



SICILY, NOT ITALY

Since the American continent became a part of the European imagination, it has always been seen to represent freedom. Especially after 1776, when the American democratic “experiment” giving rise to the United States, proved durable, America became a source of social and political inspiration to generations of Europeans and non-Europeans alike. Unsurprisingly, also in the Italian context, the catalog of ways in which American values have been “translated into Italian” and adapted to Italy’s cultural space seems to be ever-growing. Yet, even though the cultural transfer dates back to Christopher Columbus, it is especially since the outbreak of World War II that Italy has been markedly influenced by intellectual and material values generated in the US. At some point, the fascination with the US soared to such a level that, incredibly as it may sound, one of the most iconic provinces of Italy would begin to imagine itself as the forty-ninth state of the US long before Alaska and Hawaii gained their present-day status: in Sicily, the American fascination seems never to abate.

Try to make a small talk with an Italian born (or naturalized) in Sicily and ask them who they are. In all probability, the first, spontaneous, answer will be: “I am Sicilian”—and it is only later (if at all) that your interlocutor will expand that self-identification by saying “I am Italian.” Demonstrably, Sicilians have always construed themselves as a nation, manifesting strong separatist attitudes: the Sicilian Vespers, a powerful revolt against the rule of the Capetian House of Anjou, which is considered by the histo-

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rians to be the precursor of modern independence efforts, broke out as early as in 1282, but it is particularly important to appreciate the crucial role Sicilians played during the Revolutions of 1848, known as the Spring of Nations. It was in the capital of Sicily, Palermo, where the hope for the independence of nations was born and it was from there that it spilled all over Europe. But even though Palermitans gave numerous examples of their dedication to freedom, as a matter of fact, Sicily—whose autonomy as a “body civic” would historically undergo numerous transformations—until the outbreak of World War II never stood a chance of full independence, always remaining under the rule of superior powers. During the war, however—the war in which Italy was part of the Axis, fighting against the Allies—Sicilians saw renewed hope to finally become a sovereign state with its own distinctive heritage, cultural traditions and language, in their unique American connection: the Sicilian-American community that had emigrated to the US at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Thanks to that, and owing to the relations between politicians and mafia bosses, during the Italian campaign of World War II Sicily became a firm foothold for the Allied forces. It is not by chance that the US military chose this Mediterranean island as a strategic location in the fight against the Axis powers. Rumor has it that mafia—in particular *Cosa nostra* and Lucky Luciano—offered help to the Seventh United States Army under the command of Lieutenant General George S. Patton and the Eighth British Army under the command of Lieutenant-General Bernard Montgomery during the invasion of Sicily (the so-called *Operation Husky*), with the view to impact the postwar status of the island as an independent state. Immediately after the Allied forces landed on the island, the separatist and independentist spirit arose again. After the armistice of Cassibile, Antonio Di Stefano, head of the newly formed Party of Reconstruction, asked for the island to be separated from the Kingdom of Italy and annexed to the United States of America, asserting that the re-establishment of Sicily had to go through an annexation to the US. The sentiment was broadly shared: for instance, the Sicilian Independence Movement—supported by a famous Sicilian bandit and robber, Salvatore Giuliano, labeled “the Robin Hood of Sicily”—also supported the idea of the separation.

Yet, even Giuliano's strong influence proved insufficient to make the project of bringing Sicily into the Union under the forty-ninth star viable. Importantly, however, in their naïve hope that the US would aid their independence, Sicilians opened up to all things American: Sicily became an important "portal" through which cultural values from across the Atlantic would enter Italian culture and, "translated," would become domesticated. Interestingly, in Sicily the utopian American fascination is still vivid, especially among elderly people. Should you ask them, over a glass of wine, about their assessment of the modern Italian history, many of them would answer—naïvely again—that the present social and political situation in Sicily would be better if the island had become the forty-ninth state of the US after the war.

Unquestionably, this brief, somewhat personal, insight fails to do justice to the complexity of phenomena related to the presence of American values in Italy. However, to provide a more complex vision of how America got "translated" into Italian, the present issue of *RIAS* collects reflections by a number of scholars, whose articles serve to illustrate the many areas in which Italian art, cinematography, literature, and political culture adopted and adapted American discourses and made them "their own."

And so, Laura Blandino's article highlights the role of Rome as the basis for the development of a distinct art scene in the 1950s, uniting representatives of the American and Italian experiences in an innovative dialogue boosting creativity; Cristina Giorcelli's overview of the Italian fascination with US literature throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries emphasizes the powerful insights and adventurous spirit exhibited by Italian critics and publishers in different historical contexts; Stefano Luconi's article focuses on US influences on Italy from the political perspective after World War II; Giorgio Mariani's essay draws attention to the thematic similarities between the graphic novel *Tutto ricominciò con un'estate indiana (Indian Summer)* by Milo Manara and Hugo Pratt and Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, arguing that some of the characters of *Indian Summer* are in fact liberal reinventions of characters from *The Scarlet Letter*, essentially "spin-offs" of Hawthorne's narrative; Sostene Massimo Zangari's topic is the comedy movies of the early 1980s, which variously comment

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on the Italian-American relationship; and Valeria Gennero's essay explores the meaning of untranslated "gender" in Italian culture and its relationship to "sex" in contrast to the traditional sex/gender binary, following the nature/culture opposition. Daniele Pomilio's review essay highlights the main critical contributions collected in the volume recently edited by Curreli and Delville on *Profondo Rosso*, reconsidering the cult movie by Dario Argento, and finally, John Matteson's postscript offers an insight into his exploration of Margaret Fuller's Italian episode and her role as America's leading spokesperson for the Roman Revolution.

Even though the volume does not presume to be either authoritative or exhaustive, as its guest editor I sincerely hope that the insights it offers the reader will rekindle debate dedicated both to the "translatological" vision of cultural transfer and to the American contributions to Italian life as we know it today. With these goals in mind, I am proud to present the *Trans/Lazio* issue to the readers with the goal of inspiring further studies on the Italian-American connection, both in Italy and the US, both among the IASA members and independent scholars worldwide.

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