

Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad.

By Mark I. Choate.

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319 pages.

The last few years have seen a renaissance in the study of Italian migrations that has led to an extension of the periodization and the inclusion of areas previously neglected. The migratory history of the country now includes Italian artists who during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries built European and American capital cities, *frontaliers* who went back and forth over the Alps, along with the new mobility (*le nuove mobilità*) due to globalization and the development of the European Union. New areas for exploration include Mediterranean and African countries. The inclusion of new themes, or of subjects long abandoned, has resulted in a wholesale rethinking of the Italian migratory experience.

Mark Choate's *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* focuses on a conventional time span, from the years after Italy's unification to World War I and the advent of Fascism, but he adds to the traditional countries of emigration for Italians – Argentina, Brazil, France, and the United States – a little-explored area: Eritrea and Tunisia in Africa. He also considers a subject even less studied, at least by migration scholars, namely, the relationship between migrations and colonialism and migrations to African countries that were not part of Italian colonial policy. He operates from the premise of the interchangeable use of the Italian word *colonia* as both colonized territory and emigrant community abroad. Yet, this book is about more than Italian migrations and the construction of Italian identity abroad, as one would expect from the title. It deals with a chapter of Italian history when migratory issues were part of the general discourse on nation building, a subject that has not been addressed until now. In the various chapters, which follow a chronological and thematic order, Choate analyzes state policies (Chapter 2, "The Great Ethnographic Empire"), economic institutions, such as chambers of commerce (Chapter 3, "Migration and Money"), cultural programs such as the Dante Alighieri Society (Chapter 4, "The Language of Dante"), religious initiatives through the Opera Bonomelli and the Scalabrinian missions (Chapter 5, "For Religion and for the Father Land"), together with world expositions. He argues that the Italian government actively fostered the emigrants' continued identification with Italy through these various institutions and policies. At the same time, emigration was used to justify Italy's burgeoning colonial policies.

Utilizing in-depth archival research conducted in Italy and in the United States, Choate notes that the Italian debate on migration regulation started on the eve of the era of mass migration. This is not a new subject in Italian historiography. The novelty of Choate's contribution lies in his accurate analysis of the parliamentary and scholarly debate on whether Italy should have emigrant ("spontaneous") colonies or a demographic colonialism through colonies of "direct dominion" in Africa – in the case of the former, Eritrea in 1897 and Somalia in the nineteenth century, and Libya and Ethiopia in the twentieth century, in the latter case.

For a long time, Italian colonial history has been superimposed, or rather confused, with the history of migration, despite a clear distinction between colonial political discourse and Italian colonization, and Choate likewise fails to integrate Italian

migration into colonial history. The Italian colonialist lobby exploited the theme of national emigration to claim new political colonies in order to redirect Italian emigrants toward them. With this goal in mind, the Italian Colonial Institute devoted two conferences to emigration, one in 1908 and the other in 1911. The final motion of the second conference expressly asked for the occupation of Tripolitania, Libya.

Whether out of necessity or political considerations, Italian colonial policy was contradictory in abandoning the Mediterranean region where historically the largest Italian communities abroad resided, such as Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia. Instead, Italy alternately concentrated its own colonial efforts on the remote lands of the Horn of Africa or on the Libyan coastline where there was no significant Italian presence. In addition, Italian emigration to other European colonies in Africa was underestimated to preserve and protect the rhetoric of Italian colonial propaganda targeted to encourage emigration to African colonies. Images from the colonies, far from providing an accurate record of colonial life, tended to emphasize wealth and employment or earnings expectations. Exhibitions, colonial expositions, and academic as well as popular publications were included not only in the Italian colonial discourse but also in its colonial efforts. In order to support, at least partially, Italian colonial policy, African colonial reality was manipulated and misrepresented at home.

But how can Choate's discussion of Italian migration and colonial history be integrated? A good starting point would probably be the analysis of the impact of Italian colonialism in terms of numbers since Italian settlers represented an essential pillar to legitimize and build consensus around governmental colonial policy in Africa.

Unfortunately, what is missing in Choate's book is the quantification of the phenomenon. To reinstate the correct proportions of Italian colonization into the wider colonial context, it should be noted that only around 1 percent (Novati 2007) or at most 1.7 percent during the peak years (Labanca 2002) of the Italian migrants who left their motherland from the nineteenth through the twentieth centuries chose African colonies under Italian rule. In other words, Italian emigration to the Italian colonies in Africa represented a small figure (250,000–350,000 people) compared with the millions who left for the Americas or other countries in Europe. Nevertheless, taking into account circumstances other than permanent migration, from residencies ranging from short periods to a few years, the total count rises to about 2 million (Del Boca 1984). So, the relations and interactions between Italy and colonial Africa were stronger than the data on migration in the strict sense alone would lead us to conclude: Italians in Africa significantly shaped policy in the colonies as well as in the motherland.

Choate demonstrates the validity of Luigi Einaudi's *Principe mercante* thesis, that a peaceful expansion of a greater Italy carried on by free emigration—"le colonie spontanee dove si matura la formazione di nuove Italie" (the spontaneous colonies where new Italies are formed)—was replaced by Italy's aggressive imperialism in Africa, or "le pazzie africane" (the African madness) (my translation) (Einaudi 1900, 20). The era of nationalism, during which Italian colonialism was expected to solve overpopulation and other national problems, led to the abandonment of Italian emigrants in the Americas. Although the process was not linear, as Choate clearly demonstrates, the 1896 Italian defeat at Adua, in northern Ethiopia, brought new attention to the Americas. That same year, a renewed support for Italy's free colonies

was demonstrated by the approval of the first important Italian emigration law in 1901. But the impact of nationalism on Italian migratory policy, combined with Mussolini's politics toward Italian communities abroad, had consequences still evident today, that is, the abandonment of Italians abroad. It is only fairly recently that Italy has begun to embrace its history of emigration. The Vittoriano monument, built in 1911, which Choate references in his conclusion as the symbol of the ties between Italy and its emigrants, is now hosting a National Museum of Italian Emigration. One of its main purposes is to include immigrants within the Italian national identity.

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Il fascismo e gli italiani all'estero.

By Matteo Pretelli.

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160 pages.

Matteo Pretelli, a research affiliate at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia, has positioned his study, *Il fascismo e gli italiani all'estero* (Fascism and Italians abroad), under the rubric of migration studies, with emphasis on transnationalism. His objective is to reconstruct the links between Italians abroad and Italian Fascism through consideration of fascist ideology and the political impact of the latter upon immigrants. He is also interested in how immigrants responded to Mussolini's propaganda efforts. Pretelli notes that in the period between the world wars, Italians abroad maintained closer ties with their country of origin than in preceding decades, a tendency he attributes to Mussolini's charisma and the efforts Il Duce expended to garner their support for his regime. He also observes that the political strategies employed by Mussolini's government in regard to Italy's citizens abroad were not dissimilar to the practices previously utilized by the Italian liberal state or by governments today for the purpose of maintaining interaction with the mother country and cultivating national identity. These strategies, which changed according to circumstances, were specifically designed to benefit Italy politically and economically, while ostensibly benefiting Italians abroad as well—at least according to fascist propaganda.