

Book Review

– *Italy to Argentina: Travel Writing and Emigrant Colonialism*, by Tullio Pagano, Amherst College Press, 2023

Disciplines, much like continents and languages, are separated by imaginary borders. But the intricate tapestry of history and human migration is not as clearly delineated as power structures or scholarly discourse would want us to believe. As a Latin American scholar, I rarely encounter the multiplicity of reciprocal gazes involved in the history of diaspora and colonialism in the region. Tullio Pagano's *Italy to Argentina: Travel Writing and Emigrant Colonialism* offers a welcome perspective, prompting reconsideration of my field through a different lens. Pagano traces intellectual exchanges alongside the uncomfortably coupled processes of emigration and colonialism. While his focus may seem confined by the title's direction from "Italy to Argentina", his work is also an endeavour to reexamine Italy through the eyes of those who have journeyed to Argentina and returned to redefine their national and regional narratives.

Argentina emerged as a primary destination for Italian immigrants in Latin America, welcoming about 3.5 million Italians between 1850 and 1950. It is no wonder then that both countries forged close familial, political, and intellectual ties. Tullio Pagano's research focuses on emblematic "symptomatic" cases of Italian intellectuals – travel writers, anthropologists, novelists, economists, lawyers, and anarchist revolutionaries – who engaged with Argentina. By symptomatic, I mean that instead of seeking the "essence" of the Italian diaspora, Pagano builds a broader history by addressing contradictions and highlighting pivotal moments, offering a panoramic view enriched by a constellation of thinkers. Although Pagano initially frames his research as centred on "travel writing," his book is better described as an intellectual history, analysing the intertwined rhetoric of economy, militarization, and colonialism, as well as the paradoxes in the narratives and motivations behind one of the largest Italian diasporas.

Italy to Argentina: Travel Writing and Emigrant Colonialism challenges the presumed disjunction between emigration and colonialism within the Italian diaspora. As the author argues, "the common goal pursued by the otherwise opposed nineteenth-century Italian groups – liberals who encouraged emigration to Argentina and nationalists who sought to create an Italian empire – was

conquest” (p. 5). Despite differentiating between liberal proponents of “free” emigration and nationalist and fascist advocates of military interventions, their shared thread was “the racist ideology, camouflaged as scientific discourse, that permeated even the most progressive Italian and Western scientific discourse at the turn of the century” (p. 27). Regardless of their ideological leanings, the author contends that both groups contributed to the process of land colonization and “internal colonialization”. The extent of the argument, however, may be limited in scope, merely unveiling the hidden agenda of colonialism behind the efforts and attempts by Italian intellectuals to promote emigration. This approach prompts reflection on whether such critique inadvertently perpetuates a broader narrative, amalgamating diverse ideologies under the guise of what we now consider to be a societal concern. It also risks overlooking the nuanced differences between ideologies and oversimplifying the complex historical dynamics.

Pagano begins his intellectual voyage by focusing on the economist Jacopo Virgilio, who wrote about transatlantic migration in 1868, shortly after Italian unification. For Pagano, Virgilio’s text establishes the nexus between migration and colonization, portraying them as intertwined and often “indistinguishable, as powerful nations extend their influence and create new colonies” (12). Advocating for spontaneous, gradual emigration, Virgilio saw this as a path to advantageous, enduring outcomes. The seemingly organic Italian migration to the Río de la Plata region epitomized this model, foreseeing it as a lasting economic and cultural imprint. The “peaceful colonization” by Italians left a lasting imprint both in the economic sphere (facilitating trade and exchange of people, goods, and capital) and in the construction of an imaginary identity (as “the love for the native country is often enhanced by distance”). Despite Virgilio’s disdain for the “imperialist” tendencies later embraced by Italian nationalism and Fascism, his advocacy for emigration aligned with a model of colonization. Continuing this historical exploration, Pagano examines Paolo Mantegazza’s travelogue and epistolary novel set in Argentina. Mantegazza depicts Argentina as both progressive and inhospitable to the impoverished, reflecting the colonial desire to reclaim and “civilize” the continent. These works highlight the complexities and setbacks of such endeavours, illustrating the dual nature of colonial ambitions intertwined with migration narratives.

Next, Pagano examines Edmondo De Amicis, emphasizing nostalgia, attachment, and loss in the diasporic experience. De Amicis’ use of military metaphors reveals a colonial mindset despite promoting voluntary, highlighting the tension between the ideals of civilization and colonial realities. Pagano then shifts to Luigi Einaudi, a liberal economist and the first president of the Italian Republic, who uses the metaphor of a merchant prince to depict Italian expansion. Einaudi, like De Amicis, uses military language to describe economic strategies, equating migrant workers to soldiers directing an “emigrant invasion” of South America. This militaristic imagery is echoed in the journalism of Luigi Barzini and Giuseppe Bevione.

The fifth and most compelling chapter delves into Italian Anarchism as a transnational movement thriving through global networks, with militants like Malatesta and Pietro Gori spreading Anarchist ideals amid Argentina's social and political upheavals. Figures like Malatesta and Pietro Gori intended to disseminate Anarchist ideals amidst escalating social and political tensions in Argentina. The final chapter examines Gina Lombroso's travel writings in *“Nell'America meridionale”*. Influenced by her father Cesare Lombroso, Gina reflects on institutions and Italian diasporic communities in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. Her narrative, shaped by her perspective as a woman, sees women as a “natural” barrier against racial conflicts exacerbated by modern capitalism.

In conclusion, while *Italy to Argentina: Travel Writing and Emigrant Colonialism* by Tullio Pagano offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics of Italian migration and its intersections with colonialism, it falls short in fully extending its main argument beyond the tracing of a dialectics with emigration and colonialism. Despite its exploration of intellectual exchange and acknowledgement of narrative contradictions, the book's theoretical framework would have benefited from further development. The author's examination of Italian intellectuals' promotion of emigration is fascinating in principle, yet parts of the analysis seem to overlook the nuanced differences between ideologies and risks oversimplifying complex historical dynamics. Overall, while Pagano's work sheds light on important aspects of the Italian diaspora, there is scope for enhancing the depth and coherence of its central argument, suggesting avenues for further research and refinement.

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