the Criticism of Historical Films

In the second half of the 1930s, Italian historical films commonly supported Mussolini's regime by fascistizing the picturesque and creating a parallel between the past and the present.[368] Did American critics perceive the ideological implications of such films? Alternatively, did they frame historical films again through the dimensions of the melodrama and of the picturesque?

With regard to *Scipione l'africano* and *Condottieri*, American critics were indeed conscious of the main ideological goals of these historical films. They knew that Gallone and Trenker were creating a connection between past eras and Fascist Italy. Yet, this fact is not surprising. In the case of *Scipione l'africano*, the Italian Government itself had contributed to publicize heavily the link between the film's fictional Roman battles and the Fascist army's actual battles in Ethiopia. *Condottieri*, instead, reached the U.S. at the beginning of the 1940s, when American critics—due to the tragic development of the war in Europe—were eager to blame the depiction of authoritarian leaders in Italian films. The character of Giovanni De Medici in *Condottieri* was one such Mussolinesque figure.

Scipione l'africano and *Condottieri* were exceptions, though. American critics usually were not able to understand the engagement of Italian historical films with Fascist ideology, and they kept interpreting them through the lens of the picturesque stereotypes. The reception of *Il dottor Antonio* (1937) is a telling example of this phenomenon.

Writing a review from Rome, *Variety*'s critic Heln. did not mention the historical parallel that *Il dottor Antonio* articulates between Fascism and 19th century Italian

[368] On the Italian films' fascistization of the picturesque, see Ch. 3.

nationalism.[369] Indeed, once again the American critic discussed the potential attractiveness of *Il dottor Antonio* for American spectators without taking into consideration its ideological component:

> It is not a likely hit for the U.S., even if dubbed in English, for it is not an entertaining film. And it presupposes too much knowledge of Italian history at the time of the 1848 uprisings, as well as too much knowledge of the novel "Dottor Antonio."[370]

As he deemed the plot too hard to follow for the American public, Heln. kept focusing on the quality of the acting and more generally on the film's spectacular features—"scenes of the street fights between the patriots and the soldiers are well directed."[371] Finally, Heln. considered the picturesque setting as an additional attraction of the film, and not as a stylistic device that significantly contributed to the film's ideological discourse by mediating between tradition and modernity. In fact, he just briefly noted that "the shots of the countryside around the bay of Naples are enchanting."[372]

The *New York Times*' review of *Il dottor Antonio* reproduced the same arguments, in its inability to discuss the film's ideological implications and by offering, instead, a merely descriptive list of the film's most spectacular elements:

> The period background is first rate as are the scenes of street battles, meetings of the "Carbonari" and sentimental incidents.[373]

Reviews of *Campo di maggio* and of other historical films further testify to the general misunderstanding by American critics of Italian historical films.[374]

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[369] Heln., "Il Dottor Antonio," *Variety*, December 22, 1937: 24.
[370] Ibid.
[371] Ibid.
[372] Ibid.
[373] Harris T. Smith, "At the Broadway Cine Roma," *The New York Times*, December 7, 1939: 35.
[374] See Shan., "Campo di Maggio ('100 Days of Napoleon')," *Variety*, September 16, 1936: 17. This review ignored the connection between Napoleone and Mussolini, which Giovacchino Forzano wanted to establish

Between Stereotypes and Americanization: Critique of Romantic Comedies

In the case of romantic comedies, American critics either reviewed them by relying again on their preconceptions about Italy or looked at them through the filter of American culture. In both cases, once again they were not able to unpack the films' ideological overtones.

The American reception of *Napoli che non muore* [*Naples That Never Dies*, Amleto Palermi, 1939][375] is a good example of the first category of reviews. Palermi's film tells about the marriage between a Neapolitan engineer, Mario, and a French woman, Annie. The narrative focuses on the tensions that soon animate this relationship. The couple lives in the large house of Mario's family in Naples, and both Mario's dedication to his work and his old mother's attachment to the family clash against Annie's desire to have fun at the horse races and to engage in other frivolous social events. As this narrative develops, Palermi contrasts picturesque landscapes with the settings of Annie's consumerist life. The dialectic between tradition and modernity is evident in the film's narrative and style, and it eventually leads to the reaffirmation of the conventional and patriarchal notion of family. In fact, Annie is destined to become a "good" mother and a guardian of the house. In line with Fascist conservatism, Palermi's film is keen to re-establish the traditional role of the woman in the Italian family, and consequently to stress the defense that old values grant against the disruptive forces of modernity. This

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through the film, and once more it insisted on the film's spectacular and picturesque traits: "The battle flashes are excellent as are the scenics as a whole." Other reviews that failed to understand the ideological goals of the film in question are: Scho., "Le Scarpo [sic] al Sole ('Alpine Love')," *Variety*, June 10, 1936: 35; Wear., "Il Re Burlone ('The Clown King')," *Variety*, April 8, 1936: 17; Edga., "Lorenzino de Medici ('Magnificent Rogue')," *Variety*, April 15, 1936: 23. *Le scarpe al sole* (*Le Scarpe al Sole*, Marco Elter, 1935), set in the north of Italy during World War I, *Re burlone*, set in Naples in 1844, and *Lorenzino de' Medici*, set in Florence during the Renaissance period, again create a parallelism between past and present through a Fascist perspective.

[375] Released in the U.S. in 1940.

apparently simplistic resolution takes place after a quite elaborate visual and narrative struggle between images of Vesuvio and Annie's exploration of present-day consumerism. Yet, the *Variety* review of *Napoli che non muore*, written from Rome, was unable to take into account the subtlety of such ideological facets.[376] The anonymous reviewer only stressed the "well-portrayed glamor of Naples" and the fact that "film gets off slowly with its many shots of Naples, suggesting at first that it's a travelog."[377] In other words, the reviewer's focus once again was exclusively on Naples' picturesque views.

In a journalistic context still dominated by stereotypes about Italy, the reviews of *Darò un milione* and *Partire* opened a new perspective, because they Americanized these films by reading them through the lens of the American culture. Particularly, the reviews in question emphasized the similarities between *Darò un milione* and the American comedies dealing with the Depression, and they singled out the characters in *Partire* as business-like and thus close to American models.

In his review of *Darò un milione* for *Variety*, Hobe. stressed the fact that the subject was suitable for an American remake.[378] According to him, the plot was not only intrinsically attractive, but it also reflected the "current vogue for 'Mr. Deeds' and 'Man Godfrey' yarns"—a reference to the Depression-era films *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (Frank Capra, 1936) and *My Man Godfrey* (Gregory La Cava, 1936). In other words,

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[376] "Napoli Che Non Muore ('Naples That Never Dies')," *Variety*, August 30, 1939: 19.

[377] Ibid. American critics dismissed as ordinarily picturesque other comedies that instead deal in a profound way with the tensions between spirituality and materialism, tradition and modernity. See, for example, the *New York Times*' review of *Una donna tra due mondi* [*Between Two Worlds*, Goffredo Alessandrini and Arthur Maria Rabenalt, 1936]— Benjamin R. Crisler, "Between Two Worlds," *The New York Times*, February 9, 1940: 15—and the *New York Times*' review of *Voglio vivere con Letizia* [*Un Matrimonio Ideale*, Camillo Mastrocinque, 1939]—Harris t. Smith, "At the Cinecittà," *The New York Times*, December 15, 1939: 33.

[378] Hobe., "Darò un Milione ('I Will Give a Million')," *Variety*, April 7, 1937: 29.

Hobe. recognized a strong parallelism between Camerini's films and American films reworking the conflicts between rich and poor in economic-stricken America. Yet, this parallelism is true only on a superficial level.

In Capra's film, Mr. Deeds is a common man that suddenly becomes rich thanks to an inheritance; from that moment he has to face several unscrupulous people, before finding true love. In La Cava's film, Mr. Godfrey is a rich man who has become homeless because of the economic crisis and who gains a new rise in social status thanks to his humanity and smartness. These narrative patterns show that *Mr. Deeds*, *Godfrey* and *Darò un milione* certainly share significant affinities in the plot: the contrast between richness and poverty, the one between greedy individuals and noble-hearted people, the final reward for the people who are humanly—or spiritually, according to the Fascist lexicon—rich. In spite of that, Hobe's suggestion that Camerini's film resembled the mentioned Hollywood films is misleading. As much as *Darò un milione* was in dialogue with the Italian culture of the Fascist era, *Mr. Deeds* and *Godfrey*—like the American remake of Camerini's film, *I'll Give a Million*— were instead in dialogue with the cultural life of 1930s America. For this reason, they developed a different perspective on similar issues. Particularly, as I argued in a previous section, such films supported a form of "ethical individualism" that sought to moralize economics by taking inspiration from the values of the American working-class culture of the 19th century.

With regard to the American reception of *Partire*, Harris T. Smith's brief review in *The New York Times* Americanized it by emphasizing the role that modernity played in the narrative and dismissing the function of tradition.[379] Specifically, Smith downplayed

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[379] Harris T. Smith, "At the Cine Roma," *The New York Times*, October 8, 1940: 31. The quotations below are from this source.

the role of the picturesque by not realizing that the synthesis between tradition and modernity was at the core of the film's ideological discourse. The American critic misunderstood the complexity of the relation between Neapolitan laziness and Milanese industriousness developed in the film. According to him, the film's main character, Paolo, eventually is "converted to the gospel of useful work." Also, Smith stated that Anna, Paolo's girlfriend and daughter of the factory owner Anteo Diana, is "business-like." These comments neglect the resolution of the tension between tradition and modernity that both Paolo and Anna realize. Indeed, as much as Paolo by the end of the film becomes a responsible manager *and* preserves his "Neapolitan" humanity, Anna softens her managerial attitude *and* acquires a southern and sentimental character. In other words, Smith transforms the Fascist *dialectic* of the film between old and new into a clear-cut *opposition* between such poles, by letting modernity overpower tradition.

To summarize my findings, American critics—like American films—to a large extent continued to view Italy according to old stereotypes: they associated it with gangsters, the opera, the picturesque, and great works of art. American film critics commonly perpetuated these stereotypes even when they reviewed Italian films that deeply interacted with Fascist ideology. In other words, by not assimilating or not acknowledging Fascist propaganda, American critics did not discuss in their reviews the alleged novelty of Fascist Italy, nor did they deal with specific strategies of Fascist culture such as the fascistization of the picturesque and the fantasy of deprivation.[380] On the contrary, they were very much inclined to detail the "Latin" temperament of some character, the beautiful views of Naples, and the melodies of some well-known opera singer. Sometimes, American critics interpreted Italian comedies through American

[380] See, again, Ch. 3 for a discussion of how Italian fiction films enacted such strategies.

cultural lenses, thereby misunderstanding again the films' cultural roots and ideological objectives. When required to comment on some overtly pro-Fascist film like *Scipione l'africano*, American critics tended to evaluate the film's narrative and stylistic solutions after quickly dispatching with the political component of the film in question. However, as World War II was taking shape at the turn of the 1940s, reviewers abandoned their apparently impartial attitude toward the Fascist dictatorship and began to blame openly Mussolini.

All these considerations lead to the conclusion that, with regard to the American audience, the Fascist regime was unable to spread successfully its "spiritual realizations" in the U.S. through fiction films.[381] My further and final step will consist in assessing the outcome of Fascist film propaganda among Italian-Americans.

[381] As discussed in the previous chapters, Italian Ambassador Augusto Rosso aspired to exploit Italian films to convey Fascist "spiritual realizations" in the U.S. See Augusto Rosso, "Propaganda cinematografica," dispatch of February 25, 1936, addressed to the Ministry for the Press and the Propaganda, in ACS, Minculpop, DGSP, PPSE, Box 220: Folder "Pellicole per S. Francisco di California."

Chapter 5
Fragmented Italianness: Italian-Americans' Film Reception

Fascist Values in the Italian-American Community: Contrasting Reactions

Was Italian fictional cinema an effective tool of propaganda among Italian-Americans? Were Italian-Americans aware of the ideological implications of Italian films and, if so, did they endorse or oppose them? While addressing, in the next pages, these issues and arguing that Fascist film propaganda generated both approval and criticism, I specifically focus my attention on the Italian-American community in New York City.[382]

In the 1930s around one million people of Italian origin occupied various neighborhoods of New York City: Manhattan, Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island. The lower east side in Manhattan was the neighborhood in which the largest part of Italian-Americans lived, and Elizabeth Street the area most heavily populated by Italian immigrants. The Italian community included the so-called *prominenti*, who held a relevant role in the American society as businessmen, professionals, and media owners. Yet, the majority of Italians belonged to the working class and lived in modest conditions; in their workplaces, they had to cope with the demands of the *padroni*, who regulated the distribution of jobs among Italian-Americans.[383]

[382] See Chapter 1 for an analysis of the distribution of Italian films in New York City.
[383] Some basic sources about the Italian-American community of the 1930s in New York City are: Federal Writers' Project, *The Italians of New York* (New York: Random House, 1938); Salvemini, *Italian Fascist Activities in the United States*; Donna R. Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change Among Italian Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984); Donald Tricarico, *The Italians of Greenwich Village: The Social Structure and Transformation of an Ethnic*

My primary focus is on the vibrant Italian-American cultural scene in 1930s New York City. This cultural context is helpful to understand the reading positions by Italian-Americans toward *Darò un milione*, *Il dottor Antonio*, and many other films. Since that context embraced, resisted, or ignored Fascist "spirituality," I propose that Italian films generated four reading positions in the Italian-American community, which depended on the spectators' political and cultural bias: the Fascist one, the anti-Fascist one, the Southernist one, and the "anti-Italian" one.[384]

Italian-American pro-Fascist culture in New York City included newspapers, journals, books, concerts, and stage productions, and frequently depicted Fascist Italy as the carrier of a "spiritual" regeneration, which overcame "materialism" through the support of traditional institutions like family and religion. In line with the *prominenti*, the authors of such cultural products, while not repudiating their host society, defined Fascism as a set of values that better coped with the economic crisis of the time. This shows that the Fascist Government's insistent propaganda on the "spirituality" of Fascism had some concrete resonances inside the Italian-American community, and it further attests the limitations of John P. Diggins' well-known thesis, according to which Italian-Americans did not know Fascist ideology and appreciated Mussolini only because

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Community (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1984); Robert Anthony Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985); Philip V. Cannistraro, ed., *The Italians of New York: Five Centuries of Struggle and Achievement* (New York: The New-York Historical Society and the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, 1999).

[384] For the concept of Southernism, I follow the insights of Giorgio Bertellini in *Italy in Early American Cinema*. Bertellini defines Southernism as "a picturesque poetics of passionate love, betrayal, and brigandism 'under the volcanoes'" that "permeated the […] Southern Italian official and popular culture, from theatre, music, and painting to printmaking and film" (*ibidem*, 7). Further, he adds: "Southernism identifies a cluster of essentialist value judgments dialogically juxtaposing Southern Italian landscapes and populations against ideas of modern nationhood and citizenship" (*ibidem*, 70). Accordingly, when I mention Southernism, I refer to the Southern melodramatic culture and I consider it as distinct from the Fascist conception of Italian national identity, which rejected the association between Italian and brigandism and tried, instead, to fascistize the picturesque (see Chapter 3).

he had given international prestige to Italy.[385]

Further, such a reworking of Fascist values demonstrates that Italian fiction films engaged in deep inter-textual relations with Italian-American culture. Films like *Darò un milione*, which dealt with the "spiritual crisis" of the modern era, echoed articles in *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* that praised the virtues of Fascist corporatism during the economic crisis. This chapter reconstructs such inter-textual connections by looking at diverse sources: articles in New York-based newspapers like *The Voice of Italy* and journals like *Giovinezza*, advertisements, and theatrical skits by the well-known actor Eduardo Migliaccio (Farfariello).[386]

The dialogue between this variety of sources and Italian films suggests that pro-Fascist Italian-Americans had the competence to decode the fascistization of the picturesque in *Il dottor Antonio* and the fantasy of deprivation in *Darò un milione*.[387] In order to test this hypothesis, I analyze film reviews by professional journalists. Particularly, I consider reviews published in *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* and the *Corriere d'America*, both owned by the businessman and Fascist advocate Generoso Pope.

The Italian-American community in New York City also included a diversified

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[385] I explored the intellectual component of Fascist propaganda and gave a preliminary reassessment of Diggins' argument in Chapter 2. Indeed, as I better stress below, Diggins' interpretation remains to some degree correct, because a part of Italian-Americans actually saw Mussolini as the person who had proved that Italians were not violent and backward. In Chapter 2 I also stressed that my *intellectual* analysis of the Fascist experience in the U.S. differs from the previous scholarship on Fascist propaganda abroad, which mostly focused on the *institutional* aspects of that propaganda. In fact, so far historians of Fascism have mainly studied the governmental branches devoted to propaganda in foreign states and their defense of the regime's short-term actions in internal and foreign policy. In doing that, they emphasized the regime's efforts to strengthen the nationalist cult among Italians, but they downplayed its attempt to shape that cult on specific values of Fascist ideology. See Garzarelli, *Parleremo al mondo intero*; Cavarocchi, *Avanguardie dello spirito*; Pretelli, *La via fascista alla democrazia americana*.

[386] The title *Giovinezza* derived from the song of the same name, written by Salvator Gotta and set to music by Giuseppe Blanc, which was the official hymn of the National Fascist Party.

[387] See Chapter 3 for a discussion of these issues.

anti-Fascist constituency. Such a constituency was composed of both leftist and anarchist supporters, whose newspapers and journals harshly criticized Mussolini's actions and the basic values of Fascist ideology. Anti-Fascists denounced the Fascist "idealist" revolution as the backdrop for anti-democratic measures and material interests, and at the same time they proposed a "spiritual" regeneration based on a leftist or anarchist platform. I analyze articles from the radical newspapers *Il Proletario* and *Il Corriere del Popolo* (San Francisco) in order to develop this argument.[388] Further, I also look at the anti-Fascist cultural context by focusing my attention on the novel *Cupido tra le camicie nere* (1937-38) by Clara Vacirca, wife of the exiled socialist deputy Vincenzo Vacirca.[389] This novel attacked the regime's propaganda regarding Fascist spirituality, and stressed both the violence of Fascist actions and the pursuing of personal interests by Fascist exponents. Overall, anti-Fascists' publications and their cultural production developed a strong dismissal of the main beliefs of Fascist ideology and, implicitly, of Italian films like *Darò un milione* and *Partire*, which conveyed such beliefs.

Other factions of the Italian-American community did not engage with Fascist ideology. On the one side, several Italian-Americans, coming from the south of Italy, supported Fascism because—as Diggins argued—Mussolini had significantly improved Italy's reputation, and not because they appreciated Fascist ideology.[390] Indeed, Southern Italians largely continued to identify Italy through the lens of the picturesque, the family, the Catholic religion—namely, through the values of their vernacular culture, and not

[388] In the case of *Il Corriere del Popolo*, I mention a newspaper not published in New York City. I do that because one issue of the *Corriere* presents an article that is particularly helpful to illustrate the radicals' system of values. Beyond *Il Proletario*, other notable New York-based anti-Fascist publications were *Il Martello*, *Il Pensiero*, *L'Unità*, *L'Unità del Popolo*, *Il Mondo*, and *La Strada*.
[389] Vacirca, *Cupido tra le camicie nere*.
[390] See Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*.

through the values of Fascist nationalism. On the other side, second-generation Italian-Americans tended to dismiss their Italian ancestry and to adapt to the customs of their host country. As Fascist and anti-Fascist supporters debated the actual capacity of the Italian regime to preserve tradition and embrace modernity, the Southern faction of the Italian-American community—in spite of having Fascist sympathies—associated Italy only with tradition; conversely, the youngest component of that community rejected Italian tradition and embraced American modernity. Moving from these assumptions, I also discuss, respectively, the Southernist reading and the "anti-Italian" reading of Italian films, thus stressing how much fragmented the notion of Italianness was inside the Italian-American community.

By highlighting overall aspects of the Italian-Americans' life, the study of these reading positions helps us to investigate a major theme of the Italian immigrant experience (and, in general, of any immigrant experience): the tension between assimilation and resistance to the host country. In his essay "Theorizing Italian American History: The Search for a Historiographical Paradigm," Gerald Meyer discusses the main scholarly perspectives of the past decades on this issue.[391] First, Oscar Handlin's volume *Uprooted* (1951) proposed that European immigrants, including Italians, largely adjusted to the customs of the American society by avoiding class conflicts and living in solidarity.[392] Then, in the essay "*Contadini* in Chicago: A Critique of the Uprooted" (1964) Rudolph Vecoli challenged Handlin's "assimilation" thesis by stressing the specificity of each immigrant experience and the Italian-Americans' preservation of

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[391] Gerald Meyer "Theorizing Italian American History: The Search for a Historiographical Paradigm," in *The Status of Interpretation in Italian American Studies*, edited by Jerome Krase (Stony Brook, NY: Forum Italicum Publishing, 2011), 164-184.

[392] Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migration That Made the American People* (New York: Grosset & Dunlop, 1951).

Italian mores in the U.S.[393] Subsequently, in the volume *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* (1984) Donna Gabaccia explored the life of Sicilian migrants in New York and argued that they tended to create a mix between the American and the Italian culture.[394] By entering into dialogue with such contributions, my chapter explores how the main constituencies of the 1930s Italian-American community either sought a mediation between assimilation and resistance (the *prominenti*) or were more inclined toward one of such poles: assimilation (the youngest generation) or resistance (the Southern component).

The Fascist Reception of Italian Films

The Fascist component of the Italian-American community in New York City was mostly associated with the *prominenti*. Businessman and media mogul Generoso Pope (1891-1950) was one of them. A native of Campania, Pope arrived poor in the U.S. in 1906 and within a few years became a rich entrepreneur by working in the construction and in the food business. In order to reinforce his prestige and influence, Pope also acquired several Italian-American newspapers. Most notably, in 1928 he purchased *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* (1880), the most popular Italian-American publication in New York City. *Il Progresso* significantly increased its circulation under Pope's direction during the 1930s. Other newspapers owned by Pope were the *Corriere d'America* (New York City) and *L'Opinione* (Philadelphia). The Italian magnate was also the proprietor of a radio station called WHOM, whose programs were constantly advertised in his

[393] Rudolph Vecoli, "Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of *The Uprooted*," *Journal of American History*, vol. 51, no. 3 (1964): 404-417.
[394] Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street*.

newspapers.[395]

In their statements to the press or in the public events at which they participated, the *prominenti* used to pay respect to the American society and to praise the opportunities that the U.S. had given them. At the same time, they also wanted to emphasize their Italian heritage and to promote the distinctive quality of the Fascist values, because Mussolini had strengthened their nationalist pride. Accordingly, the pro-Fascist Italian-American culture in New York City insisted in presenting Fascism as an original doctrine and a model of society from which the American capitalist society could take inspiration to deal with the economic crisis.

Fascist exponents in New York City sought to gain support from Italian-Americans by controlling local Catholic parishes.[396] They wanted to exploit the religious zeal of many Italian-Americans to make them appreciate the "spiritual" component of Fascism. Fascists also exerted a significant influence over the Italian-language schools, which often became sites of overt propaganda.[397] Other Fascist transmission belts were the association of The Order of the Sons of Italy and cultural institutions such as the

[395] On Generoso Pope, see Cannistraro, *Blackshirts in Little Italy*; Paul David Pope, *The Deeds of My Fathers: How My Grandfather and Father Built New York and Created the Tabloid World of Today* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010).
[396] On this topic, see the documents in Center for Migration Studies, New York City (NY), Collection Our Lady of Pompei Records, New York, N. Y.: Series II: Papers pertaining to Fr. Demo and the Parish. See also Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*; Mary Elizabeth Brown, "A Separate Feast: The Italian Influence on Catholic New York," in *Catholics in New York: Society, Culture, and Politics, 1808-1946*, edited by Terry Golway (New York: Fordham University Press/Museum of the City of New York, 2008), 27-39.
[397] About the Fascist propaganda in U.S. schools, see the documents in ASMAE, Direzione Generale Italiani all'Estero – Archivio Scuole: Archivio Scuole 1929-1935, and in ASMAE, D. G. R. C. Archivio Scuole 1936-1945. See also Pretelli, *La via fascista alla democrazia americana*, Chapters 2 and 3. In the Lower East Side of Manhattan, in New York City, the Tenement Museum hosts some old tenements originally inhabited by immigrants from various countries. In 2013 I attended a tour of the tenements and I also visited an apartment of a family of Italian immigrants in the 1930s. In that circumstance, the tour guide informed me that the anti-Fascist parents of the family in question complained about the Fascist indoctrination that their daughter received in a local Italian school. I mention this episode to further remark the role of Italian schools in the regime's propaganda. Thanks to Abigail Celis, doctoral student at the University of Michigan, for recommending me the Tenement museum.

Dante Alighieri Society.[398]

Pro-Fascist activists also tried to influence the leisure and consumerist side of the Italian-Americans' life. For example, the Italian theaters operating in the Times Square district—the Broadway Cine Roma, the various theaters managed by Clemente Giglio, and others—offered several kinds of spectacles, which often contained pro-Fascist messages: stage melodramas, comic sketches, songs, and films.[399] By looking at this cultural and intellectual context, I aim to explore the reworking of Fascist ideology in three distinct areas: journalism, publicity, and theatre.

Italy's "Spiritual Regeneration" in Newspapers and Journals Articles

Several New York-based Italian-American newspapers and journals offer key insights on the promotion of Fascist values in the U.S. during the 1930s. I discuss here some articles from the cultural journal *Giovinezza* and the newspaper *The Voice of Italy*.

One article in the May 1935 issue of *Giovinezza* collected positive opinions about Fascism from journalists around the world. The article's subheading mentioned the topics under examination, including "The Spiritual Revolution" and "The Corporative State." These arguments evoke the major issues of Fascist propaganda in the early 1930s: the ability of Mussolini's corporate plans to deal with the economic crisis and to mediate between business and ethics—as opposed to the mere materialism of capitalism and communism. Indeed, the piece quoted an article from the Uruguayan journal "Diario" that emphasized those issues. Particularly, the Uruguayan article, entitled "On the Corporative State," praised Fascist corporatism for being able to cope with the economic

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[398] The first detailed examination of the Fascist agencies in the U.S. was in Salvemini, *Italian Fascist Activities in the United States*.
[399] See Chapter 1 for an overview of the Italian-American theaters in New York City.

crisis and criticized the solutions to the crisis offered by both communism and capitalism:

> We are in a period of transition from one civilization to another that is more elevated and equitable; as opposed to the liberal and marxian conceptions, the world, in its crisis, requires the birth of a new concept: hierarchical and totalitarian in nature: it is the Corporative State which encloses all the living forces of collectivity.[400]

By suggesting that Fascist corporatism could be exported to Uruguay, this article also linked corporatism to Mussolini's alleged "spiritual revolution:"

> In this hour of tribulation, in which it is more than ever necessary to hold on to *the most pure, spiritual values*, to battle against the unrestrained passions […], the corporative formula […] opens up a luminous way.[401]

Several articles from *The Voice of Italy* developed the same association between Fascist economics and spirituality. In the first issue of the newspaper, dated July 6, 1935, a journalist named Igino Manecchia described the current situation as a "sfacelo generale:"

> Ovunque è subentrato un senso di stanchezza e di sfiducia, *ovunque il patrimonio ideale e spirituale è rimasto soffocato o disperso*.[402]

Manecchia then considered this negative condition a product of "historical materialism," which Fascist intellectuals associated with both Capitalism and Communism, and he predicted a triumph of the spiritual dimension over the material one:

> *Bisogna uscire dal materialismo storico, ossia dal determinismo economico, bisogna entrare e rimanere nel determinismo ideale e spirituale.* La crisi economica non c'entra! […] La rianimazione dello spirito di italianità non è una conquista e nemmeno un affare è un apostolato di volontà e di fede e se non dispiace un atto di nobiltà.[403]

Manecchia again deemed Italian nationalism and its "spiritual" component as a solution to the economic crisis.

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[400] F.A.M., "The Foreign Press Views Italy," *Giovinezza*, May 1935: 122-124. The quotation is from p. 123. The bibliographic data on the Uruguayan article are absent.
[401] *Ibidem*, 124. The emphasis is mine.
[402] Igino Manecchia, "Diretto richiamo," *The Voice of Italy*, July 6, 1935, 1. Italics are mine.
[403] *Ibidem*. Italics are mine.

Another journalist of *The Voice of Italy*, Vittorio E. De Fiori, presented similar arguments in an article entitled "L'America, l'Italia e gli italo-americani" and published in the same issue of the newspaper.[404] De Fiori openly criticized the America's economic model and its way of life:

> Quando si pensa all'America, par di sentire nelle orecchie e nel cervello il battito tormentoso delle locomotive spinte a velocità fantastica sulle linee ferroviarie; l'urlo lugubre e stridente delle sirene, la percussione dei magli nelle sonanti officine. […] Vien di pensare alle immense città metallurgiche […], agli scenari delle più fantastiche evoluzioni del dinamismo meccanico.[405]

By stressing that this model led to the economic crisis, De Fiori once again promoted a moral reawakening as a solution:

> Oggi il mondo intero avverte l'impellenza di *orientare spiritualmente* la vita delle moltitudini e di *abbandonare quel "monocordismo economico"* che, perché era coronato dal successo, giustificava ogni abdicazione a quelli che sono […] i valori morali dell'uomo. Intanto, come logica conseguenza, sul mondo si è abbattuta la crisi.[406]

In his article De Fiori also mentioned the virtues of Italian tradition by associating them with Roman monuments:

> I monumenti romani non avvertono il peso dei secoli. I grattacieli d'America rimangono deserti e spenti perché ai *businessmen* non conviene più pagare l'affitto […] degli spaziosi e modernissimi *floors* che servivano alla transazione di ingenti affari.[407]

By saying that Roman monuments "non avvertono il peso dei secoli," the author implied that they supported the "spiritual" needs of the present time because they conveyed the great values of the Roman civilization. At the same time, De Fiori contrasted Roman monuments to American skyscrapers, which appeared to him expressions of a society focused merely on business and economic transactions. That

[404] Vittorio E. De Fiori, "L'America, l'Italia e gli italo-americani," *The Voice of Italy*, July 6, 1935, 6 and 13.
[405] *Ibidem*, 6.
[406] *Ibidem*. Italics are mine.
[407] *Ibidem*.

said, pro-Fascist journalists did not want Italy to be identified only with its old monuments, since this could suggest its backwardness. Instead, they wanted to demonstrate that Italy could *both* meet the demands of progress and maintain the moral virtues expressed by its past achievements. Accordingly, many journal articles in pro-Fascist Italian-American newspapers depicted Mussolini's Italy as a synthesis between tradition and modernity.

The newspaper *Corriere Siciliano* (New York City) presented this topic by recounting a lively debate on the Sicilian town Partanna that was taking place in Italy.[408] The debate regarded an article published in the Florence-based newspaper *La Nazione*, which complained about Partanna's inability to embrace technological and architectural progress. *La Nazione*'s article evoked the stereotypical contrast between Italy's industrial north and its backward south—namely, the contrast that Fascist propaganda was trying to eradicate by depicting Italy as a synthesis between old and new. A journalist from Partanna named Benedetto Molinari had replied to *La Nazione*'s article by listing the achievements that the Fascist government had accomplished in the small Sicilian town. The *Corriere Siciliano* reprinted Molinari's defense of Partanna because it helped Italian-Americans to counteract Americans' prejudices about Italy's backwardness. In his article Molinari first described Partanna's successes in the past, addressing with irony the journalist from *La Nazione* that had criticized his town:

> Porgo all'assai cavalleresco amico il saluto […] della mia austera cattedrale, del mio merlato Castello trecentesco, delle mie vie e piazze […], della mia vasta Villa Garibaldi sempre fiorita, dei miei svariati belvederi, degl'incantevoli panorami.[409]

Then, by referring again to *La Nazione's* journalist, Molinari listed the

[408] See Benedetto Molinari, "Dov'è Partanna?," *Corriere Siciliano*, November 17, 1938, 5.
[409] *Ibidem*.

accomplishments of the "new" Partanna, the one shaped by the Fascist regime:

> Gli porgo inoltre all'unisono […] il vocio delle duecento radio ed il potere di quei fili che non ha visti e mi auguro che qualche signore, il quale potè impressionarsi ritorni tra di noi a bearsi della bella, singolare, progredita cittadina, marciante col passo fascista.[410]

This and the articles from *The Voice of Italy* and *Giovinezza* deal with the same issue of Mario Camerini's film *Darò un milione*; they all criticize the lack of good human values, and the distance from the lessons of tradition, in the economic realm of the time.[411] The character of Mr. Gold in *Darò un milione* raises this issue by mentioning the "crisi spirituale" that he is experiencing. Mr. Gold, a wealthy man annoyed by his lifestyle, is fighting against what De Fiori calls the "monocordismo economico" and Manecchia the "determinismo economico." Both he and the journalists in question offer the same solution to such concerns: the pursuing of a synthesis between morality and business.

Tradition and Modernity of Fascist Italy in Tourist Advertisements

Multiple tourist advertisements of Italy also promoted the reconciliation between tradition and modernity that was at the core of Fascist ideology. My first example is a tourist advertisement that appeared in the inside front cover of the journal *La Settimana* (New York City) and that blended old and new through both words and images (see Fig. 19 and Fig. 20).[412] The advertisement includes two photographs showing picturesque landscapes and works of art, which address canonical expectations about Arcadian Italy.[413] However, the advertisement's headline also pays attention to describing the

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[410] *Ibidem*.
[411] See Chapter 3 for a discussion of *Darò un milione.*
[412] See *La Settimana*, April 24, 1936: inside front cover.
[413] The link between tourist advertisements and the picturesque was well established in the decades prior to the advent of Fascism. This is due to the fact that, in spite of emphasizing the Italians' violent and decadent

country's up-to-date accommodations: "Italy offers a new conception—of travel economy, modern comforts, speedy transportation and the sheer Joy of Living!"[414] The text following this headline further develops the link between traditional and modern Italy:

> Americans now traveling in Italy and those who have recently returned are enthusiastic in their praises of a lovely and *rejuvenated* land. From sunny Sicily to the lakes of Lombardy, they behold the mighty symbol of a *new nation pulsing with youth*! They sense a *New Will among a united people who have restored the beauty and grandeur that are Italy's heritage. In Rome, "Cradle of Civilization," arises a New Eternal City*; in towns, villages, at the famous spas, in the mountains, everywhere there is unmistakable evidence of *an ideal bond uniting the Old with the New*.[415]

Fig. 19 and Fig. 20. *La Settimana*, April 24, 1936: cover and inside front cover.
Courtesy of the Immigration History Research Center (Minneapolis, MN).

An advertisement of Rome by the Italian Tourist Information Office (New York City, Chicago, and San Francisco), published in an issue of the cultural journal *The Vigo Review* (New York City), is also explicit in portraying Italy's capital as a combination of

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nature, the picturesque ultimately offered a romanticized depiction of Italy and thus it was functional to promote travels there. On these issues, see again Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema*, esp. Ch. 1 and 2.

[414] *Ibidem.*

[415] *Ibidem*. Italics are mine.

old and new (see Fig. 21 and Fig. 22).[416] In this advertisement, the emphatic sentence "The Grandeur that is Rome" accompanies a photograph of the Stadium of the Marbles (Stadio dei Marmi), the sport complex inaugurated by the regime in 1932. Close to it, the sentence "The Grandeur that was Rome" accompanies a picture of the Imperial Fora (Fori Imperiali), the well-known series of squares constructed between 46 BC and 113 AD. The advertisement's headline reconciles past and present by simply stating: "Enjoy them both in Italy." Once again, the main text further illustrates this concept:

> History has marched for centuries across the Seven Hills of Rome […]. The ancient Forum where once great Caesar trod… the majestic ruins of the Colosseum… […] these are the glories of Imperial Rome, the proud remnants of an ancient civilization. The grandeur of Rome lives on in the landmarks of a new civilization… in a splendid new Forum, a new Appian way… in a hundred enterprise which place the New Italy in the vanguard of modern progress. Come soon and enjoy *all* Italy.[417]

Fig. 21 and Fig. 22. *The Vigo Review*, vol. 1, no. 6 (October 1938): cover and back cover. Courtesy of the Immigration History Research Center (Minneapolis, MN).

In the May 1935 issue of *Giovinezza*, an advertisement of Italy again puts together an element representing the past and one representing the present, particularly a

[416] See *The Vigo Review*, vol. 1, no. 6 (October 1938): back cover.
[417] *Ibidem.* Italics are in the text.

picturesque mountain landscape and a ship (see Fig. 23 and Fig. 24).[418] Specifically, the advertisement showcases some touristic views in the background, and then emphasizes the ship's luxuries through the text and some pictures in the foreground.[419]

Fig. 23 and Fig. 24. *Giovinezza*, May 1935: cover and back cover.
Courtesy of the Immigration History Research Center (Minneapolis, MN).

All the above mentioned advertisements evoke the fascistization of the picturesque that characterized films like *Partire*, consisting in the insertion of Fascist overtones into a typical picturesque landscape (see Fig. 14, 16, and 18).[420] A comparison between the last advertisement that I took into consideration (Fig. 24) and the initial harbor sequence in *Partire* is particularly telling. In the advertisement the ship's modernity emphatically occupies the center of the page, by reminding us the close-up of a ship's smokestacks at the beginning of *Partire* (Fig. 13). At the same time, the

[418] See *Giovinezza*, May 1935: back cover.
[419] As they were promoting the Italian synthesis between tradition and modernity, Italian-American newspapers criticized, instead, those American advertisements that reproduced negative stereotypes about Italians. For example, one issue of *The Vigo Review* blamed a poster of the oil company Esso presenting "an Italian laborer of fifty years ago, with a hat 'a la calabrese', a red handkerchief around his neck, and a pair of bushy mustaches, playing an accordion." The article then stated: "It seems to us that if the Standard Oil Company cannot conceive a more appropriate representative of the modern Italians, it is bound to create ill-will among the thousands of Italian automobile owners who patronize their 'gas' stations." See "Italian Types of Yesterday," *The Vigo Review*, June 1938: 3-4.
[420] See Chapter 3.

coexistence—in the advertisement—of a touristic landscape and of a brand-new means of transportation bear striking similarities with *Partire's* long shot showing the indolent Neapolitan Paolo Veronda (Vittorio De Sica) poised between a ship and a picturesque landscape (Fig. 15). This visual and thematic affinity demonstrates once more that Italian films activated strong inter-textual links with Italian-American culture. My last example of this inter-textual framework comes from the theatrical scene.

The Imprint of Fascist Ideology in Farfariello's Macchiette Coloniali

Italian-American culture also contributed to the promotion of Fascist values in the U.S. In this regard, my attention focuses on the *macchiette coloniali* (colonial skits or sketches) of comic actor Farfariello.

Farfariello—which literally means "little butterfly" and informally indicates a "womanizer"—is the pen name of Eduardo Migliaccio (1882-1946), a native of Campania who moved to the U.S. in 1897 or 1898.[421] For most of his life, Migliaccio worked in New York City as a bank accountant, but from the early 1900s to the 1940s he also was a popular entertainer and showman, labeled by his Italian-American supporters as "il Re dei Macchiettisti" ("the King of the Character Clowns").

In his comic skits, Farfariello reinterpreted the experience of Italian immigrants in

[421] On Migliaccio's artistic trajectory, see, Esther Romeyn, "Worlds in between Worlds: Italian-Americans and Farfariello, Their Comic Double" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1990); Emelise Aleandri, *The Italian-American Immigrant Theatre of New York City* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1999); Hermann W. Haller, *Tra Napoli e New York: Le macchiette italo-americane di Eduardo Migliaccio* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2006); Esther Romeyn, *Street Scenes: Staging the Self in Immigrant New York, 1880-1924* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), esp. the Chapter "Juggling Identities: The Case of an Italian American Clown," 101-122; Nancy C. Carnevale, *A New Language, a New World: Italian Immigrants in the United States, 1890-1945* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), esp. the Chapter "The World Turned Upside Down in Farfariello's Theater of Language," 114-135; Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema*; Emelise Aleandri, *La Piccola Italia* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2012); Simona Frasca, *Italian Birds of Passage: The Diaspora of Neapolitan Musicians in New York* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

the U.S. by impersonating typical characters of the everyday life: the *prominenti* (bankers, doctors, presidents of associations), people from the criminal underworld, various kinds of American authorities (policemen, judges), and middle class and working class exponents of the Italian community. Farfariello often presented characters derived from the tradition of the *commedia dell'arte*: the Neapolitan Pulcinella, the rapacious Venetian merchant Pantalone, the Milanese Meneghino, the Sicilian Pasquino, and the Florentine Stenterello. His *macchiette* mostly were in verse and had a musical accompaniment. Migliaccio's language was a mixture of standard Italian, Italian dialects, English and Italianized English. Such a linguistic variety was functional to enact the challenges that Italian-Americans faced as they both adapted to the American way of life and strove to preserve their own ethnic identity.

Indeed, working-class Italian-Americans, who composed the bulk of the Italian community, lived a delicate balance between assimilation and resistance to the American society. The *prominenti* and middle class Italian Americans pressured them to Americanize, as well as to abandon their vernacular identity and to embrace the "more respectful" national Italian identity. In such a complicated scenario, Italian workers reacted in contrasting ways, and to a large extent they did not follow the *prominenti*'s injunctions: the older Italian-Americans refused the process of Americanization and "Italianization" by remaining devoted to a Southernist approach to their identity; the younger Italian-Americans felt detached from their Italian ancestry and attracted to American customs, which they identified with more freedom and entertainment. Farfariello's sketches created mockeries, parodies, and paradoxes about these aspects of the Italian immigrant life. As Ester Romeyn argues, the result of Farfariello's comic

efforts was ultimately educational for the spectators: his constant reworking of common social conflicts gave Italian-Americans hints and suggestions on how to act properly in their daily occupations.[422] In this sense, as Romeyn again contends, Farfariello's characters eventually shaped an Italian identity in which—beyond regional differences—all Italian immigrants could recognize themselves.[423] In other words, in spite of the fact that he constantly recurred to the Neapolitan dialect and more generally to the *vernacular* Southern tradition, Farfariello aimed to enhance the *nationalist* pride of his spectators—the very goal that the *prominenti* also pursued, albeit with a different strategy: the erasure of the vernacular component from the definition of Italianness.[424] I argue that Farfariello especially promoted his own blend of Southernist and nationalist values when Mussolini entered the scene, namely when the Fascist dictator was successfully promoting a new Italian identity.

Indeed, Farfariello injected some of his skits with Fascist values. For example, in *Il cafone patriota* he boasts of the Italians' attachment to their country by making overt references to Mussolini's nationalist project.[425] The protagonist of this sketch is a *cafone*, a figure of unpolished peasant that Farfariello used to both ridicule and depict with affection. As he blames the "uomo che si finge mericano" as an "animale" and a "mascalzone," the *cafone*, speaking in the first person, repeatedly pledges his loyalty to Italy through exclamations like "viva l'Italia!"[426] The *cafone* also pronounces such words in front of the American authorities, thereby compromising his request of a work permit.

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[422] See Romeyn, *Street Scenes*, 118-119.
[423] *Ibidem*, 119.
[424] A discussion on Farfariello's balance between the national identity and the vernacular one is also in Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema*, 273-275.
[425] See Haller, *Tra Napoli e New York*, 92-95.
[426] *Ibidem*, 92-93.

In the appendix to the skit, the *cafone* celebrates Italy as

> una terra italiana piena di tutti popoli italiani, la quale come fosse: li genovisi, li piamuntisi, senza contare li napulitani, li calavrisi e li siciliani, li quali sono pure taliani, 'e rumane e tuscane che se la fanno nelle terre taliane e sono pure taliane![427]

A praise of the Italian King, of "nostro Ducio," and the Pope follows such words. By identifying Italy through both its main authorities and its many regions, *Il cafone patriota* runs against parochialism and embraces, instead, the nationalist pride that Mussolini had been able to raise among Italian-Americans.

In another skit, *Parto pe ll'Africa amice arrivederci*, Farfariello supports the Italian war in Ethiopia through a character named Pascale (Pasquale).[428] Pascale, another kind of *cafone*, has decided to leave the U.S. to join the Italian army. The sketch focuses on different aspects of his immigrant life: family, work, and friendship. Pascale briefly introduces his romantic relationship and tells about his decision to leave his girlfriend. Then, he describes his duties as the "auseschippo" ("housekeeper") of a tenement and recounts his "victory" in a tense debate there with some residents. Pascale further praises his oratorical skills by mentioning a conversation on the Italian war made with some friends at a bar. Finally, Pascale mentions his interview with an Italian consul, in which he proclaims his enthusiasm for the war ("voglio sparà") and for Italy:

> 'E taliane 'America
> 'A patria nun s' 'a scordano.
> Evviva il duce e il Rre [sic].
> Uno' Due'…[429]

In one passage of this sketch, the character of Pascale also notes: "Io vado a civilizzare quelle barbare tribune."[430] Through this line, Farfariello embraced one of the

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[427] *Ibidem*, 94.
[428] *Ibidem*, 175-179.
[429] *Ibidem*, 179.

major arguments of Fascist propaganda, namely the regime's ability to bring progress in an underdeveloped country. Farfariello emphasized the "civilizing" nature of the Italian war in Africa to counteract the American prejudices about Italy's backwardness.

Another sketch, *L'aeroplane 'e Balbo*, underlined both Italy's progress and its greatness in the past.[431] Accordingly, Farfariello developed in it a specific value of Fascist ideology, the representation of Italy as a synthesis between tradition and modernity, further demonstrating that his work was in dialogue with the national identity promoted by Mussolini.

At the turn of the 1930s, the aviator and politician Italo Balbo (1896-1940) increased the Italian-Americans' affection toward their mother country through his well-advertised transatlantic flights.[432] By echoing that sentiment, in *L'aeroplane 'e Balbo* Farfariello stresses the emotion of Italian immigrants in assisting Balbo's accomplishments:

> Sfila 'ncielo ll'Italia!
> Nuie povere emigrate
> Nce asciuttamme na lagrema,
> Vedennole 'e passà!...[433]

In the light of this event, Farfariello asks Mussolini to explain that Italy is not backward anymore:

> Duce, tu ca si' ll'ommo d' 'o destino,
> c' 'a patria nosta tiene dint' 'e mmane,
> vuo' fà capì ca nun è 'o mandulino
> sultanto buono 'n mano a 'e taliane.[434]

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[430] *Ibidem*, 177.
[431] *Ibidem*, 82-83.
[432] Balbo completed two transatlantic flights in that period. First, he led the flight of twelve flying boats from Orbetello, Italy to Rio De Janeiro, Brazil between December 17, 1930 and January 15, 1931. Then, he led a round-trip flight of twenty-four flying boats from Rome to Chicago, Illinois by leaving on July 1, 1933 and returning the following month, on August 12.
[433] Haller, *Tra Napoli e New York*, 82.
[434] *Ibidem*.

After dismissing the canonical association of Italians with the mandolin, in the rest of the skit Farfariello shows his loyalty to Fascist ideology by imagining the fusion between ancient Rome and Balbo's airplane, and thus identifying Italy through the encounter of tradition and modernity:

E scenne Roma antica
'A dinto a st'arioplane
a chesta terra amica,
ca nce sape apprezzà.[435]

Finally, Farfariello postulates the synthesis between old and new in Fascist Italy through the figure of a "vicchiarello c' 'a bandiera'n mano," namely a war veteran who reinforces his nationalist pride in front of the young aviator' s accomplishments. To summarize, in line with Fascist propaganda *Il cafone patriota* boasted the *unity* of the country, from Piedmont to Sicily; *Parto pe ll'Africa amice arrivederci* and *L'aeroplane 'e Balbo* identified that unity through particular *values*, which pertained to Italy's ability to preserve its past accomplishments and to meet the demands of progress.

My analysis of articles and advertisements published in Italian-American newspapers and journals, as well as my examination of Farfariello's sketches, demonstrate to what extent Fascist ideology penetrated in the U.S. throughout the 1930s. How did such a phenomenon affect the reception of Italian fiction films inside the Italian-American community? My hypothesis is that the visual and thematic analogies between Italian films and Italian-American culture may have informed the spectators' reading strategies. By relying on this assumption, I suggest that Italian-Americans could well decode the films' ideological overtones. Articles and film reviews in Generoso Pope's newspapers *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* and the *Corriere d'America* offer useful data to

[435] *Ibidem*.

verify my conjecture.

The New Italy: Film Reviews in Pro-Fascist Italian-American Newspapers

Cinema was a relevant component of Fascist propaganda in the second half of the 1930s. At that time, in spite of multiple difficulties, the activity of the Broadway Cine Roma in New York City marked the propaganda's strongest effort.[436] The film program at the Cine Roma usually included a fiction film and one or more newsreels or documentaries. Since fiction films often had a melodramatic title and non-fiction films introduced Italy's present-day events, it would seem that the regime assigned to them different goals: the perpetuation of comforting cultural cliché, in the case of fiction films, the representation of the regime's current endeavors, in the case of non-fiction films. However, we know that Italian fiction films mediated between notions of both tradition and modernity.[437] Indeed, as pro-Fascist Italian-American newspapers and journals extensively covered Cine Roma's screenings, they constantly referred to Italian fiction films as meritorious expressions of the New Italy, and not just as representations of old Italian customs.

In particular, the reviews in *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* deemed Italian cinema proof of Fascist Italy's technological progress. One of the first films to be screened at the Cine Roma was *Re Burlone*, a comedy about the King of Naples in 1840, Ferdinando II di Borbone, and the young patriots fighting against him for Italy's unification. This film interprets the past of Italy through the lens of Fascist nationalism, and ends by showing some patriots escaping from prison in a picturesque location—another example of the

[436] On this topic, see Chapter 1.
[437] See Chapter 3.

fascistization of the picturesque in the Italian cinema of that time.[438] In its review of Guazzoni's film, *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* praised Cine Roma's owners by saying that the theatre "ha iniziato un movimento artistico degno della *nuova* Italia."[439] The same newspaper eulogized an historical film taking place in Reinassance Florence, *Lorenzino de' Medici*, by stating:

> gli italiani accorreranno a vedere questo capolavoro della *ringiovanita* industria cinematografica italiana, perché così potranno constatare personalmente il *progresso* che *l'Italia moderna* sta facendo anche in questo campo.[440]

The *Corriere d'America*, the second most popular newspaper owned by Generoso Pope, also praised the production values of the Italian fiction films screened at the Cine Roma. For example, its review of another historical film, *Ginevra degli Almieri*—set in Florence in 1400 and focused on the love story between a woman from a noble family and a humble painter—states that "questa pellicola dimostra luminosamente quali grandi passi abbia fatto l'Italia in questo ramo e quali e quanti altri maggiori è in via di farne."[441]

The *Corriere d'America* particularly emphasized the capacity of Italian films for defying stereotypes about Italy's backwardness. An article on *La cieca di Sorrento* [*The Blind Girl of Sorrento*, Nunzio Malasomma, 1934][442]—an adaptation of a popular 19th

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[438] See again Chapter 3 for this topic.
[439] "Le repliche di Re Burlone," *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, April 7, 1936, 5. Italics are mine.
[440] "Al Cine Roma," *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, April 18, 1936, 5. Italics are mine. *Lorenzino de' Medici*, set in the first half of the 16th century, focuses on the well-known Florentine family de' Medici. In particular, the film portrays the contrast between Lorenzino de' Medici and his cousin Alessandro, Duke of Florence, who acts as a tyrant and an oppressor of the Florentine people. By following the principles of Machiavellian realpolitik, Lorenzino plans Alessandro's murder to favor the rise to power of another of his cousins, the wise and astute Cosimo de' Medici. In dealing with issues of power, government, and corruption, Brignone's film once again evokes parallels between the past and the present. Since the Fascist regime used to see Cosimo de Medici as a precursor of Mussolini, the film seems to embrace a pro-Fascist perspective. Yet, in this case the parallel between Renaissance and present-day Italy is quite contradictory, since Lorenzino's reaction against a dictatorial figure also suggests a potential anti-Fascist reading of the film. On these opposite readings, see Landy, *Fascism in Film*, 187-190; Id., *The Folklore of Consensus*, 134-137.
[441] "Continua al Cine Teatro Roma il Successo di Amore e Denaro," *Corriere d'America*, March 14, 1937, 10-S.
[442] Released in the U.S. in 1936.

century *feuilleton* (1852) by Francesco Mastriani—notes that the Cine Roma is able to

> mantener viva quella fiamma di italianità scaturita dalle opere magnifiche compiute dal Regime Fascista e che in questi ultimi tempi ha acceso i cuori di tutte le masse nostre immigrate e ha fatto ricredere la gioventù Italo-Americana che aveva dell'Italia un falso concetto della sua civiltà, della sua sorte e della sua potenza. Le documentazioni filmizzate che si presentano al "Cine Roma" compiono senza molto sforzo il miracolo della trasformazione psicologica degli increduli e dei falsi informati.[443]

The article argues that Italian films convinced even young Italian-Americans, namely those who tended to reject their ethnic heritage because of the negative stereotypes about their country of origin, of Italy's progress.

Italian-American newspapers also evoked the "spiritual" relevance of Italian films. A month after the opening of the Cine Roma, an article in *Il Progresso* collected the praise by several Italian newspapers for the new theatre.[444] The article also mentioned the comments of a newspaper published in Rome, *Ottobre*, which stressed the patriotic role of the Cine Roma in presenting the best products of Italian cinema. *Ottobre* invited Italians in New York City to attend Cine Roma's screenings with the following words: "Gli italiani vadano sempre al 'Cine-Roma' per appagare le loro esigenze artistiche e le loro *soddisfazioni spirituali*."[445] Overall, all the articles that I have considered so far in this section demonstrate that pro-Fascist publications used to connect Italian films to the core beliefs of Fascist ideology, specifically to the notions of Italy's modernity and Italy's spirituality.

Other reviews in *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* and the *Corriere d'America* focused on the specific ideological overtones of the films under consideration. To name one example, the review of *L'armata azzurra* in *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* links the

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[443] "Seconda Settimana di 'La Cieca di Sorrento,'" *Corriere d'America*, August 9, 1936, 4-S.
[444] "Il Cine Roma e la stampa d'Italia," *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, April 29, 1936: 5.
[445] *Ibidem*. Italics are mine.

film's narrative to the Fascist dialectic between tradition and modernity.[446] Gennaro Righelli's film recounts the adventures of some aviators of the Italian army: its main propaganda goal is to celebrate the airplanes' technological efficiency, as well as the aviators' bravery, heroism, and willingness to sacrifice. Not surprisingly, the review in question starts with an emphatic boast about the Italian army: "Il titolo del film indica subito di che cosa si tratta: l'Aviazione Militare Italiana, che è assurta ad una *potenza straordinaria ed imponente*."[447] To further emphasize this point, the anonymous reviewer also notes:

> Il Ministero dell'Aeronautica ha messo a disposizione del Direttore del Film interi squadroni aerei con centinaia di apparecchi, i migliori assi dell'Aviazione e gli aereoporti più importanti dove si notano *le più moderne e perfettissime attrezzature*.[448]

Then, the review stresses that, beyond this semi-documentarian representation of the Italian army, *L'armata azzurra* also showcases the characters' emotions and sentiments:

> Tutto in esso è vita, palpito, emozione. Attraverso una delicata storia d'amore rifulgono figure d'eroi. […] Il lavoro potrebbe definirsi la più bella e più superba sintesi dell'eroismo dell'aviazione italiana, dello spirito di cameratismo degli ufficiali aviatori, reso manifesto attraverso fatti drammatici e vicende passionali.[449]

Thus, the review makes clear that in *L'armata azzurra* the narrative conventions of a sentimental drama accompany the images of the aviators' flights. The journalist is conscious that, in line with the Fascist ethos, Righelli's film "corrects" the display of modernity through the purity and authenticity of the Italian character. In other words, by stressing both the characters' "heroism" and their "passional affairs," the review of

[446] "L'Armata Azzurra al Cine Roma," *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, December 11, 1937, 5.
[447] *Ibidem*. Italics are mine.
[448] *Ibidem*. Italics are mine.
[449] *Ibidem*.

L'armata azzurra appropriately identifies the film's balance between tradition and modernity. Ultimately, this demonstrates that pro-Fascist Italian-Americans had the capacity to decode the ideological overtones of Italian films.

In an article published a day later, *Il Progresso* summarized the intersection, in the film, of the sentimental component and of the military one by saying that *L'Armata Azzurra* "ha destato vivo interesse per l'alto spirito animatore degli Ufficiali-Aviatori e per la drammaticità delle vicende passionali."[450] Yet, not all the constituencies of the Italian-American community were keen to accept the propaganda for the "New Italy" that this and other film reviews in *Il Progresso* and the *Corriere d'America* conveyed. Indeed, the Fascist attempt to impose its own hegemonic discourse among Italian-Americans encountered several obstacles and forms of opposition in New York City.

The Anti-Fascist Reading Position (I): Leftist and Anarchist Newspapers

The Italian-American community in New York City included constituencies that utilized journalism and the arts to promote values that were not aligned with the Fascist conception of Italianness. First, there was a combative anti-Fascist faction, composed of anarchist, socialist, and communist individuals and organizations. Notable representatives of this anti-Fascist constituency were anarchists such as Enrico Malatesta (Errico Malatesta) (1853-1932) and Carlo Tresca (1879-1943), and left-wing figures such as the

[450] "L'Armata Azzurra al Cine Teatro Roma," *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, December 12, 1937, 6-S. See also how an article of *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* relates to the Fascist dialectic between tradition and modernity a film soon to be released and set in Naples, *San Giovanni decollato* (1940) by Amleto Palermi: "A un nuovo film su Napoli pensa Amleto Palermi […]: a un film—a quanto si dice che, riportando sullo schermo il profumo di quel 'folklore' napoletano spesso così male interpretato da molti altri cineasti di nostra conoscenza, vorrà esprimere *la spirituale evoluzione della cosiddetta 'vecchia Napoli' verso il nuovo clima morale e sociale suscitato dal Fascismo*" ("Un film napoletano," *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, December 15, 1940, 6-S. Italics are mine). In spite of this presentation, and in spite of the fact that Palermi had indeed modernized Naples' picturesque in *Partire* (see Chapter 3), *San Giovanni decollato*—a comedy with stock characters and situations—seems to rely conventionally on the picturesque stereotypes.

poet Arturo Giovannitti (1884-1959), history professor Gaetano Salvemini (1873-1957), and East Harlem congressman Vito Marcantonio (1902-1954).[451]

The Italian radicals, who used to call themselves *sovversivi* ("subversive"), expressed their beliefs through their own culture: they owned newspapers, theaters, libraries, and orchestras. Notable radical newspapers were *Il Proletario* and Carlo Tresca's *Il Martello*, both published in New York City. Well-known artists belonging to this political spectrum were the mentioned writer Arturo Giovannitti, Pietro Di Donato (1912-1991), author of the proletarian novel *Christ in Concrete* (1939), and sculptor Onorio Ruotolo (1888-1966), who founded in New York the Leonardo Da Vinci Art School (1923-41).[452] With regard to theatre, one popular artist was Riccardo Cordiferro (pen name of Alessandro Sisca, 1875-1940), who wrote several plays with a socialist message.[453]

Leftist and anarchist Italian-American newspapers and journals did not comment on Italian fiction films. However, the absence of reviews does not prevent us from discussing an anti-Fascist reading position of *Darò un milione* and *Il dottor Antonio*. In fact, the anarchist and leftist culture of the time thoroughly counteracts Fascist ideology and represents an indirect rebuttal of the films that conveyed that ideology. In order to

[451] The bibliography on anti-Fascist activities in the U.S. is quite extensive. Notable contributions include: Donna R. Gabaccia, *Militants and Migrants: Rural Sicilians Become American Workers* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutger University Press, 1988); Philip V. Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer, eds., *The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism: Politics, Labor, and Culture* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2003); Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution: Italian Women's Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Marcella Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture: The Idealism of the* Sovversivi *in the United States, 1890-1940* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2011).

[452] Pietro di Donato, *Christ in Concrete* (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1939).

[453] In 1893, Riccardo Cordiferro founded, along with his father Francesco and his brother Marziale, the cultural journal *La Follia di New York*. In the first decades of the twentieth century *La Follia* influentially tried to promote the integration of Italian-Americans in the U.S, by featuring articles of various kinds on their life as immigrants. When Fascism rose to power, the journal oscillated between criticism and acceptance of it.

analyze this rejection of Fascist cultural propaganda, I examine both the call for an anti-Fascist "spiritual" regeneration in some newspapers of the time and the anti-Fascist appropriation of the melodramatic tradition in the serialized novel *Cupido tra le camicie nere* by Clara Vacirca.

Italian-American leftist and anarchist newspapers heavily criticized Fascist values. They often proposed their own plan for a "spiritual" regeneration, implicitly attacking the "spiritual" reawakening that Mussolini's emissaries were staunchly promoting. In the 1930s, this competition between left and right for this "spiritual" way of life was the result of the economic crisis: at that time, both the Fascist and the anti-Fascist factions promised to offer the best solution to survive the financial unrest and to finally gain a "moral economics"—to use the expression coined by American historian Robert McElvaine.[454]

With regard to the anti-Fascist campaign, an article in *Il Proletario* carrying the "idealist" title "L'uomo che si eleva" is particularly significant.[455] Speaking in general of the "società presente" (and not specifically of the Fascist regime in Italy), the author of the article, a certain Giovanni Camillo, first stresses that the moral development of people depends on their freedom; then, he attacks the institutions that, in his perspective, limit that freedom through their violence and authority: the church, the state, the family, and the private property. In the author's view, only socialism can grant people freedom, economic stability, and a renewed process of moral uplift. The following passage shows how Camillo reinterprets the Fascist well-known idealist lexicon through the lens of his leftist ideology:

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[454] See McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, 196-223.

[455] Giovanni Camillo, "L'uomo che si eleva," *Il Proletario*, 19 March 1938, 2.

> Il socialismo come panacea per por fine ai mali della società che la corrodono non è che un palliativo. […] *Il benessere dell'uomo non sta soltanto nella questione economica*, perché non gli abbisognano soltanto *cose materiali*, ma anche *soddisfazioni dello spirito*: autonomia individuale, libertà personale, mutua cooperazione, o azione volontaria… […] Non v'è possibilità di *ascensione materiale e spirituale dell'umanità* finché non si siano abbattuti la chiesa lo stato, la proprietà e la famiglia.[456]

Another article in *Il Corriere del Popolo* (San Francisco) stresses that the Fascist and Nazi governments, in spite of their professed anti-capitalism, are at the service of big industries, and that Fascist and Nazi leaders take advantage of their positions to accumulate wealth.[457] The article criticizes the motto "nudi alla meta," which the School of Fascist Mysticism (Scuola di Mistica Fascista) diffused and made popular. The School arose in Milan in 1930 to revive the goals of the early Fascist movement and to shape the future exponents of the National Fascist Party. Its motto "nudi alla meta" invited adherents to favor the spiritual life over the material one, in line with the Fascist nationalist project. The article in *Il Corriere del Popolo* blames the material interests that lay behind the rhetoric of that expression and, more generally, behind the "maschera idealista" of Fascism:

> Nudi alla Meta…
> Non è inopportuno ricordare la *maschera idealista* di cui si è coperto e si copre il fascismo di tutti i paesi per combattere e distruggere il movimento operaio sindacale. […]
> "Nudi alla meta"! è stato il grido dei fascismi!
> *Intanto però tutti i gerarchi nazisti si sono accaparrati posti lucrativi, accumulando ricchezze fantastiche*.[458]

These articles from *Il Proletario* and *Il Corriere del Popolo* further confute Diggins' idea that there was no circulation of Fascist values in the U.S., since they demonstrate that those values were indeed at the center of a fierce debate between Fascist

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[456] *Ibidem*. Italics are mine.
[457] "Anticapitalismo di Hitler," *Il Corriere del Popolo*, 9 November 1939, 1.
[458] *Ibidem*. Italics are mine.

and anti-Fascist supporters.

More specifically, what kind of interaction did these anti-Fascist publications establish with Fascist film propaganda? I address this question by referring again to *Darò un milione*. As mentioned before, in Camerini's film a millionaire named Mr. Gold asks a beggar who just attempted suicide if a "crisi spirituale" is the cause of his desperation. However, the beggar replies that a "crisi finanziaria" is plaguing him. Indeed, the two characters experience a reverse condition: Mr. Gold is *spiritually* poor, but *economically* rich; the beggar is *spiritually* rich, but *economically* poor. In order to overcome his "crisis," Mr. Gold reconciles money and sentiment by enacting a fantasy of deprivation that is in line with Fascist ideology: he and his girlfriend eventually deserve a wealthy lifestyle because they have been willing to live in poverty.[459] In doing that, *Darò un milione* does not question the existing social order and the division of the society into classes. The anti-Fascist articles analyzed above indirectly criticize Camerini's film because they promise the reconciliation between money and ethics through a challenge to the *status quo*. They cannot accept the idea that to solve the "crisi spirituale" of the present times the current social structure remains untouched and that wealthy people like Mr. Gold maintain their advantages. Certainly, in *Darò un milione* Mr. Gold's girlfriend, a poor circus employee, at the end changes her class status, but this happens because she shows goodness and generosity—what the article in the *Corriere del Popolo* would call an "idealist mask"—and not because she recognizes social injustice or questions class privileges. An attack to the Fascist notion of spirituality—and, more generally, to the Fascist model of society—is also at the core of Clara Vacirca's *Cupido tra le camicie nere*.

[459] See Chapter 3 for a discussion of these issues.

The Anti-Fascist Reading Position (II): Cupido tra le camicie nere *(1937-38)*

In 1937 the anti-Fascist journal *La Strada* (New York City) began to publish, in serial form, the novel *Cupido tra le camicie nere* by Clara Vacirca (born Palumbo).[460] The following year, the journal's publishing company released Vacirca's novel in the volume format.[461] Vacirca had escaped from Italy and moved to the U.S. with her husband, the socialist deputy (and writer himself) Vincenzo Vacirca. *Cupido tra le camicie nere* is a *feuilleton*—or *romanzo d'appendice*, in the Italian definition—centered on the love story between a woman called Laura, living in a small town (whose name is never mentioned), and an anti-Fascist activist called Marco. As Italian culture of the *ventennio* used to fascistize well-established cultural traditions such as the melodrama and the picturesque, *Cupido tra le camicie nere* followed the same strategy, although with the opposite political goal. In fact, in her novel Vacirca replicates the narrative techniques of serial melodramas—which became common in the course of the 19th century—and she injects them with anti-Fascist beliefs, so seeking to take that ground back from fascists.[462]

Indeed, the melodramatic elements of Vacirca's novel are numerous: the rigid opposition between good and evil, the accumulation of climaxes, a love story between characters from different classes (Laura belongs to a wealthy family, Marco comes from

[460] The first episode appeared in *La Strada*, July 1937: 26-31.

[461] Vacirca, *Cupido tra le camicie nere*. A brief discussion of Vacirca's novel appears in Martino Marazzi, *Voices of Italian America: A History of Early Italian American Literature with a Critical Anthology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011); Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture*; Francesco Durante and Robert Viscusi, *Italoamericana: The Literature of the Great Migration, 1880-1943* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

[462] A classic study on 19th century melodrama—focused, especially, on stage melodramas and their influence on novelists like Balzac and Henry James—is Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976). On the study of *romanzi d'appendice* and *feuilletons*, the work of Umberto Eco was pioneering. See, especially, Umberto Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati: Comunicazioni di massa e teorie della cultura di massa* (Bompiani: Milan, 1964); Id., *Il superuomo di massa: Studi sul romanzo popolare* (Cologno Monzese: Cooperativa scrittori, 1976).

a lower class), the contrast between love and personal obligations (Marco puts in danger his political fight and the tranquility of Laura's family by having an affair with her), familial tensions (Laura's father disapproves the love affair of his daughter). The novel first follows the separate trajectories of the two lovers: Laura suffers love pains in her small town, where acts of Fascist violence constantly terrorize citizens; Marco, instead, lives in Rome, where he both practices as a doctor and pursues his clandestine fight against Mussolini's regime. Finally, Laura abandons her town and reaches Marco in Rome. The novel's ending is dramatic, since the regime arrests Marco and puts him in prison. However, a letter from him to Laura gives a message of hope for the future.

The novel deconstructs the regime's obsessive propaganda regarding the "spiritual" nature of Fascism. One passage of the book focuses on the arrival of an important official of the Fascist Party in the small town in which Laura lives. The town's mayor, don Beppe Merlotti, carefully plans this event in order to guarantee its success. As the official from Rome arrives, don Beppe introduces him with a speech from the balcony of the town hall. His words rework the well-known Fascist dialectic between spirituality and materialism:

> Il Regime ha segnato in questo paese, in questa provincia, come ovunque in Italia, il ritmo della sua rapida ascesa, ed uomini di ferrea volontà hanno guidato questo cammino. *Non è soltanto avanzata di opere materiali, ma è avanzata di spiriti.*[463]

However, something unexpected disrupts don Beppe's speech: the unfolding of a giant red flag on one hill surrounding the town. The flag's sudden appearance questions the ideological assumptions of Beppe's speech. Further, to some extent this flag is a response to the fascistization of the picturesque enacted in films like *Il dottor Antonio* and

[463] Vacirca, *Cupido tra le camicie nere*, 52. Italics are mine.

Partire.[464] In this case, it is an anti-Fascist symbol that "appropriates" a typical Italian landscape, by offering a leftist version of the picturesque.

The rest of the novel continues to question Fascist ideology through an insistent narrative trope, which replicates the argument of the aforementioned article from *Il Corriere del Popolo*:[465] the characters supporting Fascism are mere opportunists, who only care about getting money or power through their political allegiances. In other words, such characters demonstrate that Fascist people actually pursue material gains, thus contradicting Don Beppe's emphatic remark on the "avanzata di spiriti." To mention a couple of examples, a cousin of Laura named Sara, who is also in love with Marco, gets married with a wealthy Fascist politician only for the social and economic benefits that such a wedding entails. Don Beppe himself—in his duties as the town's mayor—is more interested in oppressing his citizens through taxes and coercive actions than in pursuing the nation's "spiritual" goals. In Vacirca's view, both the genuine love story between Laura and Marco and Marco's altruistic fight for the freedom of his nation sharply contrast with the mundane interests of Sara e Don Beppe, and they truly convey a "spiritual" conception of life.

Like the articles taken into consideration in the previous section, *Cupido tra le camicie nere* refutes Fascist ideology and opposes the values that Italian fiction films were trying to promote in the U.S. Accordingly, it suggests that anti-Fascists living in the U.S. had the intellectual tools to criticize the synthesis between spirituality and materialism made by *Darò un milione* and to promote their own alternative solutions for the accomplishment of ethical goals.

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[464] Again, see Chapter 3 for an analysis of this topic.
[465] "Anticapitalismo di Hitler," *Il Corriere del Popolo*.

The Southernist Reading Position

In 1930s New York, a part of Italian-Americans still associated Italianness with their vernacular identity and resisted pressures to Americanize. Belonging mainly to the working class and to the first generation of immigrants, such people came from the south of Italy and identified their mother country through picturesque views and melodramatic narratives.[466] In line, in this case, with Diggins' thesis, these Italian-Americans largely supported the Fascist regime because Mussolini had given prestige to Italy, and not because they were appreciative of specific Fascist values.[467] In this context, several stage productions of the Italian-American theatre carried pro-Fascist messages and, at the same time, kept conveying melodramatic conventions in order to satisfy the spectators' expectations. As a result, in spite of their pro-Fascist discourse, such melodramas defined Italianness through *vernacular* values that—ultimately—were not consistent with the Fascist *national* identity.

One play that shows the tension between the vernacular and the national conceptions of Italianness is *L'eroe della guerra italo-etiopica ovvero un delitto in famiglia* by Rocco De Russo—a playwright and an actor who for many years toured the U.S. with his company "Arte Vera."[468] *L'eroe della guerra italo-etiopica* is one of the plays that Italian-American authors wrote during the Ethiopian war to celebrate the virtues of Italian soldiers. The duplicity of its title, which refers to the war *and* to family issues, makes clear its contradictory nature. Indeed, on the one side the play praises the Italian effort in Ethiopia through the character of Roberto, a soldier of Mussolini's army.

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[466] On melodramas in the Italian-American theatre, see Aleandri, *The Italian-American Immigrant Theatre of New York City*; Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema*; Aleandri, *La Piccola Italia*.
[467] See Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism.*
[468] De Russo's main body of work is at the IHRC in the collection De Russo, Rocco, Papers. *L'eroe della guerra italo-etiopica ovvero un delitto in famiglia* is in Series 2. Plays, Box 1, Folder 9.

On the other side, the play, entirely set in Italy, seems more interested in dealing with the well-consumed repertoire of the Southernist melodrama. In fact, it introduces sexual predators, virtuous women, and issues of honor and revenge that echo numerous Southernist melodramas staged in U.S. theaters since the last decades of the 19th century.

The play mainly focuses on three characters: Antonietta, Roberto's wife; Teodolinda, Roberto's sister; and Barone De Sardi, Teodolinda's would-be husband. As Roberto is in Ethiopia, De Sardi tries to seduce Antonietta and compromise her honor. Teodolinda intervenes to help her sister-in-law, and eventually kills De Sardi to protect her. Having come back from Africa, Roberto takes responsibility for the crime, and explains to the judges that he killed De Sardi for a right cause—namely, to safeguard the integrity of his family. Indeed, the play deems Teodolinda's act of violence as appropriate because it is addressed toward a villain. This depiction of a "right" violence, which solves a question of honor, presents Italians in a way that the Fascist regime was trying to eradicate. Mussolini wanted to contrast the stereotype of Italians as violent people and to portray them as active, brave, and disciplined persons. Thus, although De Russo celebrates the Fascist enterprise in Ethiopia through the character of Roberto, he perpetuates conventions of the Southernist cultural tradition that do not adhere to the Fascist nationalist project.

Indeed, the 1930s plays by De Russo that do not contain overt references to the Fascist regime further attest the prominence of the vernacular values over the national ones in his opus. In such works, the vernacular ethos sharply contrasts with the Fascist synthesis between tradition and modernity. The play *Zappatore*, for example, testifies to

this phenomenon.[469]

As previously noted, in the 1920s *Zappatore* became one of the most famous Neapolitan *sceneggiate*.[470] Even a film adaptation of it, directed by Gustavo Serena, reached the U.S. in the early 1930s. De Russo wrote his own version of this well-known *sceneggiata* in order to attract a large audience. Indeed, as he admits in his unpublished autobiography, *Zappatore*—also advertised with the title *Signori e zappatori ovvero Il cuore spezzato di una madre*—was one of his biggest successes in the U.S. theaters from the 1930s to the 1950s.[471]

The play is divided into three acts. The first act, set in the countryside around Naples, introduces its main characters: Gaetano Geremia, his wife Maddalena, and their son Antonio. Gaetano and Maddalena are simple-minded farmers; Antonio, who pursued his studies thanks to his parents' efforts, is a lawyer in Naples. While glorifying the moral virtues of the honest farmers, this act stresses Antonio's disaffection toward both his parents and his humble origins. The life in the city seems to have morally corrupted him. His occasional sexual encounter with Rita, a young woman who lives with his parents and is in love with him, stresses this point; in fact, according to the moral code typical of the *sceneggiata*, Antonio violates her honor through that encounter. The act's final scenes heighten the contrast between the city and the countryside. Antonio's girlfriend Elvira unexpectedly arrives at Gaetano's house and immediately proves to be a snobbish person from Naples. Her presence creates embarrassment in Antonio, who has lied to her about

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[469] Rocco De Russo, *Zappatore*, in IHRC, De Russo, Rocco, Papers, Series 2. Plays, Box 1, Folder 15.
[470] See the section "Early 1930s: American Critics Reframing Old Italy Through Italian Films" in Chapter 4.
[471] See Rocco De Russo, *Brani della carriera artistica dell'artista Comm. Rocco De Russo: Nulla della vita privata, tranne qualche cenno accademico*, 67, in IHRC, De Russo, Rocco, Papers, Series 1. Autobiographical, Box 1, Folder 1.

the social condition of his family and now tries to distance himself from his parents. The outcome of this situation is very tense: Gaetano and Maddalena break with Antonio because of his lack of respect toward them.

The second act, which takes place two years later, is set in Naples and further highlights the contrast between the city and the countryside. As Antonio is celebrating his birthday, Gaetano makes an unexpected visit to him. The farmer's naive attitude strongly contrasts with the elegant atmosphere of the event, and the meeting ends with Gaetano blaming Antonio for his pretentious lifestyle. The reconciliation between father and son seems impossible at this point.

The third act brings back peace and serenity in Geremia's family. Antonio recognizes the arrogance of his life in Naples and comes back home. He decides to live as a *zappatore* and to marry Rita, thereby rejecting his job as a lawyer and his connections with the city. Gaetano joyously approves his son's choice by telling him:

> E mo ricordate ca dinta a famiglia nosta nun nce stanno cchiu avvucate, nun nce stanno cchiu signure. Da ogge in poi avimma essere tutte zappature. […] E tu mo stracciale chilli libre, ca nce so custate sudore 'e sango e lagreme cucente e amare. Tu pure zapparraie a terra, vicino a tatillo tuie, ca nun lassarraie mai cchiu.[472]

Through this praise of the farmer's life, *Zappatore* refuses to accomplish an imperative of Fascist 1930s cultural policy, the synthesis between old and new, namely between *strapaese* and *stracittà*. A comparison of this play with Amleto Palermi's *Partire* clarifies De Russo's distance from the Fascist intellectual mindset. In order to demonstrate Italy's embrace of modernity, *Partire* reconciles the opposite poles of the city and the countryside through the fascistization of the picturesque.[473] On the contrary,

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[472] De Russo, *Zappatore*, 34.
[473] See the analysis of this film in Chapter 3.

Zappatore praises the simplicity of honest people living in the countryside and condemns the city as a site of moral perdition. In its refusal of the Fascist call for modernity, De Russo's play confirms the tension between the vernacular identity and the national one in the Italian-American community. In such a scenario, the showcasing of modernity in *Partire* and in other films likely met indifference or disagreement among those Italian-American spectators that preferred to remain aligned to the Southern cultural heritage.

The "Anti-Italian" Reading Position

In Chapter 4 I proved that the Fascist attempt to modernize the image of Italy was not effective with American people, who persisted in associating Italy with violent individuals and picturesque landscapes. In the previous sections of this chapter, I showed that the Fascist effort neither worked with Mussolini's opponents nor with that segment of Italian-Americans still faithful to picturesque Italy. That same effort was unproductive even with the majority of second generation Italian-Americans, who wanted to assimilate the customs of the American society and did not care about Italian politics. Indeed, by growing up in an environment that kept perpetuating negative bias toward Italian immigrants, young Italian-Americans aimed to adapt to the lifestyle of their American friends of the same age.[474]

Indeed, Fascist publications of the time frequently blamed the youngest exponents of Italian-American families for embracing the "materialist" side of the American

[474] On this issue, see, for example, William Foote Whyte, *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1943); Lawrence Frank Pisani, *The Italian in America* (New York: Exposition Press, 1957), 124-162. Thomas J. Ferraro discusses how in the last decades, after losing contact with their heritage, Italian-Americans have mostly redefined their notion of Italianness through Hollywood films in *Feeling Italian: The Art of Ethnicity in America* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), 128-142.

society. A 1936 article in *La Settimana*, "La famosa Centosedicesima strada" by Costantino Catanzaro, offers an example of this criticism.[475] The article is centered on the Little Italy of Harlem in New York City. Its introductory paragraph boasts the Little Italy in question through the canonical blend of past virtues ("La 'Piccola Italia' di Harlem, custode gelosa delle tradizioni, dei colori e delle molteplici voci dell'Italia Meridionale"[476]) and present accomplishments ("sono balzati […] da essa uomini che occupano i migliori posti del mondo politico americano, della magistratura, delle professioni e del Commercio"[477]). The paragraph finally rejects the stereotypical view of Italian as criminals by saying that "molte tristi dicerie sul nostro conto hanno avuto, così, la loro smentita."[478]

After these remarks, the piece details the Italian customs in Harlem's 116th Street. Catanzaro stresses that most of the people living there are from the south of Italy (especially from Calabria, Campania, and Sicily) and describes their colorful activities: their markets, shops, rituals, and festivities. In this last respect, Catanzaro gives emphasis to the annual celebration for the Madonna del Carmine on July 16th, which he deems as particularly representative of the Italian-Americans' Catholic faith.[479] Then, in order to counteract the prejudices about Italians, Catanzaro lists the successes of Italian-Americans in politics, justice, art, and other fields. For example, he mentions Fiorello La Guardia, the New York mayor; Vito Marcantonio, member of the House of Representatives; Salvatore Cotillo, member of the New York State Supreme Court; the

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[475] Costantino Catanzaro, "La famosa Centosedicesima strada," *La Settimana*, March 20, 1936: 11, 16.
[476] *Ibidem*, 11.
[477] *Ibidem*.
[478] *Ibidem*.
[479] On the celebration of the Madonna del Carmine in Harlem, see Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*; Brown, "A Separate Feast."

aforementioned sculptor Onorio Ruotolo, founder of the Leonardo Da Vinci Art School.

Yet, beyond praising the Italians living in the Harlem community, Catanzaro also notes that some of its members seem to waste their time in futile *American* occupations. Precisely, the Italian-Americans to whom he refers are

> belle, bruttine ragazze […] che esibiscono unghia e labbra furiosamente rosse e maestose "permanenti"; che cinguettano paroline inglesi, che si scaldano per l'ultimo film e vanno in sollucchero per il prossimo appuntamento con il caro "fellow."[480]

Thus, the article criticizes those young Italian women who apparently prefer to meet American people, speak English, watch American films and shape their physical appearance on the last trends.

How do the "unghia e labbra furiosamente rosse" mentioned by Catanzaro relate to the Fascist values of Italian fiction films? Indeed, by evoking the American conception of modernity, those "unghia" oppose the conception of Italianness of 1930s Italian fiction films, which relied on the balance between tradition and modernity. Accordingly, the young women of Catanzaro's article are what I call the "anti-Italian" spectators of Italian films—namely, those spectators who neglected Italian films since these films, to different degrees, continued to depict Italy's old and picturesque traits.

Ultimately, in contrast with the regime's goals, the perceptions of Italianness remained diverse and highly disputed in the United States during the 1930s. Italian fiction films praising the Fascist notion of spirituality and the Fascist adaptation to modernity created a variety of inter-textual connections with the Italian-American culture in New York, and such culture was supportive, indifferent, or critical of the films' ideological overtones. The articles and the advertisements in pro-Fascist newspapers, as well as

[480] Catanzaro, "La famosa Centosedicesima strada," 11.

Farfariello's *macchiette coloniali*, accepted and supported—although through different ways—the Fascist synthesis between moral and material values, between tradition and modernity.[481] The articles in anti-Fascist newspapers and the novel *Cupido tra le camicie nere* rejected those values and proposed their own prospect for a moral regeneration. Southernist melodramas like *L'eroe della guerra italo-etiopica ovvero un delitto in famiglia* and *Zappatore* embraced only one side of the Fascist system of values, the one concerning the Italian tradition. Finally, the "unghia" of young Italian-Americans attested their rejection of the Fascist beliefs and their acceptance of American modernity. The heterogeneity of such inter-textual connections indicates that Italian films met both support and multiple forms of disapproval in the Italian-American community, and thus that Fascist propaganda, nothwistanding the regime's efforts, ended up being to a considerable extent unsuccessful.

[481] As previously argued, Farfariello's strong attachment to the Southern cultural tradition distanced him from the *prominenti*, for whom the national values prevailed over the vernacular ones.

Conclusion

On June 10, 1940, from the balcony of Palazzo Venezia in Rome, Benito Mussolini exploited his well-known melodramatic style of oratory to announce Italy's entry into World War II:

> Combattenti di terra, di mare, dell'aria, camice nere della rivoluzione e delle legioni, uomini e donne d'Italia, dell'Impero e del Regno d'Albania, ascoltate: l'ora segnata dal destino batte il cielo della nostra patria. L'ora… L'ora delle decisioni irrevocabili. La dichiarazione di guerra è già stata consegnata agli ambasciatori… agli ambasciatori di Gran Bretagna e di Francia. Scendiamo in campo contro le *democrazie plutocratiche e reazionarie dell'Occidente*, che spesso hanno insidiato la marcia e l'esistenza medesima del popolo italiano. […] *L'Italia proletaria e fascista* è per la terza volta in piedi, forte, fiera e compatta come non mai.[482]

The crowd in Piazza Venezia often interrupted the dictator with cheers. In spite of this enthusiasm, many other Italians reacted to Mussolini's speech with skepticism and disillusion. Indeed, Italy was joining a highly tragic conflict, destined to put an end to Mussolini's—and Hitler's—totalitarian plans through the death of millions of people and the suffering of many others. With regard to the diplomatic relations between Italy and the U.S., they stopped when Roosevelt led his country into the war in December 1941.

In dealing with Fascist propaganda in 1930s America, I have not focused on the regime's praise of its actions in domestic and foreign policy. Only tangentially did I deal

[482] Italics are mine. Shortly after Mussolini's speech, several print editions of it were published. See, for example, Benito Mussolini, *Vincere!: Testo del discorso pronunciato dal duce dal balcone di Palazzo Venezia il 10 giugno 1940-XVIII* (Parma: Federazione Dei Fasci di Combattimento/Tip. M. Fresching, 1940). Yet, the best way to evaluate Mussolini's emphatic oratory is to watch the LUCE newsreel of the event. The video is available in the LUCE website: http://www.archivioluce.com. A recent analysis of Italy's entry into the war is in Emilio Gin, *L'ora segnata dal destino. Gli Alleati e Mussolini da Monaco all'intervento (Settembre 1938 – Giugno 1940)* (Rome: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2012).

with events like the Ethiopian war and World War II, focusing instead on the intellectual fabric of the regime's policies. Mussolini's aforementioned speech makes reference to Italy's enemies as "plutocratic and reactionary democracies" and to Fascist Italy as "proletarian," thereby justapoxing the regime's "spiritual" and interclass superiority over "materialist" nations.

My emphasis on the intellectual nature of the Fascist experience followed the "revisionist" approach to the study of fascism and looked especially at the work of scholars like George L. Mosse, Emilio Gentile, and Pier Giorgio Zunino, who identified and discussed the cogency of specific fascist ideas, myths, and values.[483] This approach distanced itself from the historiographical tradition, largely contending that fascism itself was a purely reactionary political force opposing the 1917 revolution and at the service of ruling bourgeois elites.[484] Mosse, Emilio Gentile, Zunino, and in general all the historians studying fascist culture and ideology, frequently had to justify their exploration of this topic, since other scholars contended that they were downplaying the horrendous acts perpetrated by Hitler and Mussolini. In other words, such "revisionist" historians had to justify that behind the fascist *practice* there was a fascist *theory*, which was quite complex and elaborate like any other relevant political doctrine. In line with this perspective, my study sought to highlight the fact that the U.S. distribution of Italian

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[483] British historian Roger Griffin also contributed to the revisionist interpretation of fascism. Notably, he sought to define "generic fascism" by looking for the common elements of the various 20th century fascist experiences. In trying to fulfill this goal, Griffin deemed fascism as "a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism" (see *The Nature of Fascism* [London: Pinter Publishers, 1991], 26). This expression emphasizes the fascist call for a nationalist and revolutionary reaction to both liberal and socialist systems. In later works, Griffin further discussed how fascist ideologues prospected an alternative modernity, which aspired to open a new era in the history of civilization by marking its distinction from both the capitalist and communist models of society. See, especially, Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke, UK and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[484] For a compelling presentation of the main scholarly traditions on fascism, I recommend again Iordachi, *Comparative Fascist Studies*.

fiction films meant to be the intellectual support of tragic and racist enterprises such as the invasion of Ethiopia.

My research centered on an original and unexplored topic. With regard to Fascist film propaganda abroad, so far historians have only paid attention to the distribution of few overtly pro-Fascist fiction films like *Camicia nera*.[485] Rarely, they have mentioned the distribution of "a-political" fiction films, largely considering them as innocent entertainments than more works aimed to innocently entertain Italian communities than actual propaganda tools.[486] Instead, I tried to demonstrate that even romantic comedies like *Partire* played a relevant role in the regime's foreign propaganda. Further, I insisted on the fact that Fascist officials sought to distribute such apparently a-ideological films in "a-Fascist" venues, especially commercial theaters. The Italian Government exploited all these steps to make *indirect* propaganda through fictional cinema. However, its plans overall obtained poor results.

My project opens questions that future researches on Fascist film propaganda abroad need to address. Particularly, did the Italian regime promote a large distribution of Italian fiction films in other countries, beyond the U.S.? What institutional sites screened such films? Did Fascist officials try to distribute fiction films even in commercial venues, so that the regime's propaganda could be as much concealed as possible? Did they actively collaborate with local distributors and exhibitors to grant the release of Italian films? What kind of audience did attend the screenings? What cultural and social milieu

[485] Benedetta Garzarelli focused on the screenings of *Camicia nera* in Berlin, Paris and London, as Pierluigi Ercole studied the distribution of the same film in Great Britain. See Garzarelli "Cinema e propaganda all'estero nel regime fascista: le proiezioni di 'Camicia nera' a Parigi, Berlino e Londra;" Ercole, "'The Greatest Film of the Fascist Era:' The Distribution of *Camicia nera* in Britain." Nir Arielli mentions the screening of the colonial film *Lo squadrone bianco* in Egypt in his *Fascist Italy and the Middle East,* 98-99.
[486] See Garzarelli, *Parleremo al mondo intero*, 99-112; Tintori, "Tra luce e ombra;" Cavarocchi, *Avanguardie dello spirito.*

did Italian fiction films met? What does this milieu tell us about their reception and about the overall results of Fascist film propaganda?

Studies dealing with such questions, and—more broadly—studies covering any aspect of Fascist propaganda in foreign countries, would benefit from dealing carefully with three areas of research: the first and the second pertain to the action of the Fascist regime, the third one regards the social and cultural context of the countries in question. The first area is the *institutional* one, related to the activities of the Fascist emissaries operating in a particular country: the ambassador, the consuls, and all the other dignitaries working in the Italian diplomatic offices. During the 1920s, such executives often clashed with the local sections of the Fasci, whose overt promotion of Fascism created diplomatic embarrassments to the Italian Government. After the dismantling of the Fasci abroad at the end of the 1920s—indeed, at that time the regime discarded all the Fasci abroad, not only the ones in the U.S.—the Italian Ambassadors became entirely responsible of the propaganda and mostly developed it through "soft" tactics, which relied on several channels: conferences, lectures, radio, cinema, cultural institutes, schools.[487] The analysis of the institutional component of Fascist foreign propaganda focuses on these issues.

The second area of study is the *intellectual* one, referred to the set of ideological beliefs that supported the activities of Fascist officials abroad. In this respect, historians mainly need to assess how—in performing propaganda—Italian diplomatic representatives mediated between the defense of specific Fascist actions in domestic and foreign policy and the promotion of overall Fascist values.

[487] I repeat some essential bibliographic references on these topics. On the Fasci abroad, see Gentile, "La politica estera del partito fascista;" De Caprariis, "'Fascism for Export'?;" Franzina and Sanfilippo, *Il fascismo e gli emigrati*. On the concept of "soft power," see Nye, *Bound to Lead*; Id., *Soft Power*.

The third aspect to be considered is the *cultural* one, which is indebted to the cultural turn in the investigation of Fascism that emerged during the 1970s and the 1980s. This perspective is part of the above-mentioned "revisionist" historiography on Fascism. By moving, again, beyond the boundaries of Marxist social history—strictly focused on issues of class and socio-economic dynamics—the cultural approach has both explored the dissemination of Fascist values in Italian media and social practices and tried to understand if Italian citizens accepted or rejected them.[488] This method can also help to study Fascist propaganda abroad, particularly to examine the social and cultural context in which such propaganda penetrated and to evaluate its impact on people of Italian origin, as well as on people of the host country.

In the last decades, the scholarly work on Fascist foreign propaganda has already filled significant gaps, especially in the study of the Italian regime's institutional initiatives in countries and regions like Portugal, England, France, Germany, East Europe, the Middle East, United States, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Peru.[489] Yet, whenever historians will more globally assess all the above-mentioned aspects and the interactions between them, we will achieve an even more comprehensive view of the phenomenon under consideration.

[488] On the main historiographical approaches of the last decades, see Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005).
[489] For the bibliographic references on Fascist propaganda abroad, see Note 2 in Chapter 1.

Filmography

I ordered the films according to their release date in the U.S. If a film received a new title, the U.S. title follows the Italian one. The titles of the films registered at the Copyright Office of the Library of Congress are in italics.

Films released in the U.S. in 1931

Canzone dell'amore, La (Gennaro Righelli, 1930)

Fra Diavolo (Mario Bonnard, 1931); Romance in the Abruzzi - Fra Diavolo

Maciste all'inferno (Guido Brignone, 1926)

Napoli che canta (Roberto Roberti, 1926); Naples of Song

Straniera, La (Amleto Palermi, Gaston Ravel, 1930)

Terra madre (Alessandro Blasetti, 1931)

Films released in the U.S. in 1932

Frate Francesco (Giulio Antamoro, 1927); The Passion of St. Francis

Rubacuori (Guido Brignone, 1931)

Sette giorni, cento lire (Nunzio Malasomma, 1932)

Zappatore (Gustavo Serena, 1929)

Films released in the U.S. in 1933

Donna di una notte, La (Marcel L'Herbier, 1930)

Figaro e la sua gran giornata (Mario Camerini, 1931)

Vecchia signora, La (Amleto Palermi, 1932); *La Vecchia Signora (The Old Lady)*

Films released in the U.S. in 1934

Camicia nera (Giovacchino Forzano, 1934)

Films released in the U.S. in 1935

Avvocato difensore, L' (Gero Zambuto, 1934)

Eredita' dello zio… Buonanima, L' (Amleto Palermi, 1934)

Porto (Amleto Palermi, 1934); Il delitto di Mastrovanni

Tenebre (Guido Brignone, 1934); Dopo una notte d'amore

Films released in the U.S. in 1936

Amo te sola (Mario Mattoli, 1935)

Campo di maggio (Giovacchino Forzano, 1935); One Hundred Days of Napoleon

Canzone del sole, La (Max Neufeld, 1933); *La Canzone del Sole*

Cappello a tre punte, Il (Mario Camerini, 1935)

Cieca di Sorrento, La (Nunzio Malasomma, 1934); The Blind Girl of Sorrento

Don Bosco (Goffredo Alessandrini, 1935); *Don Bosco*

Fiat Voluntas Dei (Amleto Palermi, 1935); Fiat Voluntas Dei (Your Troubles are mine)

Lorenzino de' Medici (Guido Brignone, 1935); *Lorenzino de' Medici*

Luci sommerse (Adelqui Millar, 1934); Dimmed Lights (or Crooked Love)

Marcia nuziale, La (Mario Bonnard, 1934)

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Scarpe al sole (Marco Elter, 1935); *Le Scarpe al Sole*

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Aldebaran (Alessandro Blasetti, 1935); Patria, amore e dovere

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Due misantropi, I (Amleto Palermi, 1937); Amore in quarantena

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Trenta secondi d'amore (Mario Bonnard, 1936)

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Arma bianca (Ferdinando Maria Poggioli, 1936); Adventure of Giacomo Casanova

Cavalleria (Goffredo Alesandrini, 1936); Lancieri di Savoia

Chi e' piu' felice di me! (Guido Brignone, 1937)

Come le foglie (Mario Camerini, 1935)

Contessa di Parma (Alessandro Blasetti, 1937)

Damigella di Bard, La (Mario Mattoli, 1936); Il destino

Maestrina, La (Guido Brignone, 1933)

Non ti conosco più (Nunzio Malasomma, 1936); Il diamante porta-fortuna

Questi ragazzi (Mario Mattoli, 1937); Il trionfo dell’amore

Solo per te (Carmine Gallone, 1938)

Villafranca (Giovacchino Forzano, 1934); Il padre della patria

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Cabiria (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914)

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Ho perduto mio marito (Enrico Guazzoni, 1937)

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Lotte nell'ombra (Domenico M. Gambino, 1939)

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Films released in the U.S. in 1941

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