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'A beautiful moment of bravery and hard work': Italian colonialism in post-1945 history high school textbooks

Grazia De Michele*

Department of Italian Studies, University of Reading, UK

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Italian colonialism in Africa has for some time been a largely neglected subject of study. The signing of the Paris Treaty of 1947, which deprived the country of its colonies, did not lead to critical debates, in Italy, around the issue. On the contrary, the post-war political elites continued to demand the restitution of those colonies, in continuity with previous regimes. The hagiographic and mythic image of colonialism that had been created by liberal and Fascist propaganda remained alive in Italian culture and society. This article analyses the continuities and ruptures in the treatment of colonial history offered by post-war high school history textbooks. Traditional discourses and imagery marked the way in which textbooks examined the nation's colonial past, distorting the reality of the past and contributing to the creation of a sense of innocence with regard to the Italian presence in Africa.

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For many years after it officially came to an end, the question of Italian colonialism in Africa did not undergo any serious critical reappraisal.[1] Unlike other colonial powers, whose dismantling of colonial empires in some cases resulted in bitter debates and profound rifts within their society and culture, political decolonisation in Italy did not undermine a largely positive and benevolent assessment of Italian conduct in Africa.[2] Instead, after the signing of the Paris Treaty in 1947 – which deprived the country of its overseas colonies – deliberate attempts were made to block any serious evaluation of the phenomenon. Access to the archives was denied to those historians who did not belong to the still-operating colonialist lobby, right up to the beginning of the 1970s, and 'even after that there were vetoes and restrictions' (Del Boca 2003, 33). The publication, between the 1950s and the 1980s, of a monumental work, some 50 volumes, on *L'Italia in Africa*, promoted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was a 'colossal, costly and almost incredible effort of mystification' (Del Boca 2003, 18). The vast majority of the volumes in this series, edited by a committee composed of former colonial governors or officials and of 'scholars of sound colonialist faith', lacked 'any requisites of seriousness and scientific nature' (Del Boca 2003, 18).

The explanations for this delay in coming to terms with the colonial past are complex and multi-faceted. Italy's decolonisation was 'anomalous' with respect to other European countries: it did not come as a result of the rise of independence movements and it was not

*Email: g.demichele@reading.ac.uk

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decided by the Italian government itself. On the contrary, de-colonisation had its origins in the military defeat 'suffered by whites at the hands of other whites' (Labanca 2002, 434). The loss of the African colonies was perceived as a punishment inflicted by the great powers on a country already shattered by the war and by 20 years of dictatorship. The protracted struggle of post-war governments to retain the colonies exacerbated these feelings.[3] The anti-Fascist political forces who had fought in the name of freedom did not hesitate, indeed, to reclaim Italy's supposed right to retain sovereignty or at least some form of control over the territories conquered before the rise of Fascism. This attitude, as Enzo Collotti has pointed out, reveals the presence of persistent nationalist tendencies even in the ranks of the anti-Fascists (1977). According to Claudio Pavone (1991), however, the lack of a clear anti-colonialist stance by the main political parties was an indication of the huge gap between the concerns of post-war governments and the moral commitment of the partisans, who did not cite the colonies among the reasons for choosing to fight against Nazi-Fascism.

Firm opposition to any restoration of Italian control in Africa came first of all from the British, who regarded the possibility of returning the colonies to Italy as a threat to their strategic interests in both the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. In addition, and especially in Libya, such a step would have constituted a dangerous element of instability on account of the deep hostility of the colonised people towards their former rulers (Rossi 1980; Del Boca 1984). More generally, the Allies believed that the loss of the colonies would not damage Italy's economy, since, in their opinion, those possessions had always been more of a burden than an asset. Almost all of Italy's leading political figures, however, argued that 'pre-Fascist' colonies – Eritrea, Somalia and Libya – should, if possible, be retained (Del Boca 1984; Pastorelli 2000). There were some dissenting voices, but they were 'fragmentary' and never led to 'complete and coherent political proposals which broke with the colonial past' (Pastorelli 2000, 67). In the immediate aftermath of war, the left did express disapproval of the nationalist claims of the government with regard to the colonies. This critique was not inspired, however, by a clear anti-colonialist position but simply by the consideration that the colonies would prove to be excessively onerous for Italy. Nonetheless, the 1947 crisis, the 1948 elections and the developing international context led both the Socialist Party (PSI) and the Communist Party (PCI) to accuse the Christian Democrats (DC) of having acted contrary to the interests of the country in order not to compromise relations with the Anglo-Americans. The Communists, in particular, attacked the government for its failure to support Italian requests as well as for its decision to reach a diplomatic agreement (Pastorelli 2000).

In general, the question of the colonies led to a degree of consent – something rarely achieved in the history of the Republic – between competing and often conflicting forces who, in this case, were united in defence of what they saw as Italy's national interest. The justification for this stance can be summarised as follows. First, it was argued that the alliance with Germany had been sought by Fascism and not by the Italian people. On the contrary, it was said, Italians had contributed to the fall of the dictatorship and Allied victory.[4] Second, through their energy and endeavour, Italians had created development and progress in the colonies, which were also still seen as indispensable in order to satisfy the migratory needs of a poor but 'densely populated' country, with scarce resources. Italy, it was felt, would be ruined by the loss of its colonies. On the domestic front, a propaganda campaign was launched by the Ministry of Italian Africa in order to raise public awareness of the issue. According to a Doxa survey of October 1946, the

colonial question was not as deeply felt as that regarding Trieste and Venezia-Giulia. Nevertheless, 18.1% of Italians considered the loss of the colonies as 'a painful mutilation' (Del Boca 1984, 32). The neo-colonialist position taken up by Italy's new political class is extremely significant and should perhaps be included among the elements that show a continuity of the state, a position underlined by Claudio Pavone (1995) and whose importance is also stressed in Michela Ponzani's contribution to this special issue of *Modern Italy*. After intensive diplomatic negotiations, Italy managed to obtain a 10-year Trusteeship mandate over Somalia, but missed a great opportunity to reconsider her relationship with her colonial past. For many years the idea of an exceptional and more humane form of colonialism, with its roots in the scarcity of resources in the motherland, rather than imperialist impulses, remained almost unchanged. As a result, the brutal massacres which Italians had perpetrated before and during Fascism, causing the death of hundreds of thousands of people, were deliberately concealed.[5] Moreover, a sense of frustration and revenge in the face of the Allied *diktat* was added to this idyllic assessment of Italy's African experience. The question of the colonies disappeared from political debate, but their troubled memory continued to survive in forms which are worth investigating further.

Continuities and change in the reading of post-war high school textbooks

Post-war history school textbooks played an important role in the spread of colonialist narratives. In general, these texts gave successive generations of students 'an officially sanctioned, authorized version of human knowledge and culture' (De Castell, Luke and Luke 1989, vii). History texts, in particular, are an extremely powerful vehicle for the dissemination of national narratives and are often the only form of contact with history (Procacci 2003). The discussion of Italian colonialism offered by textbooks published in post-war Italy is particularly revealing in terms of the persistence of many of the stereotypes and the deliberate false histories which had already marked both liberal and Fascist colonial propaganda. About 70 textbooks have been analysed for this study, and most were published between 1947 and 2002. The vast majority of these books, until the 1970s, were not particularly different from their predecessors. Traditional racist representations were adopted – of the African continent and its inhabitants (referred to as savages waiting to be civilized) – as well as those relating to the virtues of Italian colonisers, whose hard work had guided the colonies on the path to development.

The absence of any substantial change in this area in school textbooks published in the post-war period was not limited, however, to colonial history. After the armistice of 1943, the purge of school textbooks – and more generally of educational institutions – was contradictory and problematic. The establishment of both national and regional commissions for their revision was a source of confusion and conflict. Furthermore, the publishers exerted their influence in order to safeguard their business (Galfré 2005). Of 147 history textbooks examined by the commission created by the Ministry of Public Instruction, only 18 were banned: 54 were authorised for sale on the condition that some sections were eliminated, while 75 were allowed be sold unchanged. As a result, the majority of the most successful textbooks published under Fascism – such as those by Pietro Silva, Niccoló Rodolico, Alfonso Manaresi and Francesco Landogna – continued to circulate in the post-war period (Ascenzi 2004).

It is not perhaps surprising, then, that in the years that followed many teachers, students and scholars criticised this continuity with the past, which seemed in conflict with the founding values of the Republic. In 1952, during a conference on history teaching organised by the Association for the Defence of National Schools (*Associazione per la Difesa della Scuola Nazionale*), the Communist historian Ernesto Ragionieri condemned the lack of renewal in both history high school textbooks and in the curriculum.[6] The decision taken by the Badoglio government – which was meant to be provisional – to exclude the events following the Versailles Peace from the list of topics to be taught had been upheld by successive democratic governments (Di Pietro 1991). This decision was seen by Ragionieri (1952, 334) as a 'benevolent approval' towards the falsifications propagated by the regime. Fascism had stressed the relevance of contemporary history as a powerful propaganda tool: textbooks published in 1942 – Ragionieri reported – had been quickly updated and contained detailed and near-fanatical accounts of the early phases of the Second World War.[7] The governments of the Republic, through their decision not to allow any discussion of more recent national and international events, had abandoned their duty to transmit new democratic values to younger generations. Furthermore, if some textbooks – in line with the curriculum – did not even mention Fascism, others praised the dictatorship and other controversial episodes of Italian history, such as D'Annunzio's seizure of Fiume (Ragionieri 1952, 335). The textbooks by Alfonso Manaresi and Pietro Silva were placed by Ragionieri in this second group. They also represent some of the clearest examples of continuity in the treatment of colonial history.

Manaresi's volume was among the most enduring and widely used textbooks both during Fascism and in the post-war period. Although purged of its more obvious Fascist material, his post-war volumes continued to reproduce certain myths linked to Italian colonialism and did not offer any form of reassessment of this issue. This was the case with the battle of Dogali, which was still described as a barbaric massacre,[8] or with the Fascist war of aggression against Ethiopia, which – according to Manaresi – was nothing more than a 'modest colonial war' (1948, 293; 1951, 282). This judgement was not only simplistic but was also offensive to the Ethiopians, who, in addition to the invasion of their own country, had suffered atrocities such as the use of poison gas by the Italians – an event that was denied for decades (Del Boca 1996) – and the terrible three-day reprisal which followed the attempt on the life of Marshal Graziani on 19 February 1937. Such an analysis, however, was not isolated, and reflected the general outlook of post-war Italian historiography concerning the Ethiopian war. The relevance of colonialism with regard to the history of the Fascist regime and its racism was downplayed for many years. Moreover, the majority of post-war textbooks did not consider colonised peoples to have the same rights as Europeans. Being backward and savage, the former 'did not have the right to prevent their resources being enhanced by superior western civilization' (Landogna 1950, 352).

Only in the 1970s did a new approach start to make its way into textbooks, in the wake of the first wave of new work on Italian colonialism and as a result of the growing attention devoted internationally to the history of imperialism. As a result, the structure and contents of these volumes were renewed. The criticism of their overall approach increased during the 1960s and the impact of the 1960 curriculum reform on history teaching was widely seen as unsatisfactory (Di Pietro 1991). The inclusion of more recent events among the subjects to be taught did not form part of a broader plan of reorganisation of secondary education. Moreover, the list of topics to be studied, without

any further indication of the way they had to be related to one another, reproduced the myth of history merely 'as . . . a cleaned up reconstruction of facts' (1991, 109). Textbooks simply added extra chapters to inform readers of the scholarly debates on certain issues, but they did not undertake a thorough revision of their contents. According to a survey conducted by a group of scholars and published in 'Il Movimento di Liberazione in Italia',[9] several textbooks tended to 'muddle and silence problems' and, by using a 'generic moralism' as a form of analysis, they aimed to 'reconcile the opposites' (Ganapini et al. 1964, 69). By using an idea of 'scientific neutrality', both Fascism and the Resistance were treated with the same benevolence and history was turned into a sort of 'Last Judgement', with a few key characters determining the course of events and absolved, regardless of their conduct, for the greater good of the nation (Ganapini et al. 1964, 70).

When, in 1970, the textbook survey was resumed in order to ascertain whether any change had occurred, Giorgio Rochat pointed out that textbooks were undergoing a deep crisis (Rochat 1970). The protest movements against the education system had also targeted textbooks. A wide debate, involving historians, educational experts, teachers and students, singled these texts out as a symbol of the authoritarian approach to teaching, and many even called for their abolition.[10] Both students and teachers agreed on the need to develop critical analytical tools in order to develop research skills. This critique led to an improvement in many textbooks, at the beginning of the 1970s, as they were opened up to a more interdisciplinary approach. A new generation of history texts was introduced, enriched with more detailed maps, glossaries and suggestions for links with other disciplines. The 'romantic-nationalist' paradigm was replaced by a Marxist viewpoint and, as a result, conflict among nations was no longer seen as the driving force behind history, which was instead interpreted in terms of class struggle (Baldocchi 2002, 46). This renewal was, however, limited by the introduction of a Marxist perspective while all the issues related to the process of nation building – which are so crucial to the understanding of both Italian and European history – were neglected.

As far as colonialism was concerned, with some exceptions racist stereotypes slowly faded away. Nevertheless, the treatment of colonial history became more and more limited in terms of space, and was often relegated to just a few lines. Moreover, Italy's conduct in the colonies was still depicted as different from that of other countries. Marxist authors fell back on Lenin's famous definition of Italy's overseas expansionism as an 'imperialism of beggars'. This interpretation was absolutely valid with respect to the European context, Italy's expansionism having been late and far less profitable than that of other countries. However, it does not give due weight to the violence and exploitation which are common in Italian and indeed any form of colonial domination, the consequences of which were extremely important in the post-colonial era. In an attempt to criticise Italian colonialism, these textbooks continued to rely on a Eurocentric image of colonial issues, which did not consider the point of view of the colonised. A general misunderstanding of African history also marked 1980s and 1990s textbooks; they did, however, start to condemn the crimes committed by Italians and thus helped to spread a more objective account of Italy's colonial past.

The marginalisation of colonialism in Libya

The renewed approach to Italian colonialism characterising textbooks published since the 1970s was almost exclusively concerned with the treatment of events in the Horn of Africa;

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the occupation of Libya, in contrast, was rarely discussed. Even in the most recent volumes, for example, there is little mention of the brutal repression of the Libyan resistance between the 1911–1912 war and the 1930s. In most cases, there is a simple summary of the military operations that officially came to a close in 1912. The invasion of Libya itself was erroneously represented in 1950s and 1960s textbooks as a success. Military preparation was defined as 'meticulous', and diplomatic preparation as 'perfect' (Picotti and Rossi-Sabatini 1959, 277) and in contrast 'with the improvisation which marked the previous African campaign, that in Eritrea of 1885, which was lacking in clear and specific aims or an adequate knowledge of the facts and difficulties' (Silva 1952, 301). Giorgio Spini affirmed in his *Corso di storia*, published in 1951, that the 'Libyan enterprise had been conducted quickly and successfully' (Spini 1951, 214).

Another difference between the two campaigns was seen in the 'sound and resounding' enthusiasm of the 'great majority of the Nation' for the war (Silva 1952, 302). The emotion for 'this *gesta d'Oltremare*, as sung by the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio' was considered even more important than the 'success, the heroism in fighting against the local guerrillas and the audacity of Italian action', since it revealed the country's 'maturity as a nation' (Barbadoro 1967, 221). By conquering Libya, 'Italy offered a strong demonstration of her power' (Filippone 1961, 168) and 'affirmed in the Mediterranean her right to exist and make progress' (Rodolico 1952, 319). The decision to invade Libya was explained by textbooks as a result of Italy's aspiration to be acknowledged as a great power and to avoid 'the risk of remaining suffocated in that Mediterranean Sea which had such great importance in our ancient and medieval history' (Barbadoro 1967, 220). However, as in the case of the Red Sea, foreign policy was not the only explanation used. Italy had supposedly been pushed to colonial conquests by a 'very strong impulse, lacking in other more ancient coloniser nations: the extraordinary growth of the population, which required new lands and new commercial and industrial fields of activity' (Landogna 1950, 365).

Even those textbooks that cast doubt on the possibility of Libya as a destination for Italian emigrants and which pointed out the high costs of the conquest and control of those territories ended up reasserting that 'so many sacrifices' had guaranteed Italy a place in Mediterranean Africa and land for her emigrants: 'Europe was called upon to civilise Africa. And Italy made her contribution' (Rodolico 1967, 338). The establishment of a colony of settlers in Libya was also justified by the presumed acceptance of Italian occupation by local populations. It is well known that the Italians had become firmly convinced that they would be welcomed as 'liberators', owing to the hostility of the natives towards the Ottoman government. Libyan resistance, instead, turned out to be a source of great difficulties for the Italian army, whose control, at the signature of the Ouchy Treaty in 1912, never really extended beyond the coastal areas of the country. One of the episodes that revealed how the Arabs were not willing to accept the occupation was the attack launched on 23 October 1912 in the oasis of Sciara Sciat, during which about 600 Italian soldiers were killed. Convinced that they had been betrayed, the Italians reacted with ferocious repression: mass executions lasted for several days and thousands of people were deported to penal colonies in Italy.[11] Although the textbooks do not mention these unexpected complications, they reproduced one of the most enduring refrains of Italian colonial propaganda: the image of the Arab 'traitor'. According to Alfonso Manaresi's 1948 textbook, for example, the responsibility for the 'killing of some of our brave missionaries', which had taken place just before the war, was to be imputed to 'the blind

fanaticism of the Arabs' (Manaresi 1948, 140). Concerning the Arab guerrillas it stated that 'the enemy had been used to them for ages' and viewed the reprisals following the battle of Sciara Sciat – which was not explicitly mentioned – as a legitimate reaction to the slaughter of a number of Italian units. The latter, 'encouraged by apparent Arab kindness, [had] entered into the oasis of Tripoli'. Thanks to the 'execution of the leaders' and the arrest of those 'guilty of betrayal', however, everybody was forced to 'respect our flag' (Manaresi 1948, 140). Sciara Sciat was also mentioned – again with no reference to the fierce Italian reaction – by other textbooks: that by Rinaldi, published in 1951, held only the 'local Arab population made fanatical by Muslim propaganda' responsible for those events (Rinaldi 1951, 268); others even listed Sciara Sciat as one of the 'many Italian victories' (Belvederi 1960, 284). Although the 'betrayal' had been caused by 'religious hatred' (Simeoni 1947, 146), the resistance was reported as being organised by the Turks while the Senussi were ignored altogether. Enver Bey, praised as an 'audacious Turkish warrior and politician' (Filippone 1961, 168), was pictured as the only organiser of Arab resistance, both before and after the Peace Treaty of 1912, when 'Turkish troops under [his] command continued a guerrilla war against the Italians' (Soranzo and Tarantiello 1960, 396). Yet, this Turkish officer had actually 'left Cyrenaica in the first days of December 1912' (Del Boca 1986, 202).

Textbooks published between the 1950s and the 1960s seemed to suggest that the history of relations between Italy and Libya ended with the Ouchy Treaty: the majority of the sections dedicated to this issue ended with reassuring analysis of new lands ready to welcome a throng of Italian emigrants. With the peaceful image of 'two vast colonies which formed an outlet for emigration and provided imported products for the motherland' (Landogna 1947, 106), both Tripolitania and Cyrenaica disappeared from school textbooks. Not a single word about the genocide of Cyrenaica's inhabitants (about a quarter of the population) by the Fascists appeared in the textbooks that have been analysed for this article.[12] This was a conscious omission, since textbooks published during the Regime, in an indirect way, had underlined the effectiveness of the 'methods of energy and resolution [that] in a few years, had [crushed] the turbulent and threatening Senussi sect' (Silva 1938, 410). It is certainly true that the studies on the 're-conquest' of Libya and on the means used to 'pacify' the region are relatively recent. It would, nonetheless, have been possible to touch on the main events regarding Fascist rule of the country, relying on the limited amount of available sources. Only one volume, published in 1951, gave an impartial account of those events. This textbook argued that in order to 'isolate the rebels wire netting was stretched along 250 kilometres on the border between Libya and Egypt, [and that] the leader of the revolt Omar El Mukhtar was arrested while his followers surrendered or ran away' (Rinaldi 1951, 377). The silence of those textbooks that appeared after the 1970s is far less justifiable. In 1972, the publication of Giorgio Rochat's book, *Il colonialismo italiano*, breached the wall of fictions and omissions regarding Italian colonialism and brought to the attention of scholars the absence of studies on the 're-conquest' of Libya. Moreover, it criticised the rhetorical approach of school textbooks, which were not able to 'go beyond a generic criticism of colonial wars', and offset this by praising the peculiar Italian ability to create human relationships with African subjects (Rochat 1972, 9). Some years later, Rochat himself, along with Enzo Santarelli, Roman Rainero and Luigi Goglia, edited a volume on Omar al Mukthar and the repression of Cyrenaican resistance, which shed light on Fascist policy for the first time (1981).

In the mid-1980s, Angelo Del Boca's study, *Gli Italiani in Libia* (1986), was published. Textbooks, however, seemed to ignore this rediscovery of collective memory: in addition to the silence on important aspects of that period, there was a significant decline in the space dedicated to the 1911–1912 war. Moreover, some textbooks continued to focus almost exclusively on the diplomatic and military features of colonialism, and seemed unwilling to take up the opportunities offered by new trends in social, economic and cultural history. Salvadori's 1987 work, for example, while mentioning 'thousands of executions' of Libyans by the Italians, dealt with the Libyan war in a chapter that was generically entitled 'Le relazioni internazionali dalla fine del secolo XIX al 1914' and predominantly focused on international relations (Salvadori 1987, 166). Others turned their attention to Italy's internal situation and emphasised the success of the nationalist movement which had supported the campaign. The invasion of Libya was used as evidence of the crisis faced by the liberal state. It had also proved, however, that 'something had changed in State organisation': the war had been won and Adowa had been vindicated, despite 'the resistance of Berber tribes'. The caption for a picture from *L'Illustrazione Italiana* provided space for a typical comment: 'The reality [of war] was the same as in every colonial campaign: a huge waste of means, losses, guerrilla assaults, repression and the execution of rebels' (Traniello et al. 1980, 314). This was a rather bland analysis, considering the ruthlessness that characterised the occupation of Libya. Even the more innovative texts, which offered new methodological approaches and contents, were superficial with regard to Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. Rosario Villari's 1970 textbook looked at the issue from a purely Italian perspective, looking above all at nationalism, the mistakes of the left, the pressures of economic interests, the high costs of the campaign and low profits. Even Libyan reaction was defined merely as a cause of 'great difficulties' for the Italian troops (Villari 1970, 493). In spite of his anti-Fascist position, Villari limited Fascist colonial policy to the Ethiopian war. In the following editions his approach did not change and the 2002 edition does not even mention the use of poison gas against the Ethiopians, although it does include Del Boca's *Le guerre coloniali del fascismo* (1991) and *I gas di Mussolini. Il fascismo e la guerra d'Etiopia* (1996) in its bibliography (Villari 2002). The 1972 volume of the textbook by Augusto Camera and Renato Fabietti followed the same path, though the 1911–1912 war was analysed in a more comprehensive way. With regard to subsequent periods, however, the volume mentioned only 'some minor changes to the borders in Somalia and Libya obtained by Mussolini' (Camera and Fabietti 1972, 277). In 1980, Giorgio Spini's book provided a summary of the account from its 1951 edition and eliminated its previous analysis of a 'quick and successful war'. It did not mention anything, however, regarding the new historical work on Italy's colonial past.

Textbooks for *istituti professionali*

In this article, textbooks intended for institutes for vocational training (*istituti professionali*) form a special case. These institutes are different from those other designated types of high schools – such as *licei*, *istituti magistrali* and *istituti tecnici*. Scholars argue that the Italian education system was, since unification in 1861, based around principles of class selection and that this was a long-term trend (Bertoni 1972; Barbagli 1974; Fadiga Zanatta 1976; Dei and Rossi 1978). The Gentile reform of 1923 in particular is considered as crucial to efforts by the ruling class to protect existing social

hierarchies and exclude forms of social mobility. Mussolini described this law as 'the most Fascist of the reforms', but this does not imply that Gentile's reform was inspired by Fascist ideology alone. The liberal elites were also interested in creating a more closed and selective educational system, and the 1923 reform was also a reactionary response to this kind of demand.[13] After the Second World War, the Gentile reform remained the law that regulated the education system in the Republic. Only partial modifications were introduced, such as the middle school reform of 1962, which guaranteed access to high schools for all students, the extension from a three- to a five-year curriculum for the institutes for vocational training and the liberalisation of access to university in 1969.[14] The fact that between 1923 and 1962 the Italian education system remained unaltered – apart from the short period marked by Giuseppe Bottai's School Charter in 1939 – indicates the continuity of purpose from previous regimes. The intellectual aristocracy continued to view vocational training students as 'less gifted' and, for this reason, considered them as unable to formulate independent judgements about events in the past and compare them with the current socio-political situation. The authors of history textbooks for vocational schools consciously suppressed any form of critical reflection. From 1945 to the end of the 1960s, two small volumes of no more than 200 pages usually contained the whole history curriculum, which, together with Italian (language and literature) and civic education, constituted a single subject called 'general culture'; a third volume, meanwhile, focused on economic history. For instance, Bernardino Barbadoro's textbook, published in 1961, managed to summarise the whole of modern and contemporary history in just 208 pages (Barbadoro and Montanari 1961). A further edition of the 1961 textbook by the same author but intended for the final class of the *istituto tecnico*, dedicated to contemporary history, ran to 402 pages (Barbadoro and Ferrara 1961). The graphic design of these volumes was very similar to that of books for children: the characters were large, the maps lacked detail, and photographs were replaced with illustrations that harked back to those used in primary schools.

The treatment of Italian colonialism was oversimplified and any serious discussion of causation was neglected. For example:

> After [the creation of the colony of Italian Eritrea] the Minister Francesco Crispi decided to extend the protectorate to all of *Ethiopia (or Abyssinia)*, after reaching an agreement with the emperor (negus) Menelik (1889). But the latter did not keep his word and the Italian army started to advance again.

In a similar way it was claimed Barbadoro's book claimed, without much explanation, that the 'African enterprise was very unpopular in Italy and Crispi did not obtain the resources to pursue it' (Barbadoro and Montanari 1961, 177). The section entitled 'civic education' attributed to colonialism the merit of having educated 'savage peoples to more elevated forms of life' (Barbadoro and Montanari 1961, 187) and so urged students 'not to berate [their] Italian hearts' for the loss of the colonies, but rather to be proud of the ability of Italian governments to 'transform our colonies into advanced countries that are able to rule themselves' (Barbadoro and Montanari 1961, 220). The third volume offered a distorted evaluation of Italy's presence in the colonies, describing it as 'a beautiful moment marked by Italian bravery and hard work'. After claiming that the colonies were 'poor in raw materials' and that the economic balance of the whole enterprise was unfavourable, the author felt obliged to remark that 'human actions are not be judged in a selfish way in terms of the immediate profit that can be derived from them, but for the future benefits

that humanity can gain': a clear example – according to this rhetoric– was represented by the way in which Italian work was 'able to transform deserted areas into fertile and pleasant regions; in this way our administration civilised savage peoples'. It was possible to conclude then that 'the balance of our administration could not be more active and comforting' (Barbadoro and Montanari 1961, 114).

Luigi Ambrosoli and Cesare Spellanzon's 1964 textbook has the merit of bringing together in one chapter all the issues relating to European colonialism in Africa and Asia from the nineteenth century up to decolonization after the Second World War. Despite this positive element, however, it adopted the ambiguous and racist approach common to most of the texts published in this period. After citing the negative aspects of European expansionism, which had been responsible 'for economic exploitation of the colonies' resources [and for] the repression, which was sometimes truly bloody, of colonised peoples whenever they showed a desire for independence', the text added that colonialism had been positive in those cases 'where colonisers truly and in a concrete way allowed the native population to elevate themselves culturally and morally, and acquire qualities indispensable to the achievement of self-government' (Ambrosoli and Spellanzon 1964, 121). The history of Italian colonialism formed part of this section, along with that of Germany, France and Britain; but, despite the innovative approach of treating all the colonial experiences as one, the analysis was informed by prejudice: Abyssinian troops, for instance, were described as 'bellicose', something which Italians were not prepared for and which led to the defeat at Adowa (Ambrosoli and Spellanzon 1964, 128).

From the 1970s on, textbooks for vocational students benefited from the introduction of a five-year curriculum and from the aforementioned improvements in the education system resulting from the demands of the student protest movement. Antonio Saitta's 1970 textbook, for example, was particularly representative of this new trend; it offered an updated view of historical events, which were examined from social, economic and cultural viewpoints. At the end of each chapter there is a glossary and a biographical appendix of the principal historical protagonists. The glossary for chapter II, entitled 'La politica europea al tempo di Bismarck e la spartizione dell'Africa', explained that the Dervishes were not an 'ethnic but a religious group [whose] name, deriving from the Persian for poor or indigent, indicates the members of a Muslim religious brotherhood' (Saitta 1970, 23). Yet even this text was not free of stereotypes. In the fifth section of the same chapter, however, the Dervishes were defined as 'a fanatical sect' (Saitta 1970, 37) and the Mahdi as 'a man with an extraordinary personality who seemed to have come out of the Middle Ages' (Saitta 1970, 44). Moreover, the author's attempt to analyse the main features of the scramble for Africa was marked by certain inaccuracies. For example, 'geographical expansion, subordinated to scientific and religious interests' was distinguished from the 'seizure of vast territories by the European states' (Saitta 1970, 36): it is very well known, on the contrary, that explorers and anthropologists set the pace for the European penetration into the African continent and provided important information on places and populations which were to be subjugated (Surdich 1982). Italian colonialism was carefully analysed throughout the book; even the battle of Adowa was described as a 'slaughter of Italian troops' by their enemies (Saitta 1970, 78). Innovative, given the textbook's year of publication, was the criticism of 'the widespread use of poison gas' during the Fascist attack on Ethiopia, which was described as an anachronistic colonial war (Saitta 1970, 235–36). The verdict on the invasion of Libya was, however, quite benevolent, with Giolitti described as having been motivated not by considerations of

prestige but by a belief that the conquest of new lands would have solved the emigration problem (Saitta 1970, 160). The reaction of the local population to the invasion was neglected while the unforeseen prolongation of the war was explained through reference to 'some international complications' (Saitta 1970, 161). Italy's post-war claim on the colonies seemed also to be supported by the author, who blamed the Allies for 'not having distinguished between the Fascist government's and the Italian people's responsibilities', thereby assuming a position which was in contrast with the democratic and progressive attitude of the textbook (Saitta 1970, 268).

In 1992, the autonomy of the teaching of history – which until then had been combined with Italian language and literature into a single subject – was finally recognised even in institutions for vocational training.[15] In 1997 a new history curriculum was approved and publishers produced a new set of textbooks.[16] However, history classes continued to consist of only two hours per week, forcing teachers to make major cuts in what they covered and publishers to summarise, often very superficially, important topics. As had been the case 40 years before, any sort of logical connection between events seemed to be lacking when it came to Italian colonialism, allowing scope for distortions. This was the case with Crispi's colonial policy, which, according to one of the new textbooks, 'was not discussed by Parliament', with the result that Crispi 'made a very bad choice' in supporting Menelik as successor to Negus Yohannes IV (Gentile, Ronga and Salassa 1997, 233). Irrespective of the truth or otherwise of this statement, it is striking that no further explanation was given as to why Crispi's decision to favour Menelik as Emperor of Ethiopia should have been considered a mistake. Furthermore, the sections on the lack of clarity of the Uccialli Treaty and on the criticism of the latter by the Ethiopian Emperor made the understanding of the issue even more difficult (Gentile, Ronga and Salassa 1997, 235–37). Similar distortions occurred with the Libyan war, where the complex political and economic origins were dismissed in no more than a couple of sentences while the local resistance was presented as a 'holy war against Italians' (Gentile, Ronga and Salassa 1997, 245). Equally ambiguous and inadequate is the account of the war against Ethiopia, whose sole negative aspect, it seems, was the 'denationalisation of Ethiopian people, [which was] short-sighted inasmuch as it excluded collaboration by the natives in the State administration' (Gentile et al. 1997, 342).

Conclusions

This analysis of post-war high school textbooks has shown the extent to which stereotypes, distortions and omissions, which were part of liberal and Fascist colonial propaganda, carried on into the post-war era. It is also worth underlining that these texts – apart from those used for vocational training schools – were intended for use in high schools and so were aimed at those students who in the future, would, in theory, form the country's ruling elites. The failure to purge textbooks and, broadly speaking, Italian mental attitudes and the culture of colonialist views should be contextualised and seen as consistent with the continuity that can be seen in the country's institutions and in its socio-economic structures from the liberal and the Fascist period right up to the Republican era. The anti-Fascist ideals of freedom and social justice that had marked the resistance movement in the final years of the war did not lead to a radical renewal of Italian society and culture. In fact, the existence of anti-colonialist and anti-racist stances in Italian anti-Fascism needs

to be studied further and, at the very least, should not to be taken for granted. Leo Goretti's article in this issue of *Modern Italy*, for example, highlights the role of the Communist youth press in reproducing a number of typical anti-Semitic tropes.

It was only in the 1970s that certain textbooks finally began to lay out a more accurate account of the history of Italian colonialism, yet such new approaches were far from homogenous. For example, if some changes occurred with regard to the treatment of the liberal phase of colonialism in the Horn of Africa or of the war of aggression against Ethiopia, this did not imply that the sections on Libya had been updated. More generally, the topic was discussed briefly as something of little importance – a tactic which strengthened the traditional view that Italians had not committed atrocities and that the colonial campaigns were a brief parenthesis in Italian history. The marginalisation of the issue of colonialism in Libya in many textbooks underlines the fact that a real attempt to achieve a full understanding of the roots of Italian colonialism and of its impact on the Italian politics and culture, as well as on the populations directly affected, has not yet been made in terms of school education. By continuing to offer a stereotyped and distorted view of colonial history and of African peoples, these textbooks have certainly contributed to the dissemination in post-war Italy of a racist system of perception, whose principal target is represented today by so-called 'extracomunitari' (Tabet 1997). The racist attitude towards foreign migrants that has developed over the past years can also be seen through the legacy of the country's unwillingness to come to terms with its colonial past.

Notes

1. Angelo Del Boca has extensively investigated the causes of the lack of critical debate on Italian colonialism. Del Boca (1992, 2003).
2. The Algerian war and its impact on French politics, society and culture are important reference points and the literature on this topic is extensive. On the opposition of French intellectuals to the war and on its limits, Vidal-Nacquet (1986); Roux and Sirenelli (1991). According to Stephen Howe (2005), nothing of that sort happened in post-war Britain where a key role in the organisation of an anti-colonial culture was played by migrants from the former colonies. See also Schwarz (2003).
3. Among the few studies dealing with this issue are Rossi (1980), who concentrates on the diplomatic aspects, and Pastorelli (2000), who focuses on the internal debate. See also Kelly (2000).
4. This justification was adduced by Alcide De Gasperi in his speech delivered during the Paris Peace Conference. See *Per una pace nella fraterna collaborazione dei popoli liberi. Discorso pronunciato al Palazzo del Lussemburgo a Parigi, all'Assemblea Generale della Conferenza della pace il 10 agosto 1946*, in Allara and Gatti (1990, 357–64).
5. According to Del Boca no less than a hundred thousand people perished in Libya between 1911 and 1932, while no less than four hundred thousand Ethiopians died between 1887 and 1941 (Del Boca 1992).
6. The Association for the Defence of National Schools was created between 1946 and 1947 with the aim of defending state education, which was thought to have been weakened by the privileges that the Minister Guido Gonella had granted to private and Catholic schools (Semeraro 1993). The Conference was given prominence by the parliamentary debate on the Scelba Law. According to article 9 of the law, publications documenting Fascist anti-democratic action must be disseminated among school students (Baldissara 2004).
7. On the links between Fascism and school publishers see Galfrè (2005).
8. 'On the 26th of January 1887 [Ras Alula] with five thousand men attacked a column of our soldiers, who were marching toward the plateau, under the orders of colonel De Cristoforis, and barbarously massacred it at Dogali' (Manaresi 1951, 127). On the legend of Dogali, which,

according to Alessandro Triulzi, represented one of the stepping-stones 'for the strengthening of the new foundations of the Italian colonial monument', see Battaglia (1958); Del Boca (1976); Triulzi (2003).

9. The survey originated from a refresher course for teachers on the 'Last Fifty Years of Modern History', organised by the Istituto Nazionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione in Italia (Institute for the History of Liberation Movement in Italy), the University of Milan, the Milan City Council and the National Didactic Centre in Florence.
10. On this topic see Ricuperati (1972, 1977). Mattozzi (1978) was in favour of the abolition of textbooks.
11. On Sciara Sciat see Del Boca (1986); Del Fra (1995); Rainero (1983). On the massive deportation following the battle see Moffa (1996).
12. In her research around the discussion of Italian colonialism in Libya in Italian history textbooks published between 1950 and 2001, Francesca Di Pasquale has identified some textbooks which cite the atrocities committed by the Italians in suppressing the Cyrenaican resistance. Among these, it is worth remembering Capra, Chittolini and Della Peruta (1992); De Bernardi and Guarracino (1990); Camera and Fabietti (1998). Overall, however, of the 43 textbooks examined by Di Pasquale – the great majority of which were published between the second half of the 1980s and 2001 – only eight offer an analysis of the situation of Libya in the aftermath of the First World War (Di Pasquale 2003).
13. On the complex relationship between the Gentile reform and the cultural and ideological debate preceding it see Borghi (1951); Barbagli (1974); Galfrè (2000) and Raicich (1981).
14. The purpose of recasting the organisation of education, from the lowest to the highest level, remained unfulfilled. Moreover, if the reform of the middle school was finally realised, at the end of 1962, after more than a decade of debates, that of upper secondary education never took place. The changes introduced in 1969 represented a limited government response to the demand to dismantle and reform the system of higher education. It is worth noting, however, that the new state examination, which was meant to be a 'biennial experiment', actually lasted until 1999. See Dei (1993).
15. D.M. 24 April 1992 'Programmi ed orari di insegnamento per i corsi di qualifica degli istituti professionali di Stato', *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana* no. 117, *Supplemento Ordinario* no. 77, May 21, 1992.
16. D.M. 31 January 1997, *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana* no. 36, *Supplemento Ordinario* no. 31, February 13, 1997.

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