Uncivilized and Idealized:

Depictions of the Southern Italian Peasant in the Fascist Period

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Introduction

In the preface to his 1934 novel, *Fontamara*, Ignazio Silone writes of rural life that, "The life of the men, the animals, and the earth seem closed in an immobile circle bound in the closed grip of the mountains and the weather patterns. Bound in a natural circle, immutable, as a kind of life-sentence."[1] Depictions such as this one, in which life in rural Southern Italy was described as static and unchanging, provided the inspirational spark for this paper. The initial research question asked whether or not rural life was as timeless as this depiction suggests. If not, why did so many critics of fascism repeat the image of the South as unchanged and backward?

Questions such as that are hard to answer, mostly because it forces the relatively intangible concept of experience onto a mostly illiterate population. As this project developed, the intricacies and nuances of the Southern lifestyle, or Southern problem as it was often seen (commonly referred to as the Southern Question), became more apparent. As it pertains to Italy, the "South" is a charged word, connoting more than just geography but a certain lifestyle and a separation from Northern Europe. The history of the Southern phenomenon spans centuries. As this paper evolved, the primary question shifted to ask: how was the South, and therefore to an extent the Southern Question, depicted in the fascist period? With an interest still in literary works, the question of Southern representation during the fascist period was approached from several angles. I explore the meaning of the South developed in Mussolini's early speeches, in visual propaganda, and in fascist- and anti-fascist literature.

The Italian South is more of an understanding than an actual region. No clear geographic boundary exists across the Italian peninsula demarcating North from South. There is no Italian Mason-Dixon Line, if you will. The concept of the Italian South has been evolving for centuries;

[1] Ignazio Silone, Preface to *Fontamara*, 7th ed. (Milan: Mondadori, 1970), 11, my translation: "La vita degli uomini, delle bestie e della terra sembrava cosí racchiusa in un cerchio immobile saldato dalla chiusa morsa delle montagne e dale vicende del tempto. Saldato in un cerchio naturale, immutabile, come in una specie di ergastolo.

and one at point the "South" encompassed the entirety of the Italian peninsula, as it was considered Southern Europe. After Italian unification in 1871, the South was considered to be Italy "truncated somewhere below Tuscany," including Sicily and the adjacent mainland.[2] This type of definition contextualizes the Italian South going into the modern period.

For the purposes of this paper, Southern Italy will be conceived of as anything south of Rome, as well as the Abruzzo region that lies east of the capital city. The key Southern regions of this study are the Abruzzo, Apulia, and Basilicata—forming the calf, heel, and arch of the Italian "boot"—as well as the New Towns of the Pontine Marshes just south of Rome in Lazio. The authors to be examined situate themselves respectively in these regions, except for Apulia, that is used for additional historical context.

The representation of the South during the fascist period is of particular importance because of the pro-rural campaigns the regime undertook. Compared to the rhetoric of the liberal period, and to statements Mussolini made in the early 1920s, the ruralization campaign seems an apparent contradiction. Mussolini recognized the extreme Southern poverty in a speech in Milan in 1923, when he asked the Milanese to provide aid to their fellow countrymen. After 1925, however, the country entered into the post-war economic slump that by the end of the decade was internationally pervasive. The fascists began a pro-rural campaign focused on autarky and agricultural independence. By the 1930s, the nation was also on the verge of invading Ethiopia, a campaign that in part led the fascists to a pro-rural stance in an effort to raise the birthrate and thus build a military. Inherent in the ruralist campaign was positive imagery about the rural lifestyle, a rhetorical mode somewhat out of line with what had come before. The *bonifica integrale* (land reclamation program) can be viewed as an amalgamation of these two rhetorical

[2] Nelso Moe, *The View From Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 48.

modes: rural life needed to be squalid enough to warrant initial intervention but positive enough to encourage internal colonization to the New Towns. Nevertheless, the difference between the rhetoric of the early 1920s, that echoed liberal ideals about the South, and the ruralization campaign, is less a contradiction than an example of the Southern influences in the fascist regime.

In part, the confusion of these disparate perceptions of rural life stemmed from the overall problematic relationship between fascism and modernity. As Victoria de Grazia phrases the dilemma in the introduction to her book, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, there were at once, "demands for modernity and the desire to reimpose traditional authority."[3] Chronologically this dichotomy can be separated into two phases. The first was related to Futurism, the untraditional, urban social movement in Italy beginning before World War I. It tended to be more violent, interested in revolution, and focused on modernity.[4] The second came as a part of the economic downfall of the late 1920s and the obsession with demographics. It pushed for traditional and rural lifestyles. Mussolini, whose rise to power had in part been driven by Southern thinkers, led a pro-rural campaign that turned the Southern Question upside down.

A workable distinction should be made between "modern" and "traditional." For the sake of clarity this paper will make relatively broad distinctions between the two. "Modern" can be considered urban, industrial, and interested in mass culture. "Traditional" can be considered agricultural and removed from mass culture. To make the difference even more clear, for the purposes of this paper modern should be associated with Milan (urban, industrial) and the term traditional associated with a town such as Matera in the Basilicata, where people continued to

[3] Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 2.
[4] Adrian Lyttleton, *The Seizure of Power: Fascism in Italy 1919-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 385.

live in one-room cave dwellings without electricity, ventilation, or running water and with all of their livestock into the twentieth century.[5] The boundaries between the two distinctions were not clear across the North-South divide. Not all of the South was traditional nor all of the North modernized.

The first part of the paper will outline the Southern Question and then trace ways the fascist government presented the South in speeches and in propaganda from the years immediately after the March on Rome, during the Battle for Wheat, and in promoting the *bonifica integrale* (land reclamation). Material for this section comes from the reproduction of Mussolini's speeches in the *Opera Omnia* as well as from primary research conducted as the Wolfsonian Museum in Miami, Florida. Both pieces of visual and printed propaganda are analyzed for the purpose of understanding the government stance towards ruralism and rural peoples.

From there, the focus will shift to non-governmental representations of Italian peasants in fiction. This paper will analyze texts by the novelists Ignazio Silone and Carlo Levi to gain an anti-fascist perspective deeply imbedded in the peasant lifestyle. While these two authors were not peasants themselves, they were able to draw on experiences in the South. Silone, who was born in the Abruzzo, was a communist-turned-Christian-socialist and a critic of the fascist government. His works *Fontamara* (literally *Bitter Spring*) and *Vino e Pane* (*Bread and Wine*) will be used in this paper.[6] Levi was also a member of the anti-fascist movement, for which he was exiled to the South. His experience in exile in the Basilicata region formed the basis for his book, *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (*Christ Stopped at Eboli*).[7] Both Silone and Levi were

[5] Paolo Scrivano, "Signs of Americanization in Italian Domestic Life: Italy's Postwar Conversion to Consumerism," *Journal of Contemporary History* (April 2005), 318-320.
[6] Ignazio Silone, *Fontamara,* and *Vino e Pane*, 3rd ed. (Milan: Mondadori, 1955).
[7] Carlo Levi. *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, 3rd ed. (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1990).

sympathetic to the plight of the rural Southerners even though they were not representative of that class of people. Both public critics of fascism, they demonstrated through the Southern condition the shortcomings of the regime as a totalitarian state. Moreover, both men had strong personal connections to the region, heightening the tone of sensitivity to peasant life.

This paper will study other novels about rural life but written more sympathetically towards the fascists, the government, or at least the status quo to provide contrast to the works of Silone and Levi. *Il Guscio e il Mondo* (*The Shell and the World*) by Lucio D'Ambra, *Sotto il Sole* (*Under the Sun*) by Francesco Sapori, and *Dalle Paludi a Littoria: Diario di un Medico 1926-1936* (*From Swamp to Littoria: Diary of a Doctor 1926-1936*) by Dr. Vicenzo Rossetti will all be considered.[8] *Il Guscio e il Mondo* will be used to understand the idyllic facet of ruralism and is included in the first half of the paper. *Sotto il Sole* and *Dalle Paludi a Littoria* will be read for their accounts of land reclamation. The manners with which these texts, in particular *Sotto il Sole* and *Dalle Paludi a Littoria*, deal with the peasant population is of utmost concern.

These three authors, D'Ambra, Sapori, and Rossetti, were all affiliated with the *Sindicato Autori e Scrittori* (Authors and Writers Syndicate) in Italy during the fascist period. The primary function of the syndicate was to unite the fascist cause with literary ventures, for the purpose of creating an uniquely fascist culture.[9] Sapori was a heavily involved in the literary syndicate movement and served as secretary for the Roman branch of the organization.[10] D'Ambra led a group from the Roman branch on a trip through the Lazio, in particular to Littoria, in 1932 to visit authors in that region.[11] Rossetti's novel was promoted by the local authors syndicate in

[8] Lucio D'Ambra, *Il Guscio e il Mondo: Romanzo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1931), and Francesco Sapori, *Sotto il Sole* (Rome: Tosi, 1941), and Vincenzo Rossetti, *Dalle Paludi a Littori: Diario di un Medico 1926-1936* (Milan: Bompiani, 1937).
[9] Francesca Petrocchi, *Scrittori Italiani e Fascismo: Tra Sindacalismo e Letteratura* (Rome: Archivo Guido Izzi, 1997), 19.
[10] Petrocchi, *Scrittori Italiani e Fascismo*, 121.
[11] Petrocchi, *Scrittori Italiani e Fascismo*, 121.

Littoria.[12] The close affiliation of these three authors to a group like the Authors and Writers Syndicate, with the main goal to align fascism and culture, suggests that their works must be read within a fascist cultural canon—a literary tradition highly influenced by the politics of the day.

It should be noted that the purpose of the syndicate as it developed into a corporatist entity was also of censorship. This aim was in part motivated by Ignazio Silone's success publishing from abroad—the organization displeased with the popularity of an anti-fascist writer. They were especially concerned with the process of translating foreign texts into Italian, viewing their role in the process as morally and politically based.[13]

By placing the contemporaneous texts in dialogue with each other, it can be seen that despite differing sympathies (towards or against the lifestyle of the peasants), there was a common representation of the peasants as far-removed from civilization or modernity and at times inhuman. While the agency, the outcome, and the relation of the peasants to fascism vary through the texts, there are a handful of shared approaches all of these authors take towards rural peoples. The focus on alterity, politicization, and the importance of the radio can all be seen as familiar between the novels. Despite the overall differences of their literary aims, each of the authors in this study rely on pre-fascist conceptualizations of the South as well as provide viewpoints deeply imbedded in the Southern condition.

Two overall assessments can be made. The first is that there were both a variety of aims and approaches taken in describing the peasants and their lifestyle. The South was portrayed as simultaneously loyal to the regime; a backwards and treacherous place; and an idyllic, pastoral haven. The purpose of such depictions ranged from attempts to win over the Southerners themselves, discourage urbanism, promote the fascist agenda, and criticize the failures of the

[12] Petrocchi, *Scrittori Italiani e Fascismo*, 142.
[13] Petrocchi, *Scrittori Italiani e Fascismo*, 94-95.

totalitarian state. Some of the rhetoric about the South was lingering ideology from the liberal period. Other rhetoric, especially the rhetorical idealization of rural life, reflected Southern influences in the fascist government. Therefore, during the fascist period, the Southern Question changed. Both critics and supporters of fascism relied on some of the liberal-era Southern prejudices, but they approached a solution to the Southern Question from a decidedly different point of view.

Rise of Fascist Ruralism

Frank Snowden's book on the estate farm system in Apulia provides some history on the rise of fascism in that region, and as such provides one account of the spread of fascism to the South. According to Snowden, the shift came later than in the Northern and Central areas of the country, with Bari falling to the fascists in the summer of 1922 as opposed to areas in the North and Center which mostly fell in the winter of 1920-21.[14] The movement was driven by landowners who saw fascism as the final solution in their struggle to repress the Socialism that had become popular with farm workers after World War I. Modeled somewhat after the "para-military assaults by armed gangs of black-shirts on the agrarian socialism at Bologna and Ferrara in November and December of 1920," the fascist movement in Apulia however relied more on violence than on the "conventional…suasion" that had become effective in the North and Center.[15] Violence was necessary where farm workers could otherwise not be won over to

[14] Snowden, *Violence and the Great Estates*, 177.
[15] Snowden, *Violence and the Great Estates*, 176, 182.

fascism. While the Apulian situation is not representative of the whole of the Southern shift to fascism, it does show the unsteady ground on which the Southern movement was built.

The growing fascist unrest came to a head, albeit a somewhat anti-climactic one, with the March on Rome in October 1922. Fascists threatened to use against Rome the force of those violent bands that had been taking over cities across Italy for several years. King Vittore Emanuele III, avoiding potential conflict between the fascist squads and the national army, relented, basically handing the seat of the Prime Minister to Mussolini. The early years of his rule were a time in which Mussolini gradually expanded hegemony over the various seats of government and straightened out the precise details of the still emerging fascist project.

The rural campaign did not evolve until later in the fascist period, when the international depression and Mussolini's campaign to raise birthrates made aspects of the rural lifestyle, such as agricultural productivity and large families, ideal. Before that, nascent fascist policy transitioned through two distinct phases, one in which the tenets of Futurism dominated (including anti-proletarian sentiment) and another that was anti-modern and anti-intellectual.[16] The early 1920s, in which Mussolini was still Prime Minister and the regime had not fully taken shape, were thus marked by unclear and changing conceptions over just what the fascists represented.

After 1925, when Mussolini officially became Head of Government, a more articulated position on rural policy became clear as the government needed to formulate a response to the global economic situation. As Alexander De Grand portrays them, the years of 1925-1935 were a "period of crisis" in the agricultural sector. Landowners moved away from risky technological advances in mechanization and moved back towards the sharecropping system, which harmed both the tenant farmers, who then assumed more of the financial burden, and the day laborers,

[16] Lyttleton, *The Seizure of Power*, 372-373.

who lost work. Accordingly, this shift, along with the falling economy, led to a deteriorated standard of living in rural areas.[17]

Diets deteriorated as well. The cereal-fueled focus of the Battle for Wheat, the pro-agricultural campaign promoting autarky, came at the loss of other crops which were no longer grown in order to make room for more wheat. According to De Grand, these were "export-oriented crops (fruits, vegetables, and olives) and…livestock production."[18] Accordingly, he states that the country lost "a half a million head of livestock" in 1928 alone.[19] While production of other crops decreased, so did the actual amount of wheat in the country. The move toward autarky was unsuccessful as the country never produced as much wheat as it had previously imported.[20] Not only did diets consolidate towards grain products, but the amount of wheat available also decreased between the 1920s and the 1930s.[21] The government policy of the Battle for Wheat was thus linked to the decline of quality of life in rural areas.

Sharecropping, or *mezzadria*, was the preferred agricultural method of the Fascist party. It played into their contemporaneous policies on birthrate because it promoted larger families (who were awarded more land) and was thus praised for encouraging large, nuclear families. Supporters claimed the *mezzadria* system led to a more positive, communal bond between landowners and sharecroppers. It actually led, however, to a consolidation of workers under larger landowners, such that day laborers were pushed out and some faced economic downfall.[22] At the same time, despite attempted reforms, the interests of the *mezzadri* (sharecroppers) were

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[17] Alexander De Grand, *Italian Fascism: It's Origins and Development* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 62.
[18] De Grand, *Italian Fascism*, 64.
[19] De Grand, *Italian Fascism*, 64.
[20] Carol Helstosky, *Garlic and Oil: Food and Politics in Italy* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004), 76-77.
[21] Istituto Centrale di Statistica, *Sommario di statistiche storiche dell'Italia, 1861-1942* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1968), 10, 62 and Benedetto Barbieri, *Le disponibilità alimentary della popolazione italiana dal 1910 al 1942* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1946), 5, as quoted in Carol Helstosky, *Garlic and Oil*, 76.
[22] Philip Morgan, *Italian Fascism: 1915-1945* (New York, Palgrave, 2004), 123.

not necessarily promoted. In fact, part of the rural decline previously discussed was the strong rise of indebtedness of the *mezzadri* to the landowners.[23]

Arrigo Serpieri, Under-Secretary in the Ministry of the National Economy from 1923 through 1924, promoted these blocked reforms. A follower of Paretian economics, he believed in solidifying a relationship between the bourgeoisie who had founded the party and the peasantry.[24] Serpieri saw the "large inefficient estates" that "supported a mass of miserable semi-proletarian cultivators" as one of the biggest problems in stabilizing the Southern rural class.[25] Part of his solution was the *bonifica integrale*. In a bill authored by him and passed in 1924, he made cooperation in improving the *bonifica* sites madatory and not elective. The provisions began the entrenchment of the national government in rural life, although they were repealed in 1925.[26]

The *bonifica integrale* really took hold in the early-to-mid 1930s. At that point, the Fascists had developed an unease with urban environments—they were political hotbeds where resistance movements could form. To counter this possibility, the fascists encouraged people to diffuse to the countryside, where they were less likely to coalesce into a strong oppositional movement. Thirteen towns were built in twelve years, from 1925 to 1937. The motivation of the New Towns project was revival. The first "New" Town was Predappio, Mussolini's birth town. Instead of preserving the existing town, Mussolini founded Predappio Nuovo (New Predappio) and encouraged the townspeople to relocate. Predappio Nuovo, to be shorted to simply

[23] Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power*, 353-354.
[24] Lyttleton, *The Seizure of Power*, 350.
[25] Lyttleton, *The Seizure of Power*, 350.
[26] Lyttleton, *The Seizure of Power*, 350.

Predappio, set the precedent for the newly constructed, fascistized towns in its style and architecture.[27]

As the party moved it to the New Towns in the Pontine Marshes, the *bonifica integrale* became a way to encourage internal colonization from the cities to the countryside. The campaign was affiliated with the pro-rural program because it, in theory, emphasized the agricultural lifestyle and discouraged urbanism. Nevertheless, according to Diane Ghirardo, "[t]he New Town program never fit comfortably into this anti-urban scheme."[28] As she writes of the New Towns, "[t]he only thing rural about them was the total absence of urban amenities."[29] While this characterization seems to have been true, the public front of the land reclamation project was ruralization and it fits categorically into the rural campaign.

The interest in rural life was also a matter of demographics. High birthrates were associated with rural families, and increased birthrates were to be a tool in building the Italian state. High birthrates in rural areas (the population of which would have been boosted by the *bonifica integrale*) would add stability to social order, promote national strength, and would encourage women to fill traditional roles. After the Ethiopian campaign began, the birthrate campaign became important as a source of potential colonizers and soldiers.[30] The virtue of rural life was twofold, the first in its power of production, seen in the agricultural campaigns, and the second for the possibility it held for fabricating the ideal Italian state.

The war in Ethiopia was in some ways geared towards the rural population. As Philip Morgan writes, "An empire would guarantee raw materials and markets for Italian industry and agriculture, and its colonisation would satisfy the land hunger of the overpopulated south and

[27] Diane Ghirardo, *Building New Communities: New Deal America and Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 29-35.
[28] Ghirardo, *Building New Communities*, 39.
[29] Ghirardo, *Building New Communities*, 39.
[30] De Grand, *Italian Fascism*, 112.

islands."[31] The radio was the chief tool of the government to propagandize the war, and it is estimated that twenty million Italians listened to Mussolini announce the Ethiopian invasion in October 1935.[32] In some ways it can be seen that the scope of the rural campaign, was transferred onto the war process. The historical scope of this paper drops off after the start of the Ethiopian War as the Italian nation transitioned from this conflict into World War II.

Fascism and The Southern Question

The Southern Question was presented in the mid-1870s by Pasquele Villari and Leopoldo Frachetti, two liberal Italian statesmen and intellectuals. The Southern Question, as they framed it, made the problem of "southern backwardness a key point of reference in the political discourse of the nation's elites."[33] The problem of what constituted the South and how to manage its perceived backwardness, articulated by the Southern Question, and sometimes refered to as *meridionalismo*, stemmed from earlier eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notions of southernness and of alterity. The Southern Question was not a product of the period in which it was posed, but rather an articulation of an ongoing phenomenon.

The supposition of the Southern Question is that it would need to be answered. The foremost solution put forth by Villari was for the government and the central body of ruling elites to open themselves up to the poor, downtrodden masses subsisting in the South. Villari argued that the elites had become too insular and withdrawn during the unification movement, completed in 1871, and that they needed to consider the "vastly numerous class" that the

[31] Philip Morgan, *Italian Fascism 1915-1945* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave MacMillan), 172.
[32] Morgan, *Italian Fascism 1915-1945*, 174.
[33] Nelson Moe, *The View From Vesuvius,* 4.

movement had neglected.[34] Moe references the writing of Leopoldo Franchetti, a liberal politician interested in the Southern Question, who framed the North-South relationship as a doctor and a patient. Franchetti metaphorically described an "ill" Sicily emphasizing the need for Northern aid. The social problems in the South were a malady to be cured, according to Franchetti. [35]

Beyond possible solutions, the Question also necessitated explanations for its existence. Popular conceptions of the roots of the Southern Question became racial and biological at the end of the nineteenth century.[36] Antonio Gramsci describes the way liberal thinkers interpreted the South when he writes, "The South is the ball and chain which prevents the social development of Italy from progressing more rapidly; the Southerners are biologically inferior beings, semi-barbarians or total barbarians by natural destiny…"[37] Biological justifications explained away the perceived differences between North and South.

Perception of the Southern Question shifted in 1911 with the Libyan campaign. According to Lucia Re, the racialized terms of otherness that had been pushed onto the South now shifted to Libya. With a new scapegoat, and a solution to stop the flood of emigrants from Southern Italy to the United States, the South was integrated into the national Italian body as never before. A new form of national identity arose, centered around external racism and colonialism.[38]

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[34] Moe, *View From Vesuvius*, 227.
[35] Leopaldo Franchetti, *Inchiesta in Sicilia* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1974), 221, as quoted in Nelson Moe, *The View From Vesuvius*, 246
[36] Mary Gibson, "Biology or 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, New York: Berg, 1998), 100.
[37] Antonio Gramsci, "Some Aspects of the Southern Question," in *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Political Writings (1921-1926*), ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), 444.
[38] Lucia Re, "Italians and the Invention of Race: The Poetics and Politics of Difference in the Struggle over Libya, 1890-1913," *California Italian Studies Journal* 1(1): 8, http://escholarship.org/uc/item/96k3w5kn (accessed 3 March 2010).

Gramsci draws a strong connection between Southern peasants and the syndicalist movement, saying that Southern intellectuals led the movement to unite Northern workers with the Southern peasant. Gramsci also points to the Libyan campaign as a shifting point in Italian politics, as many syndicalist intellectuals were drawn into the Nationalist movement. They saw the war in Libya as a proletariat campaign. He quotes Artura Labriola, a syndicalist politician who wrote that in the first decade of the twentieth century, Mussolinism and Southernism became intertwined, a move Labriola laments as unfortunate.[39] By Mussolini's rise to power, Southern intellectuals held a place within the fascist system.

Writing in 1927, Gramsci says that Southern intellectuals had a strong presence in national politics; he writes that "three fifths of the State bureaucracy" were Southerners.[40] Without viable means of publication in the South, Southern intellectuals ventured northward, and thus became integrated into the national system. In fact, Gramsci states that "all the cultural initiatives by medium intellectuals which have taken place in [the twentieth] century in Central and Northern Italy have been characterized by Southernism, because they have been strongly influenced by Southern intellectual…"[41] The South now had vested its stake in national interests. Mussolini's presentation of the Southern Question and his Southern policies must be read within the context of the Southernist influence.

Mussolini on the South

[39] Gramsci, "Some Aspects of the Southern Question," 451.
[40] Gramsci, "Some Aspects of the Southern Question," 454.
[41] Gramsci, "Some Aspects of the Southern Question," 459.

During early 1920s, before Mussolini had cemented his hold on the national government, he is remarkably silent on a new solution to the Southern Question. While visiting the Abbruzo in August 1923, Mussolini addressed the public in several consecutive speeches in the towns of Castellammare and Pescara. In these two speeches, Mussolini relied on political, national rhetoric and ignored the Southern Question. When he returned to the North, Mussolini addressed the Southern problem but relied on a third representation of the South that was focused on its backwardness and was borrowed from liberal ideology, as opposed to forming new, fascist answer to the Southern Question.

On August 20, Mussolini spoke to a crowd already committed to the fascist cause, the army and the *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale* (National Security Volunteer Militia, hereafter MVSN). Mussolini intended for the MVSN to centralize the militarized fascist bands, the *squadristi*, whose acts of violence had in part catalyzed the success of the March on Rome and Mussolini's rise to power. Mussolini moved to harness the violent dedication of the semi-independent bands through the MVSN.[42] The speech in Castellamare showed elements of this militarism and commitment.

The following afternoon in Pescara, Mussolini instead addressed the fascist opposition, calling them "the pale-faced poor politicians who waste their time in long and verbose disquisitions on force and consensus."[43] He directly addressed the opposition and asked them to overlook the force (i.e. violence) of the fascist squads. The second speech downplayed the revolutionary call to battle of the day before. He also asked them to "take part in our new and impetuous congregation" in order to recognize consensus.[44] He drew attention to the uncommitted, whereas he had made light of them in Casellammare. The first day, he called

[42] De Grand, *Italian Fascism*, 43.
[43] Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, 10: 342-343.
[44] Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, 10: 342.

critiques of fascism "small and negligible personal matters."[45] He placed the opposition outside of the Abruzzo "in a few scarce Italian locations."[46] Therefore, between the two days he portrayed different emphases of Abruzzesi commitment. Mussolini's primary focus was in sweeping political statements.

Notably, Mussolini left the Southern Question out of these two speeches. He focused instead on national, political, and military issues. It is striking, then, the way Mussolini addressed the Southern Question when he reflected on this Southern trip in the Milanese prefect's office on September 10, 1923.[47] Just weeks after the speeches in Castellammare and Pescara, he described the South in disparaging terms that relied heavily on the pre-existing, liberal agenda of the Southern Question.

Before Mussolini addressed the room in Milan, a councilor handed him a wrought iron box filled with 706,000 signatures from Milanese pledging support and donating a small amount of money in support of the "National Association for the Interests of the Mezzogiorno." Mussolini spoke both in summation of his visit and in response to the Milanese donation.[48] He focused on the inhumane living conditions in the South, which had left them even without fresh drinking water. He claimed that the Southerners felt forgotten and neglected. He proposed more interaction with the national government. Mussolini chose a different rhetorical emphasis in Milan than he did while he was actually in the South, one that echoes pre-fascist Southern understanding.

For example, he asked the Milanese to extend their reach southward in order to provide aid for these impoverished people. He called Milan "first in line" when it came to declaring

[45] Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, 10: 342.
[46] Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, 10: 342
[47] Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, 20: 18-19.
[48] Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, introduction to Mussolini's September 10, 1923 address in Milan, *Opera Omnia*, 20: 18.

national solidarity. The South, instead, was "waiting for the national government," while living in conditions that "dishonor[ed] the human race."[49] The tone of the Milan speech is steeped in language borrowed distinctly from Villari and Franchetti.

Mussolini spoke of an un-modern Southern condition to be solved by the goodwill of Northerners. Mussolini phrased the solution to the Southern Problem as one that could be fixed if only the Milanese might continue to lend assistance to the South, just as Franchetti had emphasized aid. Mussolini described a solution to the Southern Question to his cabinet that was not new. The problematic state of the South continued from "small" Italy, the "Italy of yesterday," or liberal Italy.[50] Mussolini's early recommendations did not vary drastically from propositions made fifty years earlier, as both Mussolini and the liberals saw the burden fall on northern Italy, to "suppress" the Southern Problem "as quickly as possible."[51] Mussolini thus recycled the liberal Southern solution in a manner familiar to the Milanese.

The sense of impoverishment reflected in Mussolini's Milan speech is absent in the two he gave in the Abruzzo. In particular in the first speech at Castellammare, Mussolini emphasized labor in the region. He spoke not just of the militarism discussed earlier, but the concept of the Abruzzo as the "vanguard" of Italy was related to industry as well. He described the Abruzzo this way because they had done the most "work" in all of Italy.[52] Mussolini gave an anecdote in the speech about a manufacturer who had said to him that if fascism had "had taken power two years earlier, we would be advanced two years in our rebirth and in our moral and economic redemption."[53] Likewise in Pescara he said, "This morning, visiting the exhibition, I had the

[49] Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia,* 20: 18-19.
[50] Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, 20: 18-19.
[51] Franchetti, *Inchiesta in Sicilia*, 221, as quoted in Nelson Moe, *The View From Vesuvius*, 246
[52] Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, 10: 341
[53] Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, 10: 341.

visual revelation of your powerful force of construction and production."[54] The discussions here of work, manufacturing, and industry point to a lifestyle that is less destitute than he suggested in Milan.

Of course, this relationship between industrial centers and poor peasants is most likely why he called his visit "complex."[55] Economic historian, Costantino Felice, wrote that the images of the Abruzzo as pre-modern, strictly pastoral, or agricultural were "literary stereotypes which have little to do with historical reality."[56] He used the example of industrial mining in the Pescara Valley to demonstrate the relative economic modernity of the area. The Valley had some key components necessary for industrial development: a railway system, drivable roads, and the presence of an exploitable material. Felice traces the growth of industry in the valley from the 1860s to show that it was not just at the forefront of Italian development, but of all of Europe's as well. A modern system of factories existed along the Pescara River through the Valley, supporting Mussolini's statements about the "production" of Pescara.[57]

Therefore, there were enclaves of the South, including parts of the Abruzzo, that were decidedly industrialized and "modern." Still, Mussolini did not focus on these parts and highlighted the poorest of the peasant population. He also did not speak about the Southern Question at all while actually in the South. The dividedness here points to Mussolini's still developing rural policy. By either ignoring the problem or rehashing liberal-era policy, he shrugs the Question until his rural policies really begin two years later.

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[54] Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, 10: 343.
[55] Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, 20: 18.
[56] Costantino Felice, "Dal Sonno di Aligi al Grande Capitale: La prima Industrializzazione della Val Pescara," *Italia Contemporanea* 180 (September 1990): 505.
[57] Felice, "*Dal Sonno di Aligi al Grande Capitale*," 508

Official Representations of the South

"Grain, Grain, and still more Grain"[58]

By the *Decennale*, or ten-year anniversary of Italian fascism, fascist depictions of Southern life had shifted, however. The government entered a campaign to discourage urbanization, now demonized as a filthy, unhealthy lifestyle. The Southern, rural lifestyle was idealistically identified with the glory of the Italian nation. Government policy and propaganda encouraged agricultural production and glorified rural life as idyllic and simple.

In posters and other visual art, such as stickers, farm life is portrayed as quite beautiful. In one sticker, a young girl who is eating a piece of bread and holding a baby, presumably a sibling, sits amidst a vibrant yellow field (framed by an equally festive blue sky) while an older male, the father figure, works in the background. The manner of their dress is such that they do not appear to live in squalor and they seem content. The tone is both familial and picturesque.[59] Another, with a similar vivid color scheme, proclaims across the bottom "*La Vittoria del Grano*" (The Victory of Grain). A smiling woman holding a bushel of wheat leads a line of similarly posed women through a field. The rhetorical implication is that the agricultural lifestyle was joyous, as can be noted from their smiles, and not physically taxing. The women effortlessly, and with a perceived air of confidence, carry their bushels at shoulder height as if the act of collecting the harvest were neither strenuous nor laborious.[60] There is a clear focus on agricultural labor in these images, the father figure and the women are presented in the role of

[58] "Battaglia del Grano," Notebook, Wolfsonian Museum, Miami, Fl, ITAL 83.2.501, my translation: "…Grano, grano, e ancora grano!"
[59] "Young Girl and Baby," sticker, Wolfsonian Museum, Miami, Fl, XB1992.974, I had intended to include an image of this sticker, but my photograph from the archive is not of adequate quality.
[60] "La Vittoria del Grano," sticker, Wolfsonian Museum, Miami, Fl, XB1992.974.

cultivators, and the lifestyle associated with farming is charming and in some ways quaint—as in the children who sit idly in the field.

Despite this stated pro-agricultural policy, this was a time of rural decline in Italy. To portray the economic decline would contradict the very nature of propaganda and of the strategy for the Battle for Wheat. Still, a comparison of propaganda pieces, like the stickers, and the subsequent rural decline from the effects of the policies endorsed by the propaganda, shows the gap between how rural laborers were portrayed by the government and how they actually lived. The public image presented by the government had shifted from what was said in the early 1920s about a deteriorated South, while at the same time the new policy further deteriorated the peasant condition.

One can also see the idealized representation of rural life in literature. For example, in the 1930 novel, *Il Guscio e il Mondo* (*The Shell and the World*), Lucio d'Ambra portrayed the countryside is as an idyllic reprieve from city life. D'Ambra was a writer, a critic, and a director who prolifically wrote over ninety titles in his lifetime. He is perhaps most remembered for his role as a filmmaker more than as an author. D'Ambra was a member of the writers syndicate

and is considered to have had a conservatively Fascist ethic, seen in the hierarchical, ordered, natural world of *Il Guscio e il Mondo*.[61]

Written from the perspective of a wealthy landowner, the book comments on the natural, pristine elements of rural life. The "shell" is the countryside and he depicts it as "paradise" separate from the harshness of urban life.[62] D'Ambra writes that the countryside is "the beautiful green shell where there is a place for all of you…You will all live here, in serene toil, in heavenly good…"[63] D'Ambra presented a point of view in line with the anti-urban campaigns led by the Fascist Party. The main character, Ludovico, whose lifetime is traced through the novel, condescends city-life and at the end begs his children to move back to the country with him

The themes of the novel are reminiscent of the images in the propaganda stickers in the way country life is made idyllic. D'Ambra lays out the scenes of the novel as if it were a screen play by creating highly visual descriptions of the countryside. These descriptions are ripe with positive, pastoral images. For example, character Silvestro Silvestri says:

> I do not know how poets speak. I know that the color of the houses and of the men come uniquely in the country: clouds and sun, nice weather and bad weather. In the city you naturally have many unbeautiful things, but in the countryside, no, there is only the light, the shade, the rain, and the serenity.[64]

Descriptions like this one echo the scenes presented in the Fascist stickers. The focus on the color and the light is akin to the vivid imagery seen in the visual propaganda. The two media

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[61] Andrea Meneghelli, "Lucio D'Ambra: ipotesi per un'indagine isocronica," Fotogenia 4/5, http://www.muspe.unibo.it/period/fotogen/num045/11MENEGHELLI.htm#11

[62] Lucio D'Ambra, *Il Guscio e il Mondo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1931), 317.

[63] D'Ambra, *Il Guscio e il Mondo*, 313, my translation: "...il bel guscio verde gove c'é posto per tutti... Viver qua tutti, di serene fatiche, di celesti beni..."

[64] D'Ambra, *Il Guscio e il Mondo*, 287, my translation: "Come parlino i poeti io non so. So che questo da' unicamente, in campagna, il colore delle case e degali uomini: nuvole, sole, bel temp e maltempo, che' in citta' voi avete—si capisce—tante mai belle cose ma in caompagna no, no sia altro che questo: la luce, l'ombre, la pioggia, il sereno."

demonstrate the new, dominate trend in understandings of Italian rural life—this time focused on the idealization of agrarianism.

The quaint serenity used to capture the rural lifestyle during the Battle for Wheat was more idealistic than what Mussolini had said about Southern living conditions in the early 1920s, when he simply borrowed from pre-fascist rhetoric. The campaign demonstrated the Southern influence in national politics and fascism's shift away from Futurist and urban influences. Through *Il Guscio e il Mondo* it can be gathered that this understanding of pastoral life had some cultural holding in the Italian population, enough so that it was fodder for fascist fiction. The idealization of ruralism was synonymous with the development of fascist internal policy.

"A Superior Intervention"[65]

The *bonifica integrale* stemmed out of the pro-rural policy seen from the mid-1920s forward.[66] Similarly, the rhetoric used in the campaigns to build the new, rural towns was an amalgamation of both the rural- and urban-as-dirty sentiments already seen, although previously used separately, in fascist policy. In government stance of the day and in literary sources, it is apparent that the regime borrowed both of these modes of representation (of peasant life as either backwards or idyllic) in conjunction with each other, to encourage rural internal colonization.

On the one hand, the propaganda for the *bonifica integrale* showed the desolation of the areas chosen for reclamation, in particular the Pontine Marshes. It is essential to examine this

[65] Ente Nazionale Industrie Turistiche and Ferrovie dello Stato, *Agro Pontino, Anno IX-XV* (Milan and Rome: Pizzi and Pizio, 1938), 16, Wolfsonian Museum, Miami, Fl, ITA2 84.2.329

[66] While the *bonifica integrale* was not entirely a Southern project, only those taking place in that region will be examined here.

aspect of the rhetorical duality first because it provided the background justification for land reclamation. The government published documents promoting the *bonifica integrale* that focus on the bleak environment of the Pontine Marshes before intervention by the regime. For example, a map depicting the geography of the Marshes, printed in English, included the text:

> Desolate region of the Pontine Marshes, when its stagnant waters seemed to have condemned it forever to solitude and malaria, it must appear miraculous and almost incredible that, by the will of the Duce, this extensive territory could have been so speedily rescued from the evil of centuries, and with such rapidity have been converted into rich farmlands with new towns, roads, farmhouses, and factories."[67]

The language of this quote (desolate, stagnant, condemned, solitude, evil) continued the representational mode of the rural South as uninhabitable. The government relied on this mode of thought as justification for its presence in the Pontine Marshes.

Similarly, another government pamphlet titled "Agro Pontino, Anno IX-XV" traces the history of the Pontine Marshes and the various attempts that had been made to drain and inhabit them (the first in 312 B.C.E. by Emporer Appius Claudius Caecus). In the booklet the Marshes are called "barren" and are figured as untamable.[68] The pamphlet places Mussolini's plan within the historical struggle to drain the Pontine Marshes. The difference, as seen in the pamphlet, was to be Mussolini's success in the project. The purpose of returning to this depiction of the rural South as uninhabited or not acceptable for habitation was to capitalize on an already present and long-standing cultural notion that the area lay dormant, waiting for Northern aid.

Still, the fascist government presented the *bonifica integrale* to the public during the anti-urban campaign. The New Towns were to serve as rural alternatives to urban centers. In order to stay in line with this version new attitude towards rural areas, the government also

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[67] Ente Nazionale Industrie Turistiche and Ferrovie dello Stato, *Littoria and Agro Pontino*, map (n.p., n.d.) Wolfsonian Museum, Miami, Fl, ITA2 XC 1994.4096.
[68] Ente Nazionale Industrie Turistiche and Ferrovie dello Stato, *Agro Pontino, Anno IX-XV,* 64, Wolfsonian Museum, Miami, Fl, ITA2 84.2.329

extolled the beauty and simplicity of the New Towns. For example, one government poster displayed a pastoral scene similar to the propagandistic images of the Battle for Wheat. In this image, however, the smiling or contented people had been replaced with machinery. [69] Whereas the cultivators in the Battle for Wheat stickers worked by hand, in this poster the workers were interchanged for the tractors, demonstrating a slight rhetorical shift towards the mechanization land reclamation could bring to the countryside.

The representational notion here appears to have been pro-rural, but it is essential to note that the beauty in the scene is linked to the machinery—a modernization of farming practices. It is precisely in this transformation that it can be seen how the land reclamation project was less about absolute praise of rural life, and an encouragement for people to live as the rural population had, but was more about bringing a decidedly modern agrarian lifestyle to the countryside via development—that is, in the building of "full-fledged cities."[70]

Studies of rural structures seem to have been popular in the mid-to-late 1930s. There were at least a couple of books published devoted entirely to the architectural history of rural structures. The point of these texts appears to have been a defense of ruralism. In one book,

[69] Federazione dei Fasci di Combattimento Dell'Urbe, "Bonifiche," Poster (n.p.: 1934), Wolfsonin Museuam, Miami, Fl, ITA2 XB 1992.2357
[70] Diane Ghirardo, *Building New Communities*, 39.

Architettura Rurale Italiana, Quaderni della triennale (*Italian Rural Architecture, Notebook of the Triennale*), published for the 1936 Triennale architecture exposition in Rome, the authors and curators, architects Giuseppe Pagano and Guarniero Daniel, provide an evolutionary approach to rural architecture. Pagano and Daniel were interested in defending rural architecture as an evolutionary precursor to contemporary styles.[71] They write:

> It is the analysis of this great reserve of construction energy, that is always substituted like an a-stylistic background, that one can reserve the joy of discovering motives of an honest, clear, logical, healthy building trade where one time only the pastoral and the archaic were seen."[72]

Unlike some of the other propaganda for the *bonifica integrale*, the message here was not about how terrible life in the huts was, preempting government intervention, but instead was about showing the value in rural architecture. The positive stance towards rural structures reflected in the text demonstrates the idealization of agricultural life that was at the forefront of the ruralization movement.

Nevertheless, despite the praise, the goal of the *bonifica integrale* was to tear down these very structures and introduce new ones into the area. The architecture of the new buildings was decidedly modern, not necessarily in the sense of amenities, as Diane Ghirardo argues their apparent lack thereof, but more so in the style of the structures.[73] Architectural historian Borden Painter writes about Sabaudia (one of the New Towns) as an utmost example of modern architecture that came about "in the early 1930s when Mussolini still favored those architects who could design buildings to show that fascist Italy was modern and revolutionary."[74] The

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[71] Giuseppe Pagano and Guarniero Daniel, *Architettura Rurale Italiana, Quaderni della triennale* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1936), Wolfsonian Museum, Miami, Fl, RARE NA 111 .925

[72] Pagano and Daniel, *Architettura Rurale Italiana*, 15, my translation: "E l'analisi di questo grande serbatoio di energie edilizie, che e' sempre sussistito come un sottofondo astilistico, puo riserbarci la gioia di scoprire motive di onesta', di chiarezza, di logica, di salute edilizia la' dove una volta si vedeca solo arcadico e folclore."

[73] Ghirardo, *Building New Communities*, 39.

[74] Borden W. Painter, Jr., *Mussolini's Rome: Rebuilding the Eternal City* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 89.

project of the New Towns' architects was to unite the Modern Movement aesthetic with traditional or historical function.

Much has been said thus far regarding the renderings rural lifestyle, but in what types of structures did these people actually live? Some lived in huts with straw roofs, seemingly popular in "Calabria, Sicily, Basilicata" and in regions of Central Italy.[75] Others structures had conical roofs, sometimes of straw but other times made of stone. In Apulia, peasants lived in homes with circular, stone roofs and white washed external walls, called *trulli*. An opening at the apex of the cone allowed smoke to escape the structure.[76] In Apulia, separate *trulli* were built for men and for animals. In Matera, entire families lived in one room caves dug into the hillside with all of their livestock. The spaces had no windows and the only exterior opening was a front-door.[77]

The fascist fascination with rural structures points to the party's interest in rural life. The dual argument created around the *bonifica integrale* both admonished and praised agrarianism in order to validate the construction of New Towns and encourage people to move to them. The understanding of rural life employed during the New Towns campaigns is a combination of the pre-fascist view of the South as a national blight with the 1920s idealization of agrarianism.

[75] Pagano and Daniel, *Architettura Rurale Italiana*, Picture Caption, 1.
[76] For a description of the *trulli* at Locorotondo in Apulia, see Anthony Galt's *Far From the Church Bells: Settlement and Society in an Apulian Town* pages 21-24.
[77] Scrivano, "Signs of Americanization in Italian Domestic Life," 319-320.

The Southern Question and the Literature of the Fascist Period

The role of the fascist government in managing the Southern Question was debated in literature as well. Authors who furthered the fascist agenda, writing books about the *bonifica integrale*, drew on many of the points made in official propaganda, while the anti-fascist authors argued that Fascist policies had not reached the South. Ironically, just as the fascist authors underscored the image of the peasant as backward, anti-fascist authors also needed to develop the image of the detached peasant to highlight the failures of fascism's southern agenda. Both sides thus relied on negative images of the Southern peasant to further their argument about the successes and failures of fascism.

The Peasant Body

In both types of literature rural people are represented as non-Aryan, even as animals. The most persistent image is of the dark-featured peasant women. This image had its origins in the nineteenth century. According to Nelson Moe, Naples was frequently figured as Africa: "[T]here is no other way of imagining this land of lack than as Africa, the alterity of Europe."[78] Moe quotes what he refers to as a famous exclamation by Luigi Carlo Farini, a liberal Italian statesman, "This is not Italy! This is Africa."[79] Likewise, historian Nancy Gibson argues that the "illiteracy, poverty, disease, and crime" in the South could be explained away in terms of

[78] Moe, *The View from Vesuvius*, 146.
[79] Moe, *The View from Vesuvius*, 146.

race according to Italian positivists in the 1880s.[80] Perceived racial differences set the terms of the Southern Question in pre- and post-Risorgimento Italy.

The emphasis on dark eyes in fascist-era fiction can be read as a continuation of this kind of racial thinking. In order to emphasize the distance of the peasants from Italian modernity or urbanity, the authors fell back on familiar tropes of physical otherness. While black eyes do not immediately classify the peasants as African, the purpose of describing them thus seems to be to separate them physically from Northerners (who in the past were considered Aryan while the Southerners were Afro-European).[81] Alterity based on physical characterizations was an ongoing theme in Southern representations and was common in both the fascist and anti-fascist writings.

In *Sotto il Sole,* Francesco Sapori details the construction of the fascist New Town, Littoria. The town was the first of those built in the Pontine Marshes. Rapid construction took place between April and December of 1932. The town was meant to emulate and retain a rural feel—the boundaries were purposely kept small to coincide with that image. At the same time, however, Littoria had a more urban, industrialized feel than other New Towns.[82] In the *Sotto il Sole*, Sapori captures this emphasis on mechanization by the end of the text, but the beginning of the book is spent detailing the preexisting peasant system of the Agro Pontino.

As an author, Francesco Sapori is notable for his contribution to the integration of artists and writers into the syndicalism movement. He focused on joining the national and fascist interests with works of literature, seen in the way *Sotto il Sole* depicts the *bonifica integrale*.[83] Sapori wrote the book *I Quattro Elementi nella Poesia Itliana Contemporanea* (*The Four*

[80] Gibson, "Biology or Environment?," 100.
[81] Gibson, "Biology or Environment?," 100.
[82] Ghirardo, *Building New Communities*, 71.
[83] Petrocchi, *Scrittori Italiani e Fascismo*, 19.

Elements of Contemporary Italian Poetry) in which he described the project of fascist-promoting authors as one that would express the "grand order" (fascism).[84]

The way Sapori presents the peasant women in *Sotto il Sole* emphasizes on their backwardness (that will be erased by the end of the novel). He describes the peasant women as such:

> Two women came out dressed in black with white handkerchiefs folded on their heads and falling on their ears: both holding a baby. Their polished black eyes shone with the suffering of their beeswax colored faces. Then appeared a stooped old woman, with a spoon in her mouth and her handkerchief covering half her face; disheveled, in heavy and swollen clothes, she appeared the personification of misery and savageness.[85]

The physical description of the peasants distinguishes their lifestyle. They wear seemingly old-fashioned clothes (plain black dresses and headscarves) that are ill-fitting and unkempt. The manner of dress connotes a certain lifestyle and economic hardship. Meanwhile, the blackness of their eyes correlates to their suffering. Through their eyes they communicate their hardships. The physical feature, dark eyes, demonstrates a lifestyle discrepancy between the South and the Northern narrator creating a sense of otherness.

Sapori describes the peasant woman as "a personification of misery and savageness."[86] Notable is the choice to describe the woman as a "personification." It is dehumanizing to reduce the woman to the figurative term of personification. Her womanhood is lessened and she becomes an embodiment of adjectives: misery and savageness. Within this figurative dehumanization, her characterization follows that of the rural architecture and lifestyle expressed earlier. Both the woman's miserable state and her savagery provide basis for the modernizing

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[84] Francesco Sapori, *I Quattri Elementi nella Poesia Italiana Contemporanea* (Florence: Vellecchi, 1940), 29, as quoted in Petrocchi, *Scrittori Italiani e Fascismo*, 59.

[85] Francesco Sapori, *Sotto il Sole*, 30, my translation: "Due donne vestite di nero, coi fazzoleti bianchi ripiegati in capo e cadenti sulle orrecchie, vennero fuori: entrambe tenevano un bambino per mano. Gli occhi neri, lucidi, brillavano sul patimento del viso color della cera vergine. Poi spuntó una vecchia curva, con le guance a cuchiaio, il fazzoletto le copriva metá della faccia; arruffata, nei panni grevi e gonfi, pareva una personificazione della miseria e della selvatichezza."

[86] Sapori, *Sotto il Sole*, 30, my translation: "Pareva una personificazione della miseria e della sevatichezza."

mission just as the destitute physical state of the huts was the basis for governmental intervention in the South.

A focus on the blackness or darkness of rural peasants' eyes is also indicative of bestiality. Carlo Levi employs this figuration in his work, *Cristo si é Fermato a Eboli*. Educated as a doctor, Levi was an Italian writer and painter. He helped to form the antifascist group, Justice and Liberty in 1929, and his subversive actions led to his exile in the Basilicata region from 1935-1936.[87] Levi wrote *Cristo si è Fermato a Eboli* about his experience in exile, and it in some ways can be read as an ethnography. In *Cristo si é fermato a Eboli*, Levi describes walking past a group of women who wait to use a fountain in the town center:

> They were immobile in the sun, like a herd in a pasture; and like a herd they smelled. The confused and continual sound of voices reached me, an uninterrupted whisper. With my passage no one moved, but I felt struck by dozens of black gazes…[88]

Levi explicitly relates the women to cattle even though his text is sympathetic to rural people. The black gazes are a part of their animalism and a part of their alterity.

Literary historian Lucia Re, discussing the racialization of women in liberal-era texts, says that writers and intellectuals saw that the "wild, savage and animalistic past lurking under the surface of every human being was in women always dangerously ready to emerge."[89] Racial feminization was linked to the South, which was sometimes referred to as a "female population" ("*un popolo-donna"*).[90] Re points to the 1911-1912 colonial campaign in Libya as an ideological shift that allowed both Southerners and women to enter into a more unified figuration of Italian identity focused on Latin, Roman roots. Nevertheless, these same animalistic,

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[87] Introduction, *Cristo si é fermato a Eboli*, unnumbered front matter.
[88] Levi, *Cristo si é fermato a Eboli*, 43, my translation: "Stavano immobili nel sole, come un gregge alla pastura; e di un gregge avevano l'odore. Mi giungeva il suono confuse e continuo delle voci, un sussurrare ininterrotto. Al mio passagio nessuna si mosse, ma mi sentii colpito da diecine di sguardi neri…"
[89] Re, "Italians and the Invention of Race," 5.
[90] Re, "Italians and the Invention of Race," 23.

feminine representational modes seen in the liberal authors seem to have been still in use during the fascist period.

The Peasant Experience

The peasant way of life was described on equally disparaging terms in the works of the period. The book, *Dalle Paludi a Littoria: Diario di un Medico 1926-1936* (*From the Swamps to Littoria, Diary of a Doctor 1926-1926*), is an excellent example of the dichotomy between the two views of rural life. Presented as the *real* version of the construction of the New Town of Littoria, the "diary" chronicles ten years in the life of Doctor Vicenzo Rossetti who worked in the Pontine Marshes through the period in which the town was built. Due to the party's endorsement this book could be considered a piece of propaganda, but for the purposes of this paper it will be examined predominantly for its narrative qualities.

While the novel was presented as diary, there is nothing in the text to classify it as such. The book lacks the style, format, or tone of a diary and is instead a stylized recollection and must be read as such. While not a true diary per se, the book does record Rossetti's memories as a doctor in the Pontine Marshes for the Pontine Anti-malaria Institute. Rossetti was assigned to work in the Pontine Marshes before the construction of Littoria had commenced, and his text covers the entire process of building the New Town. *Dalle Paludi a Littoria* was readied for publication by the Sindacato Interprovinciale Fascista Autori e Scrittori (Inter-province

Syndicate of Fascist Authors and Writers).[91] As such it can be read just as much as a construct of party propaganda as a memoir.

In the first part of the book, Rossetti describes the dire state of living of the Pontine population. He writes:

> At that point I saw the first hut. Desolate spectacle: a rectangular fence formed of tree branches, with mud and fern dried in the interstices; a roof with two slopes, formed from two small pieces of wood placed like tiles; inside two small ditches to stop the water from flooding the hut. Inside was more squalid.[92]

The beginning of the book is made up of observations like this one, that establish the need for the doctor's presence in the area.

The book echoes the perceived need for Northerners to provide aid to the Southerners—a concept apparent in a scene in which Dr. Rossetti tends to a peasant patient. He writes:

> The usual short hut, cold and dark: misery everywhere. Pig's meat and fat cure hanging to the beams of the ceiling. Women are crying. Blood everywhere: on the ground, on the bedding, of the feathers. In an angle of the hut a heap of reddened linen…
> "Save me, Doctor, I have two young children. I am cold… very…"
> She chattered her teeth.
> "Be calm and tranquil, Sista. Let go and you will see what I will soon do.[93]

The doctor is interested in the unlivable conditions of the hut. It is cold, dark, and miserable. It is also a gruesome, gory place, emphasizing the need for medical attention. Not only is there human blood everywhere in the hut, but the carnage is heightened by the meat and fat that hang from the ceiling. He is there to "save" the woman, not only medically, but in the overall theme of the book he is there to save her, as representative of the peasant population, from the squalid

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[91] Petrocchi, *Scrittori Italiani e Fascismo*, 142-143.
[92] Vicenzo Rossetti, *Dalle Paludi a Littoria*), 34, my translation: "In quel punto vidi la prima capanna. Spettacolo desolante: un recinto rettangolare formato da rami d'albreo con del fango e della felce secca negli interstizi; tetto a due spioventi, formato da piccolo pezzi de legno disposti a tegolo; intorno un fossetto per impedire all'acqua di allagare la capanna. L'interno era ancora piu' squallido."
[93] Rossetti, *Dalle Paludi a Littoria*, 176, my translation: "Solita capanna bassa, fredda e buia: miseria ovunque. Carne di maiale e grassi affumicavano appesi ai travicelli del soffitto. Donne che piangevano. Sangue dovunque: in terra, sul giaciglio, si delle panache. Un un angolo della capanna un mucchio di biancheria rosseggiante… 'Salvami, Dotto', tengo due filgi piccolo. Ho freddo…tanto…' Batteva I denti. 'Stai calma e tranquilla, Sista. Lasciati visitare e vedrai che faro' presto.'"

way of life. The salvation is achieved by the end of the book through the construction of Littoria.

Later in the book, after the construction of Littoria is complete, the focus shifts interests to the more urban aspects of the town. Dr. Rossetti comments on how the completion of the project was an act of conquering nature and reacts positively to the influx of workers.[94] In this portion of the book, Dr. Rossetti captures the notion that the process of building the New Towns was primarily an act of modernization, and not of ruralization. He does not care to pay attention to the beauty of the countryside, the crucial part for him is that the region has been sterilized and made to function commercially.

Dalle Paludi a Littoria brings together the conflicting terms of the government's view on the Southern lifestyle. The duality of rhetoric in the campaign for the *bonifica integrale* was just a continuation of the rhetoric that had been a part of fascist beliefs of the South since the regime began. Parts of their understanding were borrowed from the preceding government, like the notion that the South was waiting for a helping hand. Writers like Rossetti recognized the ability of the government to affect the unlivable conditions of the South.

Nevertheless, while the more sympathetically fascist literature reflected a positive change over time in rural areas as a result of fascist policy, the anti-fascist literature lacks the possibility for improvement via government intervention. In fact, in the works of the anti-fascists, care is taken to note the absence of both progress over time and of benevolence by the national government. This is most persuasively presented in the opening paragraphs of Levi's *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*. He sets up the fictional towns of Gagliano and Grassano (which he sets in Basilicata and are modeled after his experience in the South) as totally shut off from the rest of the world:

[94] Rossetti, *Dalle Paluli a Littoria*, 243, 273.

> Many years have passed, full of war, and of that which is called History. Closed in a room, in a closed off world, I am grateful to return by memory to that other world, closed up in pain and in custom, denied by History and by the State, eternally patient; to my other world without comfort and sweetness, where farmers live in the miserable remoteness of their immobile civilization, on their arid soil, and in the presence of death.[95]

He then goes on to explain the title of the book (in English: *Christ Stopped at Eboli*) by quoting the peasants who do not consider themselves Christians. Instead they feel so far removed from civilization that they believe Christ could not have penetrated their rural existence. Levi describes the towns in terms of absence, of the complete void of those things taken for granted in Western civilization, which he lists: individualism, hope, reason, Christianity, and both the Romans and the Greeks.[96] In this way, Levi exposes rural life as unprogressive.

Unlike the fascist writers, anti-fascist authors argue a political stagnation. *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* again exemplifies this. Political matters are put in the terms of historical, pre-fascist powers, the *galantuomini* (gentlemen) and the *briganti* (brigands). Levi writes, "Fascism had not changed things," in these static distinctions.[97] Interpreting the divide in terms of pre-fascist political and social groups signifies that the peasants had not recognized a difference between what came before and what existed under Mussolini.

Ignazio Silone presents a similar understanding in *Vino e Pane*. Silone was an Italian author born in Pescina dei Marsi in the Abruzzo region. His works are set in fictional locales within the Abruzzo. After World War I, Silone participated in the Socialist movement in Italy, although he did not segue into the fascist party like others of his generation, Mussolini being the most famous example. He was the Secretary of the *Partito Communista Italiano* (Italian

[95] Levi, *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, 3, my translation: "Sono passati molti anni, pieni di guerra, e di quello che si usa chiamare la Storia…Chiuso in una stanza, e in un mondo chiuso, me è grato riandare con la memoria a quell'altro mondo, serrate nel dolore e negli usi, negato alla Storia e allo Stato, eternamente paziente; a quella mia terra senza conforto e dolcezza, dove il contadino vive, nella miseria e nella lontananza, la sua immobile civilità, su un suolo arido, nella presenza della morte."
[96] Levi, *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, 3-4.
[97] Levi, *Cristo si é fermato a Eboli*, 21-22, my translation: "Il fascismo non aveva cambiato le cose."

Communist Party) until he left the party in 1930 in protest of Stalin's actions. In 1933 and 1937 Silone published *Fontamara* and *Vino e Pane*, the two of his texts analyzed here, in Zurich where he was then living.. They are part of a trilogy and help to frame Silone's frustration with both the fascist government and the communist party. He considered himself a "Christian socialist," and his works are indicative of that mentality.[98]

Vino e Pane tells the story of a socialist leader, Pietro Spina, who goes into hiding in a small Southern town and assumes the alias of a priest, don Paolo Spada. While there, don Paolo negotiates the political beliefs of the peasants within his dislike of the fascists and his disappointment in the communists. In one section, a group of *cafoni* who play a card game in which the king is trump ask don Paolo Spada to mediate a discussion.[99] The men do not have enough kings to play the game so one of the players suggests they agree unanimously to substitute the role of the king card with the three card. The other players, incredulous to this change that seems completely unnatural to them, insist that "a king is always a king."[100] Don Paolo tells the men that card games, not unlike political systems, are human constructs, and as such it takes only the will of the people to reassess the rules.

At face value, the *cafoni* assertion about the role of kings is about the immediate card game. Still, taken in the context of the rest of the novel, the underlying message is that the peasants do not understand political change. It seems to them that a king is a fixed notion on which they have little effect. Don Paolo, with his response to their question, asserts that even *cafoni* can play a role in changing the rules of who is or is not, or can or cannot, be a ruler. The peasants are figured as disengaged from modern political process in the scene.

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[98] Introduction to *Vino e Pane*, V-X.
[99] *Cafone* (singular) is a pejorative term for a peasant, *cafoni* is plural. The term here is used to follow the style of Silone with a full understanding of its implications.
[100] Silone, *Vino e Pane*, 138, my translation: "Un re è sempre un re."

Anthropologist Anthony Galt corroborates this removal from national politics, "In general politics little interested those of the countryside, who according to an account of local peasant life early in the century, declared proverbially on the subject that, *Le chiacciere non riempono la pancia*—'Chit chat (political ideas and maneuvers) doesn't fill your stomach.'"[101] Still, it would be misleading to assume that the peasant population was apolitical, or even presented as such in the literature. For example, Galt describes a 1930 incident in which 4,000 peasants from across the Puglia region "stormed offices and burned tax registers" in the town of Martina Franca "because new excise taxes threatened their incomes."[102] While Galt depicts this action as fleeting, it nevertheless indicates a political awareness on the part of the peasants, even if fueled by "desperation."[103] While his anecdote demonstrates a relatively small-scale interest in local issues, it is still important to realize this politicization.

Similar to the event Galt describes, the peasants in Silone's novels are also relatively politically active. For example, the beginning of *Fontamara*, his other novel, centers around a dispute over water rights. After the men of Fontamara (the village, literally Bitter Spring) unwittingly sign a contract limiting their water rights, a group peasant women gather and march to the seat of local government to demand "justice"—forming a mob of sorts. Don Circostanza, priest and described advocate of Fontamara, feigns support for the women's cause, saying, "These women are right…What do these women want after all? To be respected."[104] The priest goes on to say, "They know that the law is unfortunately against them, and they do not want to

[101] Anthony Galt, *Far from the Church Bells*: *Settlement and Society in an Apulian Town* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 212.
[102] Galt, *Far From the Church Bells*, 212-213.
[103] Galt, *Far From the Church Bells*, 212-213.
[104] Silone, *Fontamara*, 71, my translation: "Queste donne hanno ragione…Che cosa vogliono in fondo queste donne? Essere respettate."

go against the law. The want an amicable accord with the mayor…Is an accord possible?"[105] In this way he deflates the women's charged activism and creates a void in which to negotiate a solution.

His "true solution," however, lacks the "respect" he had just preached.[106] He argues that in order to solve the *Fontamaresi* anger at the reduction of their water supply to half of what it had been, he would offer an increase by giving three quarters of the water to the mayor and three quarters of *what was left* (of that remaining quarter) to Fontamara. This cuts their water supply from the one-half amount it had been reduced to by the contract the husbands had signed to a paltry eighteen percent of the overall quantity. The women, who cannot mathematically follow the priest's use of fractions, agree because, as don Circostanza says, "Like that one and the other have three quarters, that is, a little more than a half."[107] Thinking they have been awarded an increase, even though they understand that it is more-or-less impossible for two groups to have three-quarters of the same whole, the women leave satisfied.

This scene demonstrates two important interpretations of the relationship between peasants and townspeople. Silone's first interpretation, that peasants did engage in local acts of political dissent, reinforces that which Galt said about rural politicization. The women, like the group Galt described, express a short-lived activism that is quickly diffused. Taken altogether (Silone's narrative and Galt's oral history) it can be determined that Silone tapped-in to one aspect of peasant understanding, in this case of their place within local political structures as occasionally-outspoken advocates of their rights.

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[105] Silone, *Fontamara*, 72, my translation: "Esse sanno che la legge è purtroppo contro di loro, e non vogliono andare contro la legge. Esse vogliono un accordo amichevole col podestá…È possible un accordo?"
[106] Silone, *Fontamara*, 72.
[107] Silone, *Fontamara*, 72, my translation: "Cosí gli uni e gli altri avranno tre quarti, cioè, un po' di piú della metà."

The second is that, as Silone phrases it, peasants and townspeople did not understand one another.[108] Silone writes, "Thousands of times, in my life, I have made this observation: townspeople and *cafoni* are two different things."[109] He uses class to unite peasants across national or linguistic boundaries, saying that *cafoni* from different countries could understand each other better than a peasant and a gentleman—a type of argument that, in light of Silone's political affiliations, might be read as in accord to his socialist ideals.[110] The men did not understand what they were doing when they petitioned away their water rights, and the women did not understand don Circostanza's math in order to recognize it as a fraud. The discordant relationship between town and country as Silone expresses it, especially as it regards language, is important considering the value of rhetoric and propaganda in the fascist regime.

Silone again turned to the peasant inability to understand governmental or politicized language in *Vino e Pane*. After the incident with the card game, there is a scene in which a school teacher, and party member reads, *Le Notizie di Roma* (News from Rome) aloud to a group of adult male peasants. As it plays out, the scene demonstrates the inability of the peasant listeners to decipher meaning from rhetoric:

> "We have a leader," she read, "that all people on Earth envy and ask what they would be disposed to pay to have him in their country…"
> Magasciá interrupted. Since he did not like generic expressions, he asked exactly how much the other people would be disposed to pay to acquire our leader.
> "It's a manner of speaking," said the teacher.
> "In buying and selling there aren't manners of speaking," protested Magasciá. "And do they want to or not want to pay? If they want to pay, what did they offer?"[111]

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[108] Silone, *Fontamara*, 27.
[109] Silone, *Fontamara*, 28, my translation: "Migliaia di volte, nella mia vita, ho fatto questa osservazione: cittadini e cafoni sono due cose differenti."
[110] Silone, *Fontamara*, 28.
[111] Silone, *Vino e Pane*, 140, my translation: "'Abbiamo un capo' lesse 'che tutti i popoli della terra ci invidiano e chissá che cosa sarebbero disposti a pagare per averlo nel loro paese…' Magasciá interruppe. Siccome non gli piacevano le espressioni generiche, egli chiese quanto esattamente gli altri popoli sarebbero disposti a pagare per acquistare il nostro capo. 'É un mondo di dire,' disse la maestro. 'Nelle compravendite non vi sono modi di dire,' prostestó Magasciá. 'Vogliono o non vogliono pagare? Se vogliono pagare, cosa offrono?'"

Their conversation continues in this way for several more lines. Rhetorical tools, like the figurative device of other nations paying for Mussolini's governance, are lost on the listeners. Silone's characters do not understand figurative terms, only literal, and so he presents it as if the bombast and exaggeration of propaganda was ineffective on them.

This becomes important when the subject of the newspaper turns to ruralization. The teacher reads, "The rural revolution has reached its aims on all lines."[112] The men express confusion; they do not understand who the "*rurali*" (rural people) are, what revolution had taken place, and on what lines this had been carried out.[113] When the teacher attempts to correct their confusion, they are left even more troubled. Once realizing they are considered *rurali*, and having not witnessed a revolution, even a "spiritual" one as the teacher describes it, the message of the article is indecipherable to the men.[114] As Silone presents it, the teacher and the newspaper represent the major points of contact between the rural people and the government, while the substance, the actual revolution, has been entirely missed by them.

The *cafoni* reaction should be compared not just to the tone of the fictional article, but to the rhetorical strategies examined in the first half of this paper. The profound change the fascist government intended to invoke in the South was not accomplished according to Silone—an opinion presented by Levi as well. In *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, the peasants wonder why the government, whose pro-rural stance they hear espoused on the radio, has not sent them money to fix a broken bridge.[115] While the destitute condition of peasants in the fascist literature was resolved through government action, like the *bonifica* project, anti-fascist writers did not project such a solution. In some ways, this projection is in line with the argument of the first section of

[112] Silone, *Vino e Pane*, 140, my translation, "La rivolazione rural ha raggiunto i suoi scopi su tutta la linea."
[113] Silone, *Vino e Pane*, 140-141.
[114] Silone, *Vino e Pane*, 141.
[115] Levi, *Cristo si é fermato a Eboli*, 116.

this paper: that supposed attempts to provide aid to rural peoples were not aimed directly at rural peoples.

It should be noted that in *Fontamara*, after the initial unrest, political activity in the village does not drop off, but continues to develop until the villagers set out to print their own anti-fascist paper. The book closes with the *cafoni* gathered, discussing a title for their paper. In turn they propose different options: The Truth, Justice, The *Cafoni's* Horn. Finally, the winning suggestion is made: *What to Do?*. They decide to use this phrase not only as a title in the masthead but as a tag-line in the paper, following each article. The paper was to report news, like the death of their fellow villager Berardo at the hands of fascist police, and then follow it with the line '*Che Fare?'* (What to Do?). The selected title and tag-line is a call to action. It invokes response on the part of the paper's readers, calling them into an organized anti-fascist movement. In this way, the *cafoni* are no longer reacting to local-issues, like the claim to water, but they are engaging in national political issues—and on a level that suggests active participation and resistance.

While Silone would have his reader believe there was a strong anti-fascist underground developing in rural areas, the political identity of rural people is expressed differently in other sources. In *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, Levi writes that while the wealthier members of Gagliano were members of the fascist party as a matter of alignment with the most powerful party, the same was not true of the farmers.[116]

> None of the farmers, for the opposite reason, would have been enrolled in any other political party that could have, for adventure, existed. There were not fascists, like they would not have been liberals or socialists or that I know, because these matters did not concern them, they belonged to another world, and they did not make sense.[117]

[116] Levi, *Cristo si é fermato a Eboli*, 67.
[117] Levi, *Cristo si é fermato a Eboli*, 67, my translation: "Nussuno dei contadini, per la ragione oposta, era iscritto, come del resto non sarebbero stati iscritti a nessun altro partito politico che potesse per avventura, esistere. Non

Levi's peasants are unaffiliated with party politics. While they conceived of political issues in pre-fascist terms (*galantuomini* versus *briganti*) as has already been seen, they did not take part in the current political divisions or claim loyalty to one party or another. It is not that they are apolitical, but that they were not highly politicized. Their sense of physical separation between themselves and civilization meant that they were also separated from the factionalized party politics that was so divided during the period.

In her study of mass organization in fascist Italy, Victoria De Grazia briefly addresses Matera, a province just east of fictional Grassano and Gagliano. Although not one-and-the-same, the geographic proximity and similar lifestyles of the three locales provide valuable comparison. According to her, fascism was more-or-less nonexistent in Matera in 1934 due to a power vacuum of local leaders, transportation difficulties, and a shortage of funding for the area that left the government unable to impact it.[118] She cites living conditions as one reason for which organizations did not take hold—the nature of poverty in Matera was so overwhelming that the idea of initiating leisure activities, as the *dopolavoro* (the fascist after-work organization) had done elsewhere, was not viable.[119] According to De Grazia, none of the villages in the province of Matera had a meeting place for the fascist party, as it was typical in Italian cities and towns during the period to have. Such meeting places would have been a common point of interaction between the government and the people. De Grazia says that due to underdeveloped fascist controls in Matera, few there were enrolled in the party, backing up Levi's narrative.

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erano fascisti, come non sarebbero stati liberali o socialisti o che so io, perché queste faccende non li riguardavano, appartenevano a un altro mondo, e non avevano senso."

[118] De Grazia, *Culture of Consent* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 122-123.

[119] De Grazia, *Culture of Consent*, 123.

Voices on the Radio

While the literature emphasizes the remote world of Italian peasants, these worlds were not immune to modern forms of communication. Levi, Silone, and Sapori each include scenes in which the peasants hear political messages on the radio. The radio symbolizes the intrusion or presence of the national, fascist voice into the countryside. The appearance of radio technology in these three texts points to its importance as tool of the government to spread the party's beliefs.

Without a strong party-base in Gagliano and Grassano, Levi suggests that the radio was an important tool for the government to interact with rural peoples. Primarily, he presents it as a mode to hear about the war in Ethiopia. Levi writes, "The radio thundered, don Luigino used all school hours not spent smoking on the terrace speaking loudly (one could hear him everywhere) to the young people, and making them sing 'Little Black Face, beautiful Abyssinia'…"[120] Don Luigino, fascist teacher, who gathers his news from the "thundering" radio, tells the farmers that the war in Ethiopia was being fought for their benefit. The war, however, did not interest the farmers. Levi writes, "Land we also have here: it is the rest we are missing."[121] The skepticism displayed towards the messages disseminated by radio demonstrates the idea that even when the voice or message of the government could penetrate the isolation of a place like Grassano, the peasants were not apt to believe it—or at least this is how Levi portrays things.

The radio is also an important tool of the fascist government by which to promote the war in Ethiopia in *Vino e Pane*. In one particular scene, the radio sits adorned by a flag in the town

[120] Levi, *Cristo*, 116, my translation: " La radio tuonava, don Luigino adoperava tutte le ore di scuola che non passava a fumare sulla terrazza, concionando ad altissima voce (lo si sentiva dappertutto) ai ragazzi, e facendogli cantare 'Faccetta nera, bella abissina,'…"
[121] Levi, *Cristo*, 117, my translation: "Di terra ne abbiamo anche qui: é tutto il resto che ci manca."

square. People gather to hear the announcement of the war. As the *cafoni* talk loudly in the moments leading up to the announcement, the town notables begin a chant for Mussolini, the Duce (after the Latin Dux, meaning leader). Instead of the two syllables of the chant coming out "Du-Ce," Silone presents the sounds as if the peasants had inverted them. They yell "Ce-Du."[122] The corruption of Mussolini's name in this instance is a symbol for *cafoni* misunderstanding or ignorance of fascist rhetorical tools. By chanting his name, the fascist town leaders intend to rally excitement and support for the regime, but without understanding what they yell, the peasants achieve superficial excitement but lose the purpose behind it. It is as if, as Silone was seen to have argued earlier, they spoke a different language.

Immediately after the radio transmission, don Paolo speaks with another man, Zabaglione, about the prospect of the war. Don Paulo asks him if there are *cafoni* who oppose the war. Zabaglione says, "The *cafoni* do not have things to eat, what would they have in politics? Politics are a luxury reserved for the well fed..."[123] The conversation between the two men is in line with much of what Silone has to say about the relationship between peasants and politics. It can be read as a reinforcement of the concept that the fascist message and peasant understanding were often disjointed. It is as if to say that even though the peasants were exposed to fascist rhetoric, their enthusiasm, already seen as misguided, did not represent a true political following. Zabaglione does say that there is a contingency of perfidious young men—serving to further Silone's argument that peasant politics, if they did exist, were opposed, not just ambivalent, to fascism.

Conversely, in *Sotto il Sole*, the radio is seen as an effective tool for communicating with the rural population. Sapori writes:

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[122] Silone, *Vino e Pane*, 210.
[123] Silone, *Vino e Pane*, 212, my translation: "'I cafoni non han da mangiare, come vuole che si occupino di politica,' disse Zabagione, 'La politica é un lusso riservato alle persone ben nutrite.'"

> In the air the radio spread the war march to such rhythms that accompany the proud step of the people: an exercise dense with veterans and with daring, of those wounded in war and of young men who affirm the consciousness, the order, the will, and the joy to obey, revealing a ferment of conquest. [124]

His writing, depicting the use of the radio in a *bonifica* town, demonstrates as association with national honor and the ongoing war. Beyond this, because the war march played over the radio is portrayed with such positive imagery, the radio as an instrument of propaganda is different than what is seen in the anti-fascist literature. In this text, the radio is a apt device through which to spread nationalistic themes to rural areas.

While the radio as a propagandistic tool is present in all three novels, responses as to its efficacy are varied. It bears emphasizing the difference between the fictionalized towns of Silone and Levi and the New Towns. The first, based on real places in the Abruzzo and in Basilicata, are, what will be termed for the purposes of this paper, independent towns or villages in terms of their relationship to the national government. The New Towns can be considered dependent towns as they are constructs of fascist will. As such, the New Towns were privileged in their relationship to fascist policy in a way that the fictional towns are not portrayed to have.

The New Towns, as this paper has already argued them to be, were crafted, superficially rural entities. The majority of colonists were northerners, many without any agrarian experience. They were both inexperienced at farm-life and resistant to education about it. It seems the colonizers had heard the voice of the national government encouraging them to move to the New Towns and had responded. In this way, the national voice projected on the radio, that linked ruralization to the war in Ethiopia, was not out of place in lives of the Northern settlers. The

[124] Sapori, *Sotto il Sole*, 317, my translation: "La radio semina nell'aria le marce guerresche a tali ritmi s'accompagna il fiero passo del popolo: un esercito compatto di veterani e d'ardito, di mutitati e di ragazzi che affermano la consapevolezza, l'ordine, le volontá e la qioia d'obbedire, rivelano un fermento di conquista."

radio, then, was written about in such a way that it did not seem an unnatural intrusion, as it had in the anti-fascist works.

That same voice portrayed in the anti-fascist works came from outside the immediate realm of the kind ruralism fitting for the towns in the novels and is, as a result, disjointed from the lifestyle depicted there. The radio as a propagandistic tool was rendered as more effective in literature on the *bonifica integrale* than in the anti-fascist literature, reflecting the diffident relationships the types of town in each type of story had with the national government.

Conclusion

In 1950, the Southern condition garnered international attention as foreign scholars and photographers exposed the poverty and depravity of life in Matera. Images of the cave dwellings taken by American photographer Marjory Collins circulated, raising awareness as they spread.[125] By the mid-1950s the Italian government forcibly removed the majority of the cave-dwelling population from their historic homes. The Southern Question thus had not died out with the fascist-Southernist solution. In fact, the postwar economic development that hit the country in the 1950s and 1960s was largely a Northern phenomenon. The South certainly felt some of the benefits, such as an increased work force, but motivation for the shift lay outside the region.[126] The South was still playing catch-up.

An examination of cultural understandings of Southern peasants during the interwar years reveals the on-going bias against the South. Going back even before the liberal period there was

[125] Scrivano, "Signs of Americanization in Italian Domestic Life." 319-320.
[126] Scrivano, "Signs of Americanization in Italian Domestic Life," 320.

misunderstanding and confusion over how to relate to the population of the South and the islands. They were often depicted in unflattering, racialized, and negative terms. Interestingly enough, while the negative figuration does not cease during the fascist period, it became entangled in the pro-rural campaign. The regime had competing interests of promoting the rural lifestyle while also trying to improve it, in effect forming a rural lifestyle set on the fascists' own terms: the New Towns of the *bonifica integrale*.

Of the competing images of Southern culture, the notion of the peasants as backwards and removed was the most persisting—even across the divergent ideological boundaries of the authors. In the works of Levi, Silone, Sapori, and Rossetti there is a common image of rural life. While the authors used this image to achieve the competing aims of either endorsing or criticizing fascist rural policy, they nonetheless came back to this picture of squalor that seems to have had its roots in liberal and pre-liberal thought. Ultimately, though, it seems that while Southernist influence led the government to promote rural life, the ruralization campaigns and literature of the period relied on the pre-fascist rhetorical terms of the Southern problem. The problem, the Southern Question, and its suggested solutions and causes did not change drastically in the fascist period, perhaps showing overall the limits of the fascist totalitarian state.

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