



Tamara Colacicco. *La propaganda fascista nelle università inglesi: La diplomazia culturale di Mussolini in Gran Bretagna (1921-1940)*. Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2018. 263 pp. €35.00, paper, ISBN 978-88-917627-8-8.

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Published on H-Italy (September, 2019)

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After a slow takeoff following the 2004 publication of a study by Benedetta Garzarelli on fascist propaganda abroad focusing primarily on France and Germany, scholarly interest in the cultural diplomacy of Benito Mussolini's regime has gained momentum in the last few years.[1] Within the context of the various dimensions of Il Duce's resort to soft power, historiography has progressively addressed the sponsorship of Italian schools and the promotion of the Italian language and culture outside Italy as surreptitious means to build up consensus for fascism among the emigrants from the peninsula and the Italophiles in foreign countries.[2] An informative addition to the latter trend results from Tamara Colacicco's monograph. Specifically, the author walks in a heretofore rather uncharted territory, except for her own preliminary research, and reconstructs the fascist endeavors to spread and, consequently, to exploit Italian studies in British universities for propaganda purposes in the two decades preceding Rome's entry into World War II.[3]

The author aptly places the fascist strategy against the backdrop of the centrality of education and the latter's connections to political issues that Mussolini's regime inherited from the previous liberal governments, which, especially under Francesco Crispi, had tried to capitalize on the diffusion of Italian culture abroad in order, for in-

stance, to involve the expatriates in their motherland's colonial ventures in the late nineteenth century. This diachronic approach in the first chapter of the volume, however, soon yields to an almost literally geographical mapping of the history of Italian studies and their political use at the University College of London and the University of Oxford, the two bailiwicks of the discipline in the United Kingdom thanks to the work of respectively Camillo Pellizzi and Cesare Foligno (both initially lecturers, then professors of Italian language and literature), as well as at the Universities of Bristol, Cardiff, Leeds, Liverpool, and Manchester. Such a perspective offers detailed accounts of the development of Italian studies at those single institutions of higher education, along with an accurate chronological description of the efforts and activities of their promoters. However, a more solid history of both the fascist soft power in the British academia and the coordination of Mussolini's cultural diplomacy with his foreign policy in the interwar years would have arisen from a parallel analysis of the events concerning the ups and downs in the overall expansion of Italian studies in Great Britain rather than from a separate examination of the diverse regions of the country.

With its summaries of the main issues discussed in the previous sections at the end of each

chapter, the structure of the volume reflects less the framework of an academic monograph than the outline of a doctoral thesis. The fact that the latter is the genesis of Colacicco's research is also revealed by some naiveté, such as, for example, the implicit attempt at distinguishing the fascist government from the fascist regime (p. 183). Moreover, the author's repeated stress on the novelty of her work, achievements, and findings also risks dissatisfying many readers other than the faculty members on her original dissertation committee.

Yet, drawing on extensive and previously untapped archival sources in both Italy and the United Kingdom, Colacicco did write an original book. She really casts light to largely ignored—but nonetheless relevant—features of Mussolini's cultural diplomacy in Great Britain and other related matters, even if her volume does not raise many problems and is sometimes more descriptive than analytical.

Colacicco persuasively argues that the fascist regime relied on the enhancement of Italian studies at the university level for propaganda purposes in the face of its failure to establish both the *Gruppi Universitari Fascisti* (Fascist University Circles) and the *Comitati d'Azione per l'Universalità di Roma* (Action Committee for the Universality of Rome) across the Channel. She identifies the Italian professors and lecturers, operating in the United Kingdom, who directly or indirectly supported Mussolini's scheme, reappraising their relations with the regime and concluding that only Pellizzi and Foligno were deeply committed to fascism and actively contributed to Rome's propaganda machinery. Others—such as Mario Praz, a lecturer at the University of Liverpool from 1923 to 1931 and a professor at the University of Manchester from 1932 to 1934—were chiefly fellow travelers with an apolitical attitude. In the case of Foligno, Colacicco specifically revises an earlier assessment of his stand by the *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* as an alleged

dissenter who sought abroad the freedom of thought he could not enjoy in Italy. In particular, she maintains that his belated application for membership in the Fascist Party in 1932 was a mere stratagem, which was intended to prevent suspicions about his propaganda activities.[4]

The gallery of the academicians in Italian studies at British universities also provides an overview of both Italy's intellectual expatriates in the United Kingdom and their response to the fascist regime. A few pages also deal with anti-fascist exiles, such as Gaetano Salvemini who vainly applied for a professorship in history at London's Bedford College, and scholars who pursued job opportunities by crossing the Channel to flee the thick political and cultural cloak of Il Duce's regime in Italy. Conducting a probe into the fascist appeal to the native high cadres in Great Britain, too, the volume muses over the Italian and British elites and appropriately offsets previous studies focusing on the reaction of the masses in the larger and primarily working-class Italian community, even when that research has addressed the political role of an academician such as Pellizzi, who was also the cofounder of the Italian fascist club in London in 1921 and held the office of state delegate for the network of these associations in the United Kingdom from December 1922 to July 1925, when he resigned amid criticism for his efforts to reach out to English aristocrats and bourgeois ultra-rightists to the detriment of concerns for immigrant laborers.[5]

Colacicco concludes that the Italian language made little inroads into Great Britain mainly because of the English persuasion that this idiom was less useful than others, while, in the milieu of such an industrial city as Manchester, socialist feelings also helped curb the use of Italian culture as a propaganda tool. Furthermore, she holds that a favorable reception of fascism was limited to small circles of British Italianists, conservative intellectuals fascinated mostly by theories of the corporatist state, and Catholics who appreciated

Mussolini's settling of the Roman Question. The latter were also the longest supporters of the regime because, instead of withdrawing their backing in the wake of the Italo-Ethiopian War, they maintained it until the late 1930s, when it became clear that Il Duce was a threat to peace.

Colacicco makes a cursory reference to Foligno's role in the establishment of a lectureship at the University of Dublin. However, with respect to Catholics' advocacy of Mussolini, one might wonder why she did not extend her study to Northern Ireland, where fascist groups operated in the Italian communities of Belfast and Londonderry.[6] One could also easily take issue with the premise of Colacicco's research, namely, the thesis that the United Kingdom was the main target of fascist cultural diplomacy, especially in the mid-1930s because, among other reasons, the regime was interested in securing London's green light for Rome's colonial venture in Ethiopia and recognition of the subsequent proclamation of Italy's empire. In fact, Mussolini paid equal—if not even greater—attention to the United States, not only for his interest in Washington's response to the war in eastern Africa for diplomatic and commercial reasons but also on the grounds that, unlike the British case, smooth naturalization procedures after five years of residence could turn Italian immigrants in North America into an influential pro-fascist political lobby.[7] Nonetheless, Colacicco has made a valuable and praiseworthy contribution to the knowledge of the teaching of the Italian language and culture in Great Britain in the interwar decades as well as to a better understanding of Il Duce's soft power in that country.

Notes

[1]. Benedetta Garzarelli, *“Parleremo al mondo intero”: La propaganda del fascismo all'estero* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2004); Lorenzo Carletti and Cristiano Giometti, *Raffaello on the Road: Rinascimento e propaganda fascista in America (1938-40)* (Rome: Carocci, 2016); Arturo Marzano, *Onde fasciste: La propaganda araba di*

Radio Bari (1934-43) (Rome: Carocci, 2016); Laura Fotia, *La crociera della nave “Italia” e le origini della diplomazia culturale del fascismo in America Latina* (Canterano: Aracne, 2017); Giorgio Bertellini, *The Divo and the Duce: Promoting Film Stardom and Political Leadership in 1920s America* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019); and Laura Fotia, *Diplomazia culturale e propaganda attraverso l'Atlantico: Argentina e Italia (1923-1940)* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2019).

[2]. Matteo Pretelli, *Il fascismo e gli italiani all'estero* (Bologna: Clueb, 2010), 129-42; Francesca Cavarocchi, *Avanguardie dello spirito: Il fascismo e la propaganda culturale all'estero* (Rome: Carocci, 2010), 225-75; Matteo Pretelli, *La via fascista alla democrazia americana: Cultura e propaganda nelle comunità italo-americane* (Viterbo: Sette Città, 2012), 46-54; Lorenzo Luatti, *L'emigrazione nei libri di scuola per l'Italia e per gli italiani all'estero: Ideologie, pedagogie, rappresentazioni, cronache editoriali* (Todi: Tau, 2018), 196-377; and Roberto Dolci, *“Il Giornalino” di Prezzolini: La lingua italiana tra promozione e propaganda nella New York degli anni '30 e '40* (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2018).

[3]. Tamara Colacicco, “L'emigrazione intellettuale italiana in Gran Bretagna: I docenti italiani di italianistica tra fascismo e antifascismo (1921-39),” *The Italianist* 35, no. 1 (2015): 157-70; and Tamara Colacicco, “Il fascismo e gli Italian Studies in Gran Bretagna: Le strategie e i risultati della propaganda (1921-40),” *California Italian Studies* 6, no. 2 (2016), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/31z5m0sg>.

[4]. Ugo Piscopo, “Foligno, Cesare,” in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 48 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1997), 556-58. Oddly enough, although Colacicco cites this entry four times, she never mentions its author (pp. 118, 141, 228-29, 246).

[5]. Claudia Baldoli, *Exporting Fascism: Italian Fascists and Britain's Italians in the 1930s* (New York: Berg, 2003); and Roberta Suzzi Valli,

“Il fascio italiano a Londra: L’attività politica di Camillo Pellizzi,” *Storia Contemporanea* 26, no. 6 (December 1995): 957-1001.

[6]. Jack Crangle, “The Italian Fascist Party in Interwar Northern Ireland: Political Hub or Social Club?,” *Queen’s Political Review* 4, no. 1 (May 2016): 1-13.

[7]. G. Bruce Strang, “A Sad Commentary on World’s Ethics’: Italy and the United States during the Ethiopian Crisis,” in *Collision of Empires: Italy’s Invasion of Ethiopia and Its International Impact*, ed. G. Bruce Strang (London: Ashgate, 2013), 135-63; and Philip V. Cannistraro, *Black-shirts in Little Italy: Italian Americans and Fascism* (West Lafayette, IL: Bordighera Press, 1999), 6.

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Citation: Stefano Luconi. Review of Colacicco, Tamara. *La propaganda fascista nelle università inglesi: La diplomazia culturale di Mussolini in Gran Bretagna (1921-1940)*. H-Italy, H-Net Reviews. September, 2019.

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