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## Picturing Italy: Cold War Perspectives in American Travel Writing on Italy, 1948-1960<sup>1</sup>

After World War II, the combination of post-war economic growth, increased accessibility, and changing attitudes towards travel rapidly led to a significant shift in international tourism. Between the end of the 1940s and the early 1950s, in fact, Marshall Plan aids, together with the spread of new, cheaper forms of travel, enabled the European tourist industry to revive. By that time, a new conception of travel was emerging that would result in the boom of mass tourism in the 1960s. This happened also because rekindling tourist channels became a US goal during the Marshall Plan years; indeed, for the US administration exporting visitors to Europe became not only a profitable way to support the economic reconstruction of the Allies and thus bridge the “dollar gap,” but also a means of exporting images of American prosperity and, more generally, of strengthening Atlantic ties (see Endy). In short, tourism was conceived as a contribution to strengthening the Western bloc by reducing the distances, both geographical and cultural, among European countries and between Europe and America. After all, tourism is not, and never has been, a mere economic budget item, but also an instrument of public diplomacy (see McKenzie; Langer).

In post-war Italy, the urgency to resume tourism spurred a collective effort to revive travel activities. Amidst the postwar challenges of reconstruction, public opinion, the private sector, and several municipalities rallied to prompt governmental intervention in the revitalization of Italian tourism. The inaugural National Congress of Italian Tourism held in Genoa in 1947 marked a pivotal moment, fostering discussions on postwar travel’s multifaceted roles. In response to calls for coordinated national efforts from the tourism industry, the De Gasperi Government established in 1947 the Commissariat for Tourism. This body, while mainly supervising

the activities of several other agencies (Berrino 242), recognized tourism's economic and political significance. De Gasperi's acknowledgment of the "cultural and spiritual" impact of mass tourism at the 1952 National Convention of Provincial Tourism Boards exemplified this awareness (Paloscia 83). Within this dynamic landscape, American tourists were immensely alluring due to their substantial dollar spending power. In Italy, however, any opportunity to attract American tourists was subordinated to the outcome of the April 1948 general elections, which Washington watched with apprehension because of the growing strength of local leftist parties. Therefore, it was the political situation, coupled with the fact that the tourist infrastructure was largely destroyed or severely damaged, that prevented American tourism in Italy from getting a kick-start until late in 1948. From that moment, the number of Americans entering Italy would grow gradually during the following decade, but settled, nonetheless, at only around 5% of all international entries into the *Bel Paese* (Statistica del Turismo 1951, 1955, 1960). It was only in the 1960s that the flow of arrivals from North America would increase dramatically.

Italy, as well as the other Western European countries, also began early on to promote itself in the US market with renewed vigor, in line with the upsurge of mass tourism. As early as 1948, at the behest of Italy and under US pressure, the European Travel Commission (ETC) was established among the European countries participating in the Marshall Plan to jointly promote travel to the United States. Additionally, in 1951, Italy initiated its own promotional campaign brand specifically aimed at the United States. By the mid-1950s, the primary focus of Italian promotional efforts was undoubtedly America, as a report from 1953 indicated that 65% of the entire foreign promotion budget was allocated solely to the United States ("Italians Study US for Tourists" 1953).

Yet, despite the importance of the 1950s as a time of transition for Italian tourism towards modernity and a tighter tourist relationship between Italy and the USA, no systematic attention has yet been devoted to the analysis of US tourism in Italy during this time span, as most authors treated the decade after the war to scant attention, focusing rather on the earlier period ranging from the nineteenth century to the Fascist era, or on the later phase of mass tourism. The subject, however, is particularly significant if

we consider the new international context and the changes that occurred in American society and in its relationship with Western Europe. Therefore, in an attempt to contribute to this complex topic, this essay will examine a selected body of American travel literature on Italy published between 1948 and 1960 to outline the historical significance of the American perception of Italy in this period, exploring how their understanding of the country reflected broader social, political, and economic trends. In particular, it is especially relevant to understanding the extent to which the new international context and the Cold War imperatives found a reflection in the travel narrative about Italy, a country of fundamental importance to the stability of the Western European bloc in the eyes of Washington administrators, and how this situation became tied up with previous, long-standing assumptions about the country.

As for the time span of the research, it addresses two major turning points in Italy's visibility in the USA; 1948 was the year when American tourism to Italy revived, while 1960 was the year of the Olympics in Rome, which spotlighted Italy's recovery and growing attractions on the global stage. In order to attain its goals, the essay will thus examine travel articles on Italy published between 1948 and 1960 in *Holiday* and *National Geographic Magazine*, as well as a variety of articles published in the travel columns of both national and regional newspapers. Also, four different travel guides published in the United States during that decade will be used.

As an initial start, it must be emphasized how the American tourists, after the war, perceived themselves to be invested with a new role, as the administration in Washington did not fail to remind them. Things were changing in the American travelers' self-perception and more broadly in their own attitudes toward Italy and Europe. The unequal relationship between the United States and Europe which had developed after World War II was reflected in the tourist exchanges between the two areas. As such, the new situation of economic and political strength in which American tourists were perceived led inevitably to an attempt by the American travel system to repudiate the existing clichés about uncultured Americans, parvenus of the civilized world, simultaneously inebriated and humbled by the cultural richness of the old continent. This shift in perception is

well reflected in the comparison drawn between the American tourists and the old pioneers of the West which is found in several occasions in travel literature during the 1950s. A piece in the 1957 *New York Times*, for example, made this explicit. Speaking of Americans vacationing in the old continent, the author stated: "It excited me and swelled my national ego to meet and talk with hundreds of these modern frontiersmen and women of the United States" (Chasins 23). John W. Houser, vice-president of Hilton Hotels International, similarly noted how American hotel chains were successfully acting as "international pioneers" ("Hotel Talks" 5) in the world, while another travel article noted how nowadays "tourists make the old western pioneers look pale" (Burton 4), and Jack Stepler rejoiced in the "American colonization of Europe" that was occurring through tourists. American travelers, in other words, began to perceive themselves as coming from the true center of the Western world and, by traveling to Europe, as going towards the peripheral outskirts of that world. What's more, the American tourist's position of strength was reinforced by the notion that by spending dollars in Europe he was actively helping the Old World get back on its feet: "The tourist helps Italy and enjoys himself" (Mowrer 12). As Erik Amfitheatrof suggested, in fact, American tourists looked with undisguised pride at Italy's economic recovery, seeing it as a sign of their own importance in the new international context (190). It is no coincidence, perhaps, that this celebration of the tourist-pioneer occurred at a time when the Western genre was experiencing a golden age in the American pop culture, for it provided a convenient and reassuring metaphor for the Cold War challenges (Slotkin 347). The intellectual defense of the new American traveler/pioneer was also undertaken by authors of the caliber of John Steinbeck, who in 1956 lashed out in *Holiday* against European prejudices about his fellow Americans and against the sense of guilty embarrassment that had pervaded American tourists for too long (25). This trend found to a certain extent a reflection in the artistic production of those years. Surveying American literary production of Roman settings during the 1950s, in fact, William Vance notes a similar undermining of the myth of American innocence/naïveté abroad. Americans by now were experienced in worldly affairs long before they arrived in Europe. They no

longer seemed in need of having “initiations” of any kind from old Europe (407).

This new situation, however, also necessarily connected with a long tradition of American accounts of Italy, which had stratified in the Anglo-Saxon imagination a long series of assumptions still very much in vogue after the war. As such, the relationship between American tourists and Italy after World War II was by no means a first encounter, but rather the resumption of a travel pattern that had begun at least a century before and that therefore rested on ideas, beliefs and clichés already rooted in American thought (see Withey). Tourism studies call this body of preexisting ideas about a tourist destination a “destination image” (Crompton 18). Thus, Italy was not being “discovered,” but rather “reconfirmed” as a travel destination.

In the traditional, nineteenth-century American perceptions, two major impressions of Italy overlapped. The country was a state of mind as well as a concrete destination, which created a certain ambivalence in the American gaze. Home of the arts, culture and beauty on the one hand, Italy was also perceived as an antiquated country, stuck in the past. Italians, for their part, were described as an amiable and artistic people but also as ignorant, indolent, poor and vicious (Diggins 5; Amfitheatrof 4), theatrical and childlike (Cosco 7). Traditionally skeptical of allegedly “Mediterranean” forms of emotional externalization, American Protestants often interpreted many Italian customs as a symptom of lasciviousness and animalistic instinctual passion (see Casillo; Ducci; Cosco; Hom; Diggins). Neither the Fascist regime’s efforts to promote a new image of Italy abroad (see Aliano), let alone the allied occupation period that followed the fall of the regime (see Buchanan), changed this general framework.

Thus, when tourist flows from the USA to Italy resumed late in 1948 after the victory of the Christian Democratic Party in the April general election, this was the prevailing situation of the Italian destination image. Given the slowness with which the image of a place changes over time, it would be hard to imagine American travel literature altering its perception of Italy in the short term just because of a new international context. To a large extent, in fact, Americans in the 1950s continued to address Italy according to the same patterns and images developed and reinforced

through the nineteenth century. Two parallel visions still persisted, that of idealized, romantic, and timeless Italy, and that of a far less seductive real, often abject, present-day Italy. As always, these two visions were not irreconcilable with each other, and indeed overlap frequently in American reports. And yet, these narratives were now clearly taking on a whole new meaning, because of the new international role assumed by the United States and the consequent economic subordination of the European countries. In this sense, these representations of Italy also took on a political innuendo, as they reflected the asymmetry of power that existed between the United States and Italy. Travel writing, after all, was highly responsive to American foreign policy, not only because, in a sense, many travel writers tended to take pro-establishment positions, but also because many of them were actively tools of propaganda. The State Department, in fact, enlisted several travel writers to promote the aims of the United States to the general American public (Klein 110).

One of the main messages conveyed in travel articles, throughout the 1950s, was about Italian poverty. Sure enough, the dire situation of post-war Italy left ample room for a bleak description of the country's misery and squalor. Yet, this description was also largely functional in showing a country on its knees and much in need of American friendship and assistance. Italy, in fact, was mostly described as an extremely poor country, plagued by innumerable problems, but – somewhat condescendingly – it was still credited with a great single virtue: the dignity of its inhabitants despite their actual conditions. If it is not surprising to find hints of widespread but dignified poverty in travel reports from the late 1940s, just after the launch of the Marshall Plan (people in Naples “have always been poor, but it has been a poverty without shame [...] I saw smiling women caring for their babies in the streets, cooking on primitive stoves in the open, and carrying great burdens”; Hume 717), things did not seem to change even a decade later, as still in 1956 the official guidebook of the American Geographic Association stated that “Italy is a poor land; it lacks most of the metals, minerals, and fuels that are vital in our industrial [...] But it has one great asset – the people” (Kish 55-56); or again, in the *Holiday* magazine: “What most strikes me is the courage it must demand to love, to breed, to sing, to keep from being bitter, to preserve one's pride, when a man cannot tell where his next meal is coming from” (O'Faolain,

"Italy" 124). The notion of Italians as a hungry, barefoot people was so strong that in 1952 Jim Gilmore seemed almost amazed to find that in Milan "everyone looks well-fed and well-clothed" (6). After all, despite the country's participation in the Marshall Plan and subsequent membership in the NATO defensive alliance, by the end of the 1950s the United States still viewed Italy with concern. They believed it to be the most vulnerable among the Western European nations, fearing that it might eventually undermine the entire European strategic establishment. Both the Truman administration and, later, Eisenhower grew increasingly exasperated due to what they considered Italy's slow progress in political and economic reform (Mistry 204). As such, it is not surprising that according to American travel writings of the late 1950s Italy was not only a truly wealthy and advanced country, remaining in need of American aid and supervision.

Italy's great tourism assets, culture, historic monuments and art, were certainly admired, but they also prompted a concerned look at the country's perceived backwardness. On the one hand, undoubtedly, this old-fashioned Italy full of traces of the past was exactly what the Americans wanted to see. The American travel material contained endless references to the idea of a country where the ruins and monuments built centuries before the arrival of Europeans in the New World were still part of everyday life. After all, this substantial difference with America had always been an irresistible incentive to visit the *Bel Paese* and also a source of embarrassed admiration on the part of many American visitors (Vance xix). Still in the 1950s, actually, for some American travelers it was almost a shock to discover that Italy could also be industrial and modern. Thus, for example, the astonishment of C. L. Munson appears sincere when he writes: "The city of Verona surprised us. We had expected a rural village, or something mildly Shakespearian, since the Bard of Avon used Verona for one of his play settings. But Verona was industrial and shell-pocked" (27). The more modern-looking Italian cities found little resonance among Americans for this very reason: "Few American tourists visit Milan for there isn't much here to see compared with the rich treasures of such cities as Rome and Florence" (Crane 24). Milan, a modern and industrial destination par excellence, was being associated with difficulty to an Italy still perceived as old-fashioned and as such it is very rarely encountered in travel articles. In short, when Italy acquired a more modern outline, one less tied to

images of monumental grandeur in decay, it ceased to correspond to the destination image that American culture had assigned to the idea of Italy and thus became less appealing and interesting.

At the same time, however, the great art cities also elicited ambiguous glances at local poverty and decadence. Rome, Naples and Venice, the favorite destinations for American tourists, in fact, were repeatedly described in terms of references to the theme of anti-modern Italian decadence, which appeared to be the inevitable downside of the “history theme.” As John Diggins put it, a “nation steeped in history” could also quickly become “a nation left behind by history” (5). Once again, the travel narratives were also a reflection of the new international role of the United States. Italy’s miserable decadence was fascinating and troubling at the same time: America should have continued to help this attractive country that had fallen dangerously behind in progress and development. In 1960, for example, a *Holiday* article on Trastevere contained vivid details about the miserable charm of certain Roman views, crowded with peasant women “so heavy they cannot move” and children “poking like rats among the debris for bits of precious metal or pieces of leather” (Kubly 48-49). Venice was beautiful, but plagued by a “filth dilapidation and general atmosphere of stagnation” (Hawkins 12), according to the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*. Also tinged with a sense of ruined grandeur was the other report on Venice published by *Holiday* with a colorful description of beggars seeking alms outside restaurants frequented by tourists (Bemelmans, “Venice” 61).

Decadence and disarming misery were also intertwined in what appears to be a well-established trope in American travel literature: the interest in the Italian aristocracy. This theme was very well suited to symbolically representing a nostalgic and pre-modern Italy, for after the war and the subsequent advent of the Republic Italian aristocrats did indeed appear something of the past. In the *Holiday* April 1960 issue, devoted to Rome, an entire thematic chapter was centered on the “black” aristocrats (i.e., the most conservative papal nobility) in which this symbolic connection was made explicit: “There is a certain reputation for decadence associated with the upper class in Rome; for one thing the very streets around them were the scenes of the decadence and decline of the great empire...” (“The Black Aristocrats” 92). What is more, as Stephen Gundle rightly pointed

out, the Italian aristocrats themselves, now deprived of their past celebrity status by economic problems and by the emergence of a new generation of VIPs from cinema, had to largely reinvent themselves as “personalities for consumption” (115) by opening their homes to film crews or journalists and writers. The displaced Italian noble was thus now available for travel literature in the new developing mass-tourism system, and the *Chicago Tribune* in 1950 could cheerfully write about “throng[s] of displaced noblemen” (“Poorhouse for Princes” 14) roaming Italy. And so, several articles and travel guides became populated with Italian princes, dukes and barons, usually described not without ironic overtones.

Not that these figures were invented out of thin air by American travel writers, of course. While it is possible at times to guess some artistic license with facts, it is nevertheless true that many aristocrats lent themselves to this kind of activity more than willingly. As mentioned above, aware of their new status within Italian society, they reinvented themselves as living tourist attractions. In the American public, culturally distant from and distrustful of the very concept of aristocracy, such articles must certainly have aroused some curiosity. What is more, it is very likely that writing about impoverished nobles well disposed toward the American tourist (and toward his dollars) also induced in the reader a certain sense of pride and vindication toward old Europe. Not surprisingly, in the majority of cases the role assigned to these nobles in the articles was that of chaperons, privileged guides to Italian wonders (Bemelmans, “Midas Tour of Italy” 45; “Countess in Rome” 103; Sterling 36). An aristocrat ready to play the role of upper-class guide for the US visitor became a symbolically powerful image. “I would like to be of assistance. *I am at your service*” (emphasis added), a Duke told the very middle-class journalist (Bemelmans, “Road to Salerno” 90). Once again, America’s new position of strength was thus emphasized, as the travelers were symbolically served even by the former Italian ruling class.

Italians’ poverty and alleged backwardness also caused some concern about their capacity to accept democracy and American values. Ordinary tourists as well, once they returned home, indulged sometimes in reflections on Italy that reinforced the idea of a country still unfit to participate on an equal footing in the US model. The encounter with a different society, perceived as different from one’s own, has always been a strong incentive

to travel; however, few tourists actually can or even want to tolerate too much novelty (Hitchcock et al. 3). What is important to them is to seek confirmation about their own society through comparison with others, especially vis-à-vis local realities perceived as poorer and more degraded (Pearce 135).

This is why an American tourist returning from Italy could say in 1952 that “Italians still don’t know the meaning of liberty [...] for they see no answer to their problems,” finding in this observation a way to reaffirm instead with pride that “American democracy is something that is not just lip service but is something that is acted out each day, for we really have the longest tradition of democracy of any nation” (“Impressions of Italy Vary” 40). Similarly, another tourist stated that “Italy can never become a truly Democratic state – it simply lacks the capacity to understand the American way of life” (“Impressions of Italy” 23). Less trenchantly, an Indiana school teacher who moved to Northern Italy, wrote to his hometown newspaper that the Italians “seem to have little loyalty to friends, locality or government because of their unhappy past experiences” (“Teacher Relates” 1).

Although potentially problematic because their recent past and their character made them unprepared for democracy, Italians in their own right could not, however, be a real threat to the United States. In fact, they had never been. During World War II Italian fascism had been considered an almost comical enemy in American public opinion, compared to the Japanese Empire and the German Reich (Buchanan 239). Similarly, after the 1948 elections, even Italian communism was described in travel literature as essentially harmless because it was the expression of an “Italian-style” communism, spawned not by fanaticism but by poverty and hence more easy to tackle. In 1950, a travel article from New York reported: “Although there is communism in Italy, it is not Soviet communism [...]. It is not an anti-clerical communism, but merely a general protest against everything brought about by economic insecurity” (“Impressions of Italy” 23). A view perfectly in line with the sentiments of many American officials in Washington, who believed that Italy’s political instability had purely economic causes (Mistry 66). Or again, an American family returning from Sardinia asserted that the local communists “seem unaware of the party

principles which they support" ("Sardinia" 8). According to *Holiday* in the *Bel Paese* "Communism is strictly Italian style – anticlerical but not pro-Russian" (Kubly, "Italy's Adriatic Coast" 59), and elsewhere Robert Neville wrote with irony of the Communist Mayor of Spoleto who during the Festival of the Two Worlds welcomed American tourists (Neville 9).

Italians were largely described as a people sincerely eager for freedom and democracy, but there existed a conviction that, just as they had once fallen under the spell of Mussolini, their simplicity and naïveté could lead to a similar mistake, should there be a lack of close supervision of their communist leanings. This is another occasion when the Cold War *zeitgeist* became entangled with travel literature. After World War II, the constant repetition of old stereotypes and the emphasis on the "true character" of Italians seems to have a political subtext. The stress on their wild passion, but also on their simplicity and child-like nature, seems to suggest the idea of a good-hearted people that, however, could easily fall prey to dictators and tyrants. Hence, the new Italian democracy needed constant vigilance (Wingenter 327). This idea, after all, is also found in accounts of foreign office agents and US officials. "The Italian people have a certain immaturity, like children, and... could be very most ungrateful and forgetful" (Mistry 154), warned Roy Melbourne of the Foreign Office in 1948. In a more casual tone, in 1951 *Life* magazine reported that what Dwight Eisenhower loved about Italians was their "childlike enthusiasm" (Serra 458).

American suspicions of Italians in the post-war era were also colored by longstanding assumptions about the profound differences between northern and southern Italians (Amfiteatrof 167) that projected the image of a country divided in half and therefore problematic and unstable. In fact, not all Italians were considered equally in danger of falling prey to communist propaganda. Being more uneducated and economically poorer, southern Italians were at times perceived as the real threat. Commenting on Italian internal migration from South to North, *Holiday* warned in 1955 that "the south is thus endlessly swelling the population of the north, diluting its culture, and creating that sort of lumpenproletariat which is the natural fodder of communism everywhere" (O'Faolain "Italy," 124). While this and similar statements contrasted with the political reality of Southern Italy which was firmly controlled by the Christian Democrats, they

undoubtedly reflect the American belief that there was a natural equation between poverty and the spread of communism, and that Southern Italians were more likely to be troublemakers. A long-standing American fear that had its foundation in nativist drives to counter the influx of Southern Italians to the North at the turn of the century.

Indeed, when it came to Southern Italy, American travel writers resorted to a variety of clichés concerning especially the theatricality and exoticism of the local population. The poor state of infrastructures in the South in general and the scarcity of American tourists south of Naples amplified the region's sense of exotic otherness. This obviously reflected also the idea of a country that, in large measure, was still underdeveloped and backward, but a racist subtext about Southerners' alleged aversion to work, their gullibility and indiscipline is also evident. Travel writer H. V. Kaltenborn, for example, warned readers that "the Sicilians are not as carefree as the Neapolitans. They are also more Oriental; they keep their women from frequenting public places" (14). Rodion Rathbone of the *Chicago Tribune* went even further:

Visitors often complain that Neapolitans are dishonest, and this may be true in the sense of western European morality [...]. In Naples and to the south there is a different cast to the mind. The southern Italians think less in terms of right and wrong, and more in terms of possible advantage to be gained [...]. There is great poverty in Naples, much of it unavoidable, but all compounded by the Neapolitan's inherent dislike for work. (18)

Southern exoticism also manifested itself in the incredulous accounts of the peculiar religiosity of local people and their mysterious folkloric manifestations. In his travel article for the *National Geographic Magazine*, for example, Edgar E. Hume recounted how people living in the South "believe in the presence of supernatural beings such as demigods (usually evil ones) and warlocks" (717).

The differences drawn by American observers, however, were not just between North and South; they affected almost every part of the country and each region. For Americans in the 1950s Italy was in fact the country of physical and psychological regional differences. There was a keen interest

in cataloging the alleged human, behavioral and physical differences between Italians. What is more, this tendency did not find correspondence (at least not to the same extent) in the cases of other European populations. The idea that men and women from Naples were profoundly different from those in Perugia, Rome or Venice, for example, and therefore should be treated appropriately, recurs in travel guides published in the USA. In *When in Rome*, a renowned American guidebook published in 1954, the authors listed, region by region, the peculiar traits of the local people. So the Lombard is “loyal, gay, good-natured; hard worker [...] for him, time is money,” while the Umbrian is “peaceful and generally kind [...] deeply religious, mystic,” and the Neapolitan is characterized instead by his “mixed Spanish-Greek temperament, leading to sentimentalism, love of poetry, song, dance” (Streeter and Weisbecker 9). The travel guide on Italy published in 1960 by *Holiday* similarly stated that “The Neapolitan has a reputation for exuberance, gaiety and sentimentality; the Sicilian for pride, clannishness and a burning loyalty [...]. The Venetian is easy-going, somewhat subtle, skeptical and cynical; the Umbrian simple and devout...” and so on (*Italy* 8). This interest in categorizing “types” of Italians clearly stemmed from the fact that in the new postwar tourism it was much easier to make direct contact with local people, as opposed to the old nineteenth-century elitist tourism. Once again, the same idea is to be found also in non-tourist literature. The assumption that Italians were so different one from the other that “sometimes you will find two different types occupying two neighboring villages” was contained also in the *Pocket guide to Italy* that the Department of Defense distributed to soldiers serving in Italy during the 1950s (3). Sure enough, because of its history, Italy has a wide variety of regional customs that arouse curiosity in foreigners. But there was more to it than that. During the 1950s, in fact, it became imperative for Washington that encounters between Americans and foreign populations served as a stabilizer of relations and not as a cause for anti-Americanism. The administration itself took pains to guide the American public to an understanding of the importance of this tourism diplomacy. From July 1957, for example, all US citizens applying for a passport received a pamphlet with a message from President Eisenhower urging them to act as goodwill ambassadors abroad, behaving responsibly

and politely toward local populations (Osgood 246). Thus, travel literature was clearly quite responsive to the cultural context of the period, offering travelers a sort of handbook of encounters they were likely to make.

Sometimes, however, American travel writings indulged in purely phenotypic descriptions, concerned primarily with the physical appearance of Italians. One can sense an almost ethnographic curiosity in encountering a human reality that was perceived as diverse and peculiar. Here again, old racial stereotypes heavily overlaid with new considerations on Italy, intended now as a periphery of the American-led Western world. In a tourist guide for the Holy Year in 1950, for example, the author stated that “most of the inhabitants of Italy are pure Italian stock, but between the natives of one part of the country and those of another, there are very distinct differences. In the south is the dark-haired, dark-skinned type, rather short of stature. In the north it is just the opposite – light-skinned and tall of stature” (Sequenzia 52). Similarly, *The First Book of Italy*, a guide published in 1958, explained how most “northern Italians are brisk, businesslike, and efficient. And in this area there are more blonds than there are in other parts of the country. [In Southern Italy] where the swarthy Greeks, the Phoenicians, and the dark-skinned Arabs once ruled, most people still have black hair and dark eyes” (Epstein 5). Again, in *When in Rome* the authors launched into a merciless and grotesque physical description of people from Rome:

Physically, the men are heavy-set, thick-chested, muscular specimens [...] with jet-black hair, sharp eyes, stubborn chin, hawk-like nose. And the women? Same dark hair, flashing black eyes [...] but also the lovely shoulders and wide hips of a Hawaiian hula-hula dancer coupled with the common Latin tendency to put on too much weight in the middle thirties. (Streeter and Weisbecker 90)

The guide even recommended to the reader specific locations where they could go and see these typical and genuine “Romans of Rome”, as if they were intriguing, exotic attractions (Streeter and Weisbecker 90-91). The idea that being among Italians was a highly exotic experience was

further reinforced when the guide compared people from Rome to Native Americans when describing their tendency to gesticulate (197).

This emphasis on experiencing the exotic, and on encountering a different, backward people (even physically different), in a context imagined as stopped in time, are all elements of an asymmetrical, colonial type of tourist relationship traditionally reserved by the West for Third-World destinations (see Crick 1989; Palmer 1994). All of these elements, however, also come to the surface in the American travel writing on Italy during the 1950s, which often appears focused on establishing an asymmetry of strength between the visiting American and the local Italian, relegated almost to the role of a fairground attraction.

Not surprisingly, a large proportion of the travel narratives referring to encounters with locals was based on explicit sexual subtexts. In the American material, both the alleged wild erotic power of local women and, occasionally, the charm of local men were heavily emphasized. “The Italian women are the best-looking in Europe by two miles, the men use the most fragrant hair lotions on earth” (McLemore, “Food Notes” 6), noted a 1957 travel article. An important influence in this regard came of course from cinema, through which Vittorio De Sica, Sofia Loren, Gina Lollobrigida and other stars imprinted well-determined standards of beauty on overseas audiences. “The greatest Italian discovery since spaghetti is a 26-year-old fawn-eyed, heavy-chested movie actress named Gina Lollobrigida” (“World of Women” 91) a 1955 article in the travel magazine *Holiday* concluded. Repurposing a classic tourist marketing gimmick, the fictional narrative sometimes went so far as to titillate the reader by letting him envisage not only the chance of meeting Italian women well disposed toward the American tourist – “the women were very friendly there [...]. They blew kisses at us as we went up the mountainside” (Craig 2) – but even the chance of meeting the movie divas in person: “American tourists in Italy (especially the male variety) are being treated to a delightful surprise these days. Alluring Sophia Loren now finds it amusing to pop over to their cafe tables ‘just to chat’” (Kilgallen 4). Or again: “What does a 17-year-old youth do when he suddenly finds he has won a dream trip to Rome? [...] He met Gina Lollobrigida!” (Craig 2). On the flip side, i.e. for the benefit of female readers, travel articles sometimes also resorted to the stereotype

of the romantic and seductive Italian male: “There are plenty of tall, dark, handsome Italian men, but probably not enough, at the present flow of tourists into this country, to guarantee every visitor the same blazing romantic idyll...” (Friendlander 15).

During the 1950s and the 1960s, while Italian cinema gained popularity in the US, the American movie industry contributed enormously to the fascination with Italy and to the sexualizing of encounters between Americans and Italians. Films such as *Roman Holiday* (1953), *Three Coins in the Fountain* (1954), *Summertime* (1955) or *Gidget Goes to Rome* (1963) helped promote an image of Italy as a romantic location par excellence, a gateway to passionate love affairs. It is now well established the impact that films can have on tourism (see Beeton). The cultural context of the Cold War adds an additional ingredient to the mix. The genre of “runaway” movies where an American falls in love with a European, in fact, was somehow metaphorically investigating “what ought to be America’s relationship with Europe” in the new international context (Anderson 16). It did not focus only on depicting a renewed “partnership” between the two shores of the Atlantic, but also on symbolically representing a form of dependence. As Laura Ruberto has illustrated in her analysis of female Italian immigrant characters in post-war American cinema, there was a widespread tendency to portray desperate yet sexually available Italian women, in much the same way as Italy was perceived as a poor country, well disposed towards the USA. In travel literature, the inference was often far more sexually explicit. The aforementioned guide *When in Rome*, for example, devoted an entire paragraph to describing Italian women – especially Roman women – and their customs, even giving some awkward advice to the tourist eager to embark on romantic conquests (Streeter and Weisbecker 89-90). Even in a more conventional travel guide like Sydney Clark’s *All the Best in Italy*, the author rhetorically asked what made Italy special, and, with a wink at the (male) tourist he playfully intimated: “Is it pretty girls? Wait till you see them, in the big cities, in the remote hamlets of the hills, in the cabarets of Rome, on the multitude of beaches, where you see *a lot of* them, quite literally!” (17). After all, as the *New York Times* reminded its male readers, contrary to popular belief, there was no ban on wearing bikinis on Italian beaches (Hofmann 25).

The emphasis on the seductive and approachable character of local people, which went so far as to hint at the concrete possibility of sexual liaisons, obviously had important implications. On the one hand, it was a repetition of century-old images about the natural seductiveness of Italians. On the other, it suggested a natural attraction between America, represented by the tourist (mostly male) and Italy that was evidently also a reflection on the imagined relationship between a powerful, manly America and a weak womanly Italy in need of help. Fantasizing about sexual conquests on vacation, moreover, is a common strategy in travel narrative, which allows the tourist to visualize the “conquest” of the destination through the bodies of the local population. Sexualizing the encounter with the locals, in other words, suggested to readers the idea that Italy was in a subordinate position and at their disposal.

To conclude, two elements emerge from what has been observed so far. The first is that the American destination image of Italy is *confirmed* rather than *modified* by the post-World War II context. In doing so, travel literature created at times a disjoint with the real situation of US-Italian relations, or it clashed with other beliefs and ideas. While the US administrations looked suspiciously at Italian communists during the 1950s, for example, it seems that travel literature had already de-rubricated them as a minor, almost folkloric phenomenon. Also, the incessant reiteration in travel articles, still at the end of the decade, about Italy’s endemic poverty is at odds with other celebratory narratives on the Italian “economic miracle.” As early as August 1951, for example, *Life* magazine reported in triumphalist tones that the “amazing postwar recovery [...] has made defeated Italy seem the most vigorous nation in Europe” (Serra 458). Moreover, a long series of complaints and negative opinions about Italians – as well as equally long-lasting negative Italian perceptions of American tourists – demonstrates the difficulty of realizing the idea of making all tourists “goodwill ambassadors” of the American model that both Truman and Eisenhower had tried to establish. “The three chief pests of modern Italy are: some systematic gouging, universal overcrowding and the almost inescapable noise,” stated E. A. Mowrer in 1950 (12). Sometimes, articles even displayed outright animosity: “This trip to Italy has convinced me that there is a [...] thing that Italians live for, namely cheating the eyeballs

out of American tourists. They are so good at it that I believe it must be taught in their schools..." (McLemore "Cheating Americans" 12).

At the same time, however, it is clear that the international context of the Cold War was also adding a new angle to travel literature, one that inserted the traditional destination image of Italy in such a way as to highlight the new role of the United States. In many ways, Italy was seen to be a poor and backward country, inhabited by people who were gay and cheerful, but also naive and inexperienced in the ways of democracy. Therefore, the travel writings entered fully into the administration's insistence about the need to help, but also to check and supervise Italy. These narratives, moreover, also served as a reminder to departing tourists that they were traveling to a destination peripheral to the center of the liberal, democratic world.

The second element of interest, on the other hand, is related precisely to the American mindset regarding travel abroad. It could be said that a transition was taking place from the "innocents abroad" ironically described by Mark Twain to the post-World War II American tourists, who were now represented with *no* irony as new pioneers, protagonists of the postwar recovery and victims, if anything, of the Europeans' attempts to cheat them.

Sure enough, even if during the 1950s there was a less celebratory travel narrative about the new American tourist (above all, by Horace Sutton of the *Saturday Review*), the sense of a profound change in power relations (even in the field of culture), eloquently expressed by *Holiday*, appeared far more recurrent and widespread. Yet, some sort of reaction within American society occurred as early as the end of the decade. It is no coincidence that a book like *The Ugly American* achieved immediate success after its publication in 1958. Although it was not a book about tourists, the press and media immediately appropriated the title to name the new American tourist who, according to many, was endangering the prestige of the United States in the world with his attitude. When all is said and done, this new development was a further confirmation that America's "tourist-ambassador" project had been less successful than originally hoped (see Endy).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I thank the Romeyne Robert and Ugucione Sorbello Foundation, which supported and funded the research.

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