

Matteo Pretelli

ITALIAN MIGRANTS IN ITALIAN EXHIBITIONS
FROM FASCISM TO THE EARLY REPUBLIC*

From the time of Italy's unification in 1861, the organization of exhibitions on the national territory, as well as the participation in exhibitions with a pavilion in foreign countries, became an instrument of nation-building for the liberally-oriented ruling classes that governed Italy from 1861 to 1922. Their ultimate goal was to finally achieve the complete unification of Italians – who had been politically and culturally divided for centuries – and persuade them to value the newly formed state. Additionally, they also sought to demonstrate the strength of the national economy and the industriousness of the Italian people. However, the goal of creating patriotic awareness in the Italian population was not generally an easy one to achieve, given the citizens' reliance on strong local identities, and as such national expositions were seemingly unable to largely contribute to that scope.¹

The beginning of massive outflows of Italians toward foreign countries in the 1880's further complicated Italy's nation-building ambitions. Migrants primarily exported their own local identities, whereas any sense of national belonging was scantily felt. Indeed, the brand new state was often conceived as a distant entity or even an enemy because of its intention to impose harsh taxes and long years of military service on the citizens.² In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, emigration was a disputed topic in the political realm that divided those who believed the departures were a loss to the nation and those who thought the Italian communities that had settled in foreign countries would be instrumental to promoting the exportation of national goods and,

* I wish to thank Nando Fasce, for his extremely competent comments. Patrizia Audenino and Emilio Franzina read this essay beforehand and offered their useful insights.

1 M. Misiti, "L'Italia in mostra. Le Esposizioni e la costruzione dello Stato nazionale", *Passato e Presente*, 14 (1996): 33-54; C. Della Colletta, *World's Fairs Italian Style: The Great Exhibitions in Turin and Their Narratives, 1860-1915* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2006).

2 P. Corti, "Le dinamiche dell'italianità nella storia delle migrazioni nazionali", *Passato e Presente*, 29 (2011): 87-100.

generally speaking, could be a contributing factor in Italy's foreign policy. Plans were drawn up to establish state-sponsored settlements of Italian migrants in rural areas of Argentina and Australia but were never carried out because of technical difficulties and high costs. Some, including the nationalist movement led by Enrico Corradini, thought Italy should have rather decisively undertaken a bigger push for colonial expansionism in Africa, where the surplus of Italian manpower could have eventually been allocated.³

What role did Italians outside of Italy play in Italian exhibitions? What kind of visibility did they have at these events? Did they have any part in the larger process of nation-building undertaken with these exhibitions? Historiography has mostly focused on the representation of Italian migrants in national exhibitions during the Liberal Age (1861-1922). Conversely, scant attention has been paid to subsequent phases in Italy's history, specifically the Fascist Age (1922-1943) and the Republican Age (from 1945 onwards). This essay will consider some of the most important exhibitions held in Italy during Benito Mussolini's regime, in particular the *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* (Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, hereafter MRF) held in Rome in 1932 and the *Esposizione Universale di Roma* (Universal Exhibition of Rome, hereafter E42), which was to be held in 1942 but ultimately was canceled because of the outbreak of World War II. The work will seek to demonstrate how the Fascist regime recovered the myth of 'Italian Geniality' from the Liberal Age and applied it to Italian migrants from an imperial standpoint, following Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 and Mussolini's subsequent proclamation of the Italian empire in Eastern Africa on May 9th, 1936. Finally, this imperial image will be evident in the *Mostra delle Terre italiane d'Oltremare* (Exhibition of Italian Overseas Lands, hereafter MTO) held in Naples in 1940, which will also be the subject of analysis. After the fall of Fascism and the end of WWII, a new democratic and republican institutional regime was established in the early post-war period. Although Fascist imperial ideology was abandoned, the myth of 'Italian Geniality' and labor outside of Italy persisted in the post-war period, at a time when Italy was seeking international rehabilitation after years under a dictatorship and the defeat in the war. A new edition of the Naples' Exhibition was held in 1952 as *Mostra*

3 E. Sori, "Il dibattito politico sull'emigrazione italiana dall'Unità alla crisi dello stato liberale", *Gli italiani fuori d'Italia. Gli emigranti italiani nei movimenti operai dei paesi di adozione 1880-1940*, a c. di B. Bezza (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1983), 19-44; G. Dinucci, "Il modello della colonia libera nell'ideologia espansionistica italiana. Dagli anni '80 alla fine del secolo", *Storia Contemporanea*, 10 (1979): 427-480; M. Melia, "The Zunini Scheme: A Plan for Italian Group Settlement in Western Australia, 1906-1908", *Aspects of Ethnicity*, eds. M. Melia and R. Bosworth (Crawley: University of Western Australia, 1991), 17-27; D. J. Grange, "Emigration et colonies. Un grand débat de l'Italie libérale", *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 30 (1983): 337-365; D. Natili, "L'emigrazione nella campagna di Libia del 1911", *Archivio Storico dell'Emigrazione Italiana*, 7 (2011): 35-40.

d'Oltremare e del Lavoro Italiano nel Mondo (Exhibition of Overseas and Italian Labor in the World). This event will be analyzed in comparison to the former Neapolitan edition, by highlighting divergences and continuities with the Fascist age.

I. THE LIBERAL AGE

The historian Emilio Franzina has drawn attention to the marginal role and limited visibility that emigration had within nineteenth-century Italian exhibitions.⁴ During the 1884 National Exhibition in Turin, Professor Brunialti lectured at the local *Società Filotecnica* on the topic of *Italians Outside of Italy* and emphasized that neither the national government nor the greater public opinion were expressing even minimal interest toward the Italians who had left the country. Attention was paid only to Italians in Argentina, where in the capital city of Buenos Aires two Italian exhibitions had been organized in 1881 and 1884. According to the periodical *L'Italia all'Estero*, roughly 6,000 visitors from the South-American country were about to attend the 1884 Turin Exhibition. Italian-Argentinean businessmen were among the most well received attendees and were invited to the 1898 Exhibition of Turin and subsequent international expositions in Milan (1906) and Turin (1911); the latter two events were specifically studied by the scholar Patrizia Audenino with regard to Italians abroad.⁵

In Milan, a special section of the exhibition was dedicated to Italians outside of Italy. In order to bring this section to fruition, the government asked to its embassies and consulates to mobilize the Italian communities to document their commercial and productive capacity. This documentation also assumed nationalist goals, since the Italian emigrants' participation in the exhibition was intended to reaffirm their sense of belonging within the greater national community, to the point that Audenino has talked about a "test of nationalism". In Milan, Italian industriousness in foreign countries was depicted as the expression of geniality of a population which had become popular for having achieved great works and historically asserted its position in the Mediterranean through the Genoese, Venetian, and Leghorn Jewish settlements. Italian geniality abroad

4 E. Franzina, "La tentazione del museo: piccola storia di mostre ed esposizioni sull'emigrazione italiana negli ultimi cent'anni (1892-2002)", *Archivio Storico dell'Emigrazione Italiana*, 1 (2005): 167-169.

5 *L'Italia all'Estero*, 1 (22 March 1884); *L'Italia all'Estero*, 1 (26 April 1884); *L'Italia all'Estero*, 1 (28 June 1884); E. Scarzanella, *Italiani d'Argentina. Storie di contadini, industriali e missionari italiani in Argentina, 1850-1912* (Venice: Marsilio, 1983), 33-34. On Attilio Brunialti see G. D'Amelio, *Brunialti, Attilio, Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 14 (1972), last accessed 1 June 2014, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/attilio-brunialti_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/attilio-brunialti_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

therefore became a key theme that was constantly present in Italian exhibitions spanning from the Liberal Age through the early post-war Republican period.⁶

Only a limited number of communities in the Mediterranean and the Americas, specifically those characterized by an entrepreneurial bourgeois eager to increase its business, responded promptly to Rome's appeals by sending illustrated monographs, Italian newspapers and general documentation related to the communities and their religious and civic associations to the homeland. One volume in particular described the Italian-Argentinean community as a template for other communities, and was displayed at the exhibitions of 1898 in Turin and 1906 in Milan. However, sections dedicated to Italians abroad generally received little attention from attendees, who expressed much more interest in the section dedicated to Eritrea, the first Italy-occupied colony in Africa. According to Audenino, this demonstrated how "by then the fabrication of the Greatest Italy was as dependent on the colonies as it was on the economic successes of emigration".⁷

In the year 1911, during the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of Italy's unification, Turin hosted an international exposition that in terms of the Italian emigrants' display shared certain traits with the events organized in 1898 and 1906. A pavilion on 'colonization, emigration, colonies' was created and themes such as Italian labor in foreign countries and Italian 'secular geniality', which had supposedly enhanced exchanges between populations and greatly contributed to the world's civilization, were reiterated. Once again the section dedicated to the colonies received much more interest from the public, which would suggest that the emigrants' world had not yet become an integral component of the national identity.⁸

II. FASCISM AND ITS TENTH-ANNIVERSARY

It is currently a matter of historiographical debate whether during the Liberal Age Italy had already developed an institutional project aimed to strongly bind the homeland to the Italians settled outside of Italy, either by practical means (e.g. by establishing Italian schools in foreign countries) or with a symbolic apparatus that would have helped

6 P. Audenino, "La Mostra degli italiani all'estero. Prove di nazionalismo", *Storia in Lombardia*, 1 (2008): 111-124.

7 Audenino, "La Mostra degli italiani all'estero", 21. On the representation of Africa and Africans in the Italian exhibitions see the seminal work by G. Abbattista, *Umanità in mostra. Esposizioni etniche e invenzioni esotiche in Italia* (Trieste: Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2013).

8 P. Audenino, "Il lavoro degli italiani all'estero nell'Esposizione Internazionale di Torino del 1911", *Archivio Storico dell'Emigrazione Italiana*, 7 (2011): 11-17.

the emigrant communities to keep their sense of belonging to the homeland alive.⁹ A discussion on this matter is beyond the scope of this essay, however it seems reasonable to consider that only the Mussolini regime had tried to organically establish a link with Italian communities. In 1927 the regime suppressed the General Commissariat for Emigration (established in 1901) and created a special bureau for Italians abroad (*Direzione Generale degli Italiani all'Estero*, hereafter DGIE). Based in Rome and under the control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by 1932 the DGIE took control of all migration-related matters and was charged with any relations between the homeland and the Italian communities in the world, whose consent the regime sought to obtain. With respect to the pre-Fascist period, the Mussolini regime developed an unprecedented interest in encouraging tours to the homeland among Italians residing abroad, a practice that since the late 1920's had been widely promoted by the Roman authorities. These travels were part of a program to promote the Italian character (*italianità*) and push back against the loss of Italian citizenship by immigrants outside of Italy, so as to maintain transnational connections to the homeland. According to a report to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, these tours were very effective, as they did not affect the national budget and served the purpose of promoting the tourism industry. Italy's largest cities, as well as its industrial and commercial centers, were shown to the visitors, whose tours were often scheduled to end in Rome in a private meeting with the Pope or *Il Duce*, or at least with a public speech by the dictator. In Fascist rhetoric these travels were both 'pilgrimages' and 'baths of Italian-ness', which deserved a material benefit in the form of discounted fares on transportation. Outside of Italy the tours were managed by ethnic mutual-aid societies, associations for Italian WWI veterans, catholic priests, or Italian newspapers. A case in point is Buenos Aires' *Mattino d'Italia*, which in 1932 organized a naval cruise to Italy for its readers. Similarly innovative were the summer camps (*colonie estive*) that the regime established in Italy for Italian youth, which the children of Italians living abroad were invited to attend annually with the intent of winning over their hearts and minds.¹⁰

9 M. Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); M. Pretelli, *Il fascismo e gli italiani all'estero* (Bologna: Clueb, 2010).

10 A. Dupont, *Realizzazioni fasciste nella vita pubblica italiana* (Rome: Tipografia del Senato, 1932), 286; P. Parini, *Gli italiani nel mondo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1935), 68; E. Scarzanella, "Il fascismo italiano in Argentina: al servizio degli affari", *Fascisti in Sud America*, a c. di E. Scarzanella (Florence: Le Lettere, 2005), 155; D. Noyes, "From the Paese to the Patria: An Italian American Pilgrimage to Rome in 1929", *Studies in Italian American Folklore*, ed. L. Del Giudice (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1993), 133-135; C. Baldoli, "Le Navi. Fascismo e vacanze in una colonia estiva per i figli degli italiani all'estero", *Memoria e Ricerca*, 6 (2000): 163-176; "Relazione a S. E. il Ministro degli affari esteri", 18 January 1930, Archivio Storico-Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Rome (hereafter Asmae), Carte del Gabinetto del Ministro e della Segreteria Generale dal 1923 al 1943 (hereafter Gab.), 504, box 821, folder "Comm. Parini Piero"; Asmae, Gab., 501, box 818, folder "Italiani all'estero e scuole".

The organization of exhibitions in Italy was instrumental to encouraging emigrant sojourns in the homeland. Particularly relevant to this goal was the MRF, held in Rome in October 1932 to celebrate the tenth-anniversary of the Fascist regime. This event was widely propagandised both in Italy and abroad as it had the objective of showing the world the historical progression of the alleged Fascist “revolution”, which spanned from Italy’s participation in WWI to Mussolini’s takeover. Curiosity surrounding the Fascist social experiment contributed to the Exposition’s success, which registered roughly 4 million visitors from Italy and other countries and was consequently extended through October 1934.¹¹ According to Fascist coeval sources, young people, intellectuals and teachers from the Italian communities visited the *Mostra*. Piero Parini, director of the DGIE, conceded significantly discounted transportation fares to these travelers, since high emigrant attendance at the exhibition was thought instrumental in Rome to their “better comprehension of today’s Italy”.¹² This plan was apparently successful, because Mussolini, following a remarkable number of requests to travel to Italy, asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs to authorise prospective tours to the country in advance in order to enhance ‘opportunity and promptness’.¹³

According to the historian Jeffrey T. Schnapp, the MRF sought to offer a public image of fascism and aimed to “symbolically renovate the revolution” and “call back to the homeland the children scattered in all continents”.¹⁴ In order to fully define the identification between Fascist Italy and the emigrants’ Italian character, a special room on the *fasci* (branches of the Fascist Party) abroad was set up on the first floor of the exposition. Inside, a world map summarized statistics on the number of Italians spread throughout the globe, while frescos and photographs portrayed the ‘outstanding’ Italian labor across continents through its master endeavours such as the construction of the Suez or Panama channels, as well as the suffering to which Italians abroad had been subject despite their remarkable traits of ‘geniality’.¹⁵ Mussolini wanted these values to become a cornerstone of the Fascist policy, so much so that he asked the Minister

11 E. Gentile, *Il culto del littorio. La sacralizzazione della politica nell’Italia fascista* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1993), 212-235; M. S. Stone, *The Patron State: Culture & Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 128-176.

12 F. Gargano, *Italiani e stranieri alla Mostra della rivoluzione fascista* (Rome: Società Anonima Imprese Editoriali, 1935); Asmae, Ambasciata Italiana a Washington, 1924-1940/41, box 55, folder “Copia della circolare n. 17 della Dir. Gen. Italiani all’Estero e Scuole nei viaggi in patria durante la mostra del fascismo 1932”.

13 Amministrative order n. 10 to the offices of Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rome, 5 October 1933, Asmae, Fondo dei Consolati italiani negli Stati Uniti (hereafter Aci), Cleveland, box 13, folder “Turismo”.

14 J. T. Schnapp, *Anno X. La Mostra della Rivoluzione fascista del 1932* (Pisa-Rome: Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, 2003), 36.

15 *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*, a c. di D. Alfieri e L. Freddi (Rome: PNF, 1933), 233-240; O. Dinale, *La Rivoluzione che vince, 1914-1934* (Rome: Campitelli, 1934), 185-199.

of Foreign Affairs to utilize its diplomats abroad to collect information related to the 'contribution' of Italians throughout the world over the centuries. With the assistance of the Italian communities, during the following years a set of volumes named *Opera del genio italiano all'estero* (Work of Italian Genius Abroad) was published along with series named *Italiani nel mondo* (Italians in the World) by Bologna-publisher Cappelli and *Civiltà italiana nel mondo* (Italian Civilization in the World) published by the cultural organization Dante Alighieri Society. The apex of this pattern was the establishment in 1940 of the *Giornata degli italiani nel mondo* (Italians in the World Day) to be annually celebrated both in Italy and in Italian communities abroad to celebrate the contribution of Italians in the world.¹⁶

The MRF room dedicated to Italians in the world also included the so-called *provvidenze*, policies undertaken by the regime on behalf of Italians abroad. These included facilitations for the return of Italian pregnant women to Italy to allow them to give birth in the homeland, or the above-mentioned summer camps for the children of immigrants. Those who resided abroad were even fully absorbed by Mussolini's liturgy for their supposed role in the Fascist 'revolution' (takeover), specifically through their contribution in WWI as returnee soldiers and, above all, as militants outside of Italy fallen at the hands of Mussolini's opponents in street riots. Among them, Nicola Bonservizi, the leader of Paris' *fascio* (branch of the Italian Fascist Party), was the icon par excellence of the Fascist 'martyr' since he had been murdered in the French capital city by Italian anti-Fascist exiles. In the room, pictures of fallen Fascists abroad encouraged the viewer to see Italians outside of Italy as their compatriots at home, an expression of Mussolini's *uomo nuovo* (new man): a prototype of the citizen, who was loyal to Fascist hierarchies and aware of Italian power and the country's mission in the world, that Rome was seeking to shape.¹⁷

In its totalitarian quest to build and pursue consent, the regime was obsessed with the foreign view of Fascism, to the extent that these opinions were diligently collected

16 Archivio Centrale di Stato, Rome (hereafter Acs), Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Gabinetto, box 108, folder "L'Opera del genio italiano all'estero"; Asmae, Aci, Cleveland, box 5, folder "Genio italiano all'estero", and A. 29 (1937-1940), box 2, folder "Giornata degli italiani nel mondo". See also in the *Legionario*, fascist mouthpiece for the Italian communities in the world, articles "Il genio italiano nel mondo", 12 March 1932; "La giornata degli italiani nel mondo", 20 January 1940. See also monographs *La giornata degli italiani nel mondo* (Rome: S.A.E.G., 1941); M. Dessy, *Continuità del 23 marzo. Gli italiani nel mondo* (Rome: ItalgRAF S.A., 1942); A. Putzolu, *Italiani nel mondo* (Forlì: Federazione Fasci di Combattimento di Forlì, 1941).

17 *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*, a c. di Alfieri e Freddi, 240. On the *uomo nuovo* see E. Gentile, *Fascismo. Storia e interpretazione* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2011), 235-264; L. La Rovere, "Rifare gli italiani: L'esperimento di creazione dell'uomo nuovo nel regime fascista", *Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche*, 9 (2002): 51-78.

in dedicated volumes. Following the same pattern, Rome published a special volume on Italian and foreign visitors to the MRF. The volume included the story of an Italian workman who purportedly visited the room of the Italians abroad and said it reminded him of his experience as an immigrant to Egypt, a country where – according to him – Italians worked hard but received low salaries; he thus appreciated the Fascist willingness to take care of its laborers abroad. Such testimonies (real or invented) were part of a wider project to create consent among Italians abroad by various means, including through the words of those who had visited the homeland. This was made possible by Rome's ability to directly control – or indirectly influence – most of the Italian press in foreign countries, and to spread its political message in the Italian communities. A case in point is London's *L'Italia Nostra*, a newspaper that during the celebrations for the tenth anniversary of Mussolini's takeover published the testimonies of a set of immigrants who had visited Italy and recounted all the supposedly major changes realized in the country by the Fascist dictator.¹⁸

III. TOWARD THE 'OLYMPICS OF THE CIVILIZATION'

After the proclamation of the Italian Empire in 1936, another major event organized by the regime in 1937 in Rome was the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* (Augustan Exhibition of 'Roman-ness', hereafter MAR), which celebrated the second millennium of the birth of the Roman emperor Augustus. The documentation analyzed does not disclose any particular interest on the regime's behalf that Italians abroad visit the exhibition. A message from the Italian embassy in Washington D.C. to the consulates in the United States reveals Rome's willingness to promote the event among Anglo-Saxon upper classes, whose presence in Italy was desired. Yet it is possible to hypothesise that the exposition was not properly designed for Italian residents abroad, who mostly had a working-class background. They therefore could be less attracted than others to an event which – despite Mussolini's political ambitions to show an alleged continuity from ancient Rome to contemporary Fascist Italy – was mostly addressed to internationally educated intellectual elites. To this end, publicity materials were printed in 25 languages and distributed across the world, while lectures in Europe, North America, and the Middle East were held to commemorate Augustus. This massive effort was rewarded,

18 L. Vicentini, *Il governo fascista giudicato fuori d'Italia* (Milan: Barion, 1924); Partito Nazionale Fascista – Ufficio di Propaganda, *Il fascismo giudicato all'estero* (Rome: Arti Grafiche Affini, [1923]); E. Coselschi, *Universalità del fascismo. Raccolta di giudizi di personalità e della stampa di tutto il mondo, 1922-1932* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1933); Gargano, *Italiani e stranieri*, 447-450; C. Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism: Italian Fascists and Britain's Italians in the 1930s* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 20.

since many foreign universities and historical associations required support from Rome in order to organise tours to Italy to visit the MAR. According to the historian Aristotle Kallis, the *Mostra* would have been a natural link between the MRF and the E42. Designed every five years, the three exhibitions would have been the core of the regime's evolution, which aspired to grow from a national "revolutionary" force to an internationally-oriented totalitarian political entity.¹⁹

The E42 presented itself as the "Olympics of Civilization". Its goal was to illustrate the Fascist "achievements" and the "glorious traditions" of the Italian people on behalf of foreign populations. The precursor to Rome's Exposition was the Italian Pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair of New York. The American exhibition constituted a model for the E42 in terms of architecture and the organization of transportation. Indeed, Mussolini planned to extend the site of the exposition nearly to the coast so as to remind visitors of the Italian sailing tradition. In addition, he strongly pushed for the realization of an efficient and fast communication system within Italy and from the center of Rome toward the site of the exposition itself.²⁰

A broad publicity campaign was promoted ahead of the event to encourage visits from Italians abroad. The organizers had to reach their communities all over the world (especially those in the United States) by inviting prospective travelers to plan their tours to Italy well in advance. The DGIE asked the diplomatic officers to draw up a complete list of *fasci*, schools, and ethnic organizations in order to maintain an updated address book and efficiently allocate its publicity. Galeazzo Ciano, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Mussolini's son-in-law, wanted even the poorest emigrants to be able to buy themselves tickets to the E42 through instalment payments, a thus far untested idea. Finally, the E42 aimed to fully display the valuable role of Italians outside of Italy

19 Asmae, Aci, Cleveland, box 13, folder "Mostra Augustea della Romanità"; J. Arthurs, *Excavating Modernity: The Roman Past in Fascist Italy* (Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 2012), 106; A. Kellis, "Framing Romanità: The Celebrations for the *Bimillenario Augusteo* and the *Augusteo-Ara Pacis* Project", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46 (2011): 824-825.

20 V. Cini, "Significato e aspetti dell'Esposizione Universale di Roma", *Civiltà. Rivista Triennale della Esposizione Universale di Roma*, 1 (1940): 11-14; id., "L'Esposizione di Roma in tempo di guerra", *Civiltà. Rivista Triennale della Esposizione Universale di Roma*, 19 (1941): 5-8; Esposizione Universale di Roma, *Aspetti e problemi fondamentali. Conferenza tenuta alla stampa italiana ed estera il 12 gennaio 1937-XV dal senatore Vittorio Cini, Commissario Generale dell'Emigrazione di Roma* (N.p.: Edizioni dell'Esposizione di Roma, [1937]); *Esposizione Universale di Roma – MCMXLII – Anno XX° E. F.*, a c. di Commissariato Generale (N.p.: n.p., 1939); A. Muntoni, "1942. L'Esposizione universale di Roma", *Le esposizioni del '900 in Italia e nel mondo*, a c. di A. Abruzzese et al. (Naples: Liguori, 1991), 175-180; E. Godoli, "LE42 e le esposizioni universali", *E42: Utopia e Scenario del Regime*, a c. di M. Calvesi et al., vol. 2 (Venice: Marsilio, 1987), 153-155; F. Fasce, "Una modernità dal cuore antico? L'Italia all'Esposizione di New York del 1939", *Viaggio in Liguria*, 1 (2003): 57-59; id., "Viaggiatori italiani alla grande fiera di New York del 1939-40", *Storia Urbana*, 109 (2005): 51-69.



Archivio Storico-Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Rome, Fondo Consolati italiani negli Stati Uniti. Cleveland, box 6, folder “Esposizione Universale di Roma 1942 (documentazione)”.

through a special Exposition of Italians Abroad and the *Opera del Genio Italiano all'Estero*, which was to be a permanent display. The DGIE would oversee the sector dedicated to the *provvidenze* on behalf of migrants; in addition, the E42's general commissioner Vittorio Cini recommended that special attention be paid to Italians in the United States due to their high numbers and their prominent role in the host society. Italians in California had even made plans to create a monument at their own expense depicting the bond of solidarity between Italian-Americans and the Fascist regime. Dedicated to the memory of the Unknown Soldier Abroad and the Fascist Fallen Abroad on Behalf of the Revolutionary Cause, it was to have sizeable dimensions and feature an equestrian statue of Mussolini. On the lower level of the monument, the walls of a shrine would have depicted each phase of Italian migration overseas; outside a cube shaped boulder would have portrayed a globe marked at each corner by an Italian legionnaire. In the designer's plans the monument was to have depicted the Fascist 'Ideal' to be transmitted throughout the centuries.²¹

IV. EMPIRE AND WAR

With respect to the Liberal Age, Fascism developed a strong rhetoric and propaganda related to its own colonies, as Mussolini wished for the Italians to develop a full colonial consciousness in order to legitimise a future imperial expansionism. Beginning in 1926, a "Colonial Day" was celebrated annually in Italy; in addition, the regime published the specialist magazine *Oltremare* (overseas) and scholarly seminars on colonial matters were periodically held. Furthermore, cinema, press, and literature played a role in constantly reminding the Italians that the country held colonial territories. In particular, the Ministry of Colonies endorsed the establishment of colonial expositions on a variety of matters including agriculture, craftsmanship, art and literature. Following a Fascist militarist approach, in 1930 a colonial war was reproduced at the Lictor Airport in Rome, while in 1931 a significant amount of funds were designated to the country's participation in the Paris Colonial International Exposition. Fascism also gave continuity to the previous attitude taken toward the public display of African bodies. From the 1884 Turin Exhibition onwards, in keeping with the pattern of many European exhibitions, reproductions of

21 ACS, Eur42, box 1107 (folder 10782 and 10791), box 1064 (folder 10231), box 1135 (folder 11216), box 1028 (folder 9770, sub-folder 20, insert 1-2), box 1048 (folder 9983, sub-folder 5), box 91, folder 442 "Scarpitta Cartaino Salvatore (Monumento a Pionieri Italiani degli Stati Uniti)". See also V. Gidaro e A. Zanuttini, "L'organizzazione delle propaganda per l'Esposizione universale del 1942. Una mappa di persone, attività e associazioni italo-americane", *L'emigrazione italiana 1870-1970*, a c. di Pubblicazioni degli Archivi di Stato (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 2002), 1314-1315.

colonial villages were regularly built in the Italian expositions to show how natives lived their daily lives. In others, austere figures of askari (native soldiers) and zaptié (native police officers) stood in the pavilions to reinforce the idea that native populations were subject to Italian power and to dispel former views of Africans as exotic and wild.²²

What role did Italians outside of Italy play in the colonial and later Fascist imperial identity? Some money was collected in U.S. Little Italies to benefit the families of wounded or deceased soldiers after the dramatic defeat of Italian troops by the Ethiopians at Adowa in 1896. In addition, during the 1911-1912 war against the Ottoman Empire that ended with Italy's occupation of Libya, Italians abroad (especially in Brazil, Argentina, and the United States) expressed solidarity with the Italian war effort through the collection of money or by sending volunteers. Propagandised by Italian publications – such as Buenos Aires' *La Patria degli Italiani* and São Paulo *Fanfulla* – as a war that pitted civilization against barbarianism, the conflict was even ambiguously depicted as a gateway for Italian emigrants abroad to settle and colonize the Libyan territories against the backdrop of assimilation in the host countries.²³

By the end of the 1920's the office in charge of the *fasci* outside of Italy – which would be eventually included in the DGIE – managed two branches in Ethiopia, specifically in Addis Abeba and Harar-Dire Dawa, that assisted local Italian residents. However, the full involvement of Italians abroad with colonial matters was achieved during the Italian-Ethiopian War, when emigrants became the target of a massive political propaganda effort. A significant number of documentary reels, radio programs, newspaper articles, books, and pamphlets were sent to or produced in foreign countries to depict a 'just war' that aimed not only to avenge the defeat at Adowa and to achieve imperialist goals, but also to supposedly free an 'uncivilised' country subject to slavery's regulations and oppression by the Ethiopian emperor Hailé Selassié. The conflict aroused the nationalist feelings of Italians settled abroad, who responded positively to this call to action by sending gold rings and money to the homeland. To fully endorse the tie between emigrants and their native country, the regime symbolically set up a legion of

22 N. Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007), 153, 155, 237, 298-300; G. Abbattista and N. Labanca, "Living Ethnological and Colonial Exhibitions in Liberal and Fascist Italy", *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires*, eds. P. Blanchard et. al. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 348-349; M. Carli, "Ri/produrre l'Africa romana. I padiglioni italiani all'Exposition Coloniale Internationale, Parigi 1931", *Memoria e Ricerca*, 17 (2004): 212-232; Abbattista, *Umanità in mostra*; B. Benedict, "Rituals of Representation: Ethnic Stereotypes and Colonized Peoples at World's Fair", *Fair Representations: World's Fair and the Modern World*, eds. R. Rydell and N. Gwinn (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994), 28-58. See also Guido Abbattista's essay in this volume.

23 F. Bertagna, "Nazionalismo da esportazione. La guerra di Libia sulla stampa italiana in Argentina e Brasile", *Archivio Storico dell'Emigrazione Italiana*, 7 (2011): 51-58; S. Luconi, "The Impact of Italy's Twentieth-Century Wars on Italian Americans' Ethnic Identity", *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 13 (2007): 472-474.



G. Ciano, 'Italiani d'Oltr'Alpi e d'Oltremare', in Istituto Coloniale Fascista, *Italiani di Mussolini in A.O.*, a c. di C. M. Garatti (Bologna: Linicio Cappelli, 1937), 283.

Italians outside of Italy, who were sent to Africa under the leadership of Piero Parini and joined the Italian military force. Though militarily useless, the legion symbolically 'avenged' the dramatic migratory journey undertaken by the relatives of soldiers. In his book celebrating the Parini legion, Adriano Grande points out that these combatants had used their rifles to conquer a land that ultimately they would turn over with their shovels. He did not doubt the fact that many would decide to remain permanently in the conquered territories to work under the Italian domain.²⁴

The empire was also a factor in the Italy pavilion of the 1939 New York World's Fair. Geared to both Americans and Italian-Americans, the pavilion aimed to show a brand new Fascist 'spirit' generated by the proclamation of the empire a few years before. An

²⁴ P. Parini, "Scuola e cultura italiana in A. O.", *L'Italia Imperiale*, special issue of the *Rivista Illustrata del Popolo d'Italia* (N.p.: n.p., n.d.); Fasci Italiani all'Estero, *L'Abissinia e noi* (Rome: Tipografia Regionale, 1935); A. Grande, *La Legione Parini* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1937); S. Petrucci, "Fascismo all'estero", *Panorami di realizzazioni del fascismo*, vol. 3 (Rome: Edizioni Giovanissima, 1942), 506; N. Labanca, "I Fasci nelle colonie italiane", *Il fascismo e gli emigrati. La parabola dei fasci italiani all'estero, 1920-43*, a c. di M. Sanfilippo e E. Franzina (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2003), 85-100.

ancient Roman architectural style joined a statue of the Goddess Rome, which suggested a sort of resurrection of the Roman imperial times. At the same time, the modernity of the Fascist industry was depicted by a waterfall that ended in a tank facing a statue of the Italian scientist Guglielmo Marconi. According to Fascist propaganda, Marconi was the highest expression of Italian geniality and the technological qualities of the ‘new Italy’. For this reason, a special section was dedicated to the scientist within the pavilion that also displayed volumes of *Opera del Genio Italiano all’Estero*. Sailors such as Columbus, Caboto and Verrazzano were mentioned too, as they had a great popularity in North American Italian communities.²⁵ Columbus, in particular, symbolised Italy’s presence at the very beginning of United States history, as the founder of the American continent. His figure was so central that the regime was keen on collecting archival documentation to scientifically demonstrate his Italian descent which was actually disputed. Additionally, in 1934 Rome expressed admiration for U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s decision to proclaim Columbus Day a national holiday.²⁶ In a letter published in the *Legionario*, the voice of the *fasci* outside of Italy, a Bronx Italian parochial classroom visiting the New York World’s Fair described Italy’s Pavilion as proof of Italian imperial power and that the Italian population was a master of civilization. Within the pavilion, a special section was designed for the Italian colonies in Libya and in Eastern Africa, where the Italian contribution was portrayed as pacific and laborious, with graphics, diagrams, and photographs intended to depict the supposed civilization of the Ethiopian territories achieved under the Fascist occupation. Military operations were voluntarily omitted in order to disguise any imperialist ambitions, since the pavilion mostly sought to make an impression on American and Italian-American attendees and inspire them to travel to Rome in the future to attend the E42.²⁷

25 “L’Opera del genio italiano all’estero alla Mostra internazionale di New York”, *L’Ora*, 6 June 1939; “Mayor is cheered at Italy’s Pavilion”, *New York Times*, 10 May 1939; *Italy’s at the World’s Fair, New York 1939* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1940), Center for Migration Studies, Staten Island (New York), De Biasi Family Papers, box 10, folder “New York & World’s Fair of the 1913 and 1939”. On the fascist myth of Marconi see L. Benadusi, “Il mito della scienza”, *Storia d’Italia. Annali 26, Scienze e Cultura dell’Italia Unita*, a c. di C. Pogliano e F. Cassata (Turin: Einaudi, 2011), 157-176.

26 “La fine di una leggenda: Cristoforo Colombo è genovese”, *Il Legionario*, 12 December 1931; “Il Giorno di Colombo: Festa Nazionale Americana”, *Il Legionario*, 26 May 1934; G. E. Pozzetta and G. R. Mornino, “The Politics of Christopher Columbus and World War II”, *Altreitalia*, 10 (1998): 6-15; B. Deschamps, “Italian-Americans and Columbus Day: A Quest for Consensus between National and Group Identities, 1840-1910”, *Celebrating Ethnicity and Nation: American Festive Culture from the Revolution to the Early Twentieth Century*, eds. G. Fabre et al. (New York-Oxford: Berghan Books, 2001), 124-139. The historic character of Christopher Columbus had already been the inspiring, even if disputed focus of the Genoa Columbian Exhibition, see Abbattista, *Umanità in mostra*, 213-215.

27 P. Gioia, “L’Impero, la Libia e Rodi all’esposizione internazionale di New York”, *Rivista delle Colonie*, 12 (1939); “Una Mostra dell’Italia d’Oltremare nel padiglione italiano dell’Esposizione Universale di New

Though in 1939 at the New York's World's Fair Italy maintained an international profile, in the same year the Tripoli International Fair (which since 1927 had been a showcase of Italian manufacturing in the colonies) was devoting greater attention to autarchic production and the alliance between Rome and Berlin. Germany was the only foreign country hosted, while others were present through single expositors (mostly Italians living abroad). A special exposition was dedicated to the Italians in Tunisia, a community which – according to Fascist rhetoric – had suffered much discrimination under French rulers; in addition, these Italians lived in country in which Italy could claim control of the territory because of the supposed influence of the Italian culture.²⁸

On the eve of WWII, a constructive role in shaping the imperial image of Italy was assumed by the MTO, an exhibition that was divided into three sections, historical, geographical, and one related to production and labor. It was opened May 9th, 1940 in the Naples' district of Fuorigrotta, but closed a few months later following Italy's entrance into WWII. Naples was chosen to serve as a bridge to the southern shore of the Mediterranean; furthermore, the exhibition would provide the city with the opportunity to improve and restyle certain areas of town. A memorandum to Mussolini explained how the exhibition sought to display 'Italy's reborn imperial power' and to become 'a recipient and permanent driving force behind energies, initiatives and imperial interests'.²⁹

The historical section portrayed Italy as a powerful country bound to the seas from the ancient Roman age through the so called Ancient Maritime Republics up to the stories of recent Italian pioneers and explorers. This was meant to be a sort of 'visual summary' of what Italians had contributed to civilization across continents, including

York", *Le Colonie*, 12 January 1939; "L'Italia e l'Impero all'Esposizione Universale di New York" and "Le terre italiane d'oltremare" both in *Corriere dell'Impero*, 21 April 1939; "New York. Una lettera al Duce dei piccoli allievi di una Scuola italiana in America", *Il Legionario*, 1 October 1939; Asmae, Ministero Africa Italiana, III (1879-1955), miscellanea, box 47, folder "Comitato per la documentazione dell'opera svolta in Africa".

28 "Funzione autarchica della fiera di Tripoli. L'internazionalità della fiera orientata sull'asse Roma-Berlino", *Le Colonie*, 3 March 1939; "Imponente documentazione della potenza colonizzatrice della razza italiana in terra d'Africa", *Il Messaggero*, 6 March 1939; "L'Italofobia a Tunisi. Il fiero contegno di sei minatori e l'inaudita citazione di un giudice", *Il Legionario*, 20 May 1939; B. L. McLaren, "The Tripoli Trade Fair and the Representation of Italy's African Colonies", *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, 24 (2002): 171-197.

29 *Prima Mostra Triennale delle Terre Italiane d'Oltremare, Napoli-Campi Flegrei, 9 Maggio-15 Ottobre 1940-XVIII: Documentario* (N.p.: n.p., n.d.); *Promemoria per il Duce. Programma* [undated], Acs, Eur42, box 39, folder 25. See also G. Arena, *Napoli, 1940-1952 dalla mostra triennale delle terre italiane d'oltremare alla prima mostra triennale del lavoro italiano nel mondo* (Naples: Edizioni Fioranna, 2012); G. Dore, "L'ideologia coloniale e il senso comune etnografico nella Mostra delle Terre Italiane d'Oltremare", *L'Africa in vetrina. Storie di musei e di esposizioni coloniali in Italia*, a c. di N. Labanca (Paese: Pagus, 1992), 49-50; U. Siola, *La Mostra d'Oltremare e Fuorigrotta* (Naples: Electa Napoli, 1980); N. Mongiello, *La Mostra d'Oltremare dalle origini al 1980* (Naples: Ente Autonomo Mostra d'Oltremare, 1981).



Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Fondo Eur 42, box 1005, folder 6769, sub-folder 45, insert 2, "Mostra Terre Italiane d'Oltremare".

the role of travelers, explorers, geographers, traders and missionaries on the African continent. Unsurprisingly, the conclusion was reached with a few sections dedicated to the colonial conquest and finally the proclamation of the empire.

The geographical section, which was dedicated to all the Italian colonies (Libya, Italian Eastern Africa, Rhodes and Italian Aegean Isles and Italy's Chinese license of Tianjin), continued the glorification of Italian geniality and labor abroad. In the room of the empire a world map displayed the global distribution of Italians; additional rooms also depicted Italian labor and missionary activities in non-Italian African colonies. Finally, the alleged function of creating a cultural bridge between the Far Eastern and Mediterranean civilizations was highlighted.

In the same section, state racism was a component of imperial identity. The racial subjugation of natives in the Horn of Africa was shown by an African village that intended to reproduce the ethnic mosaic of the Italian empire. Some 56 natives (including 17 women and 7 children), mostly workers and artisans, were recruited to live their 'ordinary' life in an imagined village regimented by Fascist ordinances. These individuals were forced to remain in Italy for the duration of the war due to the impossibility of repatriating them.³⁰

What role did Italians outside of Italy assume in the Neapolitan exposition? Archival documentation does not reveal an effort to facilitate an influx of Italian emigrants to Naples. It is more likely that Fascist hierarchies preferred to orientate prospective travelers toward the E42, which in the Fascist mind set was perceived as the most significant event of the regime's nearly twenty-year long rule; indeed, some tension characterized the relations between the managers of the two events, Vittorio Cini (E42 General Commissioner) and Vincenzo Tecchio (MTO President). Tecchio had attempted to remove any colonial exposition from the E42 in order to organize an *ad hoc* exhibition in Naples that same year. On the other side, during the preparation of the MTO, the E42 organizers denounced the tendency in Naples to overstep the boundaries of MTO's activities, which inevitably interfered with the program of the 1942 Rome Exhibition.³¹

In Naples limited visibility was granted to Italian migrants. This was probably intentional, and meant to emphasize that the 'sad time' of departures toward foreign countries had passed, and that in the Fascist age migration was only acceptable if it was to the Italian colonial settlements. Indeed, in the late 1930's the regime strongly encouraged migrations to Africa. One of the walls of the exposition symbolically reproduced a blown

30 Dore, "L'ideologia coloniale", 60; Abbattista, *Umanità in mostra*, 399-405. On fascist institutionalised racism in Africa see G. Barrera, "Mussolini's Colonial Race Laws and State-settler Relations in Africa Orientale Italiana (1935-41)", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 8 (2003): 425-443.

31 Acs, Eur42, box 1005, folder 6769, sub-folder 45, insert 2, "Mostra Terre Italiane d'Oltremare".

up image portraying the mournful face of an emigrant and was placed opposite to the image (in a different room) of an elder colonizer showing a young boy the way to Africa.³²

In the production and labor section the principles of Fascist mobility were even clearer. This section sought to shed light on the immense possibilities offered by an empire in-progress that still seemed to be oriented toward full autarchy, following the League of Nations' imposition of sanctions due to Italy's attack on Ethiopia. According to the scholar Gianni Dore, inside the MTO an exhibit on tourism offered a snapshot of the journey to the African continent, once again through the traditional lens of exoticism, but with a greater emphasis on the spirit of comfortable tourists rather than adventurers and pioneers. Indeed, the exhibit clearly indicated how travels in the Fascist Age had become fast and safe, thanks to the Italian capacity to build efficient methods of communication that inevitably begged comparisons with roads realized by the ancient Romans. In addition, the importance of Italian naval companies and airlines was particularly stressed, and they were depicted as pivotal to ensuring rapid connections between the colonies and the homeland. All in all this was considered both functional to boosting the economy of the colonies and to guaranteeing their military safety.³³ According to a Fascist pamphlet, by the time the MTO opened the city of Naples was no longer the site of "sad traffic which crowded its wharfs with young Italians whose work benefited other nations"; rather it had finally seen restored "its traffic flows and the most complete Mediterranean function of Italian expansionism in the world".³⁴ Thereby, in contrast with older migrants who cursed their desperate situation, during the era of the empire the Italian colonizer was keen to undertake a proud journey to Africa full of joyous expectations.³⁵ According to the Fascist mentality, this happy migration had to be mostly characterized by families who were ready to settle in the colonies and work hard, despite the fact that they would have found all the comforts of life in Italy. In this view, they would have received all the benefits offered to the families by the regime and would have been subject to Italian laws, including the right to be separated from native populations.³⁶

32 *Prima Mostra Triennale delle Terre Italiane d'Oltremare*, 273-276; Arena, *Napoli*, 41.

33 *Prima Mostra Triennale delle Terre Italiane d'Oltremare*, 61-102, 209-212; Dore, "L'ideologia coloniale e il senso comune etnografico", 61; see also *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana* (Milan: Consociazione Turistica Italiana, 1938).

34 *Prima Mostra Triennale delle Terre Italiane d'Oltremare*, 102.

35 *Prima Mostra Triennale delle Terre Italiane d'Oltremare*, 273.

36 *Prima Mostra Triennale delle Terre Italiane d'Oltremare*, 283.

V. THE POST-WAR PERIOD

The closing of the MTO due to the fighting, aerial bombings of Naples, and city occupations, first by the Nazi troops and subsequently by the Allies, led to the damage of nearly 60 percent of the Fuorigrotta's compound. Yet, in the early post-war years the desire to see the exposition reopened spread quickly. To this end, a special authority was established in 1948, and on June 8th, 1952, the President of the Italian Republic, Luigi Einaudi, officially inaugurated the Neapolitan exposition as the *Mostra d'Oltremare e del Lavoro Italiano nel Mondo* (Exhibition of Overseas and Italian Labor in the World). The exhibit opened in a very harsh economic period during which the country was affected by high rates of unemployment. Post-war centrist governments led by the Christian-Democrat Alcide De Gasperi fully abandoned the Fascist imperial ambitions and worked for the proper reintegration and legitimization of Italy into international politics. As a safety valve against social tensions, he strongly encouraged Italians to depart for foreign countries, nevertheless Italy worked to manage citizen labor mobility by signing bilateral agreements with many European and extra-European countries.³⁷ Some attention was given to this policy in the exposition, and emigration was newly depicted as a sad but inevitable necessity to be encouraged. Indeed, none denied that Italy would not have been able to feed its whole population and that departures would have had an economic utility in relation to the measurable incoming remittances. Therefore, it was not considered shameful to dedicate a few rooms to the economically depressed areas in Southern Italy, for whose future prosperity the traditional quality of Italian labor would have been functional.³⁸ In addition, Italy was now firmly on the path to becoming part of an international integrated system that included a European economic market. For this purpose the Naples exhibition hosted the stands of international authorities such as UNESCO, FAO, the International Labour Organization, and the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation. Moreover, since Italy was part of the pro-American Western bloc, the *Mostra* dedicated sections to the Marshall Plan and its productivity drive, the techniques of which had been exported to Italy. All of these efforts aimed to highlight the reinvigorated and solidified tie between Italy and the United States after Mussolini's conflict.³⁹

37 M. Colucci, *Lavoro in movimento. L'emigrazione italiana in Europa, 1945-57* (Rome: Donzelli, 2008).

38 R. Pepe, *Mostra d'Oltremare e del Lavoro italiano nel mondo* (Naples: Casella, [1953]); Arena, *Napoli*, 10-21, 101-136.

39 Pepe, *Mostra d'Oltremare*, 43-46; Arena, *Napoli*, 123-124. On the productivity drive in Italy see L. Segreto, "Americanizzare o modernizzare l'economia? Progetti americani e risposte italiane negli anni cinquanta e sessanta", *Passato e Presente*, 37 (1996): 55-83.

In the exposition a willingness to break with the recently fallen regime was clear, yet continuities with the former age appear evident as well. Recalling a theme that had been shaped during the Liberal age, the 1952 Exhibition again represented the prestige and utility of Italian labor as being beneficial to the wellbeing of foreign countries. This sentiment was visually presented at the entrance to the pavilion for Italian industrial activities in the world, where two colossal plaster hands holding tools were on display. Hence – with an eye also to the goal of increasing of tourism to Naples – in *Oltremare*, which was the voice of the *Mostra*, Luigi Tocchetti addressed the Italians in the world. He asked them to cultivate cultural and economic ties to the homeland and to use Italian labor as a tool for favoring mutual understanding in their host societies. According to Giuseppe Brusasca, Undersecretary of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the exposition had the objective of outlining all the achievements of Italians settled in the world who, after a visit to Naples, would have become ‘ambassadors’ for the homeland.⁴⁰

In keeping with the past, a room was dedicated to the theme of Italian geniality abroad, with comments on the current contribution of Italian miners in Belgium or immigrants in South America or Australia. Interest for the volume of the *Opera* was reinvigorated in the post-war period, to the extent that archival documentation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs (dated March 1947) reveals the imminent journey planned by Professor Roberto Vighi, the head of the *Opera*’s committee, to South America to carry out studies on Italian artists in the continent and publish a volume on to the subject.⁴¹ Ambiguities were also evident in the tourism and communications sections, where Italy was depicted as the ‘garden’ of Europe, a metaphor that had been previously used for the cover of a Fascist textbook destined for use in Italian schools abroad.⁴² Nevertheless, the most paradoxical continuities with the Fascist regime were in the pavilions dedicated to North America and Italian labor in Africa, respectively.

The former was particularly important in consideration of the rediscovered friendship between Italy and America in the post-war period. The pavilion included an iron-made tubular structure displaying a neon-lit American flag that was highly visible even at a great distance. In addition to reaffirming the traditional role of Italian sailors, the U.S. pavilion paid tribute to the labor and sacrifice of Italian immigrants in the country, who had achieved a prominent role in many sectors of the American economy. The pavilion had been managed by count Ignazio Thaon di Revel, a former Fascist. The

40 L. Tocchetti, “Oltremare”, *Oltremare*, 1 (1950); “Brusasca fissa le direttive per lo sviluppo della Mostra”, *Oltremare*, 2 (1951); Pepe, *Mostra d’Oltremare*, 21.

41 Pepe, *Mostra d’Oltremare*, 35; Arena, *Napoli*, 128-129; Asmae, Archivio di Gabinetto (1943-58), box 103, folder “Opera del Genio Italiano all’Estero – Padre Pietro Tacchi Venturi”.

42 Pepe, *Mostra d’Oltremare*, 24; Direzione Generale degli Italiani all’Estero, *Lecture classe quarta* (Rome: Scuole Italiane all’Estero, 1933).

descendant of a noble family of Turin, Revel had first been a nationalist militant before taking part in the 1919 occupation of the city of Fiume along with other prominent figures led by the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio. Subsequently he moved to New York, where in the 1920's he became president of the Fascist League of North America. For his loyalty as a militant, in 1935 he was appointed by Parini as inspector of the Italian *fasci* outside of Italy. The embarrassing presence of Revel at the exposition was coupled with its commemoration of Generoso Pope, a New York construction industry tycoon and owner of several Italian newspapers in the United States, including the most widely diffused daily newspaper in Italian *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*. Pope had also been one of the principal contacts between the Fascist regime in Rome and the Italian-American community, before ultimately conceding his pro-fascist position when war between Mussolini and the United States was close at hand.⁴³ Pope was introduced as a sort of exemplary migrant who had been plunged into the American dream:

He had an interesting life, almost legendary: expatriated as a child from a small village in Irpinia, in America he became a nationally-recognised figure. He was president of the Democratic Party in New York, editor-in-chief and owner of the newspaper *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*.⁴⁴

These ambiguous relations with the Fascist age continued in the section dedicated to Italian labor in Africa. In keeping with the pre-war period, a missionary exposition was organized (the Pope granted a plenary indulgence to all Italians residing in foreign countries who would have visited the exhibition) that specifically highlighted Italian labor's never-ending contribution to the civilization of African territories, including the non-Italian controlled colonies. Thus, the post-war Italian Republic revived a rhetoric that presumed an Italian presence anywhere that there were lands to be colonized, roads and railways to be constructed, "blood to be spilled", or a vivid memory of "laboriousness, will, and sacrifice" to be marked.⁴⁵ Furthermore, in the early post-war period the theme of Italian labor in Africa was strategically utilized by De Gasperi's governments in an effort to grant Italy trustee administration over pre-

⁴³ Pepe, *Mostra d'Oltremare*, 40-43; Arena, *Napoli*, 118. On Revel see "Ignazio Thaon de Revel Ispettore dei Fasci all'Estero", *Il Legionario*, 15 June 1935. On Pope see P. V. Cannistraro, "Generoso Pope and the Rise of Italian American Politics, 1925-1936", *Italian Americans: New Perspectives in Italian Immigration and Ethnicity*, ed. L. F. Tomasi (New York: CMS, 1985), 264-288; P. V. Cannistraro e E. Aga Rossi, "La politica etnica e il dilemma dell'antifascismo italiano negli Stati Uniti: il caso di Generoso Pope", *Storia Contemporanea*, 17 (1986): 217-243.

⁴⁴ Pepe, *Mostra d'Oltremare*, 42-43.

⁴⁵ Pepe, *Mostra d'Oltremare*, 28-31, 36; Arena, *Napoli*, 117.

fascist Italian colonies in Africa; this effort proved to be unsuccessful in every case but that of Somalia.⁴⁶

Despite these examples, Italy's attitude had changed with respect to the Fascist period. A year before the opening of the *Mostra*, Brusasca had remarked that the exposition would have been the "expression of our capacity to collaborate with the new African and Asian worlds and an overview of Italian labor outside of Italy".⁴⁷ According to his words, in an intensive phase of decolonization in Africa and Asia it looked ahistorical not to respect the rightful nationalist aspirations of the formerly colonised countries. Thus the exhibition in Naples should have offered tools for studying these new realities and to train figures capable of establishing collaborative relations with decolonised peoples by avoiding any assumed superiority with respect to the Africans.⁴⁸ Despite these considerations, Brusasca's words still demonstrate an open paternalism toward the formerly colonized populations, which reflects the myth of the Italians as *brava gente* ('good people'), a conviction that to this day is widely held and according to which Italy would have undertaken 'benevolent' colonialism in Africa. This form of colonization would have been highly "respectful" of the native populations, and therefore very different from the 'bad' and 'brutal' French and English approaches to colonialism. This idea has been widely diffused in Italian public opinion, despite the fact that many scholars have demonstrated how Italians in Africa had set up a segregated system affecting the colonized peoples. The Italians in Africa also violently repressed (both in the pre-Fascist and Fascist ages) any attempt to destabilise or contrast their power in colonies, going so far as to establish concentration camps in Libya and use chemical weapons forbidden by international treaties in Ethiopia.⁴⁹ Already in 1947 the periodical *Africa*, though it denigrated Fascism and its violent nature, continued to elevate Italy's greatest achievements on the African continent, where the Italian presence had been a

synthesis of sacrifice, perseverance, heroism, courage, and cleverness across many generations.

⁴⁶ N. Labanca, "Nelle colonie", *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana. Arrivi*, eds. P. Bevilacqua et al. (Rome: Donzelli, 2002), 197.

⁴⁷ "Brusasca fissa le direttive per lo sviluppo della Mostra", 8.

⁴⁸ "Brusasca fissa le direttive per lo sviluppo della Mostra", 8-9.

⁴⁹ See A. Del Boca, *Italiani, brava gente?* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2010); id., "The Myths, Suppressions, Denials, and Defaults of Italian Colonialism", *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 17-36; N. Labanca "Colonial Rule, Colonial Repression and War Crimes in the Italian Colonies", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 9 (2004): 300-313.

It is a holy thing because it brings the contribution of built cities and ploughed fields offered to the civilization of the world and human progress, from which native populations benefit as well.⁵⁰

Brusasca confirmed these self-acquitting statements by highlighting how important it was that the United Nations had granted Italy a trusteeship over Somalia to support its switch to independence (in the Naples' *Mostra* a section was specifically dedicated to this ex-colony). According to the Undersecretary, "destiny [...] provided a chance to demonstrate our great colonising capacities", therefore the U.N. mandate would have granted to Italy a test to reinsert itself on the international scene and offer its "contribution" to the valorization of depressed areas in the world.⁵¹ This was therefore perceived as a reward and the result of the "great capital of human labor" offered in ex-colonies by Italian farmers, workmen and employees who

were able to earn feelings of fondness and trust between the native population, therefore while others are obliged to leave their colonies due to the upheavals of the native populations, in a period of widespread anti-colonialism we Italians have been warmly welcomed in an area of Africa that was ours and recently lost not because of our former colonised subjects, but only as a consequence of an unfair treaty.⁵²

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The essay had the objective of analyzing the role of Italians abroad in the exhibitions organized in Italy from unification onwards, with a particular focus on the Fascist and early post-war Republican ages. Continuities and breaks with the past have been highlighted, while it has been shown how the representation of Italian migrants was instrumental to Fascist imperial ambitions, as well as to the pursuit of newfound international legitimization by post-war centrist governments. In particular, the themes of the alleged Italian geniality and the Italian contribution to world civilization through their work were functional to the political contingencies, and served to establish a sort of fraternal tie between those who had departed and resided abroad and their relatives in Italy. The former should therefore have undertaken a role in the process of Italy's nation-building.

50 "Lavoro italiano in Affrica", *Africa*, 2 (1947).

51 "Brusasca fissa le direttive per lo sviluppo della Mostra", 10.

52 "Brusasca fissa le direttive per lo sviluppo della Mostra", 9.

In the decades following the 1952 Neapolitan Exposition, many regional administrations and local municipalities have contributed to the re-elaboration of the memory of Italian emigration, in particular by building numerous museums dedicated to local migration flows. In addition, a National Museum of Italian Migrations has recently been established in Rome. Furthermore, scholarship has scrutinised the migration phenomenon from multiple perspectives.⁵³ However, the tendency to relate to Italians in the world in terms of geniality has been confirmed even in the most recent times. For instance in 2011, on the occasion of the celebrations for the 150th anniversary of Italy's unification, the Italian Institute of Culture in New York organized the exposition *150 anni di genio italiano* (150 years of Italian genius), which was held in New York, Boston and Turin, with the objective of explaining:

the contributions of Italian inventors and scientists, from Meucci to the most recent times, to the industrial development, particularly in America, without forgetting the missed opportunities of technological leadership; [therefore] the story will start from Leonardo Da Vinci and will look at sectors such as telecommunications, physics, chemistry, biology, medicine, neurosciences, as well as at the experiences of big Italian corporations and companies such as Fiat, Buitoni, and Olivetti.⁵⁴

Finally, the idea of Italian geniality was seen, albeit in different ways, in all Italian expositions from the unification onward, thus perpetuating a myth that even today is widely diffused in the Italian public opinion.

⁵³ *Museo nazionale delle migrazioni. L'Italia nel Mondo. Il Mondo in Italia*, a c. di N. Lombardi e L. Prencipe (Rome: Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 2008); M. Tirabassi, "Musei virtuali e reali sulle migrazioni", *Studi Emigrazione*, 167 (2008): 754-761; M. Sanfilippo, *Problemi di storia dell'emigrazione italiana* (Viterbo: Sette Città, 2005).

⁵⁴ Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri – Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali – 1861-2011. Luoghi della Memoria, Programma delle Celebrazioni, Elenco delle Grandi Mostre, last accessed 1 June 2014, <http://www.italiaunita150.it/programma-delle-celebrazioni.aspx>.