

## **Citizens and Subjects of the Italian Colonies: Legal Constructions and Social Practices, 1882–1943**

**edited by Simona Berhe and Olindo De Napoli, London, Routledge, 2021, xi + 280 pp., £120.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-367-62164-3**

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This tightly focused collection of essays offers a multifaceted and penetrating examination of what ‘citizenship’ meant within the Italian colonial empire. The volume is divided into two parts. The first deals with how legal citizenship was constructed ‘between theoretical elaborations and politics’, while the second explores ‘citizenship practices’, describing how regimes of membership and belonging were implemented in the Italian colonies. In the introduction, co-editor Olindo De Napoli notes that in the nineteenth century, ‘citizenship’ in Italy was not clearly defined, and the Italian state used ‘citizen’ and ‘subject’ interchangeably. When Italy became a colonial power in the 1880s, the civil and political status of local inhabitants had hardly been contemplated. As Italy accumulated colonies, De Napoli argues, the Italians never had a ‘well-laid plan’ and ‘distinct colonial subjecthood was not the fruit of a coherent application of legal theories conceived in the metropole’ (p. 5). Instead, early colonial authorities pursued a ‘politics of indeterminacy’ which ‘represented a wilful resistance to normative crystallization in order to leave discretionary power to the administrative and judicial bodies’ (p. 14).

The four chapters by Federico Cresti, Roberta Pergher, Alessia Maria Di Stefano, and Simona Berhe deal with the legal and political formulations of citizenship and subjecthood in Libya. Pergher notes that most inhabitants of the Fascist empire enjoyed the title ‘citizen’, whether they were ethnic Italians on the peninsula or Arabs in Libya. Only in Eritrea and Somalia, and in Ethiopia after 1935, were the native inhabitants explicitly called ‘subjects’ (p. 47). Libya and its inhabitants occupied a place of primacy within Italy’s growing colonial holdings. After Italy’s invasion in 1911, Tripolitania’s first governor Admiral Raffaele Borea Ricci informed the local inhabitants that they had ‘the same rights as all Italians from whom it is not permissible to distinguish you’ (p. 49). All four chapters show how Italian policy ultimately belied Ricci’s proclamation. While initially flirting with an assimilationist approach to colonial subjecthood, Italian policies moved progressively toward a politics of difference. The Italian state used the terms ‘citizenship’ and ‘citizen’ as, in Pergher’s words, ‘verbal fig leaves’ that concealed ‘the reality of subjecthood’ (p. 49).

The First World War forced Italy to negotiate with local elites and limit occupation to a few coastal cities. Preoccupied by war, Italy granted Tripolitania and Cyrenaica the short-lived ‘Statutes’, constitutions that granted rights to Libyans that were unprecedented in the history of European colonialism. However, anticolonial forces wanted independence, and Italian colonialists were not entirely committed to delivering the rights enshrined in the *Statuti*. Fascism came to power, and as Italians on the peninsula lost political and individual rights, the subjecthood of the native populations in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica became increasingly pronounced. During the mid-1930s, Libya’s governor Italo Balbo pushed for nationalisation of the coastal areas of Libya. However, incorporating a colony

into the metropole implied that the population would be citizens rather than subjects. The regime's solution was the creation of 'Libyan Italian citizenship', which largely maintained Libyans as colonial subjects. However, this new category of citizenship unintentionally alienated Italian colonial settlers who felt that making Libyans 'citizens' rendered them equal.

Di Stefano examines how the colonisers reconciled Italian and traditional (Jewish or Muslim) law as it applied to individuals. Islamic and rabbinical courts had jurisdiction over religious and customary matters such as personal status and succession or family law and real estate, so long as these matters did not conflict with the interests of the state, morality, or public order. For matters outside religious jurisdictions, an Italian tribunal presided 'by applying Italian and local law' (p. 74). Here, Di Stefano argues, judges 'acted somewhat like lawmakers' by 'reinventing' and 'crystalizing' traditional laws, thereby creating a legal structure that enforced Italian dominance (p. 84). Berhe's chapter examines the implications of these formulations of citizenship in practice. Peering through the lenses of political rights and space, Berhe shows how the rise of new colonial regimes – specifically with the transition from Ottoman imperial rule to Italian colonialism – narrowed the rights and also impacted the mobility of Libyans within the larger North African context (p. 158).

One of three chapters on the eastern Mediterranean, Filippo Espinoza's discussion of the Aegean, particularly the Dodecanese islands, examines the creation of a 'minor non-colonial citizenship' in 1922. For the Fascists, Levantine origin seemed compatible with *italianità*. However, as Fascism embraced 'territorial expansion rather than peaceful cooperation', identities that bridged metropole and colony began to be viewed as dangerous, and state policies shifted toward strengthening and homogenising Italian metropolitan citizenship while segregating colonial populations. Luca Castiglioni's contribution shows what these policies looked like for ordinary people, arguing that 'practices of isolation, re-denomination and cultural shaping' profoundly affected the Greek population, leaving a 'deep mark' (p. 215). Under Fascism, Italy subjected the population to Italianisation, particularly the Greeks, whose identities most strongly challenged the legitimacy of Italian claims to the islands. Meanwhile, the group most open to Italian rule, the Jewish community, had any path to citizenship and assimilation cut off in 1938 by the Mussolini regime's anti-Semitic Racial Laws. Like the Dodecanese, Albania under Italy's short-lived occupation was not considered a colony. Giovanni Villari shows how Albanians, in theory, shared many equal rights with Italians, though in practice they occupied an inferior position. For a 'combination of racial, cultural, and political reasons', Fascists viewed Albanians as European and as potential candidates for assimilation. After all, southern Italy was home to thousands of Italians (the Arbëreschë) descended from Albanians (p. 149).

Carlo Bersani's chapter, one of three on East Africa, reviews the legal culture and theoretical frameworks related to the statuses of colonial people in Eritrea, Somalia, and Italian East Africa, focusing in particular on the work of the Consiglio Superiore Coloniale (High Colonial Council, CSC) and the writings of Santi Romano, a prominent jurist whose career spanned Liberalism and Fascism. Bersani finds that the CSC 'did not feel the need to elaborate a general category of subjecthood' and deliberations about citizenship were not 'oriented toward the search for conceptual precision' (p. 102). Moreover, the acquisition of citizenship by colonial subjects 'had to be hindered and made absolutely exceptional' (p. 103). Valentina Fusari looks at Italo-Eritrean orphans – typically children of Italian fathers and Eritrean mothers abandoned in public or private institutions – and their pathways to accessing Italian citizenship. Fusari offers a nuanced discussion of 'the interplay between genetic, legal, and social identity' and the tensions between self-identification and ascribed or externally assigned identity (p. 187). As 'mixed' orphans,

Fusari's subjects carried a double stigma of marginalisation. Interestingly, however, Fusari demonstrates how some Italo-Eritreans could mobilise aspects of their experiences to attain citizenship, since subsequent Italian legislation opened citizenship to Italo-Eritreans who had an Italian socialisation and education. Boris Adjemian's chapter examines the treatment of stateless Armenians in Ethiopia between 1936 and 1941, asking questions about subjecthood and citizenship both before and after the Italian occupation. Armenians were well-integrated into Ethiopian society, with some supporting the Italians and others going over to the anticolonial resistance. Their ambiguous status, Adjemian makes clear, revealed the 'indecisive and permeable' boundaries between categories of citizen and subject (p. 239).

In the Afterword, Frederick Cooper provides a concise and illuminating overview of the volume. His presentation groups together the essays geographically, thematically, and temporally, narrating the history of Italian colonialism and the contribution of each scholar to it. The patterns through which people were incorporated into the Italian Empire, Cooper concludes, were 'more complex and less stable than a simple dichotomy of citizen and subjected, colonizer and colonized' (p. 247).

doi:10.1017/mit.2022.34

## ***Italy in the Modern World: Society, Culture and Identity***

**by Linda Reeder, London and New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, ix + 334 pp., \$32.95 (paperback), ISBN 9781350005174**

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Up in the hills of inland Sicily, there is the town of Sutera: once a dislocated village that suffered, like many other parts of Italy, from the 'brain drain' of young people, but which, in recent years, has become an outstanding example of a cosmopolitan integration of welcome immigrants and long-standing local cultural traditions. The final image of Linda Reeder's *Italy in the Modern World*, Sutera represents one of the main themes of her historical, political and cultural analysis of the last two centuries of the boot-shaped country, from Unification to recent times.

Despite its chronological structure, the book's narrative is centred around the fundamental question of how Italy progressed from a collection of divided states to a unified nation-state, reflecting on the challenges of a still-present cultural and political regionalism. Thanks to the judicious inclusion of statistical and economic data, the book breaks down the evolution of Italy as a nation-state by focusing on five recurrent forces: the relationship between northern and southern Italy; the struggle between the centralisation and regionalisation of power; the political and cultural influence of the Catholic Church; the role of gender; and that of migration.

The building blocks of these arguments can be discovered by the reader through the author's chronological examination of historical events. This is divided into four main sections, each starting with a valuable overview on how historians developed their critical