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# Italians and the Invention of Race: The Poetics and Politics of Difference in the Struggle over Libya, 1890-1913

Lucia Re

## 1. Race and Italian Identity

The manifestations of racism and xenophobia in Italy since the 1990s, especially in response to the new waves of immigration from “the other side” of the Mediterranean, have prompted scholars and cultural critics to take up once again the question of the role of race in Italian history.<sup>1</sup> Once thought to be only a temporary aberration of the Fascist era and essentially alien to the Italian “character,” racism has emerged as a recurrent trait in the behavior and cultural assumptions of Italians, including some of its most prominent political leaders. It is a trait that can arguably be traced back to the nineteenth century, even before the country’s unification.<sup>2</sup> The myth of the “good Italian” finally seems to have crumbled, while race-oriented studies have started to unveil an Italian “tradition” of racism that most textbook accounts of Italian history had long obfuscated or entirely elided. Yet even as racism re-emerges, and is sanctioned by discriminatory laws and policies against immigrants, current political discourse continues to minimize it, while downplaying or denying the historic faults of Italian colonialism and resuscitating the proverbial myth of Italian kindness and moral superiority.<sup>3</sup> The contemporary forms of racism exposed by

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<sup>1</sup> This study is part of a book in progress about Italy and Africa in the modern and modernist Italian literary imagination and cultural identity, from d’Annunzio to Ennio Flaiano’s *Tempo di uccidere* (1947, *A Time to Kill*). I would like to thank the anonymous peer-review readers of this study for their useful comments. Many thanks also to: Claudio Fogu, Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, Simon Levis Sullam, Patrizio Ceccagnoli, Sarah Carey, and Nicola Labanca.

<sup>2</sup> On racism as alien to the Italian national “character,” see for example Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo* (original edition 1966) (Torino: Einaudi, 1993), 27-28: “Tanto la psicologia popolare quanto la cultura (neppure quella media e più provinciale) non hanno mai veramente conosciuto in Italia l’eccitamento razziale e il razzismo. E non solo non li hanno mai conosciuti, ma non ne hanno mai portato in sé neppure i germi.” (“In Italy, the mind-set of the masses, like culture itself [even of the most provincial and average sort], never really had anything to do with racism or racial passions. These were always entirely alien to the former, both of which were essentially free of them even in their most embryonic form”). The study of Italian racism has grown since the 1990s, often amid controversy, with scholars examining especially the twentieth century and the contemporary period. See the pioneering essays in Alberto Burgio and Luciano Casali, eds., *Studi sul razzismo italiano* (Bologna, CLUEB, 1996); Alberto Burgio, ed., *Nel nome della razza. Il razzismo nella storia d’Italia, 1870-1945* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999) and Annamaria Rivera, *Estranei e nemici. Discriminazione e violenza razzista in Italia* (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2003). This book contains a detailed inventory of racial intolerance, “Inventario dell’intolleranza,” (91-157) for the years 2000-2002 in Italy by Paola Andrisani, drawn mostly from the national and local press. On contemporary racism and immigration in Italy, see especially Alessandro Dal Lago, *Non persone. L’esclusione dei migranti in una società globale* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1999). Among the few studies of the question of race and racism in nineteenth-century and liberal Italy, see Michele Nani, *Ai confini della nazione. Stampa e razzismo nell’Italia di fine Ottocento* (Roma: Carocci, 2006) and Aliza S. Wong, *Race and the Nation in Liberal Italy, 1861-1911. Meridionalism, Empire, and Diaspora* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> In October 2004, Italian vice-premier Gianfranco Fini, shortly before becoming minister for foreign affairs, declared in front of an assembly of representatives of thousands of Italians forced to leave Libya in 1970: “Non c’è dubbio che il colonialismo ha rappresentato, nel secolo scorso, uno dei momenti più difficili nel rapporto tra i popoli e nel rapporto tra l’Europa e, in questo caso, il Nord Africa, ma, e ovviamente parlo a titolo personale, quando si parla del colonialismo italiano, credo che occorra parlarne ben consapevoli del fatto che sono altri in Europa che si devono vergognare di certe pagine brutte perché anche noi abbiamo le nostre responsabilità ma, almeno in Libia, gli italiani hanno portato, insieme alle strade e al lavoro, anche quei valori, quella civiltà, quel diritto che rappresenta un faro per

the left-wing and liberal press may seem atypical and un-Italian even to many liberal-minded Italian citizens of today; few in fact are aware of the considerable role that various forms of racism have played in the history and even in the *formation* of Italy as a nation and, indeed, in the creation of the “Italian identity.” Proverbially weak and fragmentary, divided, and, to this day, perennially seen as loose and unstable, Italian identity seems to “come together” for Italians as a collective imaginary formation, taking on a “patriotic” semblance and an apparently solid substance, mostly when stimulated by the fear of marginalization or the dread of the nation being taken over, invaded, weakened, corrupted, or tainted by an ethnically or racially construed “other.”<sup>4</sup> As Giulio Bollati observed in a pioneering essay, the essence, nature, character of “Italianness” is an ethno-racial *imaginary* formation, an impalpable *etere etnico* (ethnic ether): “l’identità si definisce per differenza e si sostiene sulla svalutazione o la negazione dell’identità dell’altro” (“identity is defined by difference and sustained by the devaluing or negation of the other”).<sup>5</sup> Through much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Italians in the world had an ambiguous status as a poor, emigrant, and ethnically defined minority, often oppressed and subject to violent discrimination.<sup>6</sup> In the United States, Southern Italian emigrants in particular were considered “non-white” or even “black” and thus racially inferior.<sup>7</sup> The anxiety caused by this ambiguous ethnic status, and Italy’s traditional inferiority complex vis-à-vis the world’s more powerful nations, may have contributed

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l’intera cultura, non soltanto per la cultura occidentale.” (“There is no doubt that, in this past century, colonialism represented one of the most difficult moments in the relationship between peoples, and in the relationship between Europe and—in this case—North Africa. Obviously, I am speaking for myself on this topic of Italian colonialism, but I believe that we ought to address it well aware of the fact that there are others in Europe who should be ashamed of [their role in] certain ugly chapters in recent history. We too have our own responsibilities, but, at least in Libya, Italians brought not only roads and jobs, but those values, that civilization, and that system of laws that serve as a beacon for culture as a whole, and not just Western culture”). The speech may be read in its entirety at the website of the *Associazione Italiani Rimpatriati dalla Libia* (*Association of Italians Repatriated from Libya*). In another speech he was supposed to deliver in front of the Libyan president Gheddafi on the occasion of his visit to the Chamber of Deputies on June 11, 2009, Fini briefly refers to colonialism as “una pagina dolorosa” (“a painful chapter”) before going on to extol the Bengasi friendship treaty signed by the two countries on August 30, 2008 and to emphasize the need for Libya not only to renounce violence and terrorism but also to cooperate fully with Italy and the Mediterranean-European Union in curbing illegal immigration from Africa across the Mediterranean. The speech was not delivered because Fini, due to Gheddafi’s tardiness, decided to cancel the event. The speech was published in *Il foglio*, June 13, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> In the vast literature about the Italian national character and the weakness of the Italian national identity, see for example Massimo Salvadori, *Italia divisa. La coscienza tormentata di una nazione* (Roma: Donzelli, 2007), Remo Bodei, *Il noi diviso. Ethos e idee dell’Italia repubblicana* (Torino: Einaudi, 1998) and Giulio Bollati, *L’italiano. Il carattere nazionale come teoria e come invenzione* (Torino: Einaudi, 1983). For a useful survey, see also Silvana Patriarca, “Italian Neopatriotism: Debating National Identity in the 1990s,” *Modern Italy* 1 (2001): 21-34. Despite the Italian rhetorical propensity for self-denigration and anti-Italianism (widely criticized since the 1990s by a growing number of “neopatriots”), racism is hardly ever listed among the national “vices” by Italy’s critics.

<sup>5</sup> Bollati, *L’italiano*, 40.

<sup>6</sup> For example, eleven Italians were lynched in New Orleans in 1891, and in 1893 some thirty Italians were killed by a mob in Aigues-Mortes, France. About racism against Italian emigrants, see Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation. The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2008). On the new racism against immigrants after Italy’s transition “from sending to receiving nation,” see Donna Gabaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 170-176, and Marco Jacquemet, “The Discourse on Migration and Racism in Contemporary Italy,” in Salvatore Sechi, ed., *Deconstructing Italy: Italy in the Nineties* (Berkeley: International and Area Studies, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Patrizia Salvetti, *Corda e sapone. Storie di linciaggi degli italiani negli Stati Uniti* (Roma: Donzelli, 2003). See also the essays in *Are Italians White? How Race is Made in America*, ed. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (New York: Routledge, 2003).

to fuel the Italian recurrent tendency towards racism.<sup>8</sup> The presence within the national borders of “different people,” belonging to racially or ethnically defined groups, is represented and perceived recurrently in contemporary Italy as a threat to the nation and to the integrity and authenticity of “real” Italian culture: an attack on its way of life, its language, its literature, its food, and its distinguished European and Western lineage. Italian civilization, it is often remarked, dates back to Dante and the humanist tradition and can even be traced all the way back to classical antiquity.<sup>9</sup> The chronic weakness of the Italian national identity thus seems to make Italy all the more vulnerable to the fear and paranoia that trigger racism and its mythologies. Italy, perhaps more than other nations, appears capable of stabilizing its precarious self-image only through fear, loathing, and rejection or subjection of an imagined, inferior, less civilized “other.”<sup>10</sup>

The crucial role played by the Romantic literary canon in the formation of the Italian national identity in the nineteenth century has been explored by historian Alberto Banti, who in his groundbreaking work has also highlighted the pervasiveness of ethnic and racial motifs and the idea of an “Italic blood” in the literary articulation of the nation.<sup>11</sup> Through the civil code (the so-called Codice Pisanelli), the parliamentary debate on citizenship in 1865 sanctioned in legal terms the principle of “jus sanguinis” over “jus loci.” As Giuseppe Pisanelli himself explained at the time: “la razza è il precipuo elemento della nazionalità” (“race is the principal element of

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<sup>8</sup> On this tendency, see Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 43: “Minorities are the major site for displacing the anxieties of many states about their own minority or marginality (real or imagined) in a world of a few megastates, of unruly economic flows and compromised sovereignties. Minorities, in a word, are metaphors and reminders of the betrayal of the classical national project.”

<sup>9</sup> On September 27, 2001, the national and international media reported widely Silvio Berlusconi’s assertions regarding the supposed “superiority of Western civilization.” The Italian prime minister stated: “Dobbiamo essere consapevoli della superiorità della nostra civiltà. Una civiltà che ha dato luogo a un largo benessere nelle popolazioni dei paesi dove la si pratica. Una civiltà che garantisce il rispetto dei diritti umani, religiosi e politici. Rispetto che certamente non esiste nei paesi islamici. [ . . . ] L’Occidente è destinato a occidentalizzare e conquistare i popoli. L’ha fatto con il mondo comunista e l’ha fatto con una parte del mondo islamico. Ma c’è un’altra parte di questo mondo che è ferma a mille e quattrocento anni fa.” (Ansa wire service release, quoted in Rivera, *Estranei*, 126: “We must be aware of the superiority of our civilization. A civilization that has given rise to a greater wellbeing in the populations of the nations where it is practiced. A civilization that guarantees respect for human, religious, and political rights. This respect certainly does not exist in Islamic countries [ . . . ] The West is destined to westernize and conquer peoples. It did this to the communist world and to a part of the Islamic world. But there is another part of this world that is stuck 1400 years in the past”). Berlusconi, whose party at the time was called “Forza Italia” (“Go Italy”), has dominated Italian politics since 1994, winning elections repeatedly (except for a narrow defeat in 2006), and contributing to create the image of a unified Italy through his monopoly of the mass media, where (after the seeming collapse of all other ideologies and political passions), populist economic and cultural protectionism, and racialized and anti-feminist discourse, are the pervasive common denominator.

<sup>10</sup> The Italian party Lega Nord ([Northern League] a long-time and crucial supporter of Berlusconi), with its secessionist threats and its reiterated attacks against the South and against the purported Islamophilia of “Rome,” is symptomatic both of the weakness of the Italian national identity and of its chronic racism.

<sup>11</sup> Alberto Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento. Parentela, santità e onore alle origini dell’Italia unita* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000). Commenting on Giovanni Berchet’s poetic description in *Le fantasie* (The Fantasies) of the “Giuramento di Pontida” (“Oath of Pontida”), and on other canonical texts which contributed to shape the myth of the Italian nation, Banti writes: “Sono il sangue – che lega la successione delle generazioni a una terra –, una comune tradizione, un comune linguaggio, gli elementi costitutivi della comunità nazionale” (62; “A common tradition, a common language, and blood—which links successive generations to a land—are the constitutive elements of the national community”). For the wider European context of this racializing tradition and the myth of the “stirpe di un unico sangue” (“race of one blood alone”), see Alberto Banti, *L’onore della nazione. Identità sessuali e violenza nel nazionalismo europeo dal VIII secolo alla Grande Guerra* (Torino: Einaudi, 2005).

nationality”).<sup>12</sup> The same criterion of the nation as a blood or racial community rooted in a specific territory was, Banti notes, also the basis for the electoral reform carried out by Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti, with the law approved on June 13, 1912 and turned into a reality in August, which added five million voters to the political life of the state.<sup>13</sup> It is significant that this happened shortly after, according to *La Stampa* (October 19, 1912), Italy had undergone a resurrection, daring to take up arms and cross the Mediterranean to defend the *Patria*. However, Banti does not extend his analysis of the racialization of citizenship and nationality to the Liberal and Giolittian eras, nor does he seem to consider it a relevant part of the ideology of the Italian bourgeoisie.<sup>14</sup> Banti’s analysis of the imaginary making of the Italian nation through the influence of racially-inflected Romantic literature and art emphasizes the symbolic, idealized role attributed to women and their “honor.” Yet he fails to discuss the ideological process through which, despite considerable changes in the structure of the family and in gender roles in the nineteenth century, women after the unification began increasingly to be represented as naturally and exclusively destined to the reproductive sphere and the home.<sup>15</sup> He also neglects to acknowledge that, even after the creation of “universal suffrage” in 1912, women were still excluded from the vote and, thus, denied not only citizenship but, implicitly, the same racial status as Italian men. Women were in fact excluded from the right of transmitting citizenship to their own children: only the father’s “blood” mattered.

The later nineteenth century and the turn of the century saw an unprecedented racialization of women, epitomized by the publication in 1893 of *La donna delinquente, la prostituta e la donna normale* by Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero.<sup>16</sup> In the human and social sciences, and in the literary production (both popular and highbrow) of Liberal and Giolittian Italy, women were increasingly represented as more atavistic, primitive, and naturally less developed beings than men (and thus in evolutionary terms closer to the level of the “lower races”).<sup>17</sup> The insertion of women

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<sup>12</sup> Banti, *Nazione del Risorgimento*, 168-69. “Jus sanguinis” is still the prevailing principle in the Italian immigration law first promoted by the leader of the Lega Nord, Umberto Bossi and the right-wing leader Fini, known as the “Bossi-Fini law.”

<sup>13</sup> Carlo Bersani, “Modelli di appartenenza e diritto di cittadinanza in Italia dai codici preunitari all’unità,” *Rivista di storia del diritto italiano* 70 (1997): 331-342, cited in Banti, *Nazione*, 168-69.

<sup>14</sup> Alberto Banti, *Storia della borghesia italiana. L’età liberale* (Rome: Donzelli, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> Giovanna Fiume, “Storie del Risorgimento,” *Quaderni storici* 107, vol. 33:2 (August 2001): 595-614. For a feminist critique of Banti, see especially p. 609. See also my “Passion and Sexual Difference: The Gendering of Writing in 19th-Century Italian Culture,” in *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento*, eds. Albert Ascoli and Krystina Von Hennenberg (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 155-200.

<sup>16</sup> This work is now available in an excellent translation as Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute and the Normal Woman*, translated and with a new introduction by Nicole Hahn Rafter and Mary Gibson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). On the concept of “racialization” as the cultural process through which differences are naturalized and legitimated, see Karen Murji and John Solomon, *Racialization. Studies in Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1-27. Racialization as a concept originates in the work of sociologist Robert Miles, who in turn was inspired by the seminal thought of Franz Fanon, especially *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952) and *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961). Recent feminist studies have increasingly emphasized the nexus of race and gender in the racializing process. Racialization emerges always through, and in relation to, notions of sex-gender-sexuality, and physical and mental capacity, all of which are interwoven. See Floya Anthias, Nira Yuval Davis and Harriet Cain, *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-Racist Struggle* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> For a careful feminist account of the racialization of woman in the human and social sciences, see *La donna nelle scienze dell’uomo. Immagini del femminile nella cultura scientifica Italiana di fine secolo*, ed. Fernanda Minuz and Annamaria Tagliavini (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1989), and Valeria Paola Babini, “Un altro genere. La costruzione scientifica della «natura femminile»,” in Burgio, *Nel nome della razza*, 475-89.

into the public sphere was often considered a threat to the Italian race. The prevailing attitude was that women were meant to be procreators; outside the home they risked sexual degeneration, and the loss of their maternal nature was believed to imperil the future of the race. One of the main tenets of this “naturalization” and racialization of women was that women were instinctively passive, slow and peaceful, sentimental and excitable rather than rational, made to nourish and nurture, but lacking the intellectual ability, energy and strength needed to fight in the struggles of the public sphere and of the modern world. Exposure to the excessive stimuli of the public sphere, in fact, could impair the delicate mental balance of women. Women’s irrational, impulsive nature and latent tendency towards animalistic, primitive behavior were often assimilated to those of the lower classes, “the crowd,” and generally the inferior, criminal and degenerate strata of society. As early as 1890, Lombroso and Rodolfo Laschi in *Il delitto politico* (Political Crime) asserted that women’s less evolved mental abilities, akin to those of primitive peoples and inferior races, made them politically unreliable and even dangerous, because easily susceptible to the contagion of the crowd’s insane violence: “In tutte le epidemie di follia [. . .] la donna si fece notare per una eccezionale stravaganza ed esaltazione: ciò proviene dalla sua natura più istintiva e più eccitabile [. . .] sicché i suoi sentimenti sociali subiscono più facilmente gli effetti del contagio; e quando nei suoi slanci appassionati sente l’appoggio dell’uomo, lo sorpassa nel campo della follia” (“In all epidemics of insanity [...] woman drew attention for her exceptional extravagance and fervor: this is a result of her more instinctive and excitable nature [...] her social emotions are thus more easily impacted by the effects of the contagion; and when, in her impassioned fits, she perceives the support of man, she surpasses him in the realm of madness”).<sup>18</sup> Due to her lower degree of evolution, the wild, savage and animalistic past lurking under the surface of every human being was in woman always dangerously ready to emerge, especially if stimulated by a violent event such as a mass demonstration or a revolution.

The feminization and racialization of the crowd (popularized in Europe by Gustave Le Bon’s *La Psychologie des foules* [*The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*]) found one of its most prolific proponents in Scipio Sighele, author of the best-selling *La folla delinquente* (1891, *The Criminal Crowd*). Feminism and the requests for equal rights and suffrage for women, according to Sighele, will continue to be a patent absurdity – even in the new century. Sighele’s 1910 volume *Eva moderna* (Modern Eve), published at the height of the debate on female suffrage, is even clearer in this regard. Woman is more primitive and less evolved than man because she has remained essentially the captive of her physical instincts and body, “schiava del suo sesso” (“slave to her sex”), and thus still incapable of thinking abstractly. Sighele openly compares women to the less evolved races that, unlike “noi di razza bianca” (“those of us of the white race”), occupy the lowest ranks of the evolutionary scale.<sup>19</sup> This inferiorization of women in Italy was a way for men to define their own Italian identity by opposition and to give a gendered as well as racially and socially higher meaning to male citizenship.<sup>20</sup> Even when the argument against female suffrage

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<sup>18</sup> Cesare Lombroso and Rodolfo Laschi, *Il delitto politico e le rivoluzioni in rapporto al diritto, all’antropologia e alla scienza di governo* (Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1890), 228.

<sup>19</sup> Scipio Sighele, *Eva moderna* (Milano: Treves, 1910), 53-55; 130-57.

<sup>20</sup> The influential writer, anthropologist, sexologist, professor and popular writer Paolo Mantegazza, for example, who from 1875 until his death in 1910 was also a senator of the Regno d’Italia, compared the inferiority of women to that of “the African peoples.” Being underdeveloped and child-like, according to Mantegazza, women and Africans both needed to be guided and ruled by (white) men. *Fisiologia della donna* (Milano: Treves, 1893), 206-7. Unequal to men, women, in Mantegazza’s view, could not be full political subjects of the nation and could legitimately aspire only to a lesser kind of vote, the *voto amministrativo* (local elections). This position was widely shared in Liberal Italy and justified on the basis that only local, micropolitical interests were connected to woman’s natural sphere, i.e. the

was couched in seemingly complimentary terms as the necessary implication of a natural difference, it was based on the assertion of the incontrovertible superiority of the Italian white male as a political subject. This can be seen for example in a sentence issued in July 1906 by Venice's *Corte d'Appello* (Appeals Court) which, citing the words of justice minister Giuseppe Zanardelli, rejected the official request by a group of seven women to be considered for election: "Quelle stesse virtù nelle quali la donna vince veramente l'uomo e per le quali è ammirata, virtù di tenerezza, di passione, d'impeto, ma che traggono nascimento dal fatto incontrastabile che in essa prevalgono il cuore alla mente, l'immaginazione al raziocinio, il sentimento alla ragione, la generosità alla giustizia, quelle stesse virtù non sono quelle che ai forti doveri della vita civile maggiormente convengono" ("Those same virtues in which woman truly dominates man and for which she is admired, virtues of tenderness, passion, fervor, are however born from the unavoidable fact that, in her, the heart prevails over the head, the imagination over rationality, emotion over reason, generosity over justice. These same virtues are not those that are most suitable to the heavy duties of civil life").<sup>21</sup> Women in Italy increasingly came to resent their supposed inferiority, and to aspire to a more equal status in the nation. Yet, after the rise of feminism at the turn of the century, the years between 1910 and 1913 saw the defeat of suffragism in Italy. This defeat occurred in concomitance with the Libyan campaign and Italy's war against Turkey in the North-African territories of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. It was this war that facilitated the fashioning of a different racial identity for Italian women and for other groups (such as Sicilians and generally Southern and rural Italians, but also Catholics and Jews) that had been previously "racialized" in negative, demeaning terms or alienated on the basis of religious belief, ethnicity, or both. The Libyan war thus represented a turning point and an important, racially-oriented shift in the process of "making Italians," which had started fifty years earlier after Rome was finally seized from the Pope and the territorial unification officially completed in 1871.

The Libyan war sought to unify Italians by displacing racism from inside to outside the body of the nation and its people. Although most Italians have a hard time even remembering this war, which usually occupies a paragraph or two in history textbooks, it was the longest in Italian history, for it was to last effectively from 1911 until 1932. After the bombing and occupation of Tripoli on October 3, 4, and 5, 1911, Italy launched a series of attacks by the navy across the Mediterranean, from Albania to the Dardanelles, and occupied the Dodecanese islands. Turkey, which had repeatedly sought ways to avoid the war (including offering Italy a protectorate) and was considerably weakened by the fighting that immediately erupted in the Balkans, signed a peace treaty on October 18, 1912 and officially ceded its Libyan territory to Italy. Yet the resistance and guerrilla warfare continued until 1932, when, after the arrest and hanging of the resistance leader Omar Al-Mukhtar in 1931, the Italian army finally succeeded in controlling the whole country.<sup>22</sup>

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family and the home. Yet, even the possibility of granting women the local vote and allowing them to enter the electoral polls along with unknown men, and possibly degenerate women and prostitutes, was finally seen as too much of a threat to morality, to the natural separation of the spheres and to the future of the Italian people. Voting could lead to a dangerous blurring of the natural difference between the sexes, and expose women to sexual and hence racial degeneration. See Mariapia Bigaran, "Donne e rappresentanza nel dibattito e nella legislazione tra '800 e '900," in Daniella Gagliani and Mariuccia Salvati, eds., *La sfera pubblica femminile* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1992), 63-71.

<sup>21</sup> *Donne sulla scena pubblica*, ed. Nadia Maria Filippini (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2006), 209.

<sup>22</sup> See Abdullatif Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization and Resistance, 1830-1932* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994). Colonization began under the Fascists, but the aridity and extreme heat of the area made Libya unsuitable for the kind of agricultural colonization Fascism envisioned. The region's major resource was, of course, oil, but Mussolini ironically cut funding for mineral exploration in Libya in 1936 after the conquest of Ethiopia, which was believed to be much richer in minerals. Oil was discovered in Libya only

The Libyan war thus constitutes the clearest evidence of the embarrassing long-term continuity between Liberal and Fascist Italy, a fact that, along with the role played by the Catholic Church in sustaining racism, and the Italian atrocities committed in Libya as early as 1911, may help explain the Italian tendency to forget it or, rather – perhaps – repress it.<sup>23</sup>

Although studied carefully by some capable contemporary historians, the significance of the Libyan campaign of 1911-1912 and its long aftermath in relation to the racialized construction of Italian identity has yet to be fully ascertained, and the role played by literary discourse and by men (as well as women) “of letters” in this process has received scarce and sometimes only superficial attention.<sup>24</sup> The national consensus for this first racist war was, I will argue, largely constructed as a literary creation.

The invasion of Libya, the occupation of Tripoli in October 1911 and the Italian annexation a month later, despite the official declaration of “peace” in October 1912, triggered a powerful wave of resistance by the Arab and Berber populations and the beginning of the bloodiest phase of the conflict. Yet, on November 19, the feminist novelist and poet Sibilla Aleramo published in the journal *Il Marzocco* an article entitled “L’ora virile” (“The Virile Hour”) in which she wrote:

La guerra fra paese e paese, fra nazione e nazione, fra razza e razza, la guerra col ferro e col fuoco, non è una creazione della donna. Nondimeno essa l’accetta, al pari dell’uomo, ma più infelice di lui perché [ . . . ] invece di gettarvi il sangue delle proprie vene deve gettarvi quello dei suoi amati [ . . . ] La donna, che non sostiene l’idea della guerra, sa però di dover dare alla patria, con abnegazione assoluta, tutto

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in 1955.

<sup>23</sup> Although little known to the general public, Italian atrocities, after being widely exposed and discussed in the press at the time of the Libyan war, have been amply documented and studied by historians; a recent account in an accessible form is Eric Salerno, *Genocidio in Libia. Le atrocità nascoste dell’avventura coloniale italiana (1911-1931)* (Roma: Manifestolibri, 2005). Although a late-comer to colonialism, Italy in Libya was, as pointed out by Giorgio Rochat, Nicola Labanca, and others, the first colonial power to use aerial bombing of civilians and poison gas. Fire bombing of agricultural lands in Libya was practiced through the 1920s. About the phenomenon of the Italian repression of its colonial past, see Labanca 2010. See also Dal Lago 2010 and Maraini. Repression occasionally gives way to suppression and censorship, as in the case of the repeated attempts by Italian authorities to prevent the release and circulation in Italy of the 1979 film *The Lion of the Desert* by Moustapha Akkad on the grounds that it was defamatory for the Italian army. The film, with an international cast including among others Anthony Quinn, Irene Papas and Rod Steiger and Hollywood-like production standards, was lavishly financed by Muammar Gheddafi and certainly has propagandistic aspects. Yet it was also hailed by historian Denis Mack Smith (*Cinema Nuovo*, February 1982) as a memorable denunciation of the injustices and horrors of colonialism. It includes views of a concentration camp created by Italians to confine “the rebels,” as well as images depicting aerial bombardments and the use of poison gas.

<sup>24</sup> Benedetto Croce in *Storia d’Italia da 1871 al 1915* (Bari-Roma: Laterza, 1928), 270, inaugurated this tendency when he described the motivations for the Libyan war as spurious and merely literary “ragioni del sentimento” (“reasons of emotion”). For a detailed account of the Libyan war and its background, and of Italy’s and the Italians’ relationship with Libya and the Libyan populations, written with great narrative flair as well as critical acumen, see Angelo Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia*, vol. 1, *Tripoli bel suol d’amore* (Bari: Laterza, 1986); vol. 2, *Dal fascismo a Gheddafi* (Bari: Laterza, 1988). See also Paolo Maltese, *La terra promessa. La guerra italo-turca e la conquista della Libia 1911- 1912* (Milano: Sugar, 1968). For a discussion of the Libyan war in the larger context of Italian and European colonialism, see Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare: Storia dell’espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), 116-21. Labanca has brought to light the racist underpinnings of Italian colonialism. In addition to *Oltremare*, see his “Il razzismo coloniale italiano,” in Burgio, *Nel nome della razza*, 145-163. A very useful overview and anthology of texts about the Libyan war by a range of Italian men of letters and intellectuals (but no women) may be found in Antonio Schiavulli, ed., *La guerra lirica. Il dibattito dei letterati italiani sull’impresa di Libia (1911-1912)* (Ravenna: Giorgio Pozzi Editore, 2009).

quanto ha di più caro. E tace, in disparte. Ma no, non in disparte. Perché, dopo tutto, *L'Italia che si scopre oggi grande, è costituita di uomini e di donne* è un'unità non soltanto politica e militare, ma un'unità di cuori, cuori gagliardi e cuori trepidi, meravigliosa unità di destini.”<sup>25</sup>

(War between countries, between nations, *between races*—war fought with fire and steel—is not a creation of woman. Nevertheless, she accepts it just as man does, but more unhappily than he because [...] instead of spilling the blood of her own veins, she must spill that of her loved ones. [...] Woman, who does not support the idea of war, knows that she must, however, give everything she holds dear to the fatherland, with absolute self-sacrifice. And she remains silent and off to one side. But no, she is not to be sidelined! Because, after all, *that Italy which today is discovering its own greatness is made up of men and women*. The union of Italy is not only political and military, but is a union of hearts, of the strong- and weak-hearted; it is a marvelous union of destinies).

This text is interesting not only because it estheticizes the colonial war through the use of an alliterative, highly poetic rhythm and dyadic syntax, but also because it dramatically signals the end of feminist pacifism in Italy, in concomitance with the bitter defeat of suffragism. In this article, published in the journal that had been founded in February 1896 by Enrico Corradini (and named by Gabriele d'Annunzio, one of its guiding lights), women are called upon to set their differences aside and heroically to sacrifice the blood of their loved ones for the greater love of Italy and its “unità di cuori” (“union of hearts”). The war in Africa thus successfully displaced (and replaced) the gender war, now silenced in the interest of the unity of the nation. The escalation of the war in Africa and of the racialist campaign in the press in fact coincided with the electoral reform, finally ratified by parliament in May 1912 during a stalled moment in the war, as the Italian troops, despite repeated attacks, failed to curb the stubborn resistance of the indigenous population and the Arab and Turkish forces.<sup>26</sup> While widening the male electorate, the new law once again denied women the vote, entirely excluding them from representation and political citizenship and effectively splitting the nation more deeply than ever along gender lines. Although this coincidence has attracted little or no commentary, it has historic significance – a point that Aleramo brings to light. By adhering to the unifying notion of a collective identity that necessarily sets the Italian “race” in opposition to *other races*, women and, as we shall see, other disenfranchised or alienated groups “discover” (*si scopre*) an imaginary sense of belonging and commonality that makes the lack of equal political rights, and even the principle of representation, seem secondary and unimportant. In this higher, racial sense, Italy is, in Aleramo's words, “costituita di uomini e di donne” (“made up of men and women”) and is thus greater and truly one. The solemn, quasi-religious style and tone of Aleramo's text, her invocation of the need for “sacrifice” and togetherness, the allusion to the bonds of family, blood, and destiny, echo the rhetoric of those lofty imaginary pacts and calls to arms that constellate the literary canon of the Italian Risorgimento studied by Banti.<sup>27</sup>

In 1911, half a century after the political unification of the country, the lack of a truly common tradition and language in Italy was still painfully clear. The deep fractures that continued to divide

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<sup>25</sup> I quote from Sibilla Aleramo, *Andando e stando* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1997), 26-27 (emphasis mine).

<sup>26</sup> Del Boca, *Italiani in Libia*, 176.

<sup>27</sup> Banti, *Nazione*.

Italians more than ever and the failure of the “nationalization” process were exposed already in the 1880s and 1890s, in the prose of the great Italian *veristi* and *regionalisti* and by Aleramo herself in her 1906 novel *Una donna* (*A Woman*). The image of a common “blood,” on the other hand, a destiny of belonging to a distinct racial family, ethnic community, or “stock” (however composite and historically stratified) rooted in the Italian soil since ancient times, was a powerful *topos* that Liberal Italy inherited from the Risorgimento.<sup>28</sup> Fundamental to this racial *topos* was the notion of the natural superiority or *genio* (genius) of this putative Italian or Italic stock or ethnic “family”: a superiority defined in terms of aptitude to and degree of “civilization,” in contrast to the barbarity of the imagined ethnic “other.” It was through the reactivation of this latent Risorgimento *topos*, adapted and transformed to fit the new logic of colonialism and imperialism and deployed to appeal to the population at large (rather than to just an intellectual and social Northern elite), that in 1911 Italians finally gained an imaginary sense of unity and identity. Partly through a truly massive press campaign made possible by the new levels of literacy and by the construction in Liberal Italy of a highly developed network of information and public debate and exchange (through conferences, clubs, cafes, letter-writing, and salons – the latter being a specifically female-led social space), which percolated to all levels of social classes, the positive identification of nation with race took hold of the Italian collective imagination at this time, allowing for the repression and sublimation of painful internal conflicts and divisions. This identification, promoted largely through the media, was, I will argue, made especially enticing by poetic, fictional, and generally literary texts such as Aleramo’s.

My thesis is that – contrary to common perception – racism, colonialism, and imperialism are not an incidental, minor (and thus, understandably, largely forgotten) component of Italian identity and Italian history, but that in the final years of “Liberal Italy” (1870-1914), and particularly under the leadership of Prime Minister Francesco Crispi first, and then of Giovanni Giolitti, they came increasingly to be defining traits of the Italian national identity.<sup>29</sup> As previously in the Risorgimento, literature and the literary imagination played a crucial role in this unifying process. In a nation whose wealth and growth after unification were effectively based on the exploitation of voiceless women and peasants, and where parliamentary politics was soon reduced to cynical maneuvers, bargains, and intrigues (generally known as *trasformismo*),<sup>30</sup> intellectuals, writers, and idealists had sought in vain a great idea, a principle around which a strong sense of national identity and community could, however belatedly, take form. An imaginary construction of racial difference – race being always, like identity itself, an imaginary construct – and the fashioning of

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<sup>28</sup> The *topos* can effectively be traced in different forms in the language of the Italian Risorgimento, through authors as different as Vincenzo Gioberti, Giuseppe Mazzini and Vincenzo Cuoco. See Banti, *Nazione*, 63-67, and Bollati, *L’italiano*, 44-79. Gioberti wrote for example in 1844 that despite local differences there exists without question “un’Italia e una stirpe italiana congiunta di sangue, di religione, di lingua scritta ed illustre” (“an Italy and an Italian race united by blood, religion, and an illustrious written language”). *Del primato morale e civile degli italiani* (original edition 1844) (Capolago: 1846), 117.

<sup>29</sup> For the idea of nation as imaginary collective identity, see the now classic study by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (original edition 1983; second edition with a new preface London: Verso, 2006). In his ground-breaking studies, Alberto M. Banti has mapped out the formation of the Italian nation as an imaginary community. See especially Banti, *La nazione* and *Il Risorgimento italiano* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2004).

<sup>30</sup> For a concise discussion of this Italian style of politics which extends well beyond its official “inventor” (Agostino Depretis) to include Francesco Crispi, Giovanni Giolitti, and Benito Mussolini (but Silvio Berlusconi can certainly now be added to the list), see Bollati, *L’italiano* (The Italian). A more benign interpretation of Giolitti may be found in Norberto Bobbio, “La cultura italiana fra Ottocento e Novecento,” in *La cultura italiana tra ‘800 e ‘900 e le origini del nazionalismo*, ed. Roberto Vivarelli (Firenze: Olschki, 1981), 1-19.

an imaginary “Italian” racial identity contributed more than any other element to unify Italians and give them the sense of being “one nation.”<sup>31</sup> Contrary to historians such as Emilio Gentile, I believe that the word and concept of *razza* in this period, and increasingly after the crisis of the turn of the century and the decade leading up to 1911, are not used just as another way of saying *patria* (referring to a shared, spiritual, cultural, and humanist heritage and ideal),<sup>32</sup> but rather to forge the sense of an imaginary yet essential identity. Although, as shown by Mario Isnenghi, the new cult of war propagated by Gabriele d’Annunzio, F. T. Marinetti, and others became a powerful and even popular mythology in Giolittian Italy,<sup>33</sup> it was not war per se that brought traditionally marginal subjects and reticent Italians into the fold, but rather the imaginary racial identity that subtended it.<sup>34</sup> This imaginary sense of identity could entice and include even those who (like women, Catholics, Jews, peasants, and Southerners) were (or felt) excluded or alienated from the idealist humanist discourse and the paternalistic yet secular rhetoric of Italian Risorgimental patriotism. This new identity was constructed and reinforced increasingly by applying the debasing colonial logic of otherness *outside* rather than inside the nation’s borders. The creation of an imaginary (and in fact for the most part literally and even willfully *unseen*) racially different and inferior “other” on the other side of the Mediterranean (rather than, as we shall see, in the Italian

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<sup>31</sup> While some scholars refuse to use even the word “race,” and prefer to speak only of racism and racialization, and others object to race in the name of a humanist “universalism,” race remains, I believe, an invaluable concept in cultural and literary history as well as an important political and theoretical category. The idea of “race” or “ethnicity” is based on the notion that certain human groups and individuals are characterized by a visible somatic difference, or by other distinguishing features (physical, “ethnic,” religious, and cultural) that make them objectively different from “us.” To many people even today, the existence of objective racial categories seems self-evident; individuals seem to fit into one of three or four groups, defined by “obvious” physical characteristics. The idea of race seems to be based on undeniable evidence: to a certain “color” or certain somatic features correspond to certain predispositions, attitudes, capabilities, ways of behaving, and cultural traits. Yet race is not real, at least in any biological sense. There is in fact no scientific consensus on how boundaries between races may be recognized, and race has been widely acknowledged to have no substance or relevance as a biological concept. For a lively summary, see Daniel G. Blackburn, “Why Race is not a Biological Concept,” in Berel Lang, ed., *Race and Racism in Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 4-26. When noticeable physical features are not invoked, the implicitly racializing point of view assumes that the religious, cultural, social, and national peculiarities of certain groups or populations, rather than being merely historical phenomena, are traceable to some natural foundation: “blood,” genes, atavistic character, instinct, and so on. The study of racism and the critical literature on race as an imaginary construct applied to real human groups is quite vast, especially in French and English. Among some of the most useful, see Colette Guillaumin, *L’idéologie raciste. Genèse et langage actuel* (Paris-La Haye: Mouton, 1972), Robert Miles, *Racism* (London: Routledge 1989) and *Racism after “Race Relations”* (London: Routledge, 1993); Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991; original French edition 1988); Michael Banton, *The Idea of Race* (London: Tavistock, 1977) and *The International Politics of Race* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002); Murji and Solomons, *Racialization*. While acknowledging that the idiom of “ethnicity,” ethnic minority, ethnic origin, and, especially, ethnic “preference” may have some social value (especially when used by individuals and groups as inclusive manifestations of solidarity and community rather than as ethnocentric and exclusionary definitions of identity), Banton observes that these are in fact imaginary folk categories that may easily slip into the idiom of racial prejudice, with little or no theoretical and analytical value. Banton, *International Politics of Race*, 206-12. The argument against race and race-thinking as essentially “fascist” has been made, in the name of a universalist “new humanism,” by (among others) Paul Gilroy in *Against Race. Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> Emilio Gentile, *La grande Italia. Ascesa e declino del mito della nazione nel ventesimo secolo* (Milano: Mondadori, 1997), 34-36.

<sup>33</sup> Mario Isnenghi, *Il mito della grande guerra da Marinetti a Malaparte* (Bari: Laterza, 1970).

<sup>34</sup> Racism is often recognized by Italian historians as subtending other European nationalisms (French and German in particular); see for example Giovanni Busino, “Il nazionalismo italiano e il nazionalismo europeo,” in Vivarelli, *La cultura italiana*, 46-68.

South) finally allowed for an Italian identity to cohere as never before. In Italy, more than in other countries, racism thus played a key role in the belated formation of national identity.<sup>35</sup> The Libyan war press campaign, and the war itself in its largely literary construction, had, with its highly racialized symbolic logic, a paradoxically healing function for the fractured and contested identity of Liberal Italy. It created like never before, and in the face of glaring physical, behavioral, linguistic, religious, and cultural differences among Italians of different sexes, geographical areas, and social classes, the belief (however precarious and illusory) in an ethnic-racial sameness, a shared “essence.” A similar process of racialized identification and differentiation through opposition to an inferior “other,” promoted through new instruments of mass persuasion, later allowed Italians (including Italian Jews) to feel once again truly “one,” and Fascism to reach its peak moment of national consensus during the conquest of Ethiopia in 1935-1936. Men and women of all regions and social classes donated their savings and women even gave their wedding rings to the *Patria* in support of the colonial war effort in Ethiopia, while a self-righteous rhetoric exalted Italy’s attack as a “war of civilization and liberation” undertaken by a poor but generous proletarian people to find “a place in the sun” while breaking the shackles of primitive slaves in a barbaric land.<sup>36</sup>

The Italian conquest of Libya and the war against the Ottomans and the Turks, along with the Arab and Berber populations who rose up to fight the Italian invaders, have usually been read as but mere episodes on the way to the catastrophe of World War I.<sup>37</sup> *Irredentismo* is widely seen as the determining factor that galvanized intellectuals and precipitated the Italian patriotic enthusiasm for war. World War I itself is commonly indicated by cultural historians as the great unifier: the event that finally pulled Italians together (at least temporarily) and gave them a national consciousness they previously lacked. My hypothesis instead is that the Libyan war has a more central role in the history of Italian national identity. The Libyan war represents both a turning point and the *culmination* of a racial process of self-definition by Italians as ethnically “one people,” through which the profoundly disintegrating *internal* differences of race, gender, class, and religious belief that threatened the very notion of a united Italy were at once repressed, forgotten, and surpassed. In this process, poets, writers, and intellectuals in general took, for the first time in the history of united Italy, an active political role that in some ways was even more powerful than that of professional politicians.<sup>38</sup> They were not, as is often simplistically assumed, spokesmen directly at the service of political, class, and economic interests.<sup>39</sup> Rather, they

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<sup>35</sup> Eric Hobsbawm observes in *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 64-65, that ethnic or racial identity is rarely the most important motivation in modern nationalist movements, for what unites a nation is usually “not blood, but belief.” Yet this statement seems to beg the question, for to a large extent blood *is* in fact belief, as the Italian case shows (among others). The discourse of race and nation, as Etienne Balibar has argued in a fundamental essay “are never very far apart.” See “Racism and Nationalism,” in Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class*, 37. On the relationship between race and nation, “ethnoracial” consciousness and racism, see David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 118; 122.

<sup>36</sup> Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle. The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 171-182. On the Jewish support of the Ethiopian war, see Alexander Stille, *Benevolence and Betrayal. Five Italian Jewish Families under Fascism* (New York: Picador, 1991), chapter 5.

<sup>37</sup> See for example Adrian Lyttleton, *Liberal and Fascist Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 88-89.

<sup>38</sup> On intellectuals and war, see Angelo D’Orsi, *I chierici alla guerra. La seduzione bellica sugli intellettuali da Adua a Baghdad* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> For an overview of the financial, military and political backers of the press campaign that led to the Libyan war, including the Banco di Roma (whose capital came entirely from the Vatican), see Maltese, 33-34. See also the

articulated independently ideals and esthetic myths that often ended up intersecting and converging with the business agendas of financial interest groups and their press campaigns. In at least one case, that of the nationalist leader and party founder Enrico Corradini, literature and politics went hand in hand before Corradini abandoned the former for the latter.<sup>40</sup> Literary *topoi*, however, and literary devices including poetic diction, lexicon and rhythms, verisimilar narrative fiction, and utopian fantasy continued to play a crucial role in Corradini's and other writers' political activities. Literature itself, including the work of major poets and novelists such as Gabriele d'Annunzio, Giovanni Pascoli, and Matilde Serao, provided a ground for racialized political ideas to penetrate the mind of Italians and form public opinion under the guise of esthetic and even spiritual categories, only to be recycled into the stereotypes and lexicon that nourished and perpetuated the work of racism in ordinary life and in popular culture.<sup>41</sup> Finally, it was through the deployment of essentially poetic figures, and of a fictional utopian and fantastic kind of discourse loaded with exotic connotations, metaphors, and literary allusions and *topoi* imported and adapted from the literary tradition, that the press constructed the chimera of Libya as a promised dream land. The war itself sparked an unprecedented outpouring of literary creativity, including the humorous patriotic and orientalist operetta *Tripolineide*.<sup>42</sup> Literary discourse was thus no less crucial in the construction of the national consensus over Libya and of the Italian racial imaginary than the Romantic canon had been in the Risorgimento and in the movement for unification.

## 2. Race appears in literature: Morasso, d'Annunzio, and the evolution of a racial discourse from the 1890s to the Libyan War

In an article written for William Hearst's newspaper *The New York American*, d'Annunzio cites Giuseppe Mazzini and Francesco Crispi as the visionary politicians who saw that Italy's occupation of Libya was of vital importance for Italy.<sup>43</sup> In an attempt to cultivate the Italian

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fundamental study by Marcella Pincherle, "La preparazione dell'opinione pubblica all'impresa di Libia," in *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento* (July-September 1969): 450-482, and Roberta Viola, "La guerra di Libia nella percezione dell'opinione pubblica italiana," in *Mare Nostrum. Percezione ottomana e mito mediterraneo in Italia all'alba del '900*, ed. Stefano Trinchese (Milano: Guerini Studio, 2005), 39-52.

<sup>40</sup> Corradini was among the founders of the Italian nationalist party (Associazione Nazionale Italiana) in 1910; the party merged with the Italian Fascist party in 1923.

<sup>41</sup> On racial stereotypes and the press, in general and with specific examples from Piemonte, see Nani, *Ai confini della nazione*, 26-36.

<sup>42</sup> "Rivista in un prologo, due atti e tre quadri," music by Alberto Consiglio, performed by the Compagnia Italiana di Operette Carmen Mariani. It is worth pointing out that the cast of characters included the beautiful and gifted Carmen Mariani (one of the first women to have her own company) as "Tripolitania," an aviator (Alba Orlé); and a satirical impersonation of Gabriele d'Annunzio (Attilio Pietromarchi as "Gabinunzio"). The others were: Carolina Turroni (l'Italia); I. Barbetti (la maggioranza [the majority]); Guido Gianni (l'ombra di Enver bey [the ghost of Enver Bey]); Armando Laurini (Giovanni); Giulio Greni (Giovannino, gen. turco [a Turkish general]); Cesare Barbetti (Gigione); Oreste Parsi (Sonnellino); G. Gianni (Afferri, giornalista it. [an Italian journalist]); G. Tozzi (Catturati); A. Crimi (Trissolati); Paolo Mello (Il Bey di Tripoli [the Bey of Tripoli]); Salvatore Arcidiacono (segretario [secretary]); E. Fanucci (giornalista francese [a French journalist]); T. Piastrelli (giornalista inglese [an English journalist]); Armando Spelta (giornalista tedesco [a German journalist]); Elvira Procopio e Adriana Zacchi (marina [sailors]); C. Tozzi e G. Camozzi (odalische [odalisques]). For an enthusiastic anthology of writing about the Libyan war, see Emilio Scaglione, *Primavera italica. Antologia delle più belle pagine della guerra italo-turca* (Napoli, 1913). See also the nostalgic Francesco Prestopino, *Versi sulla sabbia. La poetica coloniale di Libia* (Milano: La vita felice, 2003).

<sup>43</sup> According to Mazzini, d'Annunzio claims, Libya was but a prolongation of Sicily. Written in French, the article, entitled "La Date de l'occupation de Tripoli . . ." ("The Date of the Occupation of Tripoli...") was apparently never

colonial and imperialist consciousness, Crispi and his circle had been among the first leaders in Liberal Italy to make use of a racially-inflected rhetoric, speaking, shortly before the Adua catastrophe, of “the Latin blood,” the “good blood that does not lie,” blood being the “primal and essential element of our race,” of “a truly superior people.”<sup>44</sup> But the genealogy of race in Italian political discourse is especially Dannunzian, and it has a rather interesting history prior to its full-fledged incarnation in d’Annunzio’s writings on the Libyan war. Less than a year after the Adua catastrophe, in 1897, a new writer named Mario Morasso (born in 1871), who was to have a crucial influence on Italian Futurism, published a leading article in *Il Marzocco*, the journal founded and still directed at the time by Enrico Corradini, who was then also at the beginning of the more militant, politicized phase of his publishing career (this was the same journal where the article “L’ora virile” by Sibilla Aleramo would later appear). Morasso appealed to other young men of his generation to take on the historic mission of “rebuilding the race into an organic ethnic community.”<sup>45</sup> The task at hand, Morasso affirmed, was for the Italian race to regain the primacy and power enjoyed by the same race in antiquity; a renewed cult of strength (“culto della forza”) and of the native soil (“la terra nostra”) was necessary, he insisted, to revive the noble spirit of the nation.

Morasso’s inspiration was certainly d’Annunzio, who (along with Giovanni Pascoli) was one of the literary guiding lights of *Il Marzocco*, and, having published the novel *Le vergini delle rocce* (*The Virgins of the Rocks*) in 1895, was then at the beginning of his “vate” (“prophet”) phase. D’Annunzio had been reading Nietzsche in French and had shifted in the 1890s from the cult of beauty for beauty’s sake to a more politicized, utopian, and militant estheticism, and what he still rather nebulously at first called “la fede nel nume velato della stirpe, nella forza ascendente delle idealità trasmesse a noi dai padri e ridomandate a noi dai futuri” (“faith in the shrouded idol of the race, in the ascendant power of idealities transmitted to us by our fathers and reclaimed from us by our descendants”).<sup>46</sup> Words like “stirpe” and “razza” begin to occur regularly in his work at this time as part of his efforts to create a new political sensibility among intellectuals, and a new mass following for them. A new breed of militant, politicized, and bellicose intellectuals was necessary according to the “Vate,” to save from abjection and degradation the ancient “sangue latino” (“Latin blood”): “Non è più il tempo del sogno solitario all’ombra del lauro e del mirto.

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printed, presumably due to the international scandal following Shara Shatt. It exists in manuscript form in several versions at the Vittoriale archives, and it was published in Gabriele d’Annunzio, *Scritti giornalistici*, ed. Annamaria Andreoli and Giorgio Zanetti (Milano: Mondadori: 2003), 2:807-12.

<sup>44</sup> “L’Italia nuova,” cited in Christopher Duggan, *The Force of Destiny: A History of Italy since 1796* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 347. Duggan, however, in his biography claims that Crispi was not “really” a racist, because while he often spoke about his being of the Latin race, Crispi emphasized nationality over race, for after all he knew that most Spaniards and French were of the same race. Nationality for Crispi involved the individual’s choice to embrace the culture, history, and values of a particular nation. Christopher Duggan, *Francesco Crispi 1881-1901: From Nation to Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 339. However, this argument seems weak, as the discourses of nationalism and race in Crispi are interwoven essentially to justify Italian colonialism and imperialism and the right of Italians to struggle on equal footing against the French, for example, on the basis of the same racial entitlement to civilize the racially “inferior” populations in Africa and the Mediterranean, taking over their territories either through massive emigration or through military action. Like many Italians of his era, including his staunch supporter Corradini, Crispi believed in the war between races as a tool, not only of national affirmation, but of racial evolution.

<sup>45</sup> “Ai nati dopo il 1870. La terza reazione letteraria,” *Il Marzocco* 2:1, February 7, 1897.

<sup>46</sup> The quote is from d’Annunzio’s 1895 “Proemio” to the elegant journal *Il Convito* (founded by d’Annunzio in Rome with Adolfo De Bosis, and first expression of the new Dannunzian cult and current of militant estheticism), subsequently republished under the title “La parola di Farsaglia,” in *Prose di ricerca*, vol. 1 (Milano: Mondadori, 1947), 453-57. *Le vergini delle rocce* first appeared in installments in *Il Convito*.

Gli uomini d'intelletto raccogliendo e moltiplicando tutte le loro energie debbono sostenere militarmente la causa dello Spirito contro i Barbari” (“The time is past for solitary dreams in the shade of the laurel and the myrtle. Men of intellect, gathering and multiplying all of their energies, must militarily support the cause of the Spirit against the Barbarians”).<sup>47</sup>

Race and blood as a theme emerged explicitly in d'Annunzio's work in the fifth section of the novel *Il trionfo della morte* (*The Triumph of Death*), entitled “La vita nuova” (“The New Life”) (composed between 1893 and 1894), certainly written under the influence of – among others – the new Italian school of criminal anthropology and of Maurice Barrès's highly successful trilogy of *Le Culte du moi* (1888-1891, *The Cult of the Self*). D'Annunzio himself evoked the then-fashionable school of criminal anthropology when, in a letter to his translator Jacques Hérelle, he referred to the novel as “studio rigoroso di un caso di mania suicida ereditaria” (“rigorous study of a hereditary case of suicidal mania”).<sup>48</sup> Much of the novel has a clinical tone. Giorgio Aurispa is in fact “doomed” through his “blood” to repeat the desperate act of his uncle Demetrio, who committed suicide. The intense ethnographic chapters of the novel, with the description of the savage, atavistic, and animalistic behavior of the Abruzzese fanatical and monstrously deformed multitudes, recall the Lombrosian anthropological style of the likes of Alfredo Niceforo's *L'Italia barbara contemporanea* (*Contemporary Barbarian Italy*). Unlike the naturalist French writers and the Italian *veristi*, d'Annunzio is interested, like Barrès, in exploring not only the fatality of “blood” and race, but also how individuals can overcome and transform the fate of hereditary illness and criminality.

For Barrès, the only cure for a suffering soul was immersion in the race and religion of his native soil. D'Annunzio's Barresian protagonist, Giorgio Aurispa, in order to overcome his self-disgust and erotic obsession for his lover Ippolita and to heal himself from his spiritual crisis while searching for values that will make his individual self-assertion meaningful (and redeem his egoism), goes back to his native Abruzzi. Among his people, he believes, he will be able to find his “true essence,” his ancient race and native soil, reestablishing a “contatto immediato con la razza da cui sono uscito [. . .] riprofondando le radici del mio essere nel suolo originario” (“immediate contact with the race from which I came [...] once again sinking the roots of my being into their original soil”).<sup>49</sup> For the mission of the intellectual and the secret to his self-balance is, he reflects, “saper trasportare gli istinti, i bisogni, le tendenze, i sentimenti della propria razza in un ordine superiore” (“to know how to transport the instincts, needs, habits, emotions of one's own race into a superior order”).<sup>50</sup> What he experiences, however (in the justly famous, baroquely morbid and grotesque pages of the pilgrimage to the village of Casalbordino), is profound disgust for “la tremenda folla che emanava un lezzo nauseabondo” (875; “the great crowd from which arose a nauseating stench”). He concludes that, in fact, he has nothing in common with the multitudes that make up “lo strato infimo della sua razza” (891; “the lowest level of his race”). He now sees these people as belonging at once to the lowest social strata and to that eternally primitive bottom of humanity itself that, he believes, will never evolve. An ideal human type, he thinks (now turning explicitly to Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* for inspiration),<sup>51</sup> can emerge only from the upper

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<sup>47</sup> D'Annunzio, *Prose di ricerca*, 1:456.

<sup>48</sup> Letter of January 18, 1893, quoted in the introduction to the novel, *Prose di romanzi*, vol. 1, ed. Annamaria Andreoli and Niva Lorenzini (Milano: Mondadori, 1988), 1263.

<sup>49</sup> *Prose di Romanzi*, 1:848.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 930, “Il verbo di Zarathustra [. . .] gli pareva il più virile e il più nobile che fosse mai stato preferito da un poeta e da un filosofo dell'era moderna” (“The teachings of Zarathustra [...] seemed to him the most virile and noble

strata of human societies, among physically, intellectually, and spiritually higher beings. His dream of racial superiority, although Mediterranean and “Hellenic” (in the Nietzschean sense) and therefore essentially northern European (even while claiming the need to demolish the stifling beliefs of the old Europe), is thus ultimately transnational and profoundly utopian. It is not based on any specific ethnicity or country. It is therefore still largely apolitical or, rather, anarchical: “egli era estraneo a quella moltitudine come a una tribù di oceanidi; egli era anche estraneo al suo paese, alla terra natale, alla patria, com’era estraneo alla sua famiglia, alla sua casa” (892; “he was as foreign to that multitude as to the throng of Oceanids; he was also foreign to his own country, his native land, and the fatherland, just as he was foreign to his own family and his own home”). The superior race of virile and noble beings of which Giorgio Aurispa, in his gloss of *Zarathustra*, finally dreams, has freed itself of all debilitating religious belief, overcoming the “miserable effeminacy of the old European soul” and especially curing itself of Christianity, that recurrent “sexual disease” (*lue* [syphilis]) which, in its various forms, afflicts the “razze decrepite” (930; “decrepit races”).

Finally Giorgio wishes to free himself of woman, and specifically of the power that his seductive lover Ippolita (a woman tainted by her “sangue plebeo” [“common blood”])<sup>52</sup> has over him, and the animalistic, primitive lust that she arouses. Ippolita as a woman is thus literally associated with the racial inferiority of the primitive, animalistic multitudes over which Giorgio must elevate himself.<sup>53</sup> He dreams of killing her, and in fact, in the drawn-out, symphonic conclusion that constitutes the last section of the novel (written under the influence of the story and especially the sublime music of Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*), Giorgio drags her violently and finally pulls her with him over a cliff towards their death. (The ample use of the beloved Wagner, not yet branded as “Germanic,” barbaric, and “other,” confirms the composite, European, and cosmopolitan ideology of the novel). This murder-suicide is the ultimate esthetic act of fulfillment and liberation for Giorgio. It is a gesture of anarchical nihilism. However, the text emphasizes repeatedly, and d’Annunzio himself comments elsewhere, that Giorgio Aurispa (like most of the other Dannunzian heroes or, as the author calls them, “monsters,” including Claudio Cantelmo of *Le vergini delle rocce*) is sterile and ends up entirely alone and that his is, finally, not

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ever to be articulated by a poet and by a philosopher in the modern era”). D’Annunzio’s knowledge of Nietzsche was based on the French anthology by Lauterbach and Wagnon (a copy of which with d’Annunzio’s markings and underlinings is still at the Vittoriale).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 990. See also *ibid.*, 915: “Tutti gli istinti ereditari della sua razza sono in lei indistruttibili, pronti a svilupparsi e ad insorgere [. . .] Io non potrò far nulla per purificarla” (“All of the hereditary instincts of her race are indestructible in her; they are ready to burgeon and to rise up [. . .] I will not be able to do anything to purify her”). In the description of Ippolita’s feet earlier in the same passage, the influence of Lombrosian physiognomic discourse is clear: “erano difformati nelle dita, plebei, senz’alcuna finezza; avevano l’impronta manifesta della bassa stirpe” (*ibid.*, 914; “her toes were deformed, her feet were common and devoid of refinement; they clearly bore the mark of her lowly race”). Elsewhere, Ippolita, who is chronically ill (she has an illness of the uterus that makes her sterile and is subject to epileptic attacks) and belongs to a “vulgar” middle-class family, is described as having the profound pallor of the skin and the hint of facial hair that Lombroso typically associated with the prostitute or “criminal woman.”

<sup>53</sup> This is in tune with the racial definitions of woman as lower on the evolutionary scale than “white” men and thus “primitive” that Italian anthropology was then popularizing. Giuseppe Sergi, a collaborator of Lombroso who was the first to occupy the Chair of Anthropology at the University of Bologna and then Rome (where he founded the Institute of Anthropology), wrote for example in “Sensibilità femminile.” *Archivio di antropologia criminale, psichiatria e medicina legale* 13 (1892), 8: “The woman [. . .] remains at a level that for man is imperfection but for her is a natural state.” See Mary Gibson, “Biology or the Environment? Race and Southern ‘Deviancy’ in the Writings of Italian Criminologists, 1880-1920,” in *Italy’s Southern Question: Orientalism in One Country*, ed. Jane Schneider (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 100.

a triumph but a defeat.<sup>54</sup>

The idea of racial superiority is less of a dead end in *Le vergini delle rocce*, where it takes on a more politically defined significance. In spite of its ornate and obscure style, the novel clearly spelled out d'Annunzio's disgust with the "osceni connubi" ("obscene unions") of Liberal Italy and the "Third Rome," which betrayed the racially defined "Amore indomato del sangue latino alla terra latina" ("Untamed love of the Latin blood for the Latin land").<sup>55</sup> D'Annunzio claimed to be revolted by the vulgar, debasing turn of politics towards democratization and majority rule; socialism for him and for most literary men of the era represented the worst of politics and a betrayal of the Italic *stirpe* itself: it represented in fact nothing less than a descent towards barbarism and racial degeneration. *Le vergini delle rocce* incorporates the gist of d'Annunzio's polemical Nietzschean article entitled "La bestia elettiva" (*Il Mattino*, September 25-26, 1892; "The Electoral Beast"), attacking universal suffrage and equalitarian democracy and exalting the intellectual "aristocrat," the individual embodying "la perfetta integrità del tipo latino" ("the perfect integrity of the Latin type") and capable of preserving "le ricchezze ideali della tua stirpe" ("the ideal treasures of your race").<sup>56</sup> Only such a superior individual would have eventually the power and ability to seduce and dominate the irrational, racially inferior masses.

The pervasive use of the idea of race in the novels and elsewhere in d'Annunzio's work at this time, however, is still essentially divisive; it functions to reinforce and emphasize class and gender difference and conflict, rather than to transcend or obfuscate them. It underscores prejudices against "the South," and through its attack on Christianity and morality, it certainly offends Catholics. Although d'Annunzio was intentionally writing in part to entertain and titillate, with his "perversions," a bourgeois, European, and specifically female Italian audience of readers and consumers,<sup>57</sup> and his books certainly functioned to an extent as a safety valve for the ruling classes, they nonetheless lacked the unifying national political and ideological appeal that d'Annunzio's work would gain in the years to come, reaching its peak in the years from the Libyan war to World War I.

For d'Annunzio in the 1890s, and even to some extent in the later decades, "razza" and "stirpe" are hardly fixed biological (or even social or cultural) categories, but rather shifting rhetorical constructs, to be deployed in different ways as circumstances and his own image-making process dictate. A construction of race that encompasses and unifies, transnationally, all the "Latin" peoples is used by d'Annunzio when he wants to cultivate a cosmopolitan rather than a local audience. For example, in France, where his novels and style are extremely popular in the 1890s, he liked to be seen and was presented, in the words of the *Revue de Deux Mondes* critic Eugène Melchior de Vogüé, as the "condottiere" ("captain") and spokesman for the renaissance of a "Latin" race, encompassing both France and Italy (nations that d'Annunzio would like to see close again despite the colonial rivalry in Africa and the Mediterranean), in opposition to the barbarous Germanic races.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> See *Prose di Romanzi*, 1:1297.

<sup>55</sup> D'Annunzio, *Le vergini delle rocce*, in *Prose di romanzi*, vol. 2 (Milano: Mondadori, 1989), 154.

<sup>56</sup> D'Annunzio, *Le vergini delle rocce*, *Prose di romanzi*, 2:40.

<sup>57</sup> See his letter to the publisher, Treves, quoted in *Prose di romanzi*, 1:1287: "ormai anche le lettrici sono attratte dalle cupe tragedie e provano un diletto strano nelle atrocità raffinate" ("by now even female readers are attracted to somber tragedies and experience a strange delight in refined atrocities").

<sup>58</sup> De Bosis reviewed the 1895 article "La Renaissance latine," amplifying its contents, in "Nota sul «Rinascimento Latino»," *Il Convito* (February 1895).

According to his French translator Hérelle, in helping to revive the genius of the Latin races, d'Annunzio wished to contribute even to the rebirth of Spain, a noble country unjustly despised and forgotten.<sup>59</sup> As late as March 1895, d'Annunzio stated (in his long reply to Ugo Ojetti's survey *Alla scoperta dei letterati* [Discovering Writers]): "i caratteri nazionali vanno indebolendosi nelle alte opere veramente moderne, e a poco a poco si va formando una specie di letteratura europea" ("in truly modern, high literary works national characteristics are growing weaker and, little by little, a kind of European literature is developing").<sup>60</sup> At this stage, d'Annunzio still sees nationalism as incompatible with both modernity and the modern novel. Under the influence of his journey to Greece in the summer of 1895, d'Annunzio imagined himself born and raised in Athens, and although chronically seasick (and sickened by the reality of contemporary Greece), he read and recited Aeschylus and Sophocles to his fellow travelers. His new project was a Mediterranean modern tragedy whose soul would be antithetical to the barbaric spirit of Wagner (a theme that would become central in 1900 in the novel *Il Fuoco* [The Flame]). D'Annunzio planned to write his first Greek-inspired Mediterranean tragedy (*La città morta* [The Dead City]) in French and to use the international French star Sarah Bernhardt as muse, casting her for the main role. In the 1911 article for the *New York American*, the rights of the Italian race to seize Libya are clearly set in opposition to the colonial claims of both England and France, though the latter is elsewhere considered Italy's ethnic sister. Whether local, national, or transnational, however, d'Annunzio's rhetoric of race is always based on the idea of a violent and ennobling struggle, the war against an ethnic "other"—be it Germanic, African, or "Oriental"—putatively barbarous because essentially untouched by the heritage of the great Greco-Roman, Mediterranean, or, alternately, "European" civilization.

D'Annunzio's almost comically self-praising campaign speech of August 1897 to the rural people and small landowners of his native Abruzzi (one of the most underdeveloped regions of Italy and economically and culturally part of the South), usually known as "Discorso della siepe" ("Speech concerning the hedge") which helped elect him to the parliament, represents a turning point.<sup>61</sup> While this speech is usually interpreted as a defense of the "beauty" and legitimacy of private property, its rhetorical foundation is in fact race, but understood in a new way. The political use of the notion of race as a unifying national force is the new or newly rediscovered element, race itself being a *topos* that d'Annunzio at this time helps finally to pull together from various literary and scientific sources, crystallizing it and making it a part of the Italian collective political imagination. In the speech, which is in part a prelude to the ideas later elaborated in the novel *Il Fuoco* (1900), d'Annunzio affirmed that the best of any given ethnic group or *stirpe* is always necessarily achieved through a process of "natural selection," not by any given class or

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<sup>59</sup> Annamaria Andreoli, *Il vivere inimitabile. Vita di Gabriele d'Annunzio* (Milano: Mondadori, 2000), 264.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>61</sup> *Prose di Ricerca*, 1:463-76. Various versions of this speech, later entitled "Lode dell'illaudato" ("Praise for the Unpraised"), were delivered by d'Annunzio all over Abruzzi in late July and August 1897, and the speech delivered in Pescara on August 22 appeared in *La Tribuna* on August 23, and was widely commented in national newspapers, gaining the praise of Giovanni Pascoli, among others. D'Annunzio, who ran as a candidate for the right against a candidate of the radical party, had been a resident of Francavilla in Abruzzo for three years; he was already an international celebrity, and his victory is attributable mostly to this factor. D'Annunzio at this juncture, however, was not yet interested in politics per se. (And the election in fact was temporarily invalidated due to an adultery charge). He was deeply involved with Eleonora Duse and the idea of a new theater at the time and saw politics, like theater, as a way to create a mass following for himself and his art. For a pioneering reading of the theme of race in this speech, see Jared M. Becker, *Nationalism and Culture. Gabriele d'Annunzio and Italy after the Risorgimento* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 47-49. See also Mario Moroni, "1897, scrivere i confini: la retorica della siepe in D'Annunzio e Pascoli," in *Al limite. L'idea di margine nel Novecento italiano* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2007), 71-85.

regional group, but by a select group of superior individuals – artists, poets, and intellectuals – through whom the *stirpe* perpetuates its highest and ancient heritage and “genius.”<sup>62</sup> The beautiful, ennobling image of an Italic race that, through its superior poets and intellectuals, will go beyond even the achievements of the Greco-Roman and Latin world whose spirit it has inherited is at the center of d’Annunzio’s vision.

It is through this essentially esthetic utopian vision that he hopes to overcome both the dehumanizing, exploitative, and debasing logic of capitalism and the “equalizing” materialism of socialism. In the notion of race and racial pride, d’Annunzio identifies not only a powerful antisocialist and anticapitalist rhetorical instrument, but a powerful myth eventually capable of transcending and overcoming all social, economic, cultural, religious, and sexual differences and unifying the Italian imagination. In the “Discorso della siepe,” reversing entirely the individualistic perspectives of Giorgio Aurispa and Claudio Cantelmo, d’Annunzio appeals to his prospective voters of Abruzzi (but implicitly to all Italians) as members of the same *stirpe*, inviting them to recognize in him the superior “interprete delle eterne aspirazioni che sollevano la stirpe verso il suo destino [. . .] le profonde cose che dice in voi l’antico sangue ereditario” (467; “interpreter of the eternal aspirations that lift the race towards its destiny [...] of the profound things that our inherited, ancient blood says within you”). D’Annunzio in his speech refers specifically to an autochthonous, *mixed* Italic race and even to the primitive, colonized tribes of Abruzzi that through the fierce struggle against Rome helped forge the dominant Italic race, which inherited the “Latin spirit”: “Nella storia delle stirpi umane come in quella delle specie animali è manifesto che la condizione prima di ogni ascesa verso le superiori forme di vita è la lotta” (472; “In the history of the races of humankind, as in that of the animal species, it is manifest that the prime condition of every ascent towards superior forms of life is struggle”). Struggle and war, in other words, are crucial to the refinement of the race. D’Annunzio’s is in fact an estheticized version of the social, political, and ethnic Darwinism shared by many other Italian and European intellectuals of the era – for example, in Italy, anthropologists such as Giuseppe Sergi and social historians like Guglielmo Ferrero. But while for Verga’s *vinti*, for example, being poor and working class meant, tragically, being racially inferior and doomed, social and racial inferiority no longer coincide in d’Annunzio. What is new and astute in d’Annunzio is the use of race as both a regional *and* national ethnic category, deployed as a unifying, *beautiful* image to displace divisive class, region, and gender conflicts (and potential solidarity) along those lines. The lower peasant and working classes, and the colonized Southerners, are no longer seen or represented as biologically and intellectually inferior (as they were in Verga) and, thus, doomed to extinction or dangerous degeneration, but rather as an integral part of a powerful and ascending Italian mixed race, whose consciousness must be awakened and forged by the militant poet-intellectual.<sup>63</sup>

In the “Discorso della siepe,” a long passage is devoted to expressing admiration for the heroism of the Italian “pugno di prodi devoto alla morte” (“handful of valiant men devoted to death”) who fought bravely in Ethiopia to hold the Italian position at the fort near Makelle and

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<sup>62</sup> *Prose di ricerca*, 1:475: “Avete dinnanzi a voi, rivelata, la vostra essenza. Voi credete che io trasformi tutto in mia poesia, mentre io non altro fo se non obbedire al genio cui voi medesimi siete soggetti. Voi mi giudicate dissimile, mentre io vi somiglio come un fratello purificato. [. . .] Accoglietemi come si accoglie un fratello più puro e più lucido” (“You have in front of you your revealed essence. You believe that I transform everything in my poetry, while I do nothing other than obey the genius to which you yourselves are subject. You judge me as unlike you, but I resemble you like a purified brother. Welcome me as one welcomes a purer brother who shines more brightly”).

<sup>63</sup> A similar call may be found in James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), in the famous proclamation of Stephen’s esthetic mission: “Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.”

dismay over the criminal cowardice of the Italian leaders who ordered these sacrificial heroes to desist, abandoning the fort (and fatefully moving the troops instead towards the plains of Adua). D'Annunzio does not address the issue of colonial conquest here, and he pointedly refrains from even mentioning the ignominious Adua, but emphasizes rather the way in which self-sacrifice and death in the colonial war offered the opportunity for glory and for beauty: self-immolation in the colonial war is in fact presented as an esthetic creation, a work of art: “Come il fonditore che getta il bronzo infiammato nell'impronta cava donde uscirà la statua perfetta, così m'appare ansioso il capitano consapevole d'esser per compiere un'opera bella con la fiamma di quelle anime ebre [. . .] Ma una bassa parola attraversò il mare, interruppe le gesta. La Patria e la morte furono deluse, in Macallé. La Bellezza fu violata. [. . .] E da allora il danno e la vergogna durano” (468; “Like the metalworker who pours fiery bronze into the empty mold from which the perfect statue will emerge, so the anxious captain, aware that with the flames of those enraptured souls he is about to bring into being a work of beauty, appears to me [. . .] But a base word came across the sea to interrupt the great deeds. The Fatherland and death were let down in Makelle. Beauty was violated [...] and ever since the damage and the shame have endured.”). Nonetheless, as some critics have observed, Adua and the fall of Crispi did not have on d'Annunzio that effect of a political awakening and of stimulating that thirst for colonial revenge that it had on others, most notably Mario Morasso and Enrico Corradini.<sup>64</sup> D'Annunzio was hardly invested in the politics of the right, and in fact in 1900, with a widely publicized, defiant gesture, he seized the opportunity to gain some notoriety by passing “from the right to the left,” joining the socialists. He shared none of their political ideas, but wanted to be associated in the public imagination with revolutionary fervor and change. What he wanted more than anything else was to talk the masses into seeing the need to go beyond class consciousness and class struggle and accept instead the higher principle of racial and national consciousness, embracing the beautiful challenge to fight for Italy in the grandiose international “war between the races.”<sup>65</sup> By 1900, he had effectively become himself a floating signifier of the Italian race. To Mario Morasso, d'Annunzio's literary reinvention of Italian history meant that heroes like Garibaldi and d'Annunzio himself were the epitome of racial superiority, “tutte le qualità eccellenti e perenni, tutte le virtù insigni e caratteristiche per cui la razza Ariana dettò la sua legge, impose il suo dominio e il suo primato al mondo” (“all of the excellent and eternal qualities, all of the distinctive and renowned virtues which enabled the Aryan race to dictate its law, to impose its dominion and primacy on the world”).<sup>66</sup>

The utopian idea that a new spiritual aristocracy could, with its exemplary energy, courage, and cult of beauty, redeem the people of Italy, vilified by decades of corrupt and vulgar parliamentary politics, greatly impressed Morasso. Morasso himself, like d'Annunzio, felt that an aristocracy of superior men of letters and artists could ideally lead the regeneration of the nation. He sought actively to promote through the press that politicization of “literary men,”<sup>67</sup> and specifically of estheticism, and the elitist cult of violence, race and imperialism, which characterized d'Annunzio's literary work. But this unifying racial discourse remained by and large

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<sup>64</sup> Andreoli, *D'Annunzio*, 302, points out that in d'Annunzio's plentiful, compulsive notes and letters there are almost no references to these events.

<sup>65</sup> See the speech “Della coscienza nazionale” (“On the National Conscience”) published in *Il Giorno*, May 21, 1900; and see also the “Ode Leonis.”

in *Le Figaro*, December 18, 1898, now in d'Annunzio, *Scritti giornalistici*, vol. 2, ed. Annamaria Andreoli and Giorgio Zanetti (Milano: Mondadori: 2003), 410-17; 498-505.

<sup>66</sup> Mario Morasso, “L'eroe popolare e l'eroe della stirpe,” *Illustrazione Italiana*, June 2, 1901.

<sup>67</sup> “La politica dei letterati,” *Il Marzocco* 2, 13 (May 2, 1897).

still abstract and bookish. It would remain so in fact until the Libyan war. It had the elitist tone of a humanistic rhetoric, derived essentially from the literary canon of the Risorgimento, with which only a handful of Italians could identify. The real racial divide that Italians could feel and experience concretely was instead still that between Northerners and Southerners and, especially, between the rich and the poor, the upper and the lower classes.<sup>68</sup> The rioting and barricades of the 1890s, the (illegal) declaration of martial law, with the dispatch of 40,000 troops to Sicily, the use of censorship, violent repression, and mass deportations, justified by Crispi because Italy “had a duty to protect itself against its enemies,”<sup>69</sup> represented for many Italians a more palpable experience of the reality of racism and Northern imperialism at home than the vague claims of “Latin superiority” in Africa. The *fasci siciliani* (Sicilian leagues) and the first African war are normally allotted different chapters in history books, yet, as Vilfredo Pareto clearly saw, they are best understood as part of the same war. The strengthening of the military, justified in the name of the colonial expansion, was in fact far more useful for crushing dissent at home, as became clear during the bloody repressions of the 1898-1899 riots. The displacement of racism from inside to outside the national borders and the symbolic transformation of the military into a redeeming rather than a repressive force will, as we shall see, find their fullest and most persuasive literary expression in d’Annunzio’s Libyan *Canzoni per le gesta d’oltremare* (Songs for Great Deeds Overseas).

### *3. Race studies and the literary construction of race in Liberal and Giolittian Italy*

The new, idealistic, and unifying vision of Italians as one race, and of its civilizing mission in Africa and in the Mediterranean, was constructed as a literary myth by d’Annunzio and other writers in part as a response to the problematic and divisive racializations of positivist thinkers and writers. The so-called sciences of physiognomy and phrenology and the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, and criminology and especially the theories of influential thinkers including Paolo Mantegazza, Cesare Lombroso, Giuseppe Sergi, Enrico Ferri, Alfredo Niceforo, Scipio Sighele, and Angelo Mosso contributed a great deal to racialize the Southern question as well as the woman question. They were at the same time influential in shaping the literary representation of race which paved the way for the Libyan war. There was effectively no border, no substantial difference between literary and scientific discourse, between fiction and poetry on one side and empirical reality and objective observation and description on the other. From the very start, the discourse of the human and social sciences and of positivist anthropology was saturated with fantasy; it absorbed and recycled literary images, literary devices, and fictional creations, making them its own. The number of literary allusions and citations from poets and literary writers of all eras presented as scientific evidence in the work of Lombroso, for example, is truly astounding. Lombroso’s lifelong work on race, which coincides with the history of the unification and Liberal Italy, is itself saturated with literary images taken from both high literature and folklore. Lombroso’s first essay on race, written in Calabria when he was stationed there as a medical officer with the Italian army (engaged at the time in the suppression of anti-Italian *banditismo* [banditry]), was published in 1862 and republished in a new edition as a book in 1898.<sup>70</sup> Constructed

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<sup>68</sup> See Anderson, *Communities*, 149-50: “The dreams of racism actually have their origin in ideologies of *class*, rather than in those of nation [. . .] Racism and anti-Semitism manifest themselves, on the whole, not across national boundaries, but within them. In other words, they justify not so much foreign wars, as domestic oppression and domination.”

<sup>69</sup> Duggan, *Force*, 341.

<sup>70</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *In Calabria (1862-1897)*. Studii con aggiunte di Giuseppe Pelaggi (Catania: Giannotta, 1898).

essentially through a patchwork of folksongs, folktales, romantic legends, and clichés stitched together with phrenological fantasies, the essay contributed to shape the racialization of the South as primitive, inferior, promiscuous and effeminate. A portion at least of Calabria's highly mixed and hybrid population, Lombroso argued, was racially unevolved, with physical and behavioral characteristics that pointed to its relation to the inferior racial groups still prevalent in Africa and the southern Mediterranean.

Lombroso's major study, *L'uomo bianco e l'uomo di colore. Letture sull'origine e le varietà delle razze* (The White Man and the Man of Color. Readings on the Origin and Varieties of the Races), dates from 1871; its appearance thus significantly coincided with the completion of official unification. In this work, Lombroso addresses the problem of racial difference and lays out the outlines of the grand, epic narrative of the racial evolution of Italians: the imperfect Negroid and Semitic races "of color" have evolved through time, Lombroso contends, through the influence of migration, climate, food, and environment, into the higher, more civilized White and Aryan races. However, some populations have not evolved, retaining the racial characteristics of primitive races, and are thus destined in the long run to succumb and disappear while "*noi soli Bianchi*" ("only us Whites") have achieved the highest forms and expressions of human civilization and are thus destined to continue to evolve and thrive.<sup>71</sup> Lombroso also introduced, along with this major white/non-white polarity, the notion of the hierarchy among races. For example, the Arabs, although of Semitic racial stock and thus inferior, for instance, to the white ancient Romans, are on a relatively higher level of civilization than black Africans, with whom they nonetheless have a distinct racial affinity.<sup>72</sup>

Sergi and especially Niceforo placed the racial split between north and south at the center of their work. According to Sergi, who introduced Spencer and social Darwinism into Italy, two main, very different racial groups inhabited the Italian territory: The Aryans ("*Arii*") in the North and Tuscany and the Afro-Mediterranean or "*Italici*" ("Italics") in the South.<sup>73</sup> The arrested development of the Italian South, its state of decadence, chronic weakness, passivity, and lack of energy and ability to struggle were due to its racial inferiority. Only colonization by and mixing with racially stronger *stirpi* could help civilize the South and perhaps change its fate, Sergi argued.<sup>74</sup> The notion of racial decadence, which Sergi contributed to popularize, became very influential at the turn of the century.<sup>75</sup> It was clearly connected to and nurtured by the nineteenth-century literary myth of decadence, which was the common denominator of some of the most powerful literary trends in Europe, from Baudelaire, Paul Bourget, Zola, Eugène Sue, and Huysmans' *À Rebours* (*Against Nature*) to symbolism to d'Annunzio.<sup>76</sup> Sergi himself, although anti-Dannunzian, was profoundly steeped in literature.

Like a progressive illness, decadence and degeneration seemed impossible to contain and

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<sup>71</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *L'uomo bianco e l'uomo di colore. Letture sull'origine e la varietà delle razze umane*, second edition (Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1892), 10; 223

<sup>72</sup> Lombroso, *L'uomo bianco*, 183.

<sup>73</sup> Giuseppe Sergi, *Arii e italici. Attorno all'Italia preistorica* (Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1898). On Sergi, see Vito Teti, *La razza maledetta. Origini del pregiudizio antimeridionalista in Italia* (Roma: Manifestolibri, 1993), 175-83; Wong, *Race and the Nation*; and Fabrizio De Donno, "La razza ario-mediterranea. Ideas of Race and Citizenship in Colonial and Fascist Italy, 1885-1941," in *Interventions. International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 8, 3 (2006): 394-412. On the reception of Aryanism in Italy in relation to Orientalism and on Sergi's ideas about eugenics, see also De Donno 2010.

<sup>74</sup> Teti, *Razza*, 176-77.

<sup>75</sup> Giuseppe Sergi, *La decadenza delle nazioni latine* (Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1900).

<sup>76</sup> A grotesquely exaggerated, moralistic summa of "decadence" was the hugely popular *Entartung* (Degeneration), published in 1894 by the journalist Max Nordau.

could hardly be limited to the Italian South. The ambiguous status of contemporary Rome in the literary narrative of Giolittian Italy testifies to this: neither north nor south, Rome as the capital of the nation and the site where the ruins of its ancient power and decay are most visible, is constantly threatened by degeneration in the works of novelists such as Matilde Serao, Federico De Roberto, Antonio Fogazzaro, d'Annunzio, and Enrico Corradini, among others. Decadence in the modern era was a threat to all the “Latin” nations with Mediterranean stock. According to Sergi, the Mediterranean race was responsible for the great civilizations of ancient times, including those of Egypt, Carthage, Greece, and Rome. These Mediterranean peoples were quite distinct from the peoples of Northern Europe; Mediterraneans were more creative and imaginative than other peoples, which explained their ancient cultural and intellectual achievements, but that they were by nature effeminate, volatile, and unstable. Sergi and other writers argued that Northern Europeans had developed stoicism, tenacity, and self-discipline due to the cold climate and so were better adapted to succeed in the war between the races and in the cold modern world. Yet the notion that the hegemony established by ancient Rome was the most important, central fact of ancient Mediterranean history, and that this hegemony was due principally to the Mediterranean fusion of Italic races under Rome, had also gained in popularity since the late nineteenth century and was widely used as the racial basis for legitimizing the invasion of Libya.<sup>77</sup>

Niceforo helped popularize the notion that Italy was ethnically double: “germaniche, celte e slave al nord, e fenicie, arabe, albanesi, greche al sud e nelle isole [. . .] Questa [. . .] è la ragione fondamentale della spiccata e cozzante diversità di vita individuale e sociale tra l'Italia settentrionale e l'Italia meridionale” (“Germanic, Celtic and Slavic peoples in the north, and Phoenician, Arab, Albanian and Greek peoples in the south and the islands [...] This [...] is the fundamental reason for the diversity of individual and social life between northern and southern Italy, which is both pronounced and in constant conflict”). The Mediterranean *stirpe* inhabiting the South was thus “spiccatamente bellicosa e sanguinaria” (“markedly bellicose and bloodthirsty”).<sup>78</sup> These new racial theories, grafted onto the pre-existing nineteenth-century ethnic discourse of the founding fathers of the Risorgimento studied by Banti, were disseminated through literary, poetic, and other forms of communication and propaganda, which, contrary to what is usually thought, were hardly limited to the work of a small elite of nationalist fanatics. The narrative strategies, tropes, and metaphors used by human and social scientists such as Sergi and Niceforo are effectively almost indistinguishable from those of narrative fiction, resulting in what often amounts to rhetorical short circuits.

For example, in his book on Sardinia, written to provide the reader with “the truth” about the Sardinian people and the bandits so poetically described by Grazia Deledda in the novels and stories that stimulated his scientific curiosity, Niceforo often ends up quoting Deledda’s fictional texts as evidence of his own statements. In what amounts to a hermeneutic circle or short circuit, Deledda (who had emigrated to Rome from Sardinia in 1900) then goes on to incorporate into her fiction allusions to anthropological theories of racial atavism, deviancy, and criminality, which can “explain” her characters’ violent or abnormal behavior, all for the benefit of the bourgeois “Northern” reader, at once fascinated and repelled by the literary spectacle of Southern ethnic and racial difference.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Giacomo Fazio, *L'Italia marittima e continentale* (La Spezia: Tipografia della lega navale, 1899).

<sup>78</sup> Alfredo Niceforo, *La delinquenza in Sardegna. Note di sociologia criminale* (1897), con prefazione di Enrico Ferri (Cagliari: Edizioni della Torre, 1977), 93. See also Niceforo’s *L'Italia barbara contemporanea. Studi sull'Italia del Mezzogiorno* (Milano-Palermo: Sandron, 1898) and *Italiani del Nord e Italiani del Sud* (Torino: Bocca, 1901).

<sup>79</sup> This process is most evident in Deledda’s 1903 novel *Cenere* (*Ashes*), published in installments in *La nuova antologia* (The New Anthology), in which Deledda emphasizes Sardinia’s racial proximity to Africa’s primitiveness,

The shocking parallels perceived between the criminality, promiscuity, degeneracy, laziness, superstition, and squalor of the South and what was thought to be dark, barbaric, unevolved Africa were thus explained increasingly in racial terms – Southerners were indeed primitive or “dark” Mediterraneans – racially African and Camitic or Semitic; Northerners were Aryan or Germanic and Slavic. Niceforo claimed that in Sardinia “ricchissimo è l’elemento africano” (“the African element is very abundant”),<sup>80</sup> and he even thought that he could recognize the traits of African Pigmies among Sardinians. Sicily, on the other hand, was supposed to be contaminated by Arab blood. Scipio Sighele described the Neapolitan *camorra* as “psychologically a female and often a hysterical female.”<sup>81</sup> The South was both racialized and consistently gendered as feminine and, thus, excitable, emotional irrational, excessively sexual, and dependent, primitive, and “African” or “Oriental.” Southerners and especially Neapolitans were described as “un popolo-donna” (“a woman-people”) and Northerners as “popoli-uomini” (“men-peoples”).<sup>82</sup> Niceforo thus contributed perhaps more than others to formulate in the most simplistic yet memorable terms the myth of the two Italies, based on a gender-race differentiation. Northern Italians were “Aryan” and “European”; Southern Italians were “Afro-Mediterraneans.” Northern Italians were thus imagined to be masculine, restrained, rational, hardworking, and capable leaders, destined to emerge as winners in the contest between races.

This racialization was prevalent not only in anthropology, folklore studies, and literature, but also in historiography. Historian Niccola Marselli, initially in the 1870s a critic of ethnological bias in history and politics, by the 1880s was involved in the production of a multi-volume work (initially published in part in the journal *La nuova antologia*) on *Le grandi razze dell’umanità* (The Great Races of Humanity), celebrating the virtues of the Aryan race. According to Marselli’s influential view, Italians are a branch of the Latin variety of the Aryan race, which he presents as a development in turn of a wider Mediterranean species. In his hierarchy of races, “l’imo è l’Africa, così geograficamente come etnograficamente [. . .] un mondo chiuso alla civiltà” (“the lowest is Africa, as it is geographically so it is ethnographically, a world closed off from civilization”).<sup>83</sup> Marselli predicts that the African races are destined to disappear through European colonization, and he finally calls for an international alliance among the peoples of the vigorous, superior races (a European Aryan compact of sorts, which should include Italy) to oppose the threat posed by the peoples of the Slavic and Asiatic races.

Marselli is certainly not a unique voice in what has been called a veritable tradition of Italian racist historiography, whose role in the construction of the Italian cultural identity is only now beginning to be explored in detail.<sup>84</sup> One of the most celebrated books of the turn of the century in Italy was *L’Europa giovane* (Young Europe), published in 1897 by Guglielmo Ferrero. Ferrero, who was a pupil of Lombroso and also his son-in-law, identified nations with races or racial groups and discussed at length the essential, innate, and hereditary traits of the “razza germanica”

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and has her male protagonist, Anania, attend the lectures of Niceforo’s mentor Enrico Ferri at the University of Rome. Ferri’s lectures help Anania understand the “criminal” and “primitive” nature of his own mother, who abandoned him in childhood and whose racial deviancy threatens to destroy him too.

<sup>80</sup> Niceforo, *La delinquenza in Sardegna*, 7

<sup>81</sup> Scipio Sighele, “Contro il parlamentarismo,” in *La delinquenza settaria* (Milan: Treves, 1897), 258-59; Wong, *Race*, 37.

<sup>82</sup> Niceforo, *L’Italia barbara contemporanea*, 247-48.

<sup>83</sup> Niccola Marselli, *Le grandi razze dell’umanità* (Torino: Loescher, 1880), 124-26; 128, cited in Michele Nani, “L’immaginario razziale di un ufficiale della «Nuova Italia»: Niccola Marselli,” in Burgio, *Nel nome della razza*, 69.

<sup>84</sup> Nani, “L’immaginario razziale,” 73.

(“Germanic race”), the “razza anglosassone” (“Anglo-Saxon race”), the “razza slava” (“Slavic race”), and the “razza latina” (“Latin race,”) referring mostly to Italy and France, though Spain is occasionally mentioned). Ferrero claimed, like Sergi and Marselli, that in the current stage of the struggle among races for the survival of the fittest and for world domination, and in the course of the historic migration of civilization from the hot climates of Asia, India, Mesopotamia, and Egypt where it originated, first to the temperate climates of the Mediterranean region (particularly Greece and Italy), then towards the colder climates of Northern Europe, the younger and more energetic “northern” races, and specifically the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic peoples, were now strongest and destined to prevail.<sup>85</sup> English imperialism and colonialism, in particular, are presented by Ferrero as the younger, stronger, and triumphant modern version of the ancient Roman empire. The passionate, chaotic, and irrational Celts (the Irish) lack the strength to compete with the powerful English, except when guided by the willpower of a (racially Anglo-Saxon) leader such as Parnell (10). The comparative weakness and inferiority in modern times of the Latin races, he specified, and of all other southern and “passionate” or emotional races (such as the Irish), are largely due to their excessive sensuality and erotic drive. The relative weakness of Italy, he added, despite the wealth of exceptionally gifted individuals and geniuses, was also due to excessive individualism and the lack, compared to the German race, of a common spirit and a common will. France on the other hand, as a country that was racially neither entirely northern nor southern, still retained according to Ferrero a considerable degree of power compared to Italy. Italy’s Achilles’ heel was decidedly the South.<sup>86</sup>

This view had an enormous effect, for example, on Sibilla Aleramo, who refers to Ferrero’s book several times in the novel *Una donna*.<sup>87</sup> It was through Ferrero’s racial north-south opposition in fact that the Northern female protagonist, forced to emigrate from Milan to the South with her father when he is hired by a Piedmontese firm to create and run a factory there, thinks she is able to grasp the meaning of the sexual abuse that she suffers at the hands of her Southern rapist and later husband. He and the other men of the Southern town (based on Civitanova Marche) are depicted as weak, excessively sexual, emotional, degenerate, and primitive beings destined to fail in the new Italy. The inhabitants of the town itself are portrayed as “una razza quasi orientale” (“a quasi-oriental race”), given to keeping their women secluded harem-style and incapable of comprehending the female protagonist’s intellectual and implicitly racial superiority.<sup>88</sup> The husband’s degeneracy in fact until the very end, before she is able to cut herself off and leave, threatens to engulf the protagonist and drag her towards insanity. What is striking about Aleramo’s novel is the way in which this racialization of the South coexists with the author’s explicit feminism and socialism.

Racialization thus effectively became a discourse or idiom that circulated widely in the entire culture. The myth of Northern Italians as Aryans was embraced by the most important and influential poet of Liberal Italy before d’Annunzio: Giosuè Carducci.<sup>89</sup> However, this myth and

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<sup>85</sup> Guglielmo Ferrero, *L’Europa giovane: Studi e viaggi nei paesi del Nord* (Milano: Treves, 1898), 211.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 377; 190.

<sup>87</sup> Sibilla Aleramo, *Una donna* (1906) (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1992), 100.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 6; 95.

<sup>89</sup> The implications of Carducci’s Aryanism are spelled out in a letter to Lidia of May 17, 1874: “Già il cristianesimo è una religione semitica, cioè ebrea; e i semiti, gli ebrei, non intendono, odiano anzi, il bello plastico. Ci mancava anche questo, che a noi, greco-latini, nobile razza ariana, dovesse esser infusa una religione semitica, a noi, figli del sole, adoratori del sole e del cielo. Cotesto innesto contro natura ci ha guastati, ci ha fatti falsi, tristi, pusillanimi, indolenti, ecc.” (“Christianity is in fact a Semitic religion, that is to say, Jewish; and the Semites, the Jews, do not

Carducci's literary Aryanism were unsuitable to serve as a unifying principle for Italians. Not only did the Aryans vs. Afro-Mediterraneans binary opposition perpetuate the North-South split and the gender fracture between Italians, but it was also essentially secular, profoundly anti-Catholic, and also anti-Semitic. At a time when Italian Jews, after taking part in the Risorgimento and the unification, tended to be secularized and integrated and assumed key roles at the heart of Liberal Italy's political and intellectual leadership (Lombroso himself was Jewish), Aryanism ominously threatened to reinvent ghettos in Italian society.<sup>90</sup> Anti-Semitism, a form of racism, was perhaps less readily apparent than anti-meridionalism in Liberal Italy, but it was just as deeply rooted, especially among Italian Catholics.<sup>91</sup>

Paolo Mantegazza, whose popularizing pseudo-scientific manuals of "sexual hygiene" were best sellers in Giolittian and later Fascist Italy, was among the first to give a scientific veneer to anti-Semitism in the popular press.<sup>92</sup> In Mantegazza's work, and even more so in the renowned work of the Sardinian man of letters, journalist, and scholar Paolo Orano (later to become one of the key exponents of Fascist racial theory), anti-meridionalism, anti-Semitism, and anti-feminism always go together. In his early work, Orano opposes the *homo latinus* as active and civilizing "homo faber" to the Jews and all "Oriental peoples," who are naturally effeminate, inclined to passivity, pessimism, melancholy, and derangement.<sup>93</sup> A radical left-wing and syndicalist socialist at the time, Orano in 1910 founded the first Italian anti-Semitic journal, *La Lupa*. The targets of his reiterated attacks were especially three Jewish exponents of the Italian political leadership: Nathan, Treves, and Luzzatti.<sup>94</sup> Orano accused them (following a well-established stereotype) of being Masons involved in a secret Jewish plot to eradicate Catholicism from Italy. Their detestable *riformismo* (reformism) constituted, according to Orano, an attempt to emasculate and feminize the nation.<sup>95</sup> However, anti-Semitism was hardly limited to radical socialists such as Orano, or to Catholics circles, newspapers, and journals, where the theory of the Jewish-Masonic conspiracy was indeed preponderant.<sup>96</sup> Moderate socialists such as Leonida Bissolati (the first editor of the newspaper *Avanti!*) also wrote early on about the racial position of the "Semite," who in the hierarchy of races is superior to Asians but inferior and essentially different from the Indo-

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understand—or rather they hate—artistic beauty. This was the last thing that we needed, both as Greco-Latins and as a noble Aryan race, namely to be infused with a Semitic religion. For we are children of the sun and worshippers of the sun and the sky. Such an unnatural graft has damaged us, made us false, sad, weak, indolent, etc.”). Quoted in Mauro Raspanti, “Il mito ariano nella cultura italiana fra Otto e Novecento,” in Burgio, *Nel nome della razza*, 81.

<sup>90</sup> On the integration of Jews in liberal and Giolittian Italy see Tullia Catalan, “Le comunità ebraiche dall’Unità alla prima guerra mondiale,” in *Storia d’Italia. Annali 11. Gli ebrei in Italia*, ed. Corrado Vivanti, vol. 2, *Dall’emancipazione a oggi* (Torino: Einaudi, 1997), 1245-92.

<sup>91</sup> Through the journal *Civiltà cattolica*, in the 1880s Catholic anti-Semitism in Italy became particularly virulent, peaking (as in France and much of Europe) in the 1890s with the Dreyfus affair, but continuing undeterred and with the sanction of the Vatican well into the first decade of the new century.

<sup>92</sup> See for example Paolo Mantegazza, “La razza ebrea davanti alla scienza,” *Fanfulla della domenica* 7, September 27, 1885. Delia Frigessi, “Cattaneo, Lombroso e la questione ebraica,” in Burgio, *Nel nome della razza*, 257.

<sup>93</sup> Paolo Orano, *Il problema del cristianesimo* (Roma: Lux, 1898).

<sup>94</sup> Luigi Luzzatti was a minister under Giolitti in 1906, prime minister from March 1910 to March 1911; Ernesto Nathan was the mayor of Rome (1907-1913); Claudio Treves was a reformist socialist representative to the Parliament under Giolitti, a journalist for *Il Tempo* and from 1910 the editor of *L’Avanti!*

<sup>95</sup> Francesco Germinario, “Latinità, antimeridionalismo e antisemitismo negli scritti giovanili di Paolo Orano (1895-1911),” in Burgio, *Nel nome della razza*, 105-14. Germinario observes that Orano’s anti-Semitism was entirely “homegrown” and independent of the contemporary developments of anti-Semitism in France.

<sup>96</sup> Catalan, “Le comunità ebraiche,” 1267.

European Aryans.<sup>97</sup> On the other hand, anti-Semitic Catholic culture in Italy tended consistently to identify socialism with Jewishness.

While this imaginary racial and sexual configuration underwent several permutations in the years after unification and through the turn of the century, its main function was that of sanctioning difference and Southern as well as female inferiority and implicitly justifying colonial and gender exploitation within the nation and the need at the same time to redeem and civilize. The unifying principles of nationality and Italianness on the one hand, and of class consciousness and solidarity on the other, were used by many in an attempt to counter this rhetoric. Socialists and *meridionalisti* like Turati and Salvemini stressed the importance of environment social and economic conditions as opposed to race. Achille Loria and Salvemini took a step towards the deconstruction of the whole racial argument when they observed that, from the point of view of Northern Europeans, and indeed of Italy's own allies, the whole of Italy – not just the South, was effeminate and lazy, a nation of primitive and barbarous Mediterraneans.<sup>98</sup> Yet the polarizing, violent, and disintegrating racial discourse continued more or less implicitly to do its work of pulling Italians apart and condoning colonial oppression and repression inside of Italy, as well as justifying the failures of governmental programs dedicated to the improvement of the Mezzogiorno. Only through the mediation of literary discourse, and especially of d'Annunzio as a free-floating signifier of the Italic race, was the work of racist discourse effectively turned from inside to outside the nation, becoming a powerful imaginary unifier.

In order to understand how the new, modern Italian colonial and racial national identity took shape, we must understand that the positivist discourse on race was not surpassed or superseded in the new century, but rather took on a new form which became hegemonic in Italy through the new power of the mass media and of literary discourse. In brief, the imaginary construction of an all-inclusive Italian or Italic race – part of a larger Mediterranean and Latin race – replaced the divisive discourse of racial difference between Italians and took hold of the popular imagination. It was a crucial element that allowed the Libyan campaign of 1911-1912 to become one of the defining moments of Italian national identity, almost exactly fifty years after the nominal unification of Italy.

It is important to realize that while the shrill and violent rhetoric of the Nationalists and the seductive and learned poetic oratory of d'Annunzio contributed enormously to push the idea of an Italic Mediterranean race and to promote the Italian way to colonialism and imperialism, both obtained such a consensus and became so powerful because they clearly expressed something like an emotional collective wish. This is borne out by the almost entirely imaginary, fictional, and highly poetic accounts of Libya published daily by the press. Some of the most extravagantly poetic of these texts are traceable to Giuseppe Piazza's *La nostra terra promessa* (1911, Our Promised Land) and De Martino, *Tripoli, Cirene e Cartagine* (1912, Tripoli, Cyrene and Carthage) and to earlier narratives that, from the early twentieth century, had progressively transformed Libya into a seductive, eroticized mythic land of dreams and desire:

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<sup>97</sup> Leonida Bissolati, "Il principio logico dell'ascetismo," in *Rivista repubblicana* 2 (1878), 281, cited in Raspanti, "Il mito ariano," 83.

<sup>98</sup> Wong 72. On the 19<sup>th</sup>-century myth of Italy as Europe's South and of the *Mezzogiorno* as non-European, see Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius. Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). Although he still adhered to the notion of racial difference, the socialist historian and sociologist Ettore Ciccotti observed that the fact that in different historical periods the Mediterranean race had achieved different and higher levels of civilization excluded its permanent inferiority. This argument was to be picked up by Gabriele d'Annunzio and others.

Il canto delle sirene è ora un mito per noi [. . .] eppure il risorgere di un mito nel silenzio della notte e del mare, ha la forza di farci smarrire la bussola del tempo e di confonderci con gli uomini che prima di noi vissero e morirono. Insieme a quei morti, noi ci perdiamo lungi, in una penombra simbolica, dove tutte le forme e gli atti della vita assumono origini sovrumane [. . .] Io mi protendo ora verso il golfo della grande Sirte, per udire il favoloso canto delle sirene.<sup>99</sup>

The song of the sirens is now a myth for us [...] and yet the resurgence of a myth in the silence of the night and of the sea, has the power of making us lose track of the compass of time and of confusing us with those men who have lived and died before us. Together with these dead, we lose ourselves in a far-off place and in a symbolic penumbra in which all the forms and acts of life take on superhuman origins [...] I stretch out now towards the gulf of the great Sirte, to hear the fabled song of the sirens.

Along with the literary memory of the sirens' seductive song that fosters the fantasy of a superhuman, heroic past, and of a destiny of conquest for Italians across the Mediterranean, one of the recurrent images in the literature about Libya is the myth of a Roman road, now buried in the sea, that once connected Italy with the Libyan coast. Piazza describes it dreamily as a "via romana sepolta dal mare che scorgete a specchio sporgendovi sulla marina" ("a Roman road buried beneath the sea which you glimpse when you lean out over the dead calm waters").<sup>100</sup> Libya becomes a mirror in which the shadow of an idealized Roman past and the seductive reflection of literary myth are projected to evoke the image of a new, rejuvenated, and stronger individual as well as collective identity.

As Gaetano Salvemini did not tire of repeating, the fecund promised land filled with natural resources, rich in water, and beautiful palm trees and olive trees described in the newspapers did not in reality exist at all; it was nothing but a "Grande illusione" ("Great illusion"). Nor did the Arabs await the Italians as liberators and civilizers, as the press also claimed.<sup>101</sup> In the press, the deserts of Libya were transformed, on one occasion at least through fraudulent recourse to an eyewitness account, into a veritable land of cockaigne.<sup>102</sup> Yet, what Salvemini failed to realize was that it was precisely its appeal as a literary fantasy, its construction through poetic literary topoi and tropes (familiar not only from the classics but from the youth narrative of adventure and exotic travel and even fairy tales), that turned the Libyan enterprise into a collective dream fulfillment for Italians. Libya was a literary construct for Italians, a socially symbolic narrative act (to use

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<sup>99</sup> D. Tumiatì, *Nell'Africa Romana. Tripolitania* (Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1905), quoted in Olga Tamburini, "La via romana sepolta nel mare: mito del *mare nostrum* e ricerca di un'identità nazionale," in *Mare nostrum. Percezione ottomana e mito mediterraneo in Italia all'alba del '900*, ed. Stefano Trinchese (Milano: Guerini Studio, 2005), 44.

<sup>100</sup> Giuseppe Piazza, *La nostra terra promessa* (Roma: Bernardo Lux Editore, 1911), 116.

<sup>101</sup> Gaetano Salvemini, *Come siamo andati in Libia* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1963), 117-29; 180. "Grande illusione" was what Amendola called the pacifist ideal in *La voce* 9, March 2, 1911.

<sup>102</sup> The correspondence between a German and an Italian explorer and Francesco Crispi, published by the journal *La ragione* on the eve of the war and then by Giuseppe Beviore in *Come siamo andati a Tripoli* (Milano: Bocca, 1912), rhapsodized in hyperbolic terms about the fertility of Libya: "Ho veduto gelsi bianchi come faggi, ulivi più colossali di quercie. L'erba medica può essere tagliata dodici volte l'anno. Gli alberi da frutta prendono uno sviluppo spaventoso . . ." ("I saw the mulberries white as beech trees, olives more colossal than oaks. The alfalfa can be cut twelve times a year. The fruit trees grow startlingly fast..."). It was exposed as a hoax by Salvemini in *L'Unità*, December 16, 1911, but to no avail.

Fredric Jameson's term) of wish-fulfillment.<sup>103</sup> As Mario Isnenghi observed, the popular song "Tripoli bel suol d'amore" ("Tripoli Beautiful Land of Love") soon came close to being an uncontested national anthem – the Italian equivalent of the Marseillaise.<sup>104</sup> The discursive and poetic construction of the Libyan campaign was based on an imagined historical legacy of origins and race and a sense of purpose that bonded together all Italians – Northerners and Southerners, men and women, intellectuals and peasants, pacifists and war-mongers, atheists and Catholics, imperialists and even socialists. The fundamental difference between these "new" imaginary racial groupings (the Italians on one side and the Muslim infidels on the other) made the traditional polarizing differences that plagued Italy seem to disappear. The reformist socialists Ivanoe Bonomi and Leonida Bissolati agreed that "solidarietà di stirpe non s'oppono, ma integra la solidarietà di classe" ("racial solidarity is not opposed to, but rather completes, class solidarity").<sup>105</sup>

The idea of an Italic race became synonymous with the Italian nation itself, though the meaning of race was, at best, fuzzy and constantly shifting – and thus paradoxically for this very reason all the more powerful and all-pervasive. For some, most notably d'Annunzio (but definitely not for Marinetti), it meant that the Italic race was linked by blood and heritage to Roman civilization and thus capable of creating a new modern imperium over the Mediterranean and Africa. When d'Annunzio's poems appeared, d'Annunzio's arch-enemies of *La voce* published an editorial mocking his emphatic rhetoric, yet the moralistic journal, which had initially opposed war in Libya as the expression of a vulgar and materialist government it despised, was stunned by the wave of popular consensus and soon came around to supporting the war, with the notable exception of the great Salvemini, who abandoned their company forever. For the other *vocianti* Giovanni Papini and Giovanni Amendola, and even for Giuseppe Prezzolini, the Libyan war represented the spirituality and virility of the real men who could demonstrate to the world that the Italian race was not inferior.<sup>106</sup> The journal's rhetoric became increasingly racialized, with polemical interventions such as a letter by a reader who observed that "metà dell'Italia è barbara, in qualche luogo selvaggia affatto, che ci sono ancora trogloditi ... a Napoli nei vicoli i ragazzi non vanno nudi? Le donne non si spidocchiano sulla strada?" ("half of Italy is barbarian, in some places downright savage and inhabited by troglodytes ... in the alleyways of Naples, don't the boys walk around naked? Don't the women delouse themselves in the street?").<sup>107</sup> The Libyan war was indeed, as Papini put it, an opportunity for racial regeneration for Italians because "facendo versare il sangue lo riossigena e lo rinnova" ("spilling blood reoxygenates and renews it").<sup>108</sup> Ardengo Soffici's 1912 proto-Fascist novel *Lemmonio Boreo* (published by *Libreria della Voce*) is, as Isnenghi has shown, full of references to the power of the Italian race, a race whose instinctive and atavistic strength is to be found especially in the male peasants, and has nothing to do with class consciousness. The left-wing and revolutionary socialists (still including at the time Benito Mussolini), vehemently opposed the colonial war, arguing that it was class and not race that had

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<sup>103</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981).

<sup>104</sup> Mario Isnenghi, *Le guerre degli italiani. Parole, immagini, ricordi 1848-1945* (Milano: Mondadori, 1989), 90.

<sup>105</sup> Francesco Malgeri, *La guerra libica* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1970), 217.

<sup>106</sup> Six months after the beginning of the war, on April 11, 1912, an editorial signed simply "La Voce," pointed out that the war in Libya was going to be particularly challenging because fought by a "un popolo bianco" ("a white people") against a racially inferior enemy incapable of fighting honorably: "fanatico, bellicoso, abilissimo nelle finte fughe, negli aggiramenti e nei tradimenti" ("fanatical, warlike, highly skilled in feigned retreats, flanking maneuvers and treachery").

<sup>107</sup> *La Voce*, February 1, 1912, letter by Enrico Ruta.

<sup>108</sup> *La Voce*, October 26, 1911.

to be fought for; and one might want to argue that this is one of the key reasons why they were less and less able to gather support for their cause in Italy. The Libyan war clearly opened up like never before the public discourse on race and marked the peak in the production of racist discourse in Italian culture before Fascism. The essay “Gobineau e la razza” (“Gobineau and Race”), published in 1914 by Giovanni Boine (one of *La Voce*’s leading writers), with its open declaration of veneration for the racist theory of the *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines* (Essay on the Inequality of Human Races), may be considered the apogee of this phenomenon.<sup>109</sup>

#### 4. D’Annunzio’s “*Canzoni d’Oltremare*” and the racialization of religion

In ten long poems, the *Canzoni per le gesta d’Oltremare*, published in the *Corriere della Sera* from October 8, 1911 to January 14, 1912, d’Annunzio celebrated the Libyan war while it was happening. His was an epoch-making, conscious act of intervention in the historical present and the politics of a real war. His input was far from just empty or decorative, and the poems were widely read and recited even in the trenches of Tripoli and Bengasi.<sup>110</sup> D’Annunzio was commissioned to write the poems by the head of *Il Corriere della sera* and highly paid for them. It is significant that their publication eclipsed the news of the riots in Southern Italy, which had previously filled the front pages of the paper: the rhetoric of the colonial mission in Africa, with its ethnically unifying mythology, replaced the ethnic shame and divisiveness of the failed colonization of the South. Parts of the “Canzone dei Dardanelli” (“Song of the Dardanelles”) were censored because they were considered insulting towards nations with which Italy was then allied or friendly: Germany, Austria, and England.<sup>111</sup> The poems contain specific, detailed renditions – based on the daily bulletins and the accounts in the press – of the forms of torture and killing practiced during the Libyan *impresa*. In particular, the poems sought to counter the international wave of outrage that followed the Italian repression of the Arab revolt in October 1912. The Italian reprisal, which lasted several days and was documented by gruesome photographs that were published by Paolo Valera and widely circulated in thousands of copies,<sup>112</sup> included summary and mass executions, hangings and deportations, and the slaughter of women and children. Arabs in particular were considered “non-belligerent fighters” and either slaughtered or immediately deported.<sup>113</sup> Thousands of Arabs were deported to Italian prisons in the Tremiti islands in the Adriatic, Ustica, and other state detention centers, where they were decimated by disease. In his poems, d’Annunzio made for the first time a truly massive use of Christian religious imagery and language.<sup>114</sup> The unprecedented, spectacularly sadistic emphasis on details of torture and

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<sup>109</sup> Giovanni Boine, “Gobineau e la razza,” *Rassegna contemporanea* 7 (1914): 394-413. This text is also evidence of an escalation of anti-Semitism in Italy in this period. (See also for example the anti-Semitic editorial by Prezzolini, *La Voce*, February 29, 1912, originally published in the newspaper *Il resto del Carlino* on February 8). In Italy, the unification of national identity on a racial basis was and is always unstable. While it attempts to mend and transcend internal differences, in fact, it tends eventually to reintroduce and even exasperate racial division, racism and sexism within the body of the nation. On Boine’s anti-Semitism see Franco Contorbis, “Renato Serra, Giovanni Boine e il nazionalismo italiano,” in Vivarelli, *La cultura*, 189-233.

<sup>110</sup> Del Boca, *Italiani in Libia*, 147.

<sup>111</sup> The first edition of the volume entitled *Le Canzoni delle Gesta d’Oltremare* was confiscated at the printer’s in January 1912, and reprinted later the same month without lines 67-81 of the “Canzone dei Dardanelli.”

<sup>112</sup> Paolo Valera, *Le giornate di Sciarasciat fotografate* (Milano: Tipografia Borsani, 1911); *Album-Portfolio della guerra italo-turca 1911-1912 per la conquista della Libia* (Milano: Treves, 1913). See also Silvana Palma, *L’Italia coloniale* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1999), 76-81.

<sup>113</sup> Del Boca, *Italiani in Libia*, 118.

<sup>114</sup> Among the many contributions on this aspect of d’Annunzio’s poetry, see Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, “Le immagini

bloody ferocity serves the specific purpose of arousing the reader's indignation against the infidels, while justifying the Italian reprisals as a profoundly Christian act: "Occhio alla mira ferma, o cristiani./Solo chi sbaglia il colpo è peccatore./Vi sovvenga! Dilaniano i feriti,/sgozzan gli inermi, corrono all'odore/dei cadaveri, i corpi seppelliti/dissotterrano, mutilano i morti,/scempiano i morti/straziano i feriti,/gli inermi, i prigionieri, i nostri morti!" ("Keep a steady aim, o Christians./Only he who misses his mark is a sinner./May God help you! They cut the wounded to pieces./Slit the throats of defenseless men, race toward the smell/Of corpses, they disinter/The buried bodies, mutilating the dead./Sully the dead./Torturing the wounded./The defenseless, the prisoners, our dead!).<sup>115</sup> In a holy and just war, killing is a religious duty, a holy enterprise, because the enemy is the infidel and guilty of the most inhuman crimes against humanity.

The "Canzone del sangue" ["Song of Blood"] invokes the name of Christ ("In Cristo, Re, o Genova, t'invoco" ["In Christ, King, o Genoa, I Invoke You"]) and the poems are filled with allusions to and echoes from the Bible and the Gospels. The purificatory value of the sacrificial blood is emphasized throughout. As early as the prefatory prayer to the tragedy *La nave* (The Ship, 1905), d'Annunzio had stressed the ritual significance of offering one's own blood in a violent sacrifice of purification, willed and blessed by God himself, that could restore the Italic greatness in the Mediterranean, making it again the "Mare nostro" ("Our Sea"): "O Iddio che vagli e rinnovelli/nel Mar le stirpi, O Iddio che le cancelli,/i viventi i viventi saran quelli/che sopra il Mare/ti magnificheranno, sopra il Mare/t'offriran mirra e sangue dall'altare/che porta il rostro.//Fa di tutti gli Oceani il Mare Nostro!/Amen" ("O God who separates and renews/ the races in the Sea, O God who expunges them./the living the living will be those/who above the Sea/shall exalt you, above the Sea/who upon the Sea/shall exalt you, upon the Sea/will offer you myrrh and blood from the altar/on the rostrum.//Make all of the Oceans Our Sea!/Amen").<sup>116</sup> The titles of d'Annunzio's Libyan war poems are themselves emblematic of his religious intent: "Tre salmi per i nostri morti" ("Three Psalms for Our Dead"); "Preghiera dell'Avvento" ("Advent Prayer"); "Il Rinato" ("The Reborn"); "La Preghiera di Doberdò" ("The Prayer of Doberdò"); "La Preghiera di Sernaglia" ("The Prayer of Sernaglia"); "Cantico per l'ottava della Vittoria" ("Canticle for the Octave of Victory"). Psalms and prayers are used to connote the war as a holy and sacred event that must have its liturgical celebration. The literary technique is in fact adapted from the Bible by d'Annunzio, as may be seen in the use of rhythmic repetition: "Tu spezzi le mascelle del nemico e gli fai gettar la preda di tra i denti. Tu rompi a una a una tutte le sue chiusure, e tu metti in

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della guerra," in *D'Annunzio e la guerra, Nuovi Quaderni del Vittoriale* (Milano: Mondadori, 1996): 196-217.

<sup>115</sup> "Canzone della Diana" in Gabriele d'Annunzio, *Versi d'amore e di gloria*, ed. by Annamaria Andreoli and Niva Lorenzini, vol. 2 (Milano: Mondadori, 1984), 679-690. See also the highly graphic "Canzone dei Dardanelli," *ibid.*, 705: "Taluno i suoi compagni crocifissi/rivede, là, nella moschea di Giuma/i corpi come ciocchi aperti e scissi//con la scure, conversi in nera gruma/senza forma, sguardando le ventraie/per gli squarci; e le bocche ove la schiuma//dell'agonia tersero l'anguinaie/recise, intrise fra le due mascelle;/e i viventi infunati alle steccaie,//alle travi dei pozzi, con la pelle/del petto per grembiul rosso, con trite/le braccia penzolanti delle ascelle//dirotte, con le palpebre cucite/ad ago e spago, o fitti sino al collo/nel sabbione che fascia le ferite,//le vene stagna" ("Some of his crucified companions/he saw again, there, in the mosque of Jum'a/the bodies like logs split open//with an axe, transformed into a black crust/without form, pouring out their entrails/through their wounds; and their mouths where the foam/From their death throes washed over their severed/Groins, stuffed between their jaws;/and the living bound to wooden fenceposts,//To the crossbeams over the wells, with the skin/of their chests like a red apron, with mangled/Arms hanging from their broken/Armpits, with their eyelids sewn together/With a needle and twine, or buried up to the neck/In the sandy soil that binds their wounds,//Seals their veins."

<sup>116</sup> Gabriele d'Annunzio, *La Nave in Tragedie, sogni e misteri*, vol. 2, ed. Egidio Bianchetti (Milano: Mondadori, 1940), 5.

ruina le sue fortezze./Condotte come mandre, spartite come branchi con le sue schiere. Le tue son come sacrifici di giustizia, son come olocausti di purità, son come offerte da ardere interamente” (“You crush the jaws of the enemy and make him release his prey from between his teeth. One by one you overthrow all of his strongholds, and lay waste to all of his fortresses./Driven like herds, his troops are scattered like flocks. Yours are like sacrifices of justice, they are like holocausts of purity, they are like offerings to be wholly consumed by flames”).<sup>117</sup> The enemy of Italy is thus identified as the Biblical enemy of God, and the “Latin” war with the justness of the holy war.

But d’Annunzio’s operation is in fact twofold. Not only does he (as has been widely acknowledged) “sacralize” war, turning it into a religion, but he also ethnicizes religion. D’Annunzio unites Arabs and Turks under the same category as “infidels” and “Muslims” and effectively conflates them as a single “ethnic other.” In this process, religion becomes part of ethnicity on both sides: Italians are Christians, the enemies are Muslim. Invoking and reactivating the literary and cultural patrimony of the Christian Middle Ages, d’Annunzio furthermore identifies “Christian” with “human” and “Infidel” with “inhuman,” or even not human: “non uomini” (“non men”). Dehumanization is, as many race scholars have observed, an integral part of the racial paradigm of exclusion attached to most nationalist projects.<sup>118</sup> The enemies are thus consistently referred to as “cani” (“dogs”): to kill them is not a sin, but a holy duty. Like dogs, the infidels unearth the dead in order to devour them.<sup>119</sup> The dog was reputed to be the most impure animal for the Islamic faith, a fact that added to the racial slur. The Christian rhetoric of the crusades is evoked in the description of the fight against “the infidels,” who are depicted not only as vicious and inhuman beasts, but as ethnically and biologically unchangeable, animals destined to be locked in the inhumanity of an everlasting, unsurpassable barbarism. Eternally treacherous, bloody, and barbaric, they are doomed to replicate their sacrilegious and cruel acts over and over whenever their race is again confronted with the Christian world. The Italian war is thus seen in a transhistorical and unifying perspective as a war aimed against the traditional enemy of Christendom and destined to avenge the ferocious deeds of the past: the infidels’ capture of slaves, the Saracen raids, the torture inflicted on the defenders of Famagosta, and the killing of the last Byzantine emperor and the last defenders of Constantinople. It is a just revenge against centuries of piracy and violence committed by the Turks and a revival of the glorious tradition of the Italian maritime republics – Amalfi, Genova, Pisa and Venice – in the early Middle Ages and through centuries of fighting in the Mediterranean for the defense of Christianity.<sup>120</sup> D’Annunzio’s operation is thoroughly self-conscious, even self-reflexive (as usual): “Fendo i secoli, lacerò l’oblio,/ritrovo le correnti della gloria/nell’acqua ove portammo il nostro Dio.// Levo sul mar l’onda della memoria/e col soffio dell’animo la incalzo, che ferva sotto il piè della Vittoria” (“I cleave through the centuries, I cut through oblivion,/I rediscover the streams of glory/in the water where we carried our God.// I raise on the sea a wave of memory/and with my mind’s breath I drive it forward, that it may shine at the foot of Victory”).<sup>121</sup> D’Annunzio traces an imaginary,

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<sup>117</sup> “Tre salmi per i nostri morti,” d’Annunzio, *Versi*, 774.

<sup>118</sup> Balibar and Wallerstein, 36-67.

<sup>119</sup> This finds an echo in the letters sent home from the front, where the Arab fighters are recurrently described as “bestie” (“beasts”), or “belve” (“wild animals”), and “inhuman.” See Salvatore Bono, “Lettere dal fronte libico (1911-1912),” *Nuova Antologia* 2052 (December 1971), and Del Boca, *Italiani in Libia*, 119-20.

<sup>120</sup> See especially “La Canzone del Sacramento” (“The Song of the Sacrament”), which recounts the story of the preparation of the holy league of Amalfi, Pisa and Genoa against “the infidels” in 1088, with the blessing by the Pope and the celebration of mass in front of the whole fleet ready to set sail for the attack on Mahdiya in the Barbary coast of Tunisia, considered a miniature rehearsal of the First Crusade.

<sup>121</sup> “La Canzone dei Dardanelli,” *Versi*, 708-09.

poetic hyper-map across the Mediterranean that connects disparate events in time and space in order to highlight “la gloria della razza” (“the glory of the race”).<sup>122</sup> Key points of reference in d’Annunzio’s map are a series of strategic quotes and allusions from canonical texts ranging from *The Aeneid* to Dante to Villani’s medieval *Croniche*, Tasso’s *La Gerusalemme liberata*, Carducci’s ode to Mazzini, and, of course, his own poetry. Starting from the unlikely, unpromising location of the Libyan desert, with its shifting sands and labyrinthine oases, he hopes to chart a redemptive course for Italians that will reconnect them to the Latin blood of heroes: “tal forse un genio indigete del seme/d’Enea ritorna a noi col divin segno/dallo splendore delle sabbie estreme.// Tra le palme invisibili arde il pegno/del novo patto” (“perhaps such necessary genius of the seed/of Aeneas shall return to us with the divine sign/from the splendor of the distant sands.// Between the invisible palms is ignited the pledge/of the new covenant.”)<sup>123</sup>

Finally, not only does d’Annunzio, as we have seen, racialize religion and dehumanize the enemy as the animalistic “Muslim other,” but for the first time he symbolically incorporates representatives of the poor Italian South into the holy body of the fighting Italian *stirpe*, exalting the collective national pride and erasing in the process both class and geographical and cultural difference within the nation. In “La Canzone dei Trofei” (“Song of the Trophies”) in particular, the names of simple sailors and soldiers from the Italian South who died in Libya are inscribed in the poem along with those of Northerners. The courage and bravery of the Sardinian soldiers and the Sardinian race is particularly and repeatedly celebrated and assimilated to “il gentil sangue latino” (“noble Latin blood”) and “il buon seme” (“the good seed”). Through the unifying thrust of the poem, D’Annunzio bridges North with South and the memory of Rome with the invocation of Christian and Catholic faith, all in the name of “la grande Patria dalle quattro sponde” (“the great Fatherland with four shores”).<sup>124</sup>

While d’Annunzio certainly was not alone in deploying race and racialized religion as a new rhetorical tool that could help pull Italians together (Matilde Serao did the same thing in her *Viva la guerra!* [Long Live War!], pointedly evoking images of Lepanto), his contribution was unquestionably a major and influential one due specifically to his literary reputation and skill. What is not usually recognized, however, is how much he contributed to making race and ethnicity a political and literary category in Italian discourse. That his was an operation of self-aggrandizing and literary myth-making intended to cultivate his own persona as *vate della patria* is certainly true.<sup>125</sup> Yet, literature and politics, myth-making and action, were often one and the same or inextricably tied together in Liberal Italy, and d’Annunzio was surely one of the chief agents in the specifically Italian politicization of literary discourse and, vice-versa, in the (as often noted) estheticization of politics.

The 1911 article for *New York American*, written while he was composing the first *Canzoni*, to vigorously support, in the eyes of the United States in particular, the Italian cause in Libya, shows that d’Annunzio had a clear grasp not only of the geopolitical situation, but also of the international rhetoric and politics of race. In 1910 and 1911, lynchings of Italians in Florida and in Louisiana were exposed in the press; the familiarity of Italian immigrants with African Americans and other non-whites was often cited as the reason for racial discrimination of Italians in the U.S.<sup>126</sup> D’Annunzio claimed in the article that Italy’s civilizing mission in Libya was no

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<sup>122</sup> “La Canzone del sangue,” *Versi*, 659.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> D’Annunzio, *Versi*, 676; 677.

<sup>125</sup> See Caburlotto.

<sup>126</sup> Patrizia Salvetti, *Corda e sapone*, xxiii; 36-39; 101-12.

less grand than the Risorgimento and the Unification, and the essence itself of the Italian race required that the redeeming mission of freeing Libya from the rule of its degenerate oppressor be carried out immediately. Although fallen into barbarism, Libya, he succinctly explained, still bore the traces of the Greek civilization, of the Roman rule, and of Christian holiness; its Arab and other racially mixed inhabitants were eager for liberation, and for the modernization, cultural renaissance, and economic well-being that, by making Libya once again part of their *Mare Nostrum*, Italians would bring.<sup>127</sup> In a work of unsubtle propaganda such as Paolo De Vecchi's 1912 pamphlet *Italy's Civilizing Mission in Africa*, all the themes found in d'Annunzio are recycled; Turkey is defined a "brutal usurper," and the Turks a "rapacious and tyrannical race, devoid of all sentiments of morality, slave traders and brigands," at the opposite end of the racial spectrum from the "Gentil sanguine latino."<sup>128</sup>

##### 5. Corradini and the far-away African war for the Italic race

No literary text is clearer about the ideological process of racialization we have just observed in d'Annunzio *Canzoni* than Corradini's novel *La guerra lontana* (The Distant War).<sup>129</sup> The novel was published in May 1911, in the midst of the nationalist press campaign advocating war in Libya. It is a highly dramatic story, set in Rome in 1896, in the months leading up to the historic defeat at Adua, whose traumatic effect on the hearts and minds of Italians is narrated with impassioned and melodramatic flair in the open-ended conclusion. In the novel, Adua is in fact represented by Corradini as a devastating national trauma, a humiliation that has deeply torn Italians apart and that only the war in Libya can redeem, purifying and reuniting once again the body of the nation. A *roman à clé* with strong allegorical dimensions, *La guerra lontana* is meant clearly to incite Italians to embrace the Libyan war. It features thinly fictionalized versions of Carducci (the inspiring poet who sings the past glories of Rome and the dream of its resurgence), Alfredo Oriani (the "visionary historian" who sees in the future Rome's fate of redemption),<sup>130</sup> and Crispi as the tragic, betrayed hero behind the scenes. Crispi's virile ideal of war in Africa is in fact cited explicitly in the author's introduction as the novel's main inspiration.<sup>131</sup> In style, theme, and imagery, the novel is deeply indebted to Corradini's main literary model, d'Annunzio, and Corradini's racialized representation of women and the feminized crowd, as we shall see, clearly echoes Lombroso and Sighele. Yet Corradini is able to create a literary text that is highly readable, a "poor man's version" of d'Annunzio, devoid of the rhetorical density of d'Annunzio's prose.

<sup>127</sup> D'Annunzio, "La Date," 812.

<sup>128</sup> Paolo De Vecchi, *Italy's Civilizing Mission in Africa* (New York: Brentano's, 1912), 16.

<sup>129</sup> Enrico Corradini, *La guerra lontana* (Milano: Treves, 1911). On Corradini and on this novel, see Simon Levis-Sullam, "Dal 'Marzocco' a Tripoli: la nazione di Corradini e la crisi dell'Italia liberale," in *Italiani in Guerra*, vol. 2, *Le tre Italie. Dalla presa di Roma alla Settimana Rossa (1870-1914)*, eds. Simon Levis Sullam and Mario Isnenghi (Torino: UTET, 2009). See also Carlo Alberto Madrignani, "L'opera narrativa di Enrico Corradini, in Vivarelli, *La cultura italiana*, 235-52. For Corradini's background, see in the same volume Giovanni Landucci, "Darwinismo e nazionalismo," 103-87.

<sup>130</sup> Alfredo Oriani, another "man of letters" as well as historian was the author of *La rivolta ideale* (Napoli: Ricciardi, 1908), in which he wrote, 82: "Andare in Africa significa tornarci" ("To go to Africa means to return there"). He believed that history was a creation of the will and of the spirit, but he also shared with Corradini the positivistic notion that a "people" and a nation represented a biological entity, with a distinct racial heritage. Another "visionary historian" was Umberto Angeli, author of the racist *La guerra inevitabile. L'evoluzione politica dei prossimi 50 anni* (Roma: Lux, 1912).

<sup>131</sup> Corradini, *La guerra lontana*, vii.

Like Serao, Corradini excels at the (paradoxically) creative use of stereotypes and writes with considerable melodramatic skill and flair and a sense of theatricality (he was also a playwright) that are typical of the popular novel. *La guerra lontana* also offers interesting insights into the great new power of the media in Italy, and specifically of the press, in the process of political manipulation and myth-making. In this sense, it is a curiously self-reflective and self-conscious text, considering that Corradini was also engaged at the moment in the creation of the weekly *L'idea nazionale*, whose first issue appeared in March on the day of the anniversary of Adua.

The novel's hero is the gigantic super macho, significantly named Ercole Gola, a journalist and self-made man originally from a village in the primitive countryside near Rome. Ercole's newspaper is on the edge of bankruptcy due to his mismanagement and indulgence in a corrupt life of women and pleasure. His nemesis is Carlotta Ansparro. This beautiful courtesan is a Dannunzian and a Lombrosian type: a seductress who emerges increasingly (as we see her more and more clearly through the eyes of the finally disenchanted protagonist and focalizer, as well as those of the intermittently omniscient narrator) as a degenerate, depraved monster. She lives a sterile life of material consumption and luxury. She is described repeatedly as fluctuating between a deceptively seductive and pure feminine beauty and the appearance of a hysterical, sick monster: a Medusa-like creature who seduces and petrifies Ercole. Carlotta lives for a life of the senses and estheticism, like a kind of female dandy, and she is treacherous and unstable. She embodies the degeneration and decadence of Rome: she is the *Anti-Roma* against whom Ercole must fight for his own redemption and that of Italy.<sup>132</sup>

During their first rendezvous, Ercole rapes her; this is meant as a sign of both his strength and his subjection to her deadly lure. She claims to be from Palermo, but the novel intimates repeatedly that her origins are obscure and that she is not a real Italian; she has lived a nomadic "cosmopolitan" life, and in fact she may be Jewish. In one of the first scenes of the novel – a theatrical dinner party scene in her decadent Rome apartment – one of her most honored guests at her richly laid-out table (that seems to Ercole's eyes surrounded with enemies of Italy) is a Jewish art critic, whose repulsive figure is described by Corradini using some of the most offensive stereotypes of anti-Semitic physiognomy. The novel is in fact a powerful demonstration of the interrelatedness of nationalism with racism, anti-Semitism, anti-socialism, and anti-feminism. Carlotta, after taking Ercole as her lover, will eventually betray him for his arch-enemy, the pacifist socialist politician Lambio, an opportunist whom Ercole, in one of the most effective, sadistic scenes of the novel, will finally kill in a duel while Carlotta, unseen, is spying through a window on the two men's combat.

The novel's opening scene is revealing and sets the tone for the entire text. In his office, Ercole receives the visit of a woman who wants to submit an article for publication. It is a *signorina femminista* who introduces herself using the masculine noun *professore* (she is a high school teacher) and is described sarcastically as looking ugly, masculine, sexually repressed, and sterile, with comically grotesque traces of makeup and femininity on her ridiculous face and body. The article she wants to submit (and that Ercole of course declines to accept) is an attack against Crispi's African war campaign and an argument in favor of pacifism. She is mocked by the entire staff. Later on, when Ercole happens to witness a Socialist haranguing the crowd in a public square and giving a speech against the African war, he not only describes the Socialist as a vile, despicable being (vomiting his oratorical excesses onto the passive and submissive working-class audience), but he has a hallucinatory vision of this man copulating with the feminist school teacher.

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<sup>132</sup> Corradini, *La guerra lontana*, 163.

The report of the Italian defeat at Adua and its aftermath, which forms the climax at the end of the novel, will be interpreted by Ercole as the triumph of this bestial coupling of the feminist with the socialist pacifist. In another obscene *connubio*, Carlotta and Lambio will also eventually marry.

At the opposite end from both Carlotta and the sterile feminist is Ercole's mother, a nearly illiterate peasant woman who lives with her son in Rome and embodies the austere, enduring, and original purity of the Italic race. Ercole, under the twin influences of the poet and the *storico veggente* and of his own mother, succeeds in freeing himself from Carlotta's Medusa-like emasculating and petrifying influence and experiences a veritable conversion and a renaissance: "s'era spetrato" (164, "he became tenderhearted"). He finds a son of sorts, a young man who wants to be a journalist, and together they embark on the heroic task of using the newspaper to resuscitate "la romana virtù" ("Roman virtue") and urge Italians to persevere in the African war that will restore them their long-lost empire, and give them once again pride in their noble and ancient race (170-75).

Abyssinia and Africa itself remain entirely abstract in the novel; they are in fact willfully unseen by the protagonist and unrepresented in the novel except as the abstract points and lines on a map in Ercole's office. Africa has no reality for Ercole Gola and his adopted son; it is only a wish-fulfillment for a fantasy of power, racial affirmation, and Italian unification. The war too remains abstract and uncannily ghostly and mediatic (192). Libya like Abyssinia will also be, despite ample geographical knowledge especially through the work of the great geographer Arcangelo Ghisleri, largely a fantasy for Italians at least until Shara Shatt, and even later.<sup>133</sup>

The socialist and feminist anti-war demonstrations after Adua are staged in *La guerra lontana* as the veritable trauma, the unleashing of a feminized mob, the *plebaglia*, worse even than the defeat itself: "Le bande di ribelli non si davan riposo, ma percorrevano ancora le città in migliaia e migliaia con le donne e le fanciulle urlanti che fossero richiamati dall'Africa i loro figli e i loro fratelli" (207; "The rebel bands did not rest, but continued to traverse the cities by the thousands and thousands with women and young girls screaming that their sons and brothers be called back from Africa"). On the other side, "real Italians" or rather real "Romans," mourn the defeat: "Roma tutta, la grande madre, la madre delle madri, ululava sulla sconfitta [. . .] Migliaia di persone [. . .] scendevano mute e di lontano pareva accompagnarle il compianto funebre delle generazioni passate e delle generazioni avvenire" (204; "All of Rome, the great mother, the mother of mothers, wailed at her defeat [...] Thousands of people [...] descended silently and from afar they seemed to be accompanied by the funereal sorrow of past and future generations"). Despite his heroic efforts to help the war resume, Ercole must, in the end, abandon Italy, haunted and wanted by the law for his murder of Lambio. He will have to emigrate to Latin America with his old mother; she remains the living symbol of the resilience of the ancient Italic race (271). However, Ercole's adopted son is left behind in Italy ideally to carry on the struggle (implicitly to be renewed with the Libyan war), and Ercole himself is entrusted with the task of taking over a newspaper in Brazil that will carry on the cause for and among the emigrants who suffer the Diaspora, or "I Flutti della Dispersione" (274; "The Waves of the Dispersion"). Through this open-ended conclusion, Corradini connects this novel to his previous one, *La patria lontana* (The Distant Fatherland),

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<sup>133</sup> A fervent anticolonialist and a critic of racial categorizations, Arcangelo Ghisleri was the author of *Atlante d'Africa* (Bergamo: Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche, 1909) and *Tripolitania e Cirenaica dal Mediterraneo al Saharan* (Milano-Bergamo: Società Editoriale Italiana, Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche, 1912). It is interesting to note that one of the most accurate studies of the suitability of Libya as a colony was conducted (as reported and quoted repeatedly by *La Voce* and by Salvemini) by the Jewish Territorial Organization (JTO), whose negative reports, however, were assumed to be unreliable, probably due to racial prejudice.

which advocated colonial expansion and war in Africa as a solution to the plight of emigration, especially the emigration of poor Southern peasants. Corradini's *La guerra lontana* thus resolves and symbolically disposes of both of the key questions that the racialization of Italian discourse and literature sought to address: the "woman" question and the "Southern" question. At the same time, in his work as a journalist and propagandist, Corradini in 1911 was creating for Italians an imaginary, willful misrepresentation of the reality of Libya along racial lines, which legitimated Italian dominance: "ivi non è civiltà. Ivi vivono una vita miserrima gli ultimi avanzi di tre o quattro stirpi decrepite, non più, dico, nazioni, ma neppure popoli, ma soltanto individui, stanchi anch'essi nella morte della loro unità etnica, ritornati in uno stato selvaggio, dissociati nelle solitudini tra l'infcondità del deserto e l'infcondità del mare che li separano dal resto del mondo" ("Yonder there is no civilization. There the last remnants of three or four decrepit races live a miserable life. Indeed, they are no longer nations or even peoples, but just individuals exhausted by the death of their ethnic unity. They have returned to a savage state, isolated in the wilderness between the barrenness of the desert and the barrenness of the sea that separates them from the rest of the world").<sup>134</sup>

#### 6. "The good Italian blood," Southern emigration, and the lure of a demographic colonialism: Racial myths and Deledda's doubts

The new Italian nation had started out poor, with a largely agricultural economy and few industries. Its economic policy was, from the very start, hardly ingratiating to its new citizens, especially those from the South. Through one of the most onerous systems of taxation in Europe, which shamelessly favored the wealthy and especially penalized the consumer and the poor segments of the population by heavily taxing things like wheat and bread, salt, and other basic goods, the government tried to squeeze the maximum revenue out of a poor nation. This ruthless system allowed for the creation or strengthening of infrastructures where necessary (Naples, Palermo and Catania in fact already had good basic infrastructures), including an extensive railway, roads, a respectable army and navy, a police force, and an elementary school system, thus helping to "stitch the boot of Italy." But mounting taxation and brutal exploitation and speculation along with enforced conscription brought bitter protests especially from the South, which became much more impoverished than under the Bourbons. "Victor Emmanuel is robbing us of everything," a Calabrian peasant woman complained in 1874 to the sociologist Leopoldo Franchetti (whose Jewish family had emigrated to Laverne from Tunisia in the eighteenth century).<sup>135</sup> Franchetti was an early advocate of the advisability of solving the Southern question by channeling colonial emigration into Eritrea. The tax collector and the policeman were the only representatives of the *patria* known to most Southerners. Conscription was normally for three years, and, in an effort to foster unification and repress regionalism, each regiment was recruited from two different regions, speaking different dialects, and was stationed in a third region, which was regularly rotated. There was no land reform and little or no land-reclamation, and the traditional Southern land-owning class, as long as it kept up its electoral support, was not required to improve agriculture and the desperate conditions of the peasants. Education was until 1911 one of the few things that was not centralized in the new Italy. Unfortunately this meant that the poorest communes in Southern Italy had no schools. By 1882, illiteracy in Sicily and Sardinia had only fallen from 89 to 81 percent. Yet the "misery" of the South seemed inexplicable to most people of

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<sup>134</sup> *L'ora di Tripoli* (Milano: Treves, 1911), 13.

<sup>135</sup> Leopoldo Franchetti, *Mezzogiorno e colonie* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1950), 140.

the North, who did not understand, as Gramsci observes, that the unification had not been an “equal” process but rather a colonial appropriation of the South by the North: “Il Nord concretamente era una ‘piovra’ che si arricchiva alle spese del Sud [e il suo] incremento economico-industriale era in rapporto diretto con l’impoverimento dell’economia e dell’agricoltura meridionale” (“The North was actually a leech that enriched itself at the expense of the South [and its] economic-industrial growth was directly correlated with the impoverishment of the southern economy and agriculture”). The imaginary explanation for Southern underdevelopment became increasingly “l’incapacità organica degli uomini, la loro barbarie, la loro inferiorità biologica” (“the natural inability of the men, their barbarity, their biological inferiority”).<sup>136</sup>

The gap between North and South was allowed to widen more and more until it took on the traits of the devastating “Southern question.” Emigration sadly had become the only available safety valve to the impoverishment brought by unification. Transatlantic emigration especially rose steeply in the South after the 1880s. By 1896, more than 300,000 people were leaving Italy every year—a peak of over 800,000 was reached in 1913, with a total of about six and a half million Italians scattered around the world. Only Ireland had a comparably dramatic rate of emigration. Although remittances from emigrants helped considerably to relieve the tragic living conditions of the poor South, the consequences of emigration for women, as eloquently illustrated by the Sicilian writer Maria Messina in her novels and short stories of this period, were especially devastating.

As Gramsci observed, at the beginning of the twentieth century a Southern reaction started to develop, with discussion about the millions extorted from Sardinia in the first fifty years by the national state for the exclusive benefit of the mainland, while emigration reached unprecedented levels in the years of the Libyan war. In 1912, during the Libyan war, Grazia Deledda depicted the effects of emigration to Argentina in a story entitled “Chiaroscuro.” Although not comparable to the levels of Sicily, emigration in Sardinia in the first decade of the twentieth century involved the majority of Sardinian towns and communities. Deledda, who as a writer internalized and deployed in her works the theories of Lombroso’s pupil Niceforo regarding the African roots of ethnic Sardinians and the racial backwardness and innate criminal tendency of poor Sardinians,<sup>137</sup> represented emigration to the Americas as a displacement that could only worsen the innate tendency of lower-class Sardinians towards degeneracy, corruption, and crime.<sup>138</sup> Emigration to Argentina in “Chiaroscuro,” for example, makes the ambiguously, ominously dark-skinned male protagonist turn into a liar, a thief, even a rapist. He is described as having “un viso bruno e rapace di arabo” (“the dark and rapacious face of an Arab”).<sup>139</sup> Upon his return to the island, he succeeds in seducing and robbing the female protagonist, an independent woman who, despite her intelligence and self-reliance (and true to the Lombrosian portrayal of woman’s affinity and attraction for crime), falls victim to his fascination. She degrades herself for him, betraying a suitor

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<sup>136</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere*, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Torino: Einaudi, 1975), 2021; 2022.

<sup>137</sup> According to Niceforo, *La delinquenza in Sardegna*, 46, crime in Sardinia “appartiene allo stesso tipo di razza che i moderni viaggiatori dell’Africa narrano aver visto [e] mostra il parallelismo che corre tra [la Sardegna] e le passate zone storiche che la civiltà Europea ha fortunatamente oltrepassato per sempre” (“is practiced by the same sort of race that modern travelers to Africa recount having seen [and] demonstrates the parallels between Sardinia and those historically backwards areas that European civilization has fortunately forever overcome”).

<sup>138</sup> “Il tempo e la sorte possono disfare tutto,” Deledda has one of her characters say, “ma non cambiano le razze [...] il pane bianco rimane bianco” (“Time and fate can undo everything, but they cannot change one’s race [...] white bread remains white bread”). “Le tredici uova,” in *Chiaroscuro*, in *Novelle*, vol. 3, ed. Giovanna Cerina (Nuoro: Ilisso, 1996), 15.

<sup>139</sup> Deledda, *Chiaroscuro*, 9.

who genuinely loves her, an honest man who wants to build a family with her.

The anxiety related to Southern emigration to the Americas was thus one factor that helped to popularize the peculiarly Italian, demographic view of colonialism (the peasant, poor man's colonialism advocated chiefly by Corradini and Pascoli), which contributed to build for the first time an extraordinary national consensus around the conquest of Libya.<sup>140</sup> Some of the most jingoist accounts of the Libyan war, built on the double myth of "the return," were in fact published in Latin America to appeal to the emigrant community. The colonial war was represented as a return of Italians to the land beneficially colonized by their Roman forefathers, and the conquest of Libya by the fatherland would provide the opportunity for the victims of the Italian diaspora finally to return home to "their sea," the Mediterranean.<sup>141</sup> For Deledda, who described herself on occasion as having Libyan and African somatic features,<sup>142</sup> the colonial conquest of Libya had a twofold significance. It represented the acknowledgement of the white Italian racial and cultural superiority, but it also signified the recovery and recognition of an ancient racial kinship between her "African" island and the populations on the other side of the Mediterranean.

Her ambivalence towards the Libyan war is expressed in her novel *Canne al vento* (*Reeds in the Wind*), published in *L'illustrazione italiana* from January to April 1913), in a scene where peasant poets improvise compositions pro and against the Libyan war in Sardinian dialect, while others complain about the bitter misery of emigration to the Americas. The first poet, Serafino Masala from Bultei, a man with a noble face who looks like a Homeric hero, sings of the courage of the Turks who bravely do not want to give up the combat and of the Arab fighters, who, made ferocious by the attack, fight back bravely, refusing to flee.<sup>143</sup> The poem is filled with a sense of admiration for these warriors, and implicit in it is the Sardinian sense of resentment against the Italian invader who colonized the island. The second poet, Gregorio Giordano from Dualchi, who looks like a handsome troubadour, wishes the Italians victory in Africa and calls for the blessings of the Saints on them, to help them return home safely.<sup>144</sup> The exchange that immediately follows clearly demonstrates how the Libyan war was perceived by many as an answer to the toils of emigration:

“L’America? Chi non l’assaggia non sa cosa è. La vedi da lontano e ti sembra

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<sup>140</sup> On the representation of the Libyan colony as a new America where Italian emigration would finally be, unlike Italian emigration to Argentina and North America, legitimate and ennobling, and free Italians of racial discrimination, stigma and suffering, see Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 168-80.

<sup>141</sup> Enzo D’Armesano, *In Libia. Storia della conquista* (Buenos Aires: Meucci Editores, 1913), 19.

<sup>142</sup> See Grazia Deledda, *Cosima*, in *I grandi romanzi*, ed. Marta Savini (Roma: Newton, 1993), 993: “Piccola di statura, con la testa piuttosto grossa, le estremità minuscole, con tutte le caratteristiche fisiche sedentarie delle donne della sua razza, forse d’origine libica, con lo stesso profilo un po’ camuso, i denti selvaggi e il labbro superiore molto allungato [. . .] occhi grandi [. . .] con la grande pupilla appunto delle donne di razza camitica” (“Small of stature, with a rather large head, miniscule extremities, with all of the sedentary, physical characteristics of the women of her race, perhaps of Libyan origin, with same slightly flat-nosed profile, wild teeth and a very elongated upper lip [. . .] large eyes [. . .] with the large pupils of women of the race of Ham”).

<sup>143</sup> Grazia Deledda, *Canne al vento*, in *I grandi romanzi*, 620: “Su turcu non si cheret reduire,/Anzis pro gherrare est animosu,/A’arabu inferocidu est coraggiosu,/Si parat prontu né cheret fuire...” (“The Turk does not want to surrender,/Indeed he is a courageous fighter,/The Arab is courageous,/He leaps forward at the ready, nor does he want to flee...”).

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*: “Chi àppana in dogni passu sa vittoria,/De poder tottu l’Africa acquistare;/Tranquillos e sanos a torrare,/Los assistansos Santos de sa Gloria,/E cun bona memoria e vertude,/Torren a dom’issoro ch’in salute!” (“May they achieve victory at every step,/To be able to conquer all of Africa;/May they return safe and sound,/May the Glorious Saints assist them,/And with good memories and virtue,/May they return to their home in good health!”).

un agnello da tosare; ci vai vicino e ti morsica come una cane.”

“Sì, fratelli cari, io ci andai con la bisaccia a metà piena e credevo di riportarla colma; la riportai vuota!”

“America? He who has never tasted it doesn’t know what it is. You see it from afar and it seems like a lamb to shear; you get close and it bites you like a dog.”

“Yes, dear brothers, I went there with my sack half full and I thought I would bring it back filled to the brim; I brought it back empty!”

This exchange, however, is in turn followed immediately by a grotesque account of the savagery of the war by a Sardinian veteran, a man “smilzo alto e nero come un arabo” (“lean, tall, and black like an Arab”). It is an account that belies the heroic and sanctifying rhetoric of the two poets, describing instead a sadistic and superstitious ritual of scalping and of reaping “black blood.” The veteran tells the wise old servant Efix, who is the novel’s narrator and focalizer: “Sì. Ho strappato il ciuffo ad un *Sirdusso*, uno che adorava il diavolo. Io avevo fatto voto di prenderglielo, il ciuffo; di prenderlo intero, con la pelle e con tutto. E così lo presi [. . .] Lo portai al mio capitano, tenendolo come un grappolo; sgocciolava sangue nero come acini d’uva nera. Il Capitano mi disse: bravo Conzinu!” (“Yes, I tore a clump of hair from the head of a *Turk*, one who worshipped the devil. I made a vow to take it from him, that clump of hair; to take it whole, with the skin and all. And so I took it [...] I brought it to my captain, dangling it like a bunch of grapes; it was dripping dark blood like [the juice of] red grapes. The Captain told me: well done Conzinu!”). Horrified, Efix crosses himself and exclaims: “Ti confesserai, Conzi! Hai ucciso un uomo!” (“You must go to confession, Conzi! You’ve killed a man!”). And to the man’s rejoinder that to kill “nella guerra non è peccato” (“in war it is not a sin”), Efix responds: “Ad uccidere tocca a Dio” (“Only God may kill”).<sup>145</sup> Packed in this intense page is not only Deledda’s ambivalence towards the war as a violent colonial aggression that resembles the rape of Sardinia itself, but also her horror for the sanctification by the Catholic Church of the brutality of war as a holy crusade. The Sardinian veteran of the Libyan war is presented not as a Homeric or Christian and Italian hero, but as a savage. It is a page worth re-reading in contrast to the much better known one by Giovanni Papini extolling the masculinizing, heroic, and regenerating value of a “bagno di sangue nero” (“bath of dark blood”).<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 721.

<sup>146</sup> The well known incendiary article by Giovanni Papini, “Amiamo la guerra!” (“We Love War!”) which appeared in *Lacerba* on October 1, 1914, is usually read as an interventionist manifesto, saluting the World War that had started in August, and calling for an end to Italy’s neutrality. But this article is not merely another call for a redemptive bloodbath (among the many such calls that reoccur through Italian history from the Risorgimento on), and its reference to “dark blood” is probably not just a literary figure, and needs to be read also in light of its racial implications. When the article appeared in 1914, Italy was involved in one of the bloodiest phases of the conflict in Libya, where Italians continued to massacre and be massacred in a struggle made all the more violent by the new Arab and pan-Arab nationalist movement and resistance to colonialism. The Great War, with Turkey an ally of Austria-Hungary and Germany, and the Sultan’s declaration of holy war, gave renewed impetus to the Libyan resistance against Italian colonialism, and to Italy’s colonial violence. On April 29th, only a few weeks before Italy’s entrance into the World War, the battle of Gasr Bu Hadi in Libya, and its aftermath of reprisals, caused thousands of casualties, including many among Italy’s African and Arab colonial soldiers, the *ascari*. The military censorship imposed after Italy’s entrance in the World War suppressed the news of the massacre and of the Italian defeat at Tarhuna on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1915, which was compared by minister Ferdinando Martini, in a private comment, to the disaster at Adua. See Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia*, 280-289.

Many *meridionalisti* scholars, politicians, and intellectuals of the South, including socialists, who had been ardent critics of Northern colonial exploitation, became equally ardent advocates of the idea of acquiring colonies in Africa, where emigrants could at least live under the Italian flag. Giustino Fortunato was one such advocate, asserting in 1909: “A noi importa che Tripoli, la sola terra d’Africa ancora ottomana, ancora fuori della civiltà, spetti un giorno a noi e non ad altri, pur senza credere al grande auspicato suo valore economico” (“It matters to us that Tripoli, the only land in Africa that still belongs to the Ottomans and is still outside of civilization, should one day belong to us and not to others, even if some do not believe in the great economic value that we hope to find there”).<sup>147</sup> Yet the economic myth was very strong among Southerners if just in the province of Caltanissetta in November 1911 ten thousand peasants enrolled in the cooperative for the colonization of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, declaring themselves ready to set sail for Africa as soon as possible after the end of the war.<sup>148</sup> Fortunato himself marveled at how the Libyan war gained enthusiastic support and succeeded in making even the peasants of Basilicata and Puglia feel for the first time with exultation that they were indeed part of Italy, real Italians.<sup>149</sup>

The Neapolitan radical Marxist thinker Arturo Labriola (founder of the Italian Revolutionary Syndicalist movement) was critical of the way in which the bourgeois ruling class undertook the war with what he deemed excessive slowness, prudence, and incompetence. He, like Salvemini and Fortunato, debunked the myth of Libya as the promised land for Southern emigration. Nonetheless he saw the conquest of Libya as a strategic necessity for the Italian nation and for the economic defense of the South and even as a way for the Italian and especially the Sicilian proletariat to gain a new revolutionary consciousness.<sup>150</sup> Thanks to the Libyan war, Labriola claimed, “la Sicilia non sarà più l’intestino cieco d’Italia” (“Sicily will no longer be the caecum of Italy”).<sup>151</sup> That function would presumably be moved further south. Labriola asserted that Libya represented “la prima impresa collettiva della nuova Italia” (“the first collective undertaking of the new Italy”).<sup>152</sup> And Libya was indeed a turning point for Labriola himself. He had become ever more convinced that socialism overemphasized the concept of class, while neglecting the more crucial factor of ethnicity and the importance of the nation as an ethnic community that the Libyan war crystallized for him.<sup>153</sup> After abandoning revolutionary politics and becoming a reformist, Labriola joined the parliament as an independent, becoming Giolitti’s minister of labor in 1920.<sup>154</sup> Labriola’s conversion demonstrates how the new ethnic and racial consciousness epitomized by the Libyan war served to contain and displace both socialist and Southern unrest.

But Southerners were not alone in affirming the right of Sicilians to take over what became known as the “fourth shore,” overwhelming those who many held to be its racially inferior and savage inhabitants. The celebrated explorer and later mayor of Milan Giuseppe Vigoni affirmed in fact that Sicilians would feel right at home in Libya: “In pochi anni centinaia di migliaia di

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<sup>147</sup> Giustino Fortunato, *Il mezzogiorno e lo stato italiano. Discorsi politici 1880-1910* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1973), 2:446.

<sup>148</sup> Del Boca, *Italiani in Libia*, 153.

<sup>149</sup> Giustino Fortunato, *Pagine e ricordi parlamentari* (Florence: 1926), 58-59; Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 180.

<sup>150</sup> Antonio Labriola, *La guerra di Tripoli e l’opinione socialista* (Napoli: Edizioni di Scintilla, 1912).

<sup>151</sup> On this particular image, see the incensed comments by Gaetano Salvemini in “Perché dovevamo andare in Libia,” *L’Unità*, February 20, 1924, reprinted in *Come siamo andati in Libia e altri scritti* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1963), 312-315.

<sup>152</sup> Labriola, *La guerra di Tripoli*, 49.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>154</sup> Labriola was then an anti-Fascist and went into exile in France but returned to Italy in 1935, declaring his support for the colonial invasion of Ethiopia. He was a senator of the Italian republic from 1948 until his death in 1959.

emigranti italiani potrebbero rovesciarsi sulle spiagge di Tripolitania e Cyrenaica, creandovi come una nuova Italia: l'elemento arabo-berbero vi rimarrebbe in grande inferiorità e forse anche eliminato" ("In a few years, hundreds of thousands of Italian emigrants could spill out on to the shores of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, creating a new Italy: the Arab-Berber element would become a small minority and perhaps even be eliminated").<sup>155</sup> The distinguished Italian economist Maffeo Pantaleoni, a representative to the Italian parliament for the Radical Party and professor at the University of Rome, had a brutal explanation of how 800,000 Arabs and Berbers could be "eliminated": "L'imbastardita attuale popolazione, costituita dall'incrocio di quanto vi ha di più laido tra le razze umane, va respinta e distrutta, e sostituita col buon sangue italiano" ("The current bastardized population, constituted by the mixing of the filthiest of the human races, should be shunned and destroyed, and replaced with good Italian blood").<sup>156</sup> The letters from soldiers in Libya indicate that the war not only had wide support, but that the soldiers commonly held explicitly racist views and were unable to "see" the populations in front of their eyes other than through the prism of racialized and dehumanizing stereotypes.<sup>157</sup> Yet, as pointed out by Nicola Labanca and Angelo Del Boca, there is a submerged history of feelings and emotions, and of working class private writing, still largely untapped by cultural historians, which intimates that many Italians did not identify with the racialized conflict in Africa or support it.<sup>158</sup> Deledda's Efix from *Canne al vento*, therefore, and Deledda herself, may not be as exceptional as they appear.

### 7. Women between feminism and racism

Women who had supported unification and the many who took an active role in the Risorgimento hoped and expected to be admitted to citizenship, to gain full and equal access to instruction, family patrimony, and professions. But they were soon sorely disappointed. Even as the family, and family mentality, were beginning to change and create different expectations for both women and men, women in the new Italy were still (and in fact increasingly, and more than ever) excluded from the public sphere.<sup>159</sup> Cristina Trivulzio had observed in 1866 that despite proclamations to the contrary, "la condizione della donna è al di sotto del valor suo intellettuale e morale" ("woman's condition is beneath her intellectual and moral worth").<sup>160</sup> Mariannina Coffa, the Sicilian poet who was an enthusiastic supporter of unification (she was the daughter of a liberal-minded lawyer) wrote bitterly in 1873 about her feelings of disappointment and alienation: "Patria

<sup>155</sup> Giuseppe Vigoni, *Viaggi* (Casa d'arte Ariel, 1936), 318, cited in Del Boca, *Italiani in Libia*, 153.

<sup>156</sup> *Popolo. Quotidiano di Gallipoli*, November 19, 1911, quoted in Del Boca, *Italiani in Libia*, 153.

<sup>157</sup> Bono, *Morire*.

<sup>158</sup> Nicola Labanca, *Posti al sole. Diari e memorie di vita e di lavoro dall'Africa italiana* (Rovereto: Museo storico della guerra, 2001).

<sup>159</sup> See Liviana Gazzetta and Maria Teresa Segà, "Movimenti di emancipazione: reti, iniziative, rivendicazioni (1866-1914)," in *Donne sulla scena pubblica*, ed. Nadia Maria Filippini, 138: "Escludendo radicalmente le donne dalla cittadinanza politica [. . .] il nuovo stato non solo contraddiceva i suoi stessi principi di uguaglianza formale tra i cittadini, ma cancellava addirittura i diritti già acquisiti a livello amministrativo in area lombardo-veneta e toscana" ("Completely excluding women from political citizenship [...] the new state not only contradicted its own principles of legal equality between citizens, but even eliminated the rights already acquired at a local level in Lombardy, the Veneto and in Tuscany").

<sup>160</sup> Cristina Trivulzio di Belgioioso, "Della presente condizione delle donne e del loro avvenire" ("On the Present Condition of Women and their Future"; originally published in *Nuova antologia di Scienze, Lettere e Arti*, January 1, 1866), in *Il 1848 a Milano e a Venezia*, ed. Sandro Bortone (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1977), 182.

e meta ed avvenir non ho” (“I have no fatherland, purpose, or future”).<sup>161</sup> Alienation from the *madre patria* continued to be a feeling and a *condition* that women of all social classes shared.

As Anna Maria Mozzoni – who was first an ardent Mazzinian and then a socialist, as well as one of the principal exponents of early Italian feminism – observed in 1885, working-class women bore much of the weight of the new state’s most oppressive institutions, yet shared none of the “glorie di questa patria” (“glories of this fatherland”).<sup>162</sup> Novels and short stories by the Marchesa Colombi (*Un matrimonio in provincia* [A Provincial Marriage], 1885), Matilde Serao (*Il romanzo della fanciulla* [The Maiden’s Novel], 1885), Neera (*Teresa*, 1886), Sibilla Aleramo (*Una donna*, 1906), Maria Messina (*Pettini Fini* [Fine-Tooth Combs], 1909; *Piccoli gorgi* [Little Eddies], 1911), and plays such as *Anima* (Soul, 1898) and *L’illusione* (The Illusion, 1901) by the brilliant Venetian playwright of Jewish and British descent Amelia Pincherle Rosselli (born in 1870, Rosselli was the mother of the anti-Fascists Carlo and Nello Rosselli and the grandmother of the great poet who was given her same name), highlighted and denounced the unequal treatment of women of all social classes inside and outside the family and exposed the humiliations and debasement of women perpetuated through the social and legal regulation of marriage in the new Italy. As feminist historian Annarita Buttafuoco has observed, while a growing number of even middle-class women went to work and took on new roles, living new and often highly liberated lives, they increasingly grew to resent the outmoded and discriminatory economic, social, and legal structures imposed on them in Liberal Italy.<sup>163</sup> Backed by feminists from a wide variety of backgrounds, political beliefs, and social classes, ranging from Teresa Labriola to Maria Montessori, and by socialist women and even many Catholic women, the Italian feminist and suffragist movement gained exceptional momentum in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>164</sup> The first national congress of Italian women was held in Rome in 1908. But the unity of the women’s movement, achieved in 1910 through the founding of the National Committee for Women’s Suffrage, began to fall apart only a year later, undermined by tensions and conflicts among the different groups, but especially to a large degree by the discussion over the Libyan war,

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<sup>161</sup> Marinella Fiume, *Sibilla arcana. Mariannina Coffa (1841-1878)* (Caltanissetta: Lussografica, 2000), 119. Coffa’s personal story is symptomatic. Although she loved a young musician, she was forced by her family to marry a rich landowner, and discouraged from writing or from taking charge of the children’s education. She abandoned the family and went to live alone in Noto, where she died in poverty.

<sup>162</sup> Anna Maria Mozzoni, “Alle fanciulle,” in *La liberazione della donna*, ed. Francesca Pieroni Bortolotti (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1975), 162-63: “Per te che cosa è questa terribile patria che incorona [. . .] l’immane edificio dei tuoi dolori? È il gendarme che viene a prendere tuo figlio per farlo soldato; è l’esattore che estorce la tassa del fuocatico dal tuo focolare quasi sempre spento; è la guardia daziaria che ti fruga addosso per assicurarsi che tu non abbi risparmiato qualche soldo sul pane sudato per i tuoi figli; è il lenone e la megera che, protetti dal governo, inseguono la tua figlia per trarla nelle loro reti; è la guardia di questura che la trascina all’ufficio sanitario; è il postribolo patentato che la ingoia; è la prigioniera, il sifilocomio, il patibolo; è la legge che dà i tuoi figli in proprietà a tuo marito e che dichiara te stessa schiava e serva di lui. Delle glorie di questa patria, delle sue gioie, dei suoi beni, neppure uno arriva fino a te” (“For you what is this terrible fatherland that crowns [...] the enormous edifice of your sorrows? It is the policeman who comes to take your son to make him a soldier; it is the tax collector who extorts the hearth tax from your hearth that is nearly always extinguished; it is the customs official who frisks you up and down to make sure that you did not save a few coins from the money you earned with your sweat in order to buy bread for your children; it is the pimp and the madam who, protected by the government, chase after your daughter in order to ensnare her in their webs; it is the policeman who drags her to the public health department; it is the state-licensed brothel that swallows her up; it is the prison, the syphilis clinic, the gallows; it is the law that gives your children as property to your husband and declares you his servant and slave. None of the glories, the jewels, the wealth of this fatherland will ever be yours”).

<sup>163</sup> Annarita Buttafuoco, *Questioni di cittadinanza. Donne e diritti sociali nell’Italia liberale* (Siena: Protagon, 1997), 45; Michela De Giorgio, *Le italiane dall’Unità a oggi* (Laterza, 1992), 495-503; Nadia Maria Filippini, ed., *Donne sulla scena pubblica* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2006), 210-11.

<sup>164</sup> Anna Rossi-Doria, *Diventare cittadine. Il voto delle donne in Italia* (Firenze: Giunti, 1996).

which overlapped with the discussions about suffrage.<sup>165</sup> Only socialist women continued to oppose the war, especially through Kuliscioff's journal *La difesa delle lavoratrici* (The Defense of Working Women, first published in January 1912) and the question of the vote was shelved.

Many women, including feminists like Aleramo and Rosselli, became politically (but also intellectually and morally) very close to "passionate" men such as Scipio Sighele and to the new nationalist and colonialist movement led by Sighele himself and by Enrico Corradini.<sup>166</sup> Corradini's seductive myth of Italy, based on an inclusive, racially-defined notion of Italian-ness, was particularly influential especially with intellectual women and Southerners – i.e. subjects traditionally considered racially inferior and marginal to the political identity and constituency of Liberal Italy. Amelia Pincherle Rosselli's statement about her Jewishness is symptomatic: "Ebrei? Sì: ma *prima di tutto* italiani. Anch'io perciò, nata e cresciuta in quell'ambiente profondamente italiano e liberale, non serbavo, della mia religione, che la pura essenza di essa dentro il mio cuore" ("Jews? Yes: but *first of all* Italians. Therefore I too, born and raised in that profoundly liberal and Italian environment, did not retain anything of my religion but its pure essence inside my heart").<sup>167</sup> Jewishness, no less than feminism, had to be interiorized, silenced, and effectively suppressed; the only ethnic and cultural affiliation had to be "Italian." The cause of the Italic race, championed by Corradini starting in 1903 through the newspaper *Il Regno*, was to take precedence over everything, including the traditional egalitarian claims of feminism. The Libyan war therefore made women "feel" united by their sense of belonging to "the Italic race" even as it dissolved the nascent, precarious unity of the women's movement.

Elisa Majer Rizzioli (1880-1930), a Venetian of Jewish descent, later a supporter of d'Annunzio at Fiume and then a leader of Fascist feminism in the 1920s, studied to become a nurse and daringly left her husband behind to sign up as a volunteer on an Italian hospital ship to take care of the Italians wounded in the Libyan war.<sup>168</sup> The war in Libya ushered in a new sense of citizenship for women based not on self-affirmation and equal rights, but on abnegation to the "race." Well before the advent of Fascism, Libya thus marked the beginning of a "pure," "Latin" or "Italic" kind of feminism that sought to transcend the "divisiveness" of the women's movement. It was a "different" feminism (if indeed it may be called feminism at all) that, in opposition to both the materialist tendencies of Germanic socialist feminism and the masculinizing excesses of Anglo-Saxon suffragism, exalted instead the values of Italian maternal womanhood and of female sacrifice for the sake of future generations of the Italian *stirpe*.

Latin feminism's most outspoken and popular theorist was Teresa Labriola (1873-1941), the daughter of Antonio Labriola. For Teresa, after the breakdown of the suffragist movement and the socialist failure to support the vote for women in 1910, the heroic Libyan war was the turning point that made her finally feel a part of an "Italian race" and hence finally of an Italian nation

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<sup>165</sup> Filippini, *Donne sulla scena pubblica*.

<sup>166</sup> See Amelia Rosselli, *Memorie*, ed. Marina Calloni (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001), 121: "Ero a quel tempo legata di viva amicizia con Scipio Sighele, l'illustre irredento; con Enrico Corradini [. . .] il quale aveva fondato, e dirigeva, il suo primo settimanale di carattere nazionalista. In casa Sighele fu creato il primissimo movimento nazionalista al quale partecipai io pure. Molti sentivano il bisogno in quel periodo di liberalismo un po' decadente dalle sue prime origini, di una rivalutazione dei valori nazionali che, così si credeva, lo avrebbero rafforzato" ("At that time, I was involved in a lively friendship with Scipio Sighele, the illustrious irredentist; with Enrico Corradini [...] who had founded and directed his first weekly publication of a nationalist nature. The very first nationalist movement was founded in the Sighele home, and I too participated in it. In that period, many felt the need for a liberalism that was somewhat detached from its early origins, thinking that it would be strengthened by a revaluation of national values").

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>168</sup> Elisa Majer Rizzioli, *Accanto agli eroi. Crociere sulla "Menfi" durante la conquista di Libia*, with a preface by Sofia Bisi-Albini (Milano: Libreria Editrice Milanese, 1915).

with which she could identify and for which it was worth – she argued – for women to commit their energies and sacrifices. She was the first woman to receive a law degree and to teach philosophy of law at the University of Rome. But the sense of unity and equality provided by racial imaginary identification is by definition unstable and precarious, as is race itself as an imaginary construct. A racially or ethnically-defined community tends to be consistently undermined by internal as well as external eruptions of racism and misogyny which point to its precariousness and chronic instability. Labriola's inaugural lecture in fact caused a misogynist riot, and in 1913 she was officially denied the right to join the Italian Bar association and to practice law, a profession then still legally reserved for men. Instead of rebelling, the embittered Labriola found in the new national-racial discourse an imaginary solution to her predicament and to the untenable condition of women in Italian society. Previously a leading suffragist, with the Libyan war Labriola – like Aleramo and other socialist feminists – experienced a veritable conversion, abandoning suffragism and, at the same time, rejecting the socialist tradition of her intellectual family. From then on she thought and wrote untiringly that women's true and higher mission was to embrace their racial role as mothers and be entirely devoted to the future of the Italian *stirpe* and nation. This conscious choice (rather than passive acceptance) on Labriola's part, however criticizable, predates the Fascist theories of gender and cannot thus be attributed to her uncritical subjection to its principles.<sup>169</sup> However, it is clear that Liberal Italy's racialization of women, and stubborn denial of their rights, laid the groundwork for women's far from passive take on race and their subsequent misguided turn toward Fascism and for Fascism's own misogynous gender politics.

For the socialist feminist writer and art historian Margherita Sarfatti, who was later to become a key influence on Mussolini, the notion of racial belonging in 1913 also replaced citizenship and displaced suffragism and class consciousness: the vote was no longer important, for the real political role for women of all social classes that Sarfatti envisaged was “l'avvenire della razza [che] è in voi” (“the future of the race that is in you”).<sup>170</sup> It should be noted that Sarfatti, following Lombroso (who was also Jewish), rejected the definition of the Jews as a racial group, and identified instead with the higher, hybrid racial category of the Italic or Latin people.

Not only feminist women, but even an anti-feminist, deeply traditionalist, and religious pacifist woman such as Matilde Serao, who both as a novelist and as a journalist was the extremely successful interpreter of the ideology of lower-middle-class women (and later pointedly refrained from taking part in the World War I interventionist frenzy), endorsed the Libyan campaign with enthusiasm. In a 1912 lecture tour in several major Italian cities, and then in the best-selling volume entitled *Viva la guerra! (Primavera italica)* (Long Live War! [Italic Spring]), Serao praised the colonial war that exalted “il latin sangue gentile” (“noble Latin blood”) and “il genio di nostra razza” (“the genius of our race”).<sup>171</sup> Serao, who was a Greek immigrant, the daughter of a southern Italian man and a Greek woman from Constantinople, weaves her personal history into the text and uses it as a way to affirm her ethnic Italianness. The race of Rome and Italy, she observes, had its ancient origins with Aeneas in Troy, “primo ceppo di tua razza” (“first branch of your race”),

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<sup>169</sup> See Lucia Re, “Fascist Theories of ‘Woman’ and The Construction of Gender,” in *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture*, ed. Robin Pickering Iazzi (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1995), 76-99. On Labriola, Latin feminism, and fascism, see Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy 1922-1945* (University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>170</sup> *La difesa delle lavoratrici*, November 16, 1913. On Sarfatti's racialist conversion, see Simona Urso, *Margherita Sarfatti. Dal mito del Dux al sogno americano* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2003), 87-110.

<sup>171</sup> Matilde Serao, *Viva la guerra! (Primavera italica)* (Napoli: Francesco Perella, 1912), 24; 30. Tommaso Scappaticci, “Politica e guerra nell'opera della Serao,” in *Dal mito alla storia. Studi sulla letteratura italiana dell'Otto-Novecento* (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1999), 153.

in the land now “occupied” by the Ottomans. In telling the story of when she traveled from Naples back to her mother’s birthplace in Constantinople, she opposes the superior Greco-Roman and Christian legacy of the Italic people to Turkish barbarism, recounting in vivid, gothic detail the tale of the Ottoman Turks’ “violation” and usurpation of the Church of Haghia Sophia, when Mehemed II ordered that it be converted into a mosque. The bloody mark of the infidel’s hand after the massacre of the Christians, Serao claims, was left forever imprinted on one of the sacred walls. The Italian attack on Libya and on the Aegean islands that had been “rubate dai turchi” (“stolen by the Turks”), is welcome by Serao as a just and holy re-appropriation: “Saluta la tua guerra, o gente italica” (“Welcome your war, o Italic people”).<sup>172</sup> The war for Serao finally enables Italians “di tutte le regioni e tutti i dialetti” (“of all regions and dialects”) to come together as one people in a historic moment, surmounting the problems posed by “odio di classe” (“class hatred”), “materialismo” (“materialism”), “emigrazione” (“emigration”), and “femminismo” (“feminism”).<sup>173</sup>

The Libyan expedition generated in fact an outpour of women’s enthusiastic literary texts that not only supported the heroic men, but sanctioned women’s own belonging to the racialized body of the nation. Augusta Mosconi Trevisan, for example, wrote in *Ai valorosi della Libia* (To the Valiant in Libya) about her vision of the ghosts of Italy’s noble racial ancestors – both men and women – emerging from the darkness and the ruins of the Mediterranean to bring it light through this new colonial struggle against barbarism: “[nella] fonda notte passa[va]no popolando le ruine, al variar de l’ombre e de le luci, stirpi di regi e dive d’orti incantati e bellicosi duci, coloni, nauti, barbari, predoni” (“In the depths of night, lineages of royalty and goddesses from enchanted gardens and military chiefs, settlers, sailors, barbarians and marauders passed through, populating the ruins with the play of shadow and light”). Deploying the well-established anagrammatic literary *topos* “Roma/Orma,” she herself follows in the footsteps of the newly racialized, neoclassical patriotic and imperialist discourse: “di Scipio la grande anima e il fato/vive, e di Mario il braccio, e par rivòli di Giulio la coorte ove segnato/Roma ai nipoti ha l’orme/di sua potenza in non distrutte forme” (“Scipio’s great soul and destiny/lives, and Marius’ arm, and Julius’s cohort seems to rise again where/Rome has left to its descendants the marks/of its power in unruined forms”).<sup>174</sup> The ethnic heritage or imprint of ancient Rome has been transmitted to its Italian descendants, she implies, who thus rightfully return to Libya to follow once again in their heroic and civilizing footsteps.

But women took part not only in the celebration, but also in the collective fantasy and the excitement of the war. The poet Vittoria Gnifetti, who (like Mejer Rizzioli) was a volunteer nurse on the warship *Memphi*, wrote for example: “Naviga o corazzata: benigno è il vento e dolce la stagione!” (“Sail on, o battleship: there is a favoring breeze and sweet is the season!”) and “L’anima vaga [. . .] si sogna una remota vaporosa felicità, una pace deliziosa, un languido perdersi nel nulla [. . .] A terra si lotta, si lotta ancora con furia crescente: il balenio delle armi, il movimento, lo spostarsi continuo dei soldati, l’accorrere affannoso da un punto all’altro; tutto quel tramestio, quel frastuono, il fuoco della terra e il fuoco del cielo; ma più che tutto l’idea che quel che si compie laggiù in quel lembo di sabbia . . . forse la rovina, forse la vittoria” (“My wistful soul [...] dreams of a distant, airy happiness, an exquisite peace, a languid loss of self in nothingness [...] On land there is fighting, fighting with growing fury: the arms flashing, all moving

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<sup>172</sup> Serao, *Viva la guerra!*, 40.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-29.

<sup>174</sup> *Ai valorosi di Libia* (Roma: La tecnografica, 1912), 6-8, cited in Tamburini, 58; 68.

about, the soldiers in constant motion, rushing strenuously from one point to another; all of that great commotion and uproar, the earth's fire and the sky's fire; but above all the idea that what is being done down on that strip of sand . . . [will] perhaps [lead] to doom, or perhaps to victory"). The fight is portrayed as a purifying ritual for the Italian blood, a way to recover its ancient purity through the struggle to overcome the Arabs and the Turks, seen as forces of barbarism and darkness.<sup>175</sup>

The fact that the suffrage reform bills of 1910 and of June 1911, the latter supported by Premier Giolitti, while proposing to extend suffrage to all literate men and even to illiterates on completing the military service or on reaching the age of 30, still entirely excluded women was a bitter blow to the Italian feminist movement, which felt especially betrayed by the refusal of the socialists to endorse the vote for women. The utter lack of a political voice for women was all the more paradoxical as women were a major source of income for the nation. Not only did they in fact constitute a large part of the agricultural workers in both Northern and Southern Italy, but they actually constituted the majority of the industrial workforce in the 1880s, when silk and cotton manufacturing were the largest industries and produced a growing export surplus. Even as the steel industry was developed and shipbuilding for the navy and the merchant marine pushed forward, textiles continued to hold the key place in the economy, second only to agriculture, and in 1911 – the year of the Libyan war – 73 percent of the textile workers (which was still Italy's leading industry) were women. Nevertheless, the exclusion of women from politics continued to be a cornerstone of Italian politics through the Liberal era. In May 1912, prior to the approval of the electoral reform bill by parliament which finally crushed suffragism, Prime Minister Giolitti affirmed that granting women the vote would have been a leap in the dark: "*un salto nel buio.*" Even the colonial leap toward the darkness of Africa that he had feared for so long seemed preferable to the leap in the dark represented by women's vote. In fact, it soon became clear that the colonial leap could be used, among other things, to dispose of the vexed "woman's question" and to help address the other, burning question, that of the South. Along this path, Giolitti encountered the help of the aged *vate* Giovanni Pascoli.

#### 8. Pascoli and the literary myth of a maternal colonialism

On November 26, 1911, Giovanni Pascoli, previously a well-known pacifist, and as far as may be imagined from the impetuosity and belligerence of d'Annunzio, delivered his most influential masterpiece of oratory, really a prose poem as well as a kind of sermon, "La grande proletaria si è mossa" ("The Great Proletarian has Risen").<sup>176</sup> The occasion for this famous oration, which was one of the last texts composed by the national poet laureate, was a benefit for the dead and wounded of the Libyan war held at the Teatro di Barga near Bologna. In his speech, Pascoli gave a high-literary aura to a concept that was introduced by Corradini and other nationalists, namely that the conquest of Libya was a just and humane solution to the hemorrhage and humiliations caused to Italy by emigration. Even though Pascoli and Corradini had opposite sensibilities in many ways and otherwise disliked one another, they, like many other Italians, found a common ground in Libya.

Pascoli's text alludes explicitly in its opening to Italian racial anxiety about their whiteness and cites common racial slurs used against them in the Americas: "Il mondo li aveva presi a opra,

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<sup>175</sup> Vittoria Gnifetti, *Sulla Memphi* (Torino: Tipografia A Panizza, 1911), cited in Tamburini, 61; 92-3, who also elaborates on the blood and color symbolism in this poem.

<sup>176</sup> Giovanni Pascoli, *Prose* (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1946), 1:557-69.

i lavoratori d'Italia; e più ne aveva bisogno meno mostrava di averne, e li pagava poco e li trattava male e li stranomava. Diceva: *Carcamos! Gringos! Cingali! Degos!* Erano diventati un po' come i negri, in America, questi connazionali di colui che la scoprì; e come negri ogni tanto erano messi fuori della legge e della umanità, e si linciavano" (557; "The world took them for laborers, the workers of Italy: and the more the world needed them, the less it let that need show. They were paid little, treated poorly and insulted. They were called: *Carcamos! Gringos! Cingali! Degos!* In America, they became a bit like the Negroes, these compatriots of the man who first discovered her. And like the Negroes, they were sometimes outlawed and dehumanized; and they were lynched.").

This picture of racial abjection, shame, and fear is systematically contrasted through the first part of the text with an idealized portrayal of the fatherland, whose rhetorical effect is based on the figures of hyperbole, alliteration, *variatio*, and rhythmic repetition: "Lontani o vicini alla loro Patria, alla Patria loro nobilissima su tutte le altre, che aveva dato i più potenti conquistatori, i più sapienti civilizzatori, i più profondi pensatori, i più ispirati poeti, i più meravigliosi artisti, i più benefici indagatori, scopritori, inventori, del mondo, lontani o vicini che fossero, queste *opre* erano costrette a mutar Patria a rinnegare la nazione, a non essere più d'Italia" (ibid.; "Whether near or far from the fatherland, from their fatherland noble above all others, that gave the world its most powerful conquerors, wisest civilizers, most profound thinkers, most inspired poets, most marvelous artists, and greatest researchers, explorers and inventors; whether near or far, these *day laborers* were forced to emigrate, to renounce their nation, and to belong no longer to Italy"). A few strategically chosen *exempla* from the stereotyped repertoire of great Italians and their proverbial mottos serve to illustrate Pascoli's claim that Italians abroad are confronted with the danger of vilification and debasement: "Era una vergogna e un rischio farsi sentire a dir *Sì*, come Dante, a dir *Terra*, come Colombo, a dir *Avanti!*, come Garibaldi" (558; "It was an embarrassment to say *Sì*, like Dante, to say *Terra*, like Columbus, to say *Avanti!* like Garibaldi"). Through these highlighted affirmative words (*Sì*, *Terra*, *Avanti!*), which together form a sort of shorthand rendering of the positive need for Italians to push forward and find new land, the Italian language is represented as an imaginary connection, a bond between Italian emigrants and the fatherland (even though in reality most Italian emigrants hardly spoke Italian at all). The xenophobia and racism encountered abroad are made vivid through the dramatic quotation of imaginary voices: "Si diceva «Dante? Ma voi siete un popolo di analfabeti! Colombo? Ma la vostra è l'onorata società della camorra e della mano nera! Garibaldi? Ma il vostro esercito s'è fatto vincere e annientare da africani scalzi! Viva Menelik!»" ("They said, 'Dante? But you are a nation of illiterates! Columbus? But yours is the honorable brotherhood of the Camorra, and the Black Hand. Garibaldi? But your army was defeated and annihilated by barefoot Africans! Long live Menelik!'").

The reference to the ignominious Italian defeat at Adua, and to the derisive cheering of Ethiopia's Emperor Menelik that expressed widespread popular discontent with Crispi's imperialist ambitions and with Italy's first African war (finding wide echo abroad as a symptom of Italy's impotence), is the turning point of the speech. The cheering of Menelik especially by the radical socialists and the working class is a painful reminder of how socialism risked tearing Italy apart, rather than heal its painful internal conflicts. Pascoli's rhetorical move of symbolically turning the whole nation into a single grand proletariat, struggling against richer and violently aggressive nations, is meant to unify socialists and anti-socialists, Northerners and Southerners. This is usually seen as the crux of Pascoli's text, one that gives a poetic veneer and the seal of approval of the elderly *vate* to the vociferous arguments of Corradini and other Nationalists who favored colonial expansion.

But Pascoli's text is in fact more original and subtly articulated. In the second and third parts of his oration, Pascoli goes on to recapitulate and legitimate a series of three key myths about Libya that the press had been promoting, namely: 1) that Libya is a fallen Garden of Eden; 2) that Libya is a natural extension of Italy's land across the Mediterranean; and 3) that Libya is rightfully Italian because originally settled and civilized by Italy's progenitors, the Romans. In so doing, Pascoli shrewdly demonstrates that nature, geography, and history all support Italy's claim to Libya: "Una vasta regione bagnata dal nostro mare verso quale guardano, come sentinelle avanzate, piccole isole nostre; verso la quale si protende impaziente la nostra isola grande; una vasta regione che già per opera dei nostri progenitori fu abbondevole d'acque e di messi, e verdeggiante d'alberi e giardini; e ora, da un pezzo, per l'inerzia di popolazioni nomade neghittose, è per gran parte un deserto. [. . .] Quella terra sarà una continuazione della terra nativa, con frapposta la strada vicinale del mare" (558-59; "A vast region bathed by our sea and that our small islands watch over, like advanced sentinels. Our largest island impatiently reaches out toward this vast region, where once, by the work of our forefathers, water was abundant as were crops, and it was green with trees and gardens, but now due to the inertia of the nomadic and indolent populations, it has long since become mostly a desert [. . .] That land will be an extension of their native land connected to it by the local road, namely the sea"). Those Italians who will go there will find "come in Patria, ogni tratto le vestigia dei grandi antenati. Anche là è Roma" (ibid; "Just as in the fatherland, at every turn [there will be] traces of their great forebears. There too is Rome"). The cross-over into Libya will in fact be effectively a *return* home: the classical myth of Aeneas' search for "the ancient mother," and the *topos* of traveling to the ancestral home of the race where Aeneas destined to rule again, serve to legitimize this particular story or (as Giolitti called it) "historical fatality."

Libya for Pascoli is not only a natural appendage of Italy, but it is also a palimpsest of its history and of the literary past that formed its imaginary identity. The "homeyness" of Libya for Italians, however, is predicated on the notion that its current occupants are savage and animal-like intruders. Civilization for Pascoli (as for Vincenzo Cuoco before him), and Italic civilization in particular, is based on agriculture, the ability to settle, cultivate, and build on the land, establishing the rights and lines of property and even the right to give a name to geographical sites.<sup>177</sup> Only agriculture can turn a land into a *patria*. Pascoli's heroes are the "coloni" as peasants. The soldiers themselves are only peasants who will at once gain and fertilize the land (this image will become a key theme in Fascist propaganda, for example in the closing sequence of the 1936 film *Il cammino degli eroi* [*The Heroes' March*]). The fluidity of the Mediterranean, its unpredictability and treacherousness, implicitly compared to the oceanic travels that lead Italians inexorably to lose themselves in the "gorgo" "whirlpool" of other nationalities, must be covered over by an ideal bridge: the Italian peninsula and its islands form themselves a kind of bridge of land extended towards the other side. In contrast, the sea-faring Turks and Arabs are represented as "industriosi razziatori di negri e mercanti di schiavi" (565; "industrious plunderers of Negroes and slave merchants"). The nomadic and semi-nomadic populations who live by and move through the ever-shifting sands of the desert (whose mutability and treacherous uncertainty is comparable to that of the sea) are seen as primitive, uncivilized. They are outside of "history" and unworthy of claiming this land as their own: "A questa terra, così indegnamente sottratta al mondo, noi siamo vicini; ci fummo già; vi lasciammo i segni della nostra umanità e civiltà, segni che noi appunto non siamo Berberi, Beduini e Turchi. Ci torniamo" (564; "We are closely linked to this land, which

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.: "O Tripoli, o Berenike, o Leptis Magna (non hanno diritto di porre il nome quelli che hanno disertato odistrutta la casa!)" ("Oh Tripoli, Berenice, Leptis Magna! [Those who deserted and destroyed this land do not have the right to rename its cities!].") For a discussion of Cuoco in this light, see Dainotto.

has been so shamefully taken from the world. We have already been there. We left signs of our humanity and civilization, signs that we are not Berbers, Bedouins and Turks. We are coming back”).

The racial argument is thus no less essential to Pascoli than to d’Annunzio. Not only are Italians racially defined in opposition to the uncivilized and savage “others” (*non siamo Berberi, Beduini e Turchi*), but the Libyan war reveals the Italian people and the “gioventù panitalica” (“Pan-Italic youth”) to be truly one, fused together and deeply rooted in its land: “Terra, mare e cielo, Alpi e pianura, penisola e isole, settentrione e mezzogiorno, vi sono perfettamente fusi. Il roseo e grave alpino combatte vicino al bruno e snello siciliano [. . .]” (562-63; “Land, sea, and sky, mountains and plains, peninsulas and islands, north and south, they are all perfectly fused. The fair and solemn Alpine fights near the thin, brown Sicilian”). This multicolored fusion and solidification are opposed to the condition of bewilderingly fluid and endless diasporic migration whereby Italians “si perdevano oscuramente nei gorgi di altre nazionalità” (558; “vanished anonymously into the maelstrom of other nationalities”).

But it is in the fourth section that Pascoli’s speech elaborates a new literary myth whose power and appeal are quite different from those of Corradini and d’Annunzio. If in fact their bellicose, virile rhetoric and the unifying thrust of the myths of the heroic Italian *stirpe* on the one hand, and the proletarian nation on the other, could appeal to a large segment of the population, their violence, and the emphasis on war and blood, could still be a stumbling block, alienating pacifist women for example, such as Deledda, as well as many Catholics. Pascoli deploys instead the image of a maternal Italy, effectively feminizing the body of the nation, and turning Italian colonialism into that gentler, kinder, maternal colonialism whose traces have survived to this day in the consciousness of many Italians.<sup>178</sup>

Although the feminization of Italy is a traditional literary image, the use of this image to promote imperialist war is radically new: “Tu, o pura, o santa madre Italia . . . madre d’ogni umanità, o madre tanto forte quanto pia!” (566; “You, o pure, o holy mother Italy [...] mother of all humankind, o mother as strong as she is pious!). To rescue this maternal Italy from the defamatory accusations of brutality levelled against her after Shara Shatt, Pascoli tells an emblematic story: “un fatto di eroica e materna pietà che ha virtù di simbolo” (“an act of heroic and maternal mercy that may serve as a symbol”). The story’s hero is a *bersagliere* who rescues an Arab little girl from a pile of cadavers, holding her, nourishing her, covering her, and reassuring her while “tuonano le artiglierie” (“the artillery thunders”). She will be saved and become Italian: “Ella è salva: crescerà italiana” (“She is saved: she will be raised Italian”). The little girl is clearly meant as an allegory for Libya itself. And the maternal *bersagliere* stands for the whole army: “chi non ha visto qualche volta uno dei nostri cari fanciulloni soldati con un bambino al collo?” (“Who has not at some time or other seen one of our dear young soldier boys with a little child clinging to his neck?”) The female, maternal soldier is also emblematic of Pascoli’s rhetorical choice of literary devices. The code he deploys is, on the one hand, the powerful and disarming one of the rhetoric of anti-rhetoric: “Non si chiami, questa, retorica” (“This is not rhetoric”).<sup>179</sup> The maternal, life-giving soldier, the bloody killer whose heart goes out to the little girl, is, in fact, a contradiction in terms, an oxymoron whose rhetorical roots go back at least to Petrarchan lyric poetry.<sup>180</sup> This is

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<sup>178</sup> On Pascoli’s “colonialismo della bontà,” see especially Giovanna Tomasello, *L’Africa tra mito e realtà. Storia della letteratura coloniale italiana* (Palermo: Sellerio editore, 2004), 56-68.

<sup>179</sup> See Paolo Valesio’s landmark study, “That Glib and Oylie Art: Cordelia and the Rhetoric of Anti-Rhetoric,” in *Versus. Quaderni di studi semiotici* 16 (1977): 91-117.

<sup>180</sup> For example, see Petrarch’s Canzoniere, sonnet 220: “Di qual sol nacque l’alma luce altèra/Di que’ belli occhi ond’io ho guerra e pace,/Che mi cuocono il cor in ghiaccio e ’n foco?” (“From what sun was born the high kindly light

the other rhetorical weapon Pascoli uses to capture the reader: poetic oxymora and paradoxes that become acceptable through the sheer power of their literary seductiveness. The main example of the deployment of this figure is the affirmation that “war is peace” (a kind of figure that the disenchanted George Orwell would later expose as “newspeak” or “double speak”): maternal Italy, according to Pascoli, will “imporre, mediante la guerra, la pace” (“impose peace through war”). A series of parallel oppositions gives apparent substance to this oxymoronic claim: “Noi [...] spargiamo sangue [. . .] non per disertare ma per coltivare, non per inselvatichire e corrompere ma per umanare e incivilire, non per asservire ma per liberare” (“We [...] shed blood [...] not to devastate, but to cultivate, not to degenerate or corrupt, but to humanize and civilize, not to enslave but to liberate”). The text ends with the following wish-fulfilling lines: “L’Italia, cinquant’anni or sono, era fatta. Nel sacro cinquantenario voi avete provato, ciò che era voto de’ nostri grandi che non speravano che si avesse da avverare in così breve tempo, voi avete provato che sono fatti anche gl’Italiani” (569; “Fifty years ago, Italy was made. On her sacred fiftieth anniversary, you, have proven that which our great leaders [of the past] vowed should one day happen, but did not dare to hope might come to pass so quickly. You have proven that the Italians too have now been made).”

### 9. Ada Negri’s irony

One of the few literary voices that expressed mournful regret at the deadly violence and horror of the war in Africa, and bitter disenchantment with the rhetoric of Italian heroism and sacrifice, was Ada Negri, whose little-known, powerful poem “La madre” (“The Mother”) was written in 1911 after the Shara Shatt disaster and the indiscriminate reprisals, hangings, mass deportations, and other atrocities carried out by the Italians in its aftermath. It is a text whose rhetorical effect is entirely the opposite of Pascoli’s wish-fulfilling, highly rhetorical maternal colonialism. The poem, composed of fourteen rhymed quatrains, makes a subtle use of mournful repetition, modeled on the ancient genre of the Mediterranean female *compianto*.<sup>181</sup>

The first quatrain establishes its ironic tone and intention: “Non piango, no. – So ben che tu non vuoi,/figlio. Il cuore impietrò sotto le bende/nere, il tacito cuor che non t’attende/più. Non si piange sui caduti eroi” (“No I am not weeping.—I know well that you do not want me to,/son. Your heart turned to stone beneath black/bandages, the silent heart that serves you/no longer. One must not weep for fallen heroes”).<sup>182</sup> Yet the entire poem belies this declaration of intentions, as it is in fact a protracted cry, a “complaint” for the death of the son. Negri never had a son: only a daughter (much loved and featured in several of her works), from her 1896 marriage that ended in separation in 1913, shortly before the publication of the book of poems *Esilio* (Exile), which includes “La madre.” A feminist and a socialist (she became a friend of Kuliscioff), Negri had been raised by her working-class widowed mother (a weaver) and by her grandmother (a *portinaia*) in Lodi, in the province of Milan. Trained as a school teacher, Negri became one of the most intense and sensitive interpreters of the condition of working-class women in Giolittian Italy. Her best-selling autobiographical narrative, *Stella mattutina* (*Morning Star*), was published in 1912; *Le solitarie* (Solitary Women), which was composed of fourteen short stories about the lives of

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of those lovely/ eyes from which I receive war and peace,/that burn my heart in/ ice and fire?”) Translation by Robert Durling, *Petrarch’s Lyric Poems: The Rime Sparse and Other Lyrics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 376.

<sup>181</sup> On this tradition, see Facchini.

<sup>182</sup> Ada Negri, *Poesie* (Milano: Mondadori, 1948), 537.

working women, came out in 1917. The reference to a son by the mourning mother in the poem makes the speaking voice not only a secular and disenchanting reincarnation of the Madonna at the foot of the cross, but a spokeswoman for all Italian women confronted with the senseless loss of their men in Libya.

Because this is a poem based on irony and negation, it has been widely misread by inattentive critics.<sup>183</sup> Yet it is clear that the poem is built entirely on the impossibility of not crying, of accepting silently the death of a son. The poem is notable for what it lacks, for what it does not say: no high-flown rhetoric of sacrifice, no religious references to the Italic race, to the ancient Roman past, to the civilizing mission in Africa.<sup>184</sup> Only a mournful, repetitive, and disbelieving “Non piango, no – questa è la gloria” (“I am not weeping, no—this is glory”). The overall effect is one of desperation and senselessness: this sacrifice has no resemblance to that of Christ, it has nothing to do with God and the divine: “non invocare Iddio, che Iddio non sente:/così volle la Patria – E così sia” (“do not pray to God, because God does not hear:/This is how he wanted the Fatherland—And so be it”). What does emerge is the consuming, irreducible consubstantiality of the mother’s body with the son’s: “Arde in te la sostanza di mia vita,/e tu con fibra e fibra ancor t’aggrappi/a me, come nell’ora in cui gli strappi/del tuo corpo al mio corpo eran ferita” (“Within you burns the essence of my life,/and you with every fiber still cling/ to me, as in the hour when the gashes on your body became a wound on mine”). Similar feelings are expressed, albeit in a less complex form and diction in an anonymous working-class poem of the time: “Povero figlio e sposo adorato/morto nel fiore della giovinezza,/Chissà quante volte ci avrai chiamati/trovandoti in una simile languenza./Destino infame, il figlio prendesti a me./Per non più rimandarlo – mi scoppia il cuore, ahimè” (“Poor son and beloved husband/dead in the flower of youth,/Who knows how many times you called out for us/in your weakening state./Hideous destiny, you have stolen my son./You will never return him—my heart bursts, alas”).<sup>185</sup>

#### 10. Marinetti’s *hen*

In the complex and contradictory range of literary articulations of the Libyan war, at the opposite end of the spectrum from Negri stands Marinetti’s *La battaglia di Tripoli* (1911-1912, The Battle of Tripoli). Marinetti’s is also the most uncanny of the texts about Libya, and the one that inaugurates his shocking estheticization of war. It is the inaugural text that precedes immediately and effectively introduces the most innovative of the avant-garde *poemetti* by Marinetti, *Zang Toomb Toomb* (or *Zang Tumb Tuum*), as well as the groundbreaking “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Poetry” (May 11, 1912), followed by the “Risposta alle obiezioni” (“Response to Objections”) of August 11, 1912, which includes at the end the free-word poem “Battaglia Peso+Odore” (“Battle Weight+Smell”). All three were inspired by Marinetti’s experience at the Libyan front first and then at Adrianopoli (Edirne) in the Balkans, where the Italian attack in Libya, and then against Beirut and in the Aegean Sea (where Italy occupied the Dodecanese islands), triggered further military actions against the Ottoman empire by the Balkan league (Bulgaria,

<sup>183</sup> Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia*, 146-7; Malgeri, *La guerra libica*, 271. Negri’s later support of Fascism has contributed to the misreading of her work.

<sup>184</sup> In contrast, among the many poems about Libya, see these lines from Giuseppe Villaroel’s “Il distacco, La vittoria, l’inno,” in *Il corriere di Catania*, October 17, 1911: “Italia, Italia, fiore della terra,/ Madre d’eroi novelli, eroi prepara/ alla Storia e fulgente orma di guerra./Dopo l’onta di Lissa e di Novara,/ la giovinezza tua, che mai s’oscura,/ rieda a la sacra castità d’ogni ara.”

<sup>185</sup> Lamberto Mercuri and Carlo Tuzzi, *Canti politici italiani 1793-1945* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1973), 243-44.

Serbia, Greece, Montenegro, and Greece), effectively destabilizing the entire Mediterranean area (much to Marinetti's delight).

The violent disruption of syntax in the poem "Battaglia Peso+Odore" (based directly on the battle of Tripoli and what Marinetti calls the "disfatta araba" ["Arab defeat"]) and in *Zang Toomb Toomb*, the emphasis on chaos, onomatopoeic artillery noise and disorder, and even the anarchy unleashed on the printed page, which is literally torn and exploded from within, may be seen as a mimetic rendering of the exhilarating and shocking experience of battle. Marinetti declaimed pages from the text of *La battaglia di Tripoli* in readings in several Italian cities in January 1912, organized by the nationalist journal *Il mare nostro* as a benefit for the families of the wounded in Libya. As pointed out by Paolo Valesio, 1912 was also the year of publication of the historic anthology *I poeti futuristi* (Futurist Poets) and a key year for European literary modernism. Valesio observes, however, that it is not so much the technical use of onomatopoeia and of words in freedom that make *Zang Toomb Toomb* disturbing, as much as its "horrible esthetics" and the presentation of the horrors of war as a "quickening of life rather than a process of death and destruction [. . .] This is what still gives us a shock [. . .] A shock that we no longer feel, for instance, when we read another modernist masterpiece of eight years later, Eliot's *The Waste Land*."<sup>186</sup> The extraordinary formal innovativeness of *Zang Toomb Toomb*, however, absorbs the attention of the reader, making it harder to grasp what the text is saying. The earlier *Battaglia di Tripoli*, on the other hand, is more straightforward and thus perhaps more perturbing; this is possibly the reason why it has never been reprinted after its 1912 Italian and French editions, and it has not been included in any anthology.

Marinetti went to Tripoli as a war correspondent for a French newspaper, *L'Intransigeant*, and he was, as may be said today, "embedded," along with other journalists (including Corradini, who will then publish *La conquista di Tripoli* [The Conquest of Tripoli]). His reports, extravagantly literary and exuberant in style and tone, were originally published in French from December 25 to December 31, 1911 (the delay was due presumably to censorship). The 1912 volume includes all his articles in an Italian version, plus the introductory manifesto "Per la Guerra, sola igiene del mondo e sola morale educatrice" ("For War, the World's Only Hygiene and Sole Moral Instructor"), and (in an appendix that is quite different in tone and style), two articles ("Risposte alle frottole turche" ["Replies to Turkish Lies"]) written as rebuttals to the press campaign against Italy after Shara Shatt.

Marinetti was so excited by the ultimatum given to Turkey that he concluded that Giolitti himself and his government had become futurist. And although Futurism had been founded already in 1909, its 1912 technical manifesto and the radical innovations brought onto the scene of Italian and European literature and indeed into the history of experimental poetry by words in freedom, the explosion of analogies, and the principle of simultaneity are directly connected to Marinetti's perception of the Libyan colonial war and of what he called "Pan-Italianism" rather than, as is often assumed, irredentism and World War I. Colonialism and racism are therefore to be seen and understood as integral parts not only of Italian national identity, but also of Italian modernism, and especially of avant-garde esthetics.

Marinetti sets the scene of the battle at Bu Meliana near Tripoli as an Orientalist, exoticist genre painting whose protagonist is the fascinating, alluring desert, the "sea of sand": "Sotto i miei piedi, al limite dell'oasi, le prime ondate del gran mare di sabbia hanno un tenero odore di cannella;

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<sup>186</sup> Paolo Valesio, "The Most Endurable and the Most Honorable Name: Marinetti as Poet," in F.T. Marinetti, *Selected Poems and Related Prose*, translated from the French by Elizabeth R. Napier and Barbara Studholme (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 149-65; 160.

più lontano, le curve carnicine d'un corpo di donna; ancor più lontano, marezzi che il vento della sera rastrella e cesella delicatamente [. . .] il deserto immenso si copre delle più affascinanti emozioni di colore” (“Beneath my feet, at the edge of the oasis, the first waves of the great sea of sand give off a tender scent of cinnamon; further off the flesh colored curves of a woman; further still, the evening wind delicately sweeps up and carves out ripples in the landscape [...] the immense desert is covered with the most fascinating and thrilling colors”).<sup>187</sup> In this grand spectacle, the desert is insistently feminized, in an apparent homage to the seductive heterosexual rhetoric and vision of symbolist style: “Ed ecco una gran dama allo spettacolo. Vastamente scollacciato, il deserto mette in mostra il suo seno immenso dalle curve liquefatte, tutte verniciate di belletti rossi sotto le gemme crollanti alla prodiga notte” (8; “And here is a great lady at the show. Vastly risqué, the desert reveals its immense bosom of liquefied curves, varnished with rouge, beneath the falling jewels of the lavish night”). But the desert, as a treacherous, feminized, and deadly liquid sea, will soon be metamorphosed into an uncanny stage for violence, well beyond the imaginary scope even of Flaubert. Marinetti in fact sets up this voluptuous Orientalist scene only to tear it apart with his explosive account of the battle. In the process, he will really bid goodbye – after the false start of the 1909 “Founding and Manifesto” – to his own past, rooted in the Orientalist Egypt of his youth and of French symbolist poetry. The text gives us a firsthand account of the trenches, used then for the first time on such a large scale, and also of the first use of aviation for military reconnaissance purposes. (The first bombs were also thrown, even if only manually, from airplanes, making this the earliest occurrence of aerial bombing in any war). Yet what is most interesting is the enactment of a fantasy of heightened sensorial experience that wargenerates; first and foremost a heightened vision.<sup>188</sup>

Even before aerial flight, the experience is linked to the transparency of the Libyan night and of the desert crossed by the fire of an automatic rifle: “La trasparenza della notte è tale, che le nostre fronti toccano le stelle . . . Io mi sento sollevato nel più alto cielo, trascinato dappertutto dai miei occhi moltiplicati, a tiro lungo, che scaricano i loro sguardi come le palle del nostro fucile a ripetizione, attraverso l'oasi, nel deserto, a distanze incalcolabili” (11; “The clarity of the night is such that our foreheads touch the stars... I feel that I've been raised up into the highest heaven, dragged about everywhere by my eyes that have been multiplied. My eyes have a long range, and fire off glances like the bullets of our automatic rifle, across the oasis, into the desert, over incalculable distances”). Yet the Arab enemies remain mostly unseen, as they in fact uncannily were (according to most witnesses of the battle), in the labyrinth-like oases and in the desert. But Marinetti exorcises the fear of the unseen by making the Arabs invisible because essentially amorphous (“brulichio biancheggiante” [“whitening swarm”]), formless, and surreal like primitive amoebas (33; 42), or alternatively stereotyped, cartoon-like silhouettes (57).

In opposition to this abject primitiveness, the text enacts the dream of a biological and hence racial mutation, pointing towards a higher and more evolved new life or, rather, a new sensorium achievable through the experience of war. Through the battle, there is an orgasmic heightening of all the senses: not only vision and scopic pleasure, but also hearing, smell, touch, and taste. The battle is a great symphony of artillery pieces and a multicolored explosion, a polyphony of sounds and sensations. The chapters on Captain Carlo Piazza's historic flight over the battlefield in a Blériot monoplane are narrated as a kind of syncopated operatic aria sung by the poet, who

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<sup>187</sup> F.T. Marinetti, *La battaglia di Tripoli (26 ottobre 1911) vissuta e cantata da F.T. Marinetti* (Milano: Edizioni Futuriste di Poesia, 1912), 4.

<sup>188</sup> This text precedes also the aerial fantasies of Marinetti's *Le Monoplane du Pape*, also from 1912.

imagines to be flying himself (46-61).<sup>189</sup> The text is filled with comic images of eating and food, and in fact ends with the exhilarating, incongruous comic emblem of a futurist hen: “Non vedemmo noi, alla Bumeliana una pingue gallina futurista che, appollaiata sul ramo più alto di un ulivo, durante la battaglia, lasciava tranquillamente cadere il suo uovo in un cassone pieno di *shrapnels*?” (61; “Did we not see, during the battle at Bu Meliana, a chubby futurist hen that, perched on the highest branch of an olive tree, calmly dropped her egg into a chest filled with shrapnel?”). This comical hen laying an egg on the shrapnel replaces the blind camel endlessly circling an old mill in the souk (which in the text symbolizes Libyan passivity and racial degeneration under the Ottomans), as well as both the proverbial dove of the pacifists and the eagle of the *pax romana* evoked by Pascoli and many others. There is no reference to the Roman or Latin past in fact, for Marinetti’s vision is resolutely present and future-oriented. It is also stubbornly secular: no blessings of the army or invocation of Christianity and the crusades.

Through a rapid juxtaposition of images and an excited, orgasmic tone, even if without recourse to words in freedom yet, the text involves the reader in the moment, the intensified present, and the vision of the evolutionary future. In perhaps the most perturbing of mutations, desire itself is transformed, for the battle unleashes a phantasmagoria of joyful sadomasochistic and necrophiliac violence and a technophilia that is projected as inherently beautiful as well as pleasurable: “Comè bello sentirsi così nella canna rigata di un fucile mostruoso, proiettile e bersaglio allo stesso tempo!” (59; “How wonderful to feel oneself this way in the rifled barrel of a monstrous gun, simultaneously bullet and target!”). “Non è più uno scroscio, ma un diluvio di piombo, il gran diluvio della forza italiana, che entra e sventra dappertutto, tutto!” (45; “It is no longer just the loud sound of lead [bullets] but a downright downpour, a great deluge of Italian strength that enters and ravages everything, everywhere!”). “Invidio lo splendore rabbioso dei vostri cadaveri, atrocemente scolpiti dalla battaglia” (60; “I envy the raging splendor of your cadavers, atrociously sculpted by the battle”). The narrating or singing voice imagines his body being blown up, bones shattered and scattered into the sky.

The text is, Marinetti himself admits, traversed by a kind of hysteria (44). The machine gun, in an image that will recur through many of Marinetti’s works, is featured in this theater of war and cruelty as a phallic woman, a hybrid mechanical and highly eroticized being (22). But the main erotic charge is decidedly homoerotic, as the bodies of various lieutenants (Franchini, Scarpetta) and other soldiers are extolled in their youthful, elastic masculinity (32; 57-58) and especially for their “blood”: “Finalmente ho la gioia [. . .] di baciare la fronte insanguinata di quel soldato che si stringe fra le braccia il fucile rovente” (59; “Finally I have the joy [...] of kissing the bloody forehead of that soldier clutching his red-hot rifle in his arms”). “Col suo sangue, non già con parole, un artigliere, cadendo, bagna abbondantemente e così battezza il primo cannone puntato sopra un nemico distante cento metri” (32; “With his blood, rather than with words, a falling artilleryman bathes abundantly and thus baptizes the first cannon aimed at the enemy one hundred meters away”). Although not connected for Marinetti to the blood of Latin or other Mediterranean ancestors, nor to the sacrificial blood of Christ, young Italian blood spilled in war through beneficial weapons becomes in the text the harbinger and seed of new life, of an evolutionary mutation for Italians, and of the promise of resurrection for the colonized land: “E voi pure mi abbagliate, cadaveri impetuosi e furibondi del Capitano Faitini, del tenente Bellini e del tenente

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<sup>189</sup> In the “Technical Manifesto,” the memory of Marinetti’s actual flight at Montichari near Brescia in 1909 is evoked as just as important a source of inspiration for Futurist esthetics as the experience of the battle of Tripoli. Excerpts from the text of *La battaglia di Tripoli* are also included in the manifesto.

Orsi, stesi uno accanto all'altro, con la testa posata su un vecchio aratro arabo . . . Siate orgogliosi di servir da guanciaie a questi eroi, aratri insanguinati, dal piccolo vomere di legno legato con rozze liane, e ammirate, ammirate dunque il potere dei grandi obici agricoltori che per la prima volta hanno lavorato la vostra terra feconda perfidamente mascherata di sabbia!" (60; "And you dazzle me too, impetuous and fierce cadavers of Captain Faitini, Lieutenant Bellini and Lieutenant Orsi, lying next to one another, heads resting on an old Arab plow... Be proud to serve as a pillow to these heroes, you bloodied plows, with your small wooden plowshare lashed by rough vines. Behold, behold then the power of these agricultural howitzers that for the first time have worked your fertile soil so perfidiously disguised by the sand!"). The bloody weapons have fertilized the desert. In a cartoonish time-lapse final sequence projected into the future, the text (alluding implicitly to the mythic, wish-fulfilling utopian tradition about Libya untiringly but vainly exposed as a fiction by Salvemini) stages the agricultural rebirth of the desert: "L'Uadi gonfio di piogge, sapientemente economizzato entro capaci serbatoi, compirà a poco a poco l'opera delle nostre carabine seminatrici e delle nostre mitragliatrici inaffianti. L'oasi spingerà subito i suoi speroni di verzura improvvisata nel preteso deserto da noi conquistato, che si coprirà tutto di fiori e di frutti. Fu per farvi nascere belle insalate e gloriosi rosai, che una granata scavò quell'ampia buca [ . . . ] E altre, e altre ne scaveremo noi. Pianteremo alti palmizi, sentinelle avanzate che difenderanno i nuovi orzi, i nuovi trifogli disposti strategicamente contro le sabbie sollevate del torrido *ghibli*" (61; "The *wadi*—swollen with rains, whose waters are wisely collected in capacious cisterns—will carry out little by little the work of our carbine seeders and our machine gun irrigators. The oasis will immediately push its spurs of spontaneous greenery into the desert we have conquered, which will be covered with flowers and fruit. A grenade dug that broad hole to give birth to a beautiful array of vegetables and glorious rose beds [...] And we will dig others, and others still. We will plant tall palms, advance sentinels to guard the new grain and new clover, setting them strategically to oppose the sands kicked up by the scorching *Ghibli*"). The uncanny fluidity, treacherous femininity, and liquidity or "Mediterraneanness" of the Libyan desert are contained and solidified, stabilized and exorcised by this odd futurist agriculture, this forceful writing with blood that gives meaning and purpose to the undecipherable desert.

The last section or appendix on the "frottole turche," however, all but undoes this modernist-futurist, perversely edenic literary vision of new life and new blood in the desert. What emerges, instead (in an uncanny premonition of Marinetti's future allegiance to the mystifications of the Fascist regime), is Marinetti attempting to defend Italy from charges of excessive violence and savagery and supporting the official version of events. In the appendix, Marinetti seeks to refute the version of the Shara Shatt events given by the Turkish and international press and in Italy by a few socialist publications. Marinetti attempts first to cover up what was essentially a defeat: "Non si trattava, certo, di abbandonare una posizione al nemico, già completamente scomparso nella sconfitta [ . . . ] La rivolta dell'oasi era, in realtà, completamente domata" (68; "It of course had nothing to do with abandoning a position to the enemy, who had already completely vanished in defeat [...] The oasis revolt was, in reality, completely tamed"). He attributes the misinformation to the bias and cowardice of the "Italophobic" German and British reporters, who, unlike him and the other Italians, he claims, fled from the battle scene to Tripoli, simulating indignation for the Italian atrocities (70-71). Although he elaborates on the enemies' savage behavior and the mutilation of the bodies of Italian soldiers, which he claims to have witnessed, Marinetti, whose sado-masochistic fantasies in the earlier part of the text are in fact ironically closer to the real events, forcefully denies that there were any Italian atrocities after Shara Shatt. He goes as far as claiming that the photographs that shocked the world were nothing but skillful trick montages. In

an attempt at comic relief, he compares them to the photographic trick that was once used by the *Daily Mirror* to endow him with a beautiful head of hair in a photo instead of his real, Dannunzian *calvizie*, of which he was apparently very proud (77).

In reality, two Italian regiments were surrounded and isolated by many thousands of Arab and Berber fighters, and the Italian troops, scattered and without a unified organization, were attacked while trying to reach Tripoli. About 500 were killed. Some were decapitated and even nailed to trees with their genitals cut off, in retaliation for sexual offenses committed by the Italians against the women. These sexual abuses in fact, which together with the rest of the Italian colonial violence in Libya have contributed to create a sense of unity among “Libyans,” and even to the development of a national identity, have recently been acknowledged even in official Italian publications.<sup>190</sup>

Marinetti denies that any such abuses occurred, dismissing the charges on racial bases and invoking, in a shameless display of bad faith, his firsthand knowledge of the Arab world, and (as a native of Alexandria) of spoken Arabic. He claims that Arab women, the “fatal women of the oases” (whose fascination is of course endlessly celebrated elsewhere in his writings, especially his early symbolist writings and the later *Il fascino dell’Egitto* [The Charm of Egypt]) are non-existent, for they are all repugnant, degenerate, and animal-like beings whose decaying and prematurely aged bodies are riddled by leprosy, syphilis, and other horrific diseases typical of the inferior African races.

In the narrative segment that concludes the text and is meant as an *exemplum* of Italic virility to oppose to the effeminate, morbid, and unpatriotic feelings of “compassione” (“compassion”) that were not yet “estirpati dall’anima italiana” (80; “eradicated from the Italian soul”), Marinetti recounts his own foray beyond the enemy lines on horseback with two other brave journalists (Ezio Maria Gray and Federico De Maria), during which they join, gun in hand, a *pattuglia* in a successful incursion into a walled villa where the rebels have an outpost. The house, which they succeed in penetrating by killing hundreds of Arabs, turns out also to contain other men and a group of women, whose bellies under the *galabieh* are, in his eyes, horribly disfigured by the loads of ammunitions that they are carrying. Although there is a suggestion that the men should be immediately executed and only the women taken prisoners, the lieutenant in charge declares that, being a Catholic, his good heart cannot bear “la morte di un solo arabo disarmato” (“the death of single unarmed Arab”). He orders the men, the women, and the wounded to be tied up and leads the column slowly towards Tripoli.

While the narrative is notable for its hypocritical extolling of Catholic scruples and the humane behavior of the troops (shortly after having critiqued compassion as effeminate and un-Italian), it is also an interesting testimony of the participation of women in the fighting. The Italian misconduct with women, and the occurrence of the Italian landing and attack during *Ramadan*, played a considerable role in unifying the otherwise non-homogeneous Sanusi forces, tribal confederations, Arab and Berber groups from the interior and from the Libyan *vilayets*, leading them to fight along with the Turkish troops rather than, as Italian propaganda promised, embrace the Italians as liberators bringing the benefits of an advanced and humane “superior” civilization. Despite a 24-hour lag in the attack due to the disunity of the fighters and the fluidity of the political situation, which seemed potentially to favor the cause of Berber autonomy, the Italians were thrown into a state of panic and confusion after the attack at Shara Shatt and were seemingly

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<sup>190</sup> Luigi Tuccari, *I governi militari in Libia (1911-1920)* (Roma: Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito, Ufficio Storico, 1994), quoted in Nicola Labanca, “Una nuova Italia? La guerra di Libia,” in Levis Sullam and Isnenghi, *Italiani in Guerra*, 631.

paralyzed for several hours, a pause that Marinetti seeks to present as a calculated, strategic regrouping skillfully planned by General Caneva. The confusion was generated in large part by the shocking realization that the people and especially the women of Libya were not, contrary to expectations, waiting for the Italians with open arms.

The lack of colonial training of the troops and its leaders, and the false expectations created in the minds of Italians by the racialized representations of Libya and of the war, contributed to make the Italian reaction truly devastating. As the Italian authorities and the press accused the “rebels” of cruelty, fanaticism, betrayal, barbarism, and dissimulation, the racist reactions at the front and on the home front multiplied exponentially. On October 23, the extreme, savage Italian reprisal started.<sup>191</sup> Several thousands were massacred indiscriminately, and thousands more sent to penal colonies (the latter under direct orders from Giolitti).<sup>192</sup> Gallows were set up in the main squares, and public hangings conducted as a warning to the “rebels.” The foreign press reported at least 4,000 executions. Some journalists returned their press passes to General Caneva in protest against the atrocities, decried even by some of the embedded Italians, for example Luigi Barzini.

During the transport across the Mediterranean to the detention centers and prisons at Gaeta, Caserta, and on Italian islands including Favignana, Ustica and Ponza, an unknown number of prisoners died of disease, and their corpses were thrown into the sea. In the detention centers, visited and described by Paolo Valera, prisoners of all ages and social classes were subjected to inhuman treatment, in appalling hygienic and psychological conditions.<sup>193</sup> This is certainly an uncomfortable history for Italians to contemplate, even, or especially, today when the fate of “illegal immigrants” from across the Mediterranean seems eerily to replicate this scenario. The humiliating treatment of Libyan prisoners by Italians is now a part of the collective Libyan memory, and it reemerges consistently in the seemingly perpetual negotiations between the Italian state and Libya over the vexed question of material and symbolic compensations.<sup>194</sup> The deportations after Schara Shatt have recently been studied by an international team of Libyan and Italian scholars appointed by the ministries of the interior of both countries, which has produced three volumes, including one of documentation in 2005.<sup>195</sup> Nevertheless, upon signing the news-making “Treaty of Friendship” with Libya in August 2008, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, even while claiming to acknowledge suffering of the tragic colonial past, offered, not unlike Marinetti in the final lines of his appendix to the *Battaglia di Tripoli*, only a hypocritical, vague portrayal of the good intentions of Italians.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Duggan, *Force*, 382. Duggan describes the attack as “savage,” while the Italian reaction was in his words just “extreme.”

<sup>192</sup> Giolitti’s telegram is quoted in Del Boca, *A un passo dalla forza. Atrocità e infamie dell’occupazione italiana della Libia 1911-1912* (Milano: Bombiani, 1977), 37-38.

<sup>193</sup> Paolo Valera, “La fine dei prigionieri di stato,” *La folla* 14, 27, October 27, 1912, 20, cited in Gianni Dore, “Sciara Sciatt: la rivolta libica, la repressione italiana,” in Levis Sullam and Isnenghi, *Gli italiani in guerra*, 673.

<sup>194</sup> Dore, “Sciara Sciatt.” Abdullatif Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya*. Nicola Labanca, “Compensazioni, passato coloniale, crimini italiani. Il generale e il particolare,” in *Italia contemporanea* 251 (2008): 227-49.

<sup>195</sup> Salaheddin Hasan Sury and Giampaolo Malgeri, eds., *Gli esiliati libici del periodo coloniale (1911-1916)* (Roma: Isiao, 2005). See Nicola Labanca, “Una nuova Italia? La guerra di Libia.”

<sup>196</sup> The final paragraph reads: “Lascio a voi in questa giornata il mio cuore, felice, veramente felice di essere riuscito a mettere da parte tutto ciò che non era amore e guardare verso il futuro con quei sentimenti che soli portano la felicità e il benessere all’uomo, che sono l’amicizia, la fratellanza e l’amore” (“On this day I leave my heart with you, and am happy, truly happy to have been able to put aside all that was not love, and to look to the future with those feelings that alone bring happiness and wellbeing to humankind: friendship, brotherhood and love”). For a critical reading of the treaty in a wider historical, economic and political context and compared to previous diplomatic efforts, see Labanca, “Compensazioni.” See also the contribution by Mustafa Abdalla A. Kashiem.

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