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Study Abroad in Italy during Fascism



ABSTRACT: The study covers a marginal, but important and significant episode in the strategy implemented by the Italian regime to promote the “new” fascist Italy in the world. The article refers specifically to one of the typical public diplomacy tools used by governments and institutions to promote their country: the exchange diplomacy. The article analyzes in detail the use of exchange diplomacy in relations between Fascism and the United States and the involvement of educational institutions such as Columbia University’s Casa Italiana and the Università per Stranieri di Perugia as an example of this strategy.

KEYWORDS: Study Abroad, Promotion of Italian language, Fascism, Giuseppe Prezzolini, Università per Stranieri di Perugia, Casa Italiana.

The Status of Italian in the 1920s in the United States

Until the beginning of World War I, the teaching of Italian language and culture in the United States was confined to a very few private schools, mainly Catholic, where it was taught to immigrants and their children. The very few colleges that offered Italian courses were in areas where the Italian presence was strong (Fucilla 1967).

The situation began to change in the early 1920s thanks to several concomitant factors:

- the advancement in the social ladder of Italian immigrants who were beginning to occupy important positions at the economic, political, academic and cultural levels;”
- Italy’s increased importance on the international scene, thanks in part to the victory in World War I and the rise of

Fascism, which was viewed positively by the U.S. government as an antagonist to Communism;

- the image of Italy as the cradle of Western civilization.

Changes in the teaching of Italian language would not have been possible without the contribution of the Italian and Italian-born intellectuals who, in increasing numbers, were now starting to teach in colleges and universities, or who were undertaking prominent roles in the educational sector. Some of them had fascist sympathies or were directly linked to fascism, others emigrated from Italy because of their aversion to the regime. Representatives of Italian institutions who had been entrusted by the Italian government to carry out the fascist propaganda strategy and, finally, all Americans interested in our language and our culture, also made a fundamental contribution to the promotion of Italian language teaching in the United States.

The guidelines on which it were based were related to the meaning and value of the identity term *italianità*, or *Italianness*. *Italianità* is defined as all that set of values that are in some way traceable to Italy and its culture both in an anthropological sense and as the expression of human genius. It has a strong connection to the past but is also anchored in the present (Luconi 2000, Carnevale 2009, Cavarocchi 2010). *Italianità* thus refers to a form of ethnic-cultural nationalism (Lee 2016). It thus became the reason all immigrants could feel like a community sharing the same values that were also nurtured by the bond with the motherland. It was a relationship that was not nostalgic but contemporary and became a reason for pride in belonging to a thousand-year-old culture. These reasons were interpreted differently by the various protagonists in the USA arena: community representatives, the fascist government, and anti-fascist intellectuals.

In the 1920s, Italians were the second largest ethnic group in the U.S. but only 7 percent had become naturalized U.S. citizens. Lee (2016) calls them “unmotivated and disorganized.” Only after the enactment of the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, which would regulate emigration laws in a very restrictive sense, Italians began a process of natu-

ralization.¹ American politics and the American nativist movement were pushing for assimilation by asking all immigrants to forget their own language and culture in favour of the English language and American culture. Italian immigrants began to realize that they were a substantial number. They understood that it was through being a community that they could benefit most from the assimilation process. So they favored the process but, at the same time, they strengthened the very ties that brought them together: the Italian language and culture and the relationship with the motherland. The promoters of such a model were two educators, Leonard Covello and Angelo Patri and, for political and economic reasons, other figures of the so-called *prominenti*, *i.e.*, the most prominent economic and social public figures.²

The greatest force for Americanization was the school, where, according to the nativist vision, the American citizen should be formed. It was exactly in public schools that Angelo Patri, Leonard Covello and many other prominent figures in the community, educators, and others, fought to maintain their identity.

For them, the link to Italian language and culture served first and foremost to find common values for micro-communities that were divided by dialects, and sometimes by different cultural or religious backgrounds.³ That is why they particularly focus on school-age youth who represented the American-born generation. Their native English language and simultaneous knowledge of Italian would

¹ A process that continued very quickly and that reached its peak in the years of World War II (Carnevale 2009; Lee 2016),

² For a discussion of this point and for an in-depth analysis of the position of Angelo Patri and Leonard Covello in the context of what has been called Cultural pluralism, see Meyer (2008); Rabin (2011); Patri (2007); Wallace (2006).

³ Linguistic and cultural differences among first-generation Italian immigrants in the U.S. have been addressed and discussed in the diaspora literature. For the linguistic aspects, a key reference text is Haller (1993).

allow them to be a liaison between the U.S.A. and the older generation, which was still anchored to its language and culture of origin. Patri and Covello, both school principals, envisioned it as a meeting place for the entire community, perfectly embedded in the neighborhood in which young people, aware of the identity value of the Italian language and culture, act as a bond between the diverse generations and the American society. All this should allow, in the intentions of the two educators, a balanced growth of the youth, the absence of conflicts in the families and, above all, a harmonious and smooth assimilation.

Angelo Patri expressed his philosophy very clearly by proudly recounting an anecdote of how he helped his father study to take American citizenship. The judge was impressed with how he learned it so well and asked him who had taught him. And Patri concluded:

I have been a part of many movements to Americanize the foreigner, but I see that the child is the only one who can carry the message of democracy if the message is to be carried at all (2007: 140).

Leonard Covello expressed the same concept in an article published in 1939 in *The Modern Language Journal* and already in the title summarizes his program: "Language as a Factor in Integration and Assimilation." In the article Covello reasserted the importance of the education of young people and the school as a place of dialogue and encounter, emphasizing how the figure of the language teacher is of fundamental importance in the process of assimilation.

It is essential that the language teacher measure the need for supplying the foreign-born and their American-born children with a transitional use of a familiar language while building up a full consciousness of America and a free usage of English in the foreign-born community. Language is a stabilizing influence. The foreign heritages of these new Americans cannot be obliterated over night by wishful thinking (Covello 1939: 328).

The importance of giving a strong linguistic and cultural identity to the Italian community to facilitate the assimilation process in the United States was also recognized by those referred to as the *prominenti*. Their purpose

was also to use the numerical strength of the community to gain political advantage and to influence American politics in their favor. Among all these personalities stood out those of Generoso Pope, owner of the most widely circulated Italian-language newspaper in the U.S., *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, and Giovanni di Silvestro, president of the most important association of Americans of Italian descent, the OSIA (Order Sons of Italy), which had thousands of members. Their position, and that of the other prominent ones, can be summed up in these few lines from an editorial signed by Pope himself in 1935.⁴

[Studiare l'italiano] è la forma migliore per tenere unita la nostra grande famiglia di immigrati; è lo strumento migliore per assicurare ai nostri giovani una formidabile forza morale, politica ed economica.⁵

The Italian community's effort to unite under the identity hat of *Italianità* found a strong ally in the fascist government. For Fascism, the promotion of the Italian language should serve to strengthen the ties of the second generation of Americans of Italian descent with the motherland, and to introduce them, and through them everyone else, to the new Italy, its progress (real or presumed) in the economic, political, and social spheres, and the new international prestige it deemed to enjoy. The *Italianità* of Covello and Patri is thus hued with fascist pride.

Fascism also believed that Italians should assimilate but, at the same time, maintain a strong identity under the banner of *Italianità* built through knowledge of the Italian language and contact with the motherland. The aim is the same as that of the *prominenti* and Patri and Covello: to encourage soft assimilation without shock or social conflict and to influence American policy. This time, however, not only to benefit the community itself but also

⁴Generoso Pope, "La Lingua Italiana ci serve per meglio conoscerci, per meglio mantenerci uniti, per meglio aiutarci a vicenda", *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*, New York, 14 maggio 1935. Cited by Lee (2006: 139).

⁵To achieve this goal Pope and other prominenti would use not only newspapers, but also the radio (Lee 2016).

fascist Italy. Fascism believed that U.S. “friendship was particularly important in the international alliance game and wanted to use the community as a “fifth column” to positively condition American attitudes toward fascism and its foreign policy. The war against Ethiopia in 1935 represented the real test of this effort at conditioning (Luconi 2000). Fascism did not want the two identities, the American and the Italian, to come into conflict. On the contrary, it wanted the community and its members to be proud to be Italian and be at the same time to be exemplary American citizens. This goal, shared with community members, could be summed up in the formula “good American because good Italian.” As Foreign Minister Grandi said in 1931 before an audience of Americans of Italian descent, “Italy wants her sons to be the best American citizens,” and serving the United States loyally would have been the best way to demonstrate their natural affection for Italy.⁶ Mussolini himself strongly reiterated this concept in many speeches. For example, receiving in Rome a representation of the community he addressed them by saying: “Prove the worth of the Italian race by being loyal and true citizens of the great American Republic.”⁷

In the community of Americans of Italian descent, the relationship with fascism is uneven. Leonard Covello tried to maintain an equidistant relationship, even as he used funds sent from Italy for the activities he promoted. Many prominent people, including Generoso Pope, Alberto Bonaschi, a member of the New York City Board of Education, and Giovanni Di Silvestro, declared themselves openly fascist, wholeheartedly supporting the regime’s policies and were functional to its propaganda.⁸

Between the 1920s and the 1940s, the question of *Italianità* and the teaching of Italian was a political battle-

⁶ “Bid Italy's sons Be Loyal Citizen.” 1931.

⁷ Sammartino e Scaramelli 1933.

⁸ According to some scholars, the stance toward the regime by community members also influenced the assimilation process discussed earlier. For example, Cannistraro states: “I would argue that Italian-

ground. A third, albeit more marginal and less influential position was represented by the group of antifascist intellectuals who emigrated to the U.S. to escape persecution by the Italian regime. Many of these took up positions at some prestigious colleges and universities as well. The relationship with fascism also involved many of the Italian intellectuals who had emigrated to America, again on opposing sides: some openly supported fascism, others had a more ambivalent attitude.⁹ Yet others fought from their university position against fascism and its propaganda. These included Michele Cantarella, Giovanni Borgese, and Gaetano Salvemini. The latter harshly criticized in his writings fascism and its propaganda policy through the promotion of the Italian language.

Salvemini also denounced many times the conflict that arose within the community of Americans of Italian descent because of the attitude toward fascism. Indeed, according to him, the massive recourse to the rhetoric of *Italianità* would have prevented assimilation into American society. According to Salvemini, the emphasis of fascist propaganda on the pride of being Italian would have resulted in young people not caring about America. This assertion would in fact turn out to be exaggerated, as the second generation of Americans of Italian descent would tend to assimilate very quickly with American culture.

Salvemini was convinced, however, that:

American attitudes cannot be understood, as one scholar has recently put it, by deciding whether Italian immigrants were "Italians living in America or Americans of Italian origin" (Venturini 1984: 191). The answer is, I think, somewhat more complex – that is, ethnic attitudes toward fascism were principally the result of the fact that in the 1920s and 1930s, Italian Americans were undergoing a process of transition from Italian to American identity, and that the pro-fascist sentiments of many were the result of the stresses and difficulties of assimilation and acculturation."

⁹Such as Giuseppe Prezzolini, whom we will discuss later, and Ugucione Ranieri di Sorbello. On the role of Ugucione di Sorbello see Dolci, Ruggeri and Valoroso (2022).

non si dovrebbe nemmeno prendere in considerazione l'idea di sopprimere l'insegnamento dell'italiano nelle scuole e di far dimenticare agli americani di origine italiana la terra dei loro avi e la sua lingua. [...] Lasciate che la lingua italiana si diffonda [...] ma fate in modo che essa porti la voce dell'eterna Italia, che esisteva prima che nascesse Mussolini e continuerà ad esistere molto tempo dopo (Salvemini 1969: 34-35).

The Casa Italiana of Columbia University

One of the most striking examples of the renewed pride in belonging to a nation with a millennia-old culture, of the breaking down of prejudices about Italians, and of increasing economic and social strength is the construction of the Casa Italiana at Columbia University.¹⁰

The initiative to build an "Italian House" dates back to the early 1920s, starting with a group of Columbia students and spreads to gain the support, including financial support, of American and Italian associations and prominent figures. Word of the initiative also reached Mussolini, who gave his staunch support.

On October 12, 1927, Columbus day, the Renaissance-style building was inaugurated before the Italian ambassador, prominent members of the community and Guglielmo Marconi, who read a congratulatory telegram from Mussolini himself.¹¹

The Casa was owned and administratively dependent on Columbia University, which managed it independently through the Department of Italian. The fascist government well understood the value of such an important reference point at a prestigious university in a city like New York.

The Casa Italiana's Library and media library soon became a point of reference for researchers, students, and

¹⁰ We refer to Faedda (2017), Howson (1962) and Dolci (2018) for this small and brief history of the Casa Italiana.

¹¹ Many of those involved in the founding of the Casa Italiana will receive recognition from the Italian state in the form of various awards and honorary titles.

teachers. The Casa also hosted visiting personalities and intellectuals from Italy, organized courses, seminars, lecture series, etc. In 1930, Giuseppe Prezzolini was appointed director of the Casa Italiana.¹² In addition to his work as a university professor, Prezzolini immediately began to take charge of the Casa Italiana, sensing its great potential. Under his leadership, which lasted for a decade, from 1930 to 1940, it became the most important center for the promotion of Italian language and culture in the United States.

Prezzolini called himself, in a somewhat self-deprecating and reductive tone, an “impresario di cultura” (Prezzolini 1978: 593). But with the direction of the Casa Italiana he proved to be an effective and innovative cultural promoter. He undertook an intense publishing activity, through Vanni Publishers, by publishing magazines, books, and educational materials. He increased the endowment of the library and media library. The Casa became the gathering place for numerous other associations, providing them with a prestigious space in which to meet. These included the Dante Alighieri Society, the Italy America Society, and the Association of Teachers of Italian (ITA). He, himself, founded and directed the Association of Italian *Circoli* of Schools and Colleges, which became a coordinating hub for all the activities of the small school and college *Circoli* that were operating with few means and without any coordination. It hosted the *Educational Bureau*, headed by Leonard Covello, which oversaw the analysis of American students of Italian descent behaviour, and the *International Education Bureau*, which was in charge of the exchanges with Italy.

The funds needed to develop and support all these initiatives came in part from intensive funding activities among the Italian community, but mostly from the Ital-

¹²Giuseppe Prezzolini had been invited to Columbia University for summer courses in 1923 and 1927. In 1929 the university offered him a professorship in Italian. It therefore seemed natural to the Columbia administration to also appoint him as the director of the Casa Italiana.

ian government, which each year allocated to the Casa specific funding. Because of such visible and important work as a coordination agency, the Casa Italiana was clearly involved in the dispute between fascists and anti-fascists. It will in fact be accused on several occasions, of making propaganda for fascism.¹³ Prezzolini would fiercely defend himself against the charges, trying to prove that his intent was only to promote Italian language and culture. Columbia University would defend him, but in 1940, on the eve of the outbreak of World War II, with Italy turned enemy of the U.S., these very accusations would be the cause of Prezzolini's resignation as director of the Casa Italiana.

Giuseppe Prezzolini and Italian as a "Modern Classical Language"

The community of Americans of Italian descent and the fascist government shared the need to promote Italian language and culture and to strengthen ties with Italy in order to give a strong identity to the community, encouraging its smooth assimilation and to influence American policy. Diametrically opposed was the goal of the antifascist intellectuals who, especially in colleges, taught Italian language and culture and introduced the antifascist Italy particularly.

Between these two extreme positions there was a very large space in which other figures stood and moved: Italians, Americans of Italian descent, or simply Americans, teachers in schools, professors in colleges and universities, influential intellectuals, who, albeit with different nuances, proposed what over time would become a real "canon" of Italian language teaching and which continues to be valid in our days.¹⁴

¹³ On Prezzolini's relations with fascism, the literature is extensive. See contributions by Gentile (2002), Sangiuliano (2007), Pretelli (2012), Luconi (2000), Bacchin (2007 and 2008), among others.

¹⁴ This includes Mario Cosenza, president of ITA. The various positions described here are also expressed, more or less openly, in the

Giuseppe Prezzolini, partly because of his role as director of the Casa Italiana, was perhaps the most influential and the most lucid among them. He elaborated his position in numerous speeches as early as the late 1920s, set it out in various speeches and journals in the following years, and systematized it in 1939 by publishing in *The Modern Language Journal* an article “Italian: The Modern Classic Language” (Prezzolini 1939).

Prezzolini agreed with Angelo Patri and Leonard Covello on the identity value of knowledge of the Italian language for the community. He also supported, given his “semi-institutional” role as director of the Casa Italiana, the motivations of the fascist government.

But at the same time, he believed that the teaching of the Italian language should not only have a heritage trait and an exclusively ethnic dimension. But also, must address all those who show interest in the Italian language and culture and the universal values they represent.¹⁵

Prezzolini strongly insisted that the mere study for practical purposes of a foreign language prevented one from enjoying the values it conveyed with its culture. From this perspective, a proficiency in Italian language and culture must be the background of anyone who thought belonged to Western culture or wanted to familiarize with it. In fact, according to Prezzolini, Italian language and culture were the only ones that represented those fundamental values that derived from Greek and Latin cultures and were thus the basis of European and North American culture. According to Prezzolini:

Our world, the world we live in today, is essentially a creation of the Italian people, by which I do not mean, their thinkers, artists,

articles published at that time by the journal *Italica*, organ of the AATI, (American Association of Teachers of Italian). Prezzolini's credit was to be aware of the urgency of elaborating a “canon.”

¹⁵ Indeed, both Prezzolini and Cosenza will write that they particularly rejoice when a student who is not of Italian descent shows interest in the Italian language.

and writers alone. The Italian people began the Renaissance at the very moment they began to live an independent economic and political life. [...] the place of the Italian language is indissolubly bound up with the problem of a universal civilization. Universality is the characteristic and necessary condition of the genius of Italy; it is in its tradition and essence (Prezzolini 1939: 375).

An argument he had already elaborated several years earlier stating that:

L'italiano non va considerato "una bella lingua" perché la lingua è una lingua di cose e non di suoni soltanto; e va insegnata come una lingua di una nazione quasi millenaria la quale, dopo aver dato al mondo una civiltà universale (il Rinascimento) da cui non è ancora venuto fuori tutto quello che l'umanità può cavarne, ha continuato a creare entro la tradizione e l'iniziale spinta di quel gran momento, né ha ancora cessato (Prezzolini 1931: 2).

The definition of Italian as a modern classical language thus perfectly summed up this position: it should be studied not for instrumental reasons, and practical use, but rather for educational reasons. Present-day Western civilization could be adequately understood only by studying the Italian language and culture, in order to appreciate all it produced over the centuries in the domains of art, the humanities, music, and thought, and, Prezzolini points out, it continued to offer during those years.

Prezzolini's definition was a metaphor that was very congenial to the fascist regime and its claim to present itself as the heir to classical Romanity. Nor, however, was it at odds with Salvemini's and the anti-fascists' claim that Italy and its culture were certainly not those represented by fascism. On the contrary, the teaching of Italian language and culture and its classical roots was to prove this assumption.

1930-1940: A Decade of Hectic Activity

Over the next ten years, the link with the motherland and the contribution to world culture would be the basic arguments for the promotion of Italian in the United States.

Driven by the efforts of the Italian/American community and the interests of the Italian government, the teach-

ing of Italian would grow steadily until the eve of World War II, albeit largely concentrated in states where the community of Americans of Italian descent was strongest and numerous.

The starting situation made it clear what effort was made by all the people involved. If in 1923 there were 2,252 students in 23 high schools in six states, in the last report of 1939 there were 257 Italian schools located in 16 states with 38,430 students (Cordasco 1975).

The community, however, would not react en masse and in unity to these calls. The numbers showed that despite undeniable success, the percentage of students of Italian descent who study Italian was very small compared to the potential number, and Italian lagged far behind other languages. The protagonists of the campaign, from Prezzolini to Pope to Covello, the institutional representatives of the fascist government, would complain repeatedly noting that Italian families themselves were reluctant to have their children study Italian. The reasons were several. If before 1935 one reason could be found in the overvaluation of the Italian language as a tool of identity, after the conquest of Ethiopia the negative change in American opinion of fascism drove students away from the study of Italian (Carnevale 2009). World War II will strike a severe blow to the teaching of Italian. In fact, the same number of students as in 1939 would not be reached until the mid-1970s (Dolci 2018).

Public Diplomacy and Scholarship

A state that grants scholarships to foreign students so that they can spend time at its schools or universities is doing an act of *exchange diplomacy*, which is, in turn, a component of *public diplomacy* (Cull 2008).¹⁶ Similarly, Joseph Nye (1991) defines the ability of a nation to get

¹⁶ Cull (2008: 31) defines public diplomacy as “the process by which international actors seek to accomplish the goals of their foreign policy by engaging with foreign publics.”

what it wants through attractiveness and persuasion as soft power and the internationalization of educational systems as one of the most effective tools of this strategy. Therefore, the students who benefitted from it become cultural ambassadors between the two countries. Moreover, he stated that because it is usually an opportunity reserved for a country's elites, the impact on one person could have a cascading and very long-lasting effect on economic and political levels. A very effective example of this practice are the Fulbright scholarships, which came into being after World War II to accomplish the purposes we have listed above by fostering mutual understanding. Another example, in more recent times, is the European Union's Erasmus project, which was established precisely for the purpose of training the multilingual and pluricultural European citizen.¹⁷

However, the process of building intercultural competence is not an easy one. Students must be guided and supported, otherwise the goal of mutual understanding may twist into its opposite and they may come to "wrong conclusions" by feeding or reinforcing prejudices and stereotypes, in effect destroying any form of dialogue and radicalizing their initial negative positions, if any.¹⁸

¹⁷ Currently, the whole process of internationalization of universities can be considered an example of exchange diplomacy. In the field of promoting Italian language and culture, scholarships in Italy are an important tool of MAECI's public diplomacy, in cooperation with Associations, Enti Gestori, Universities for Foreigners, etc." of¹ Currently, the whole process of internationalization of universities can be considered an example of exchange diplomacy. In the field of promoting Italian language and culture, scholarships in Italy are an important tool of MAECI's public diplomacy, in cooperation with Associations, Enti Gestori, Universities for Foreigners, etc. promoting Italian language and culture, scholarships in Italy are an important tool of MAECI's public diplomacy, in cooperation with Associations, Enti Gestori, Universities for Foreigners, etc.

¹⁸ Cull (2008) brings as an example the case of an Egyptian writer, Sayed Qtub, who in 1948 obtained a scholarship to the United States. He was appalled by what he saw: consumerism, lasciviousness, and

Exchange diplomacy can be interpreted by governments also as a one-way process: my students go to the host country and communicate how beautiful their country is; the host country's students come to me and learn how beautiful my country is (Cull 2008: 33). In this perspective, and under certain conditions, exchange diplomacy could turn into a propaganda tool, aimed at providing a preconstructed picture, sometimes not corresponding to the truth. This impression could then be conveyed by the students upon their return to their home country and could thus influence its political and economic choices towards the host nation.

The Casa Italiana and Scholarships for Italy

As Mariuzzo (2011: 1) points out, *peregrinatio academica* has been a typical feature of university education since the Middle Ages. From the nineteenth century, this feature, previously freely managed by individual universities, was increasingly brought under control by governments and became part of a precise Nation Building strategy.

Post-Unitarian Italy also follows this approach. The process becomes more evident with the fascist government, which in 1927 founded the *Istituto Interuniversitario Italiano* headed by Giovanni Gentile. The purpose of the Institute was to revitalize and coordinate university exchanges with foreign countries and to encourage relations between Italy and other countries by promoting our culture abroad, to offer courses in Italian culture for foreign students, and to manage the mobility of students, also on a reciprocal basis (Mariuzzo 2011, Santoro 2010).

The body soon became part of a precise propaganda strategy by the regime. In 1928 Mussolini addressed consular representations directly, stating that the cultural and patriotic goals of the Institute were an integral part of the

moral decadence. As a result, when he returned to Egypt he was among the founders of the Muslim Brotherhood and a leading voice against the "corruption" brought by the West.

regime's propaganda strategy, and for this reason he asked them to appoint a representative of the Institute to be chosen from among the most qualified figures in both cultural and patriotic terms (Santoro 2010: 47).

Historians have given ample evidence that fascism used Italian education and schools abroad to make propaganda. The United States became one of the most important scenarios where this strategy was carried out (Cavarocchi 2010). In the period from the late 1920s to the beginning of World War II, the school reform made by Fascism and the Italian university system are often the subject of laudatory articles throughout the U.S. press targeting the community of Italian origin and beyond. In 1927 an article appeared in *Italica*, reporting that "in these last most fervent years of national rebirth, Courses of Culture for Foreigners have been established at almost all the most important Italian universities," coordinated by the *Italian Inter-University Institute* (Celenza 1927: 36). The author points out that the courses were taught by prominent statesmen, including Mussolini himself, and that all those who enrolled would be granted travel reductions, free visas on passports, and free access to museums and sports facilities.

Giuseppe Prezzolini firmly believed in the value of cultural exchange and devoted quite a bit of energy to it. Perhaps also inspired by his previous appointment at the Society of Nations in Paris in the second half of the 1920s, where he was Italy's representative at the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation (Sangiuliano 2008). As director of the Casa Italiana, he immediately took action to promote courses for foreign students offered by Italian universities. He worked hard to find funding for scholarships, both from the Italian community in the U.S., from individual Italian universities and from the government, which willingly funded his initiatives.¹⁹ He devised

¹⁹ Prezzolini would establish only in 1937 at the Casa Italiana the Italian interuniversity bureau, explicitly defined as "the American office of the Italian interuniversity institute" (Casa italiana Bulletin VI, 1,

a very clear strategy by offering the grants primarily to teachers or those who might become teachers, because

Un buon insegnante, che fosse stato in Italia per qualche mese, avrebbe nel futuro preparato meglio centinaia di allievi (Prezzolini 1963: 234).

The Italian government's commitment to mutual Italian-US understanding was remarkable. In 1934 it organized a visit to various university cities by 350 students representing 26 Italian universities. The visit culminated with a parade and sports challenge in New York's Yankee Stadium on October 12, 1934, Columbus Day. Commenting on the event, Prezzolini, who through the Casa Italiana had actively participated in organizing the event, wrote that the Italian university students were the representatives of the Italy of the past, of those students who in the *Risorgimento* fought for Italy's freedom and independence. But they were also, above all, the representatives of the Italy of the present,

which is fashioning itself after the iron will and the realistic genius of Benito Mussolini. They are, in fine, the representatives of the Italy of tomorrow, whose destiny, as the old ruling classes relinquish their places, they will be called upon to guide (Prezzolini 1934: 1).

The many undeniable successes were also accompanied by several disappointments, once again related to his conflicting relations with the community of Italian origin. On several occasions and through various means, he tried to make the community and prominent people aware of the value of scholarships by encouraging them to fund these grants. There are many references in his diary to his fundraising activities: gala dinners, Association involvement, dances aboard steamships, etc. In 1932 he managed to convince the Italian government to grant two scholarships a year and ironically added: "Uno dei primi risultati

1938). The purpose of the bureau was to publicize courses offered by Italian universities and to evaluate the equivalencies of academic degrees.

pratici del mio lavoro e dei miei “contatti” con il fascismo” (*Diario* 30 giugno 1932: 495). In 1934 he petitioned Mussolini for a letter which, he hoped, “[...] faccia aprire i cordoni della borsa ai cafoni di qui [...]” (Prezzolini 1978: 506). He often complained that the community was not sensitive to this issue and did not support him enough in this initiative.²⁰

It is not possible to estimate the number of scholarships that the Casa Italiana granted during Prezzolini’s directorship. But there were at least twelve different lines of scholarships at the institute granted by private companies, the chamber of commerce, individual citizens and Italian universities, each for one or more students, named after famous people, such as Eleonora Duse or Giuseppe Garibaldi.

In addition to the Casa Italiana, the most important institutional channel, other institutions provided scholarships or organized trips to Italy. Associations such as Order Sons of Italy and some Catholic Associations, were very active in this regard. Scholarship winners were regularly mentioned in newspapers and magazines that targeted the community of Americans of Italian descent, such as the *Progresso Italiano* and *Atlantica*, as well as in major newspapers such as the *New York Times*, which published between 1930 and 1940 several news items about scholarships, organized trips, offers of courses in Italian universities, etc.

It is clear from the analysis of the reports that they pursue those propaganda purposes that were the goal of the fascist regime. It should first be noted, as Prezzolini had already pointed out, that the vast majority of those who benefitted from the scholarships were Americans of Ital-

²⁰ Many scholars have analyzed the strained relations between the Italian community and Prezzolini, whom he sometimes apostrophizes with contemptuous judgments. See for example Luconi (2000), Pretelli (2012), Frezza Biccocchi (1970).

ian origin. Only in a few cases, and often thanks to scholarships managed by himself, were scholarships given to students of different origins. The fascist government closely monitored all the arrangements for study trips. Once in Italy the students entered a well-designed system that decided the places to visit, the people to meet, the courses to take and their contents. For larger groups, meetings with local authorities were always scheduled and sometimes even with Mussolini himself. An event that was particularly publicized and emphasized. The visits focused on the places that best illustrated the new course of Italy and Fascism's effort to modernize it, such as land reclamation, sports facilities, new housing districts, schools, kindergartens, hospitals, etc.²¹

On several occasions, as in 1929 and 1935, OSIA President Giovanni di Silvestro led up to 800 members on a trip to Italy. They visited various locations and were received in a private audience by Mussolini who, as usual, urged them to be good American citizens and, at the same time, not to forget their homeland (Lee 2016).

Trips to Italy were also organized by Catholic schools. In 1935, 250 students from all over the United States, children of parents of Italian descent, spent a four-week period in Italy, accompanied by Fr. Joseph Congedo, pastor of Sacred Heart Church in New York. The 250 youths belonged to the Italian Honor Student movement, created

²¹ In journals for the community, but not limited to it, Italian school reform is often highlighted and touted as a feather in the cap of fascism. For example, Rina Ciancaglini, an Italian teacher and trainer who was very active in those years in New York, received a scholarship from the Casa Italiana in 1934 to further her education in Italy. Upon her return, she wrote an article in the *Bulletin of the Italy-America Society*, which was based at the Casa Italiana. In the article she reports on her participation in an international conference for teachers and extols the fascist educational model. The conference was clearly aimed at propagating the goodness of the fascist educational model to teachers abroad and demonstrating how it could train young people who would become an example for the whole world (Ciancaglini (1934).

by the priest to promote better relations between Italy and the US. The trip was paid for by the schools with parental contributions. During their time in Italy, the students were guests of the Italian government in various Italian cities and were received in private audience by the Pope Pius XI, Mussolini, and Prince Umberto of Savoia ("250 Students Back from Italian Tour", 1935).

Often, the cultural lectures attended by the students addressed issues that highlighted the progress made by Italy and the successes of the fascist government in the social, economic, and educational domains. Thus, in 1938, a group of students from Columbia University, spent a six-week period between Perugia and Rome where they attended ten lectures on the social and educational activities promoted by the fascist government with a comparative study with the methods used in the US ("Columbia Group to Live in Italy for Courses", 1938).

Comparison between Italy and the U.S., as well as emphasis on good relations between the two countries is a constant in the courses offered. In 1932, Italy celebrated the bicentennial of George Washington's birth with various events. At the Università per Stranieri di Perugia, Foreign Minister Grandi himself inaugurated a course on American institutions, which was later taught by such personalities as Count Volpi and Senator Schanzer, a former minister for Foreign Affairs (Cortesi 1932).

Fascism's use of scholarships and travel to Italy clearly elicited much criticism from anti-fascist figures living in the U.S., such as Gaetano Salvemini. He repeatedly denounced the propagandistic purpose of such activities where, according to him, students and teachers were kept Salvemini (1969: 27). He referred to Giovanni di Silvestro as a committed fascist who ran the OSIA for the specific purpose of representing fascist interests in the US. He defined Father Congedo, who organized trips for Catholic schoolchildren, as a firm fascist, a promoter of various activities in the educational area where propaganda for fascism was carried out (Salvemini 1977: 152-153). He ironically emphasized this aspect by commenting on the trip of Columbia University students in 1938, accompanied

by Howard Marraro:²²

One can be sure that the American students who go to Italy under the wing of such a guardian angel run no risk whatever at learning anything in their lectures at Rome which might lead them to the conclusion that educational and social activities of democratic America might have some superior points when compared with those of fascist Italy. Nor has there ever been any danger that the Italian Interuniversity Bureau could become a channel for information or activities which might displease the cultural agents of the Italian embassy at Washington (Salvemini 1977: 170).

An article reported in the *New York Times* stated that fascism closely monitored courses and the people who attended them. The article related that an American student, Gertrude Pulscher, had complained that she was followed throughout her stay in Italy by fascist police and then detained for 20 hours at the French border because she was accused of subversive activities against the Italian government (“Detained in Italy”, 1935).

The Promotion of the Università per Stranieri di Perugia in the United States: A Case Study

Restricted by space, this brief essay will not be able to analyze the promotional strategy of Italian universities and educational institutions in granting scholarships to students in the world. The study will choose the Università per Stranieri di Perugia to illustrate the purpose of promoting Italian language and culture in the world²³

The Università per Stranieri di Perugia was first established in 1921, when a group of Perugians, led by Astorre Lupattelli conceived the first “high culture” courses for foreign students, aimed at spreading Italian culture abroad.

Mussolini’s seizure of power would be a decisive turning point in the growth of the courses, as Mussolini im-

²² Professor at Columbia University and director of the International University Bureau of the Casa Italiana, known for his fascist sympathies.

²³ For the history of the Università per Stranieri di Perugia, see Gheda (2004).

mediately sensed the importance of institutions whose task was to spread knowledge of Italian language and culture abroad and to use them for propaganda purposes. In 1925, Royal Decree No. 1965 of October 29 officially sanctioned the founding of the “Regia Università per Stranieri.” In the fascist regime’s intentions, the Università per Stranieri di Perugia should become one of the main tools for “affirming the superiority of Italian culture in the world.”²⁶

The courses offered covered all aspects related to Italian language and culture: literature, history, music, art, etc. To promote the university and attract students to enroll in the courses, an intensive scholarship offering activity was immediately launched. These also formed part of the fascist regime’s cultural diplomacy strategy. One example is a letter sent by Piero Parini to Astorre Lupattelli in 1929. In the letter, Parini, the powerful director of the General Directorate of Italian Schools Abroad, reminded Lupattelli that scholarships to foreign students financed by the Ministry “tendono, come è noto alla S.V., a dar sempre maggiore impulso alla propaganda culturale italiana all’estero” (AUS US, Serie Borse di Studio, b. 1, 1925-1940).

From the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, the Università per Stranieri di Perugia had a strong presence in newspapers and magazines publicizing relations at the educational level between Italy and the United States. This confirms the role assigned to it by the fascist government in promoting Italian language and culture abroad.

As early as 1928 the Casa Italiana, not yet under Prezzolini’s editorship, publishes a blurb- advertisement in the New York Times. It reported that more than thirty Italian universities had sent a letter inviting American students to go and study in Italy. The initiative was directly sponsored by the Italian government and offered discounts and special economic conditions. The letter, “From the new University for Foreigners established by Mussolini at Perugia,” signed by Astorre Lupattelli, is the only one quoted in the article:

To Italians living in the United States: in the name of the great Italian navigator, who gave the world a new continent, this Royal University sends warmest greetings in the hope that they, in their hos-

pitabile and noble country, will maintain the traditions of the fatherland by promoting better understanding and amity between the two young and vigorous nations. ("Invite students to Italy" 1928).

The University was introduced as directly founded by Mussolini, a source of both pride and guarantee. Moreover, it was addressed only to the Italians of America, to whom it proudly evoked the figure of Christopher Columbus, as their predecessor. It also indirectly reminded them of the "fifth column" role they must exercise, in "their" noble and hospitable country while representing their "motherland" and ensuring friendship between the two "young and vigorous" nations. Significantly, the letter echoed some of the fascist propaganda themes used in the relationship between the two countries. All the publicity for courses for foreigners offered by the Università per Stranieri di Perugia, which appeared in articles in magazines and newspapers aimed at the community of Americans of Italian descent. These announcements were always based on common stereotypes concerning Italy, and on the typical themes of fascist propaganda.

The articles always stressed that the "Royal Italian University for Foreigners" was expressly founded by the Italian government, "in order to spread a better and greater knowledge of Italy in all its past and present manifestations" (Royal Italian University for Foreigners 1934). That its courses were taught by Italy's highest academic and political authorities.

A 1926 article reported in detail on the *lectio magistralis* devoted to ancient Rome and its dominance in the Mediterranean given by Mussolini at the opening of the academic year in front of more than five hundred foreign language students who came to study at the Università per Stranieri ("Mussolini sees Future on the Sea" 1926). The article then emphasized that the educational offerings were very broad. In addition to language courses, language certifications and diplomas for teaching Italian to foreigners, the University offered cultural courses in literature, art history, Etruscology (a special feature of the University). Moreover, it proposed courses explaining the

new Italy and boasting of its successes. A 1930 blurb highlighted how courses offered at the university would focus on the creation of modern Italy (“Summer School Opens in Ancient Perugia” 1930).

The beauty of the Umbrian city and landscape, the mixture of ancient and modern that characterizes it, the majesty of the Etruscan arch and Gallenga Palace were always cited (“Perugia” 1934). The affordability of rents and the low cost of living were highlighted, along with the many recreational activities offered: trips, visits to museums, sports activities, theater, etc.

Strong interest was aroused in the U.S. by Guido Visconti di Modrone’s music courses and the concerts of the associated *Sagra Musicale Umbra*. *The New York Times* devoted several articles to the “eminent musicologist and champion of Italy’s musical glories” on several occasions between 1935 and 1937. (“Old Works at Perugia” 1935, “Sagra Musicale Umbra” 1937). It is also emphasized that all this educational activity took place in a strongly intercultural environment with the presence of students of 30-40 different nationalities (Lupattelli 1931: 267).

The advertising campaign and the agreements with American universities, especially the Casa Italiana, were successful. In 1939, the *Bollettino dell’Università per Stranieri*, reported that the United States occupied fourth place for the number of students who had attended courses since the founding of the university with 752 students, after Germany (1013), Switzerland (889) and Hungary (875). The average, then, was about 50 students per year.²⁴

The Università per Stranieri di Perugia and the Casa Italiana of Columbia University

In the Casa Italiana’s minutes, the Perugia Summer Fellowship is mentioned as active from 1931 until 1937, but

²⁴ Data from the Bulletin are cited in the editorial of issue 16.3 of 1939 of *Italica*. This represents evidence of the dissemination of the University for Foreigners’ Bulletin to foreign institutions.

in the archives of the University for Foreigners the earliest document showing contacts between Giuseppe Prezzolini and Astorre Lupattelli is a telegram dated May 1933.²⁵ In it the director of the Casa Italiana thanked the President of the Università per Stranieri for the grant of a scholarship and informed him of the name of the winner. The archive also has the draft of Lupattelli's reply, which addressed Prezzolini formally and using "lei" as a courtesy pronoun.²⁶ An exchange of correspondence between March and May 1934, in which the two switch to a much more informal tone, calling each other "tu," again concerned the communication of the name of the winner of the grant awarded by the Università per Stranieri for that year along with Prezzolini's request to Lupattelli to grant a scholarship to the *Institute for International Education* hosted at the Casa Italiana. The president replied that it was not possible for that year, but we know from the documents of the Casa Italiana and the Università per Stranieri that in the following years the Casa Italiana and the *International Education Bureau* would receive two scholarships per year from Perugia.²⁷ But the relationship between the *Stranieri* and the Casa Italiana did not stop at two annual scholarships granted by the University for Foreigners. The scholarship funds that Prezzolini could accede to, come from a variety of sources: directly from the government, from funding activities at the community, and from funds from private individuals, such as scholarships funded by the newspaper *Il Progresso Italo-Americano*. In many of these cases, the recipients of the grants would spend their study period at the *Stranieri*. The University's archives contain the files of some of these recipients, university students or

²⁵ AUS, US, serie borse di studio Busta n.1 1925-1940 abroad and demonstrating how it could train young people who would become an example for the whole world (Ciancaglini (1934).

²⁶ Recall that the use of "voi" instead of "lei" has been imposed, albeit with little success, only since 1938. See G. Klein (1986).

²⁷ (AUS, US, serie Borse di studio Busta n.1 1925-1940).

teachers. Interestingly, Prezzolini consciously applied the principle of the cascading effect described sixty years later by Nye to which we alluded above. In fact, some of the recipients of the grants would assume important roles in the educational and cultural system of the US. Some would become university professors and deans, other entrepreneurs and diplomats, translators. The vast majority were or would become teachers of Italian.

Following the same principle of the multiplier effect, Prezzolini asked those who had won scholarships at the Università per Stranieri to chronicle their experiences once they return to the US. He then published these little travel stories in the periodicals he edited through the Casa Italiana. In the articles, students promoted the Università per Stranieri, the beauty of the Italian landscape and the benefits of such a linguistic and cultural experience. They also echoed, more or less convinced, all the arguments used by propaganda to extol the new course of fascist Italy. In reading some of these reports, the regime's aim of introducing the new Italy to the children of those who had left it because of the backwardness and poverty of the previous years was evident. A student, Elena Ruperto, upon returning from her study trip to Perugia in the summer of 1935 wrote in her brief account published in the *Giornalino*: "Compenetrata della nobiltà della mia Patria, io son ritornata qui fiera e superba di essere italiana" (Ruperto 1935: 7).

Students' accounts make it clear that the process of learning about the new Italy and the achievements of fascism was not spontaneous but was carefully guided. A student of non-Italian origin, Frances Keene, in Perugia in the summer of 1936, reported that the proposed tours were not only to the artistic beauty of Umbria, but also interested students had the opportunity "to visit the local hospitals, health clinics and child-welfare movements." That is, some of the areas where the regime believed it had achieved significant successes compared to the past. The purpose, as the student comments, was accomplished:

By this contrast of old and new the individual arrives at a better understanding of the scope and accomplishment of present-day Italy . Keene (1936: 4).

The awareness, sometimes discomfort, of feeling part of two different cultures, which Patri and Covello speak of, is well expressed in the words of Matilde Mascioli who was in Perugia in the summer of 1938. The student offers this perspective:

Most of us have heard of Italy, of Italians, from the time we were [very young], and it may have even seemed unfair to you at times, that a people – your parents among them - should talk so longingly of a land they left because, seemingly, it could not afford them the best opportunities. And if we are at all curious, if we take any pride whatsoever in our particular heritage, we are anxious to see for ourselves what sort of stuff our parents are made of, what sort of place they come from (Mascioli (1938: 3).

Mascioli then goes on to describe her Perugian experience at the university. She praises the courses and the multicultural environment, but above all she is interested by her contact with the city and its inhabitants. She draws a sharp portrait of them and their behavior, dwelling ironically on some typical stereotypes. She tells of the “crawling” on Corso Vannucci in the evening and of the young locals, the “local talent” as she calls them, who believe that any foreign girl, especially an American, “is ready to throw discretion to the winds.”

The result of the Perugia sojourn is reported by the student in her final remarks:

It is only after just such a stay in Italy that a real appreciation of the country begins. The new regime has brought with it a new spirit, a new hope; there is something doing, the country is alive. [...] the Italian of today is an earnest, realistic, determined, farsighted individual. Regrettably, the Italo-American generation has not always done its utmost to preserve the best traits of the true Italian. [...] It is lamentable that there still exists a fragment of Italo-American society which reneges the Italianity in its origin, which tries to hide what it should be proud to offer as its contribution to American society.

In the student’s Perugian experience, one finds an effective synthesis of how the different purposes regarding the learning of the Italian language and culture by second-generation Italians/Americans that Patri and Covello, the fascist regime, and Prezzolini pursued were intertwined and related. Awareness of one’s origins and thus a strong

sense of identity to overcome generational conflicts, as desired by Patri and Covello; but also, a strengthened connection to Italy, to be used to influence American policy, as desired by the regime; a sense of belonging to a millenary culture, Prezzolini's educational goal.

These events show, at the same time, how a study period abroad can be a valuable tool for promotion in cultural diplomacy, and for the development of intercultural competence in education. But at the same time, it can also be exploited as an effective propaganda tool.

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