
With their assumption to power in October 1922, Mussolini’s National Fascist Party faced the task of remaking the Italian state and empire within a new world order, where ideas of nationhood and sovereignty were being reconceptualized and renegotiated. Nowhere was this task more difficult than in the contested border regions of the state. Roberta Pergher, a historian specializing in modern German and Italian history at Indiana State University, examines the construction of the Italian Fascist state at its northern and southern frontiers in her most recent publication, *Mussolini’s Nation-Empire: Sovereignty and Settlement in Italy’s Borderlands, 1922-1943*.

Through a comparative study of Italian Fascist settlement policies in the province of South Tyrol and the colony of Libya, Pergher works to illustrate that the Fascist state functioned as a new form of nationalist-imperialism. As she argues, the establishment of the League of Nations and Paris system reframed the legitimizing structures of national belonging and sovereignty. New principles of self-determination and the assertion of minority rights created a great deal of anxiety among the European powers, as they, at the very same time, asserted that the sovereignty and legitimacy of the nation-state was embodied within and expressed through a homogeneous national community. In this context, the presence of the majority German population in South Tyrol (known as the *allogeni*) and the Arab communities in Libya were seen as a challenge to the nation’s claims to sovereignty in these borderlands. Mussolini’s regime attempted to tackle this lacuna of legitimacy through a three-pronged approach, by “expelling anti-Italian activists, assimilating the *allogeni* into the Italian community, and settling “true” Italians.”¹

Pergher presents both a macro and micro level perspective of the development and implementation of the settlement projects. The former is developed through an examination of correspondence and policy documents from the major businesses, organization and state institutions, such as the local prefecture, veteran organizations and national agricultural and economic

offices involved in the projects. The latter focuses on the personal experiences of Italian settlers through an analysis of their letters and collected interviews.

From these perspectives, Pergher reveals the great divergence between the rhetoric of the state and the reality of the situation on the ground, created primarily by contrasting conceptions of *Italianità* held by the state and its settlers. Established to build homogeneity and internal sovereignty, the implementation of the settlement projects ultimately revealed the lack of cohesion surrounding ideas of *Italianization*, the new “Fascist man” and character of appropriate settlers, and the place of the “other” within the ideological, legal and institutional structures of the state. Many settlers felt a profound sense of alienation between themselves and the heartland, amongst settlers from other regions of Italy and amidst the indigenous populations surrounding them. This feeling of alienation was reciprocated by state officials, who proceeded to implement more extreme measures to deal with their insecurity over these territorial claims.

Anxieties surrounding self-identification and sovereignty, and difficulties affirming *Italianità* in the border regions, led Italian Fascists towards the construction of a “hierarchy of citizenship” — an ordering system which asserted the superiority and legitimacy of the Italian state and people by relegating indigenous populations to an inferior social, legal and economic status. For Pergher, the creation of this “hierarchy of citizenship” was profound as it marked a new form of nationalism which “incorporated the hierarchies of empire into the nation.” As she illustrates, the shift in the demographic policies of the borderlands came to transform the Italian Fascist program internally. These developments were also reflective of the greater transformation of the legitimizing structures of the nation-state in the post-Versailles world and the radical responses of some nations in reconceptualizing ideas of expansionism, identity-formation, national belonging, and sovereignty at a time when the ideals of the nation and empire were increasingly blurred.

In this book, Pergher provides a fascinating study of the relationship between state actors and individuals as they attempted to build the Italian nation in the borderlands. She clearly presents the international context in which these programs were constructed and addresses the major political and

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2 *Italianità* is the concept of Italian culture, history, ethnicity, character and identity that developed during the period of Italian Unification (Risorgimento) in the 1800s.

3 Pergher, *Mussolini’s Nation-Empire*, 165.
economic considerations and obstacles impacting the programs development. Yet, while Pergher spends the majority of her study explaining how Italian Fascists attempted to “overcome otherness,” she does not provide enough context about the cultural and ideological foundations underpinning these categories of “otherness” in the distinct northern and southern regions.

A more in-depth discussion of Fascist conceptions of race and ethnicity would have provided the reader with a clearer understanding of the internal logic which motivated approaches to these different communities. Throughout the book, the author refers to a number of important concepts in the demographic and ethnological lexicon of Italian Fascism, such as “Italianità,” “race,” “stock,” and “white supremacy,” but does not explain their origins, development or significance within their distinct contexts. A discussion of these concepts would strengthen the theoretical framework of “otherness” developed in this study. It would also provide more balance in the explanatory structures of the book, as Pergher’s framework consistently attributes the differences in Fascist approaches to the allogeni and the Arab communities as being primarily determined by external factors – namely the challenges to sovereignty and imperialism in the new international context – which leads her to understate the importance of other internal factors, such as the “political religion” of fascism, in determining the Party’s and peoples approaches to these different groups. Race is secondary in this analysis and yet it frames much of her discussion, and therefore, some focus on these ideological concepts and the internal processes of identity formation would enrich her analysis and the readers understanding of the foundational differences of the northern and southern settlement projects.

Overall, this study marks an important contribution in the historiography of Italian Fascism and interwar imperialism. Although there are some weaknesses in her discussion and analysis of the “other”, Pergher has done an exceptional job placing the Italian Fascist settlement program within the greater context of the new international order and her book provides a solid foundation upon which students and scholars can build their understanding of

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4 For more on this idea of the “political religion” of Fascism, see Aristotle Kallis, *Genocide and Fascism: The Eliminationist Drive in Fascist Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
the relationship between sovereignty, citizenship, nationalism and empire in this volatile period.

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Robespierre n’a jamais cessé d’être une préoccupation pour les historiens de la Révolution française comme les nombreux ouvrages parus depuis les dernières années en témoignent. La biographie d’Hervé Leuwers de 2014 avait réussi à offrir de nouvelles perspectives en élargissant le corpus de sources, utilisant des manuscrits qui étaient jusqu’alors méconnus, ignorés ou oubliés. La Collection Marzet, par exemple, réunissant des mémoires judiciaires, lui a permis d’explorer les jeunes années de Robespierre comme avocat d’Arras. Jean-Clément Martin, professeur émérite de l’Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne et ancien directeur de l’Institut d’histoire de la Révolution française, souhaite, quant à lui, proposer une réflexion autour de la légende de Robespierre. Comment fut-il à la fois qualifié d’homme exceptionnel, devenant une « icône », un meneur, pour ensuite être transposé dans « l’Histoire comme la figure du révolutionnaire sanguinaire »?

À défaut de prendre le postulat de Marc Bloch — « Robespierristes, antirobespierristes, nous vous crions grâce : par pitié, dites-nous, simplement, quel fut Robespierre » — Jean-Clément Martin vise plutôt à saisir l’utilisation faite de Robespierre par ses nombreux opposants et partisans, ainsi que pour quelles raisons il a été considéré différent des hommes de son époque. C’est une position à laquelle il n’adhère pas souvent, notamment en abordant ses

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4 Ibid., p. 10.