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## **A Clash of Civilizations? U.S. Army, Italian Women and the Gender Shock of 1943–1945**

*They'd never be the same again – either dead or changed somehow.  
It was the riddle of war, of human dignity, of love, of life itself.*

John Horne Burns, *The Gallery* (1947)

*It is a shameful thing to win a war.*

Curzio Malaparte, *The Skin* (1949)

### **1. *Allied Enemies: United States and Italy (1943–1945)***

In July 1943, following their victory in North Africa, the combined Anglo-American forces led by General Dwight Eisenhower undertook an invasion of Sicily (Operation Husky). A few German divisions present on the island are usually thought to have offered much more of a fierce resistance than entire Italian armies<sup>1</sup>. The obviously low morale of their surrendering troops compelled some high ranking fascists (among them Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini's minister of foreign affairs, son-in-law and heir apparent) to remove the Duce from his position as Italy's totalitarian dictator on July 25, 1943<sup>2</sup>. Paradoxically, a regime praising the Italians' manhood – by some even accused of “an obsession of virility”<sup>3</sup> – was crumbling like a house of cards as a result of a lack of fighting spirit among its troops on the one hand and the betrayal of its leaders, including the incarnation of fascist virilities – the popular and charming husband of the Duce's beloved daughter, on the other.

However, that was hardly the last paradox of the Italian transition from the Axis to the Allied camp. King Victor Emmanuel III's newly appointed Prime

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<sup>1</sup> E. Morris, *Circles of Hell, The War in Italy 1943–1945*, New York 1993, pp. 42–43.

<sup>2</sup> I. Williams, *Allies and Italians under Occupation. Sicily and Southern Italy 1943–1945*, New York 2013, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> B. Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy*, Minneapolis 1996, p. 1.

Minister, the Field Marshall Pietro Badoglio, formerly himself a well-known fascist, solemnly declared in his first public statement that “the war [alongside Germany] went on”<sup>4</sup>, while simultaneously making desperate attempts to conclude a secret armistice with the Anglo-Americans. What today can be interpreted in terms of salutary pragmatism (the need to conceal Badoglio’s real plans from the Germans), in 1943 put the new Italian government in an extremely delicate position. When negotiating the terms of their surrender to the Americans and the British, Italian authorities requested an imminent landing of at least fifteen Allied divisions in order to protect them against a probable revenge from their former German allies<sup>5</sup>. Badoglio’s humiliation reached its climax when five days after the armistice had been informally signed, it was General Eisenhower who made it public on September 8, 1943 in a radio broadcast from his headquarters in North Africa. Since no Allied troops had been deployed to garrison the Rome area while the Germans promptly proceeded with their long pre-planned Operation Alarich aiming at an armed occupation of Italy, Marshall Badoglio and his King found no alternative to a rapid escape to the South, close to the advancing Allies<sup>6</sup>.

From the summer of 1943 to the spring of 1945 (Liberation Day is annually celebrated on April 25) Italy constituted a World War II battleground for the Germans, taking advantage of the predominantly mountainous terrain to provide stubborn resistance, and the Anglo-Americans, slowly and methodically pushing northward on what was deemed as merely a secondary theater of operations. For the prostrate country this meant a long and humiliating period of double occupation (the shrinking German-controlled area in the North and the expanding Allied-controlled one in the South) since neither side was actually willing to recognize Italians as honest partners and *bona fide* cobelligerents. To the Anglo-Americans Italy seemed – as one historian put it – an “Allied enemy”<sup>7</sup>, even if Italian civilians demonstrated their wild enthusiasm, welcoming U.S. troops marching into Naples on October 1, 1943 as saviors and liberators from the fascist yoke: “Long live the United Nations! Long live the victorious troops! Long live Italy! Long live Naples!”<sup>8</sup>.

However, remembering the crowds gathered in the city’s Piazza del Popolo, an American witness pointed out with cruel irony that this was the place where

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<sup>4</sup> H. S. Hughes, *The United States and Italy*, Cambridge 1979, p. 120.

<sup>5</sup> D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, New York 1948, p. 184.

<sup>6</sup> E. Di Nolfo, M. Serra, *La gabbia infranta. Gli Alleati e l’Italia dal 1943 al 1945*, Roma 2010, pp. 50–51.

<sup>7</sup> D. W. Ellwood, *L’alleato nemico: la politica dell’occupazione anglo-americana in Italia, 1943–1946*, Milano 1977.

<sup>8</sup> M. Porzio, *Arrivano gli Alleati. Amori e violenze nell’Italia liberata*, Bari 2011, p. 27.

“conquerors traditionally were received”<sup>9</sup>. Thus Italians were viewed as a passive, effeminate nation, throughout its history falling prey to new waves of invaders. Many American servicemen thus perceived Italy as a de facto conquered country, refusing to forget her status as a former enemy: “These Ginsoes have made war on us; so it doesn’t matter what we do to them, boost their prices, shatter their economy, and shack up with their women”<sup>10</sup>. Interestingly enough, Italian sources tend to emphasize the presence of Americans while almost ignoring that of other Allies. Americans were noticed as a result of the Italian experience of emigration to the U.S., their straightforward manners and the arrival in their ranks of African American soldiers. In fact, most Neapolitans found it difficult to put up with that so many of the cherished liberators were “Negroes”, previously depicted by Italian fascists as an inferior race to be colonized, now omnipresent in the country and in a position of power<sup>11</sup>. As a result of the Selective Service Act of 1940, it had been U.S. Army policy for African Americans to account for 10.6% of the total manpower, equal to their percentage of the national population<sup>12</sup>. However, except for the two colored combat divisions deployed in Italy (366<sup>th</sup> Infantry and 92<sup>nd</sup> Infantry-Buffalo Soldiers) normally 75% of the black GIs were employed in Service Force branches as laborers, drivers, cooks, thus maintaining even more everyday contacts with Italian civilians than the frontline – and predominantly white – fighting units<sup>13</sup>.

It was Naples, “the largest rest camp for Allied servicemen in all of liberated Europe”<sup>14</sup>, at the same time allegedly “the worst-governed city in the Western world”<sup>15</sup>, that grew to become the main laboratory of American-Italian relations in the years 1943–1945 in the context of what Italian sources often defined as its “moral and material misery”<sup>16</sup>. An Allied serviceman recalled:

It is astonishing to witness the struggles of this city so shattered, so starved, so deprived of all those things that justify a city’s existence, to adapt itself to a collapse into conditions which must resemble life in the Dark Ages. People camp out like Bedouins in deserts of brick. There is little food, little water, no salt, no soap<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> D. Graham, S. Bidwell, *Tug of War. The Battle for Italy: 1943–1945*, New York 1986, p. 112.

<sup>10</sup> D. W. Ellwood, *The Shock of America: Europe and the Challenge of the Century*, Oxford 2012, p. 282.

<sup>11</sup> M. Porzio, op. cit., pp. 66–67.

<sup>12</sup> A. Bielakowski, *African American Troops in World War II*, New York 2007, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> E. Morris, op. cit., p. 403.

<sup>14</sup> P. De Marco, *Polvere di piselli: la vita quotidiana a Napoli durante l’occupazione alleata: 1943–1944*, Napoli 1996, p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> D. W. Ellwood, *The Shock of America*, p. 284.

<sup>16</sup> M. Porzio, op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>17</sup> N. Lewis, *Naples 44*, London 1978, p. 46.

Another eyewitness added: “Hunger dominated everything else; we actually witnessed a moral collapse of this people. They did not have any more pride or dignity; their struggle to survive dominated everything else. Food was the only thing that mattered [...]. And then some warm and rest”<sup>18</sup>.

Such tragic circumstances gave rise to a fresh wave of irrationalism, a deep-rooted aspect of Neapolitan, and in general Southern Italian, mentality. A British soldier commented with a note of rather widespread sense of Anglo-Saxon superiority:

Everywhere there is a craving for miracles and cures. The war has pushed the Neapolitans back into the Middle Ages. Churches are suddenly full of images that talk, bleed, sweat, nod their heads [...] and anxious, ecstatic crowds gather waiting for these marvels to happen. [...] Naples has reached a state of nervous exhaustion when mass hallucination has become a commonplace, and belief of any kind can be more real than reality<sup>19</sup>.

Not only to the British, but also to many Americans, Neapolitans with their faith in San Gennaro’s blood solemnly liquefying on certain occasions, seemed “a pathetic people, not very strong in character”<sup>20</sup>. An American officer was surprised to hear from his Italian informants that “the prices have been increased even for blessings”<sup>21</sup>. In Naples, a city virtually ruled by the Camorra, among the poor “everything was for sale” and among the wealthy “the mood was one of escapism”<sup>22</sup>.

A first encounter between that society and the liberal Anglo-Saxons obviously brought a “shock of change” to Neapolitans and most Italians:

The Allied troops were the richest in the world, all soldiers (except for the negroes) seemed officers and all officers were tall, clean and smiling. They were climbing up the Peninsula from Sicily toward Naples, Anzio, Rome, and then Florence, Bologna, Milan, bringing white bread, tinned meat, pea flour, Camel cigarettes and boogie-woogie, causing an indefinable and burning desire to live, after years of misery and fear<sup>23</sup>.

A famous playwright, Eduardo De Filippo, put it aptly: “The new century, this twentieth century did not reach Naples until the arrival of the Allies; here in

<sup>18</sup> M. Porzio, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>19</sup> N. Lewis, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> S. Zeiger, *Entangling Alliances: Foreign War Brides and American Soldiers in the Twentieth Century*, New York 2010, p. 95.

<sup>21</sup> R. M. Hill, E. Craig Hill, *In the Wake of War. Memoirs of an Alabama Military Government Officer in World War II Italy*, Tuscaloosa, AL, 1982, p. 49.

<sup>22</sup> N. Lewis, op. cit., pp. 47, 142.

<sup>23</sup> M. Porzio, op. cit., pp. 31–32.

Naples, it seems to me, the Second World War made a hundred years pass overnight<sup>24</sup>. If the Allies meant to make a difference, they needed to fight “the second battle of Naples”, not only against local customs and superstition, but first of all against starvation and typhus. To start with, Allied soldiers were forbidden entry to most of the infested city, labelled as “out for bounds” or “off limits”<sup>25</sup>. Since few were prepared to respect such measures, this created a vast grey zone of no man’s land where black market, prostitution and petty crime reigned supreme. An American officer working for the Allied Military Government of the Occupied Territories (AMGOT, often mocked as the “Ancient Military Gentlemen on Tour”) recalled: “We saw black market everywhere. [...] Truck drivers were distributing cartons of stolen food that had just been delivered by Liberty Ships at the docks. The daily ration of 125 grams of bread was much too low, and the sight of Allied supplies was irresistible”<sup>26</sup>.

The authority exercised by AMGOT over the conquered people brought about a revival of the traditional personification of Italy as a beautiful woman, “a nubile and poetic creature longing for the embrace of a strong protector”<sup>27</sup>, dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, while it had previously motivated young patriots to fight and die for *la bella Italia*, after the collapse of the fascist myths of national virility and racial superiority few were now prepared to defend her. Postwar Italy, a helpless and passive woman, was ready to be taken possession of – symbolically and physically – by her conquerors. A process of Italy’s and Italians’ self-victimization, partly resulting from their actual experience of suffering and hardship and partly aiming at erasing the memories of their own war crimes and guilt, had thus begun.

It had profound implications for Italian women, far more directly than men. “[Italian] men were in the army. For years towns had been full of women and children, the elderly and the youth. And then the Americans arrived”<sup>28</sup>. Not very long after Salerno and Anzio had been identified as the Allies’ strategically vital beachheads in Italy, Naples came to be known as their Italian “bitchhead”<sup>29</sup>. No wonder it also became the epicenter of the 1943–1945 “clash of civilizations”, or an intercultural gender shock occurred in the largely conservative and Catholic Italian South obsessed with the notion of the chastity and honor of women subjected to the authority and protection of their fathers and husbands<sup>30</sup>. A famous

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<sup>24</sup> D. W. Ellwood, *The Shock of America*, p. 282.

<sup>25</sup> P. De Marco, op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>26</sup> R. M. Hill, E. Craig Hill, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>27</sup> C. Duggan, *The Force of Destiny. A History of Italy since 1796*, Boston–New York 2008, p. 46.

<sup>28</sup> M. Porzio, op. cit., pp. 31–32.

<sup>29</sup> R. Atkinson, *The Day Of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy 1943–44*, London 2007.

<sup>30</sup> J. Farrell, *Sicily. A Cultural History*, Oxford 2012, p. 35.

Sicilian slogan had been “Wives and sardines keep fresh in sealed tins”<sup>31</sup> while fascism had further consolidated such views through its omnipresent maternal discourse<sup>32</sup>. Thus with the Allied landing in Sicily traditional gender roles were to be challenged, or at least deeply transformed, as not-so-innocent women would make their appearance on the public scene.

However, one could interpret these new developments also in terms of continuity and change, since as a part of Southern tradition women had always been expected to make their contribution to maintaining their families. A shocked Anglo-Saxon traveler noticed:

The women are above all slaves; a woman is really on the lowest rung of the social scale. The heaviest physical tasks fall to her; when her man returns from work, she is the one who follows him, barefoot, carrying the weights that cannot be put on a mule. [...] By the age of thirty she is already an old woman<sup>33</sup>.

In the new context of the liberation (or conquest) by American GIs in the years 1943–1945 (with Italian men largely absent, interned as POWs or simply defeated, and thus symbolically deprived of their traditional role) “the heaviest tasks that fell to her” forced the Italian woman to seek protection and the very survival of her family through a range of contacts with the victorious troops. As we are going to see, the complex relations between Italian women and American men cannot be fully explained exclusively in terms of unilateral sexual exploitation. There were a number of ways Italians – both women and men – would try to manipulate this situation to their own advantage in what with time became also a rather sophisticated power play from both sides, at times leaving young Americans deeply disgusted with the scale of both material misery and moral corruption of their at least partly self-styled Italian victims<sup>34</sup>.

### **U.S. Army and the Geopolitics of Sex in WW2 Italy**

As demonstrated by Susan Zeiger in her impressive piece of research, a thorough analysis of the existing primary documentation (including official U. S. Army surveys and conference papers) must lead one to the conclusion that sex was certainly considered by American decision makers in World War 2 a vital political problem<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> V. De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women, Italy 1922–1945*, Berkeley 1993, p. 206.

<sup>32</sup> W. Pojmann, *Italian Women and International Cold War Politics, 1944–1968*, New York 2013, p. 24

<sup>33</sup> P. Ginsborg, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>34</sup> I. Williams, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> S. Zeiger, op. cit., p. 73.

Despite their private nature – another scholar points out – sexual relations came to possess larger political meanings and provided crucial models of dominance and submission. Paying female civilians to have sex taught millions of GIs to expect subservience [...]. Similarly, watching women sell their bodies – or worse still, hearing their stories of rape – forced [foreign] men to recognize their own diminished position in the world. In these cases, the [...] female body realigned power relations between the two nations<sup>36</sup>.

Romance, prostitution and rape were thus the three categories that needed to be addressed within the framework of the politics of sex in reference to how they shaped the relations between the GIs and the people of the area where they were deployed.

Similar problems had already surfaced during World War I. In the spirit of the Progressive Era young, noble, innocent and generous American “boys” were idealized as “the knights in the crusade for democracy”, “pure and clean through and through”, while – army physicians claimed – “sexual intercourse is not necessary for good health and complete continence is wholly possible”<sup>37</sup>. As a result, WWI war brides – as opposed to the meaning of the term twenty years later – had been “American Penelopes”, young girls getting married before their husbands set off for war<sup>38</sup>. However, the policies embraced by WWI military planners proved largely ineffective as the future World War II GIs “had grown up hearing stories of sexual adventure from fathers who fought in France in 1917–1918”, often leading to the conclusion that “France was a tremendous brothel inhabited by 40,000,000 hedonists” and “the French were morally degraded”<sup>39</sup>. Also endeavors aimed at maintaining the spirit of chastity among the GIs in WWI Italy failed in a very similar way, according to the memoirs of Fiorello LaGuardia, then U.S. Army liaison officer in Foggia<sup>40</sup>.

Therefore very different policies were adopted at the time of World War II. In the spirit of new sexual liberalism, it was decided that GIs needed to be treated more realistically as “red-blooded” men, and not “American boys”. Their healthy, vigorous heterosexuality was to be strengthened in order to maintain the army’s high morale. General George Patton is believed to have put it even more bluntly: “If they [soldiers] don’t fuck, they don’t fight”<sup>41</sup>. While homosexuals

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<sup>36</sup> M. L. Roberts, *What Soldiers Do. Sex and the American GI in World War II France*, Chicago 2013, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> S. Zeiger, op. cit., pp. 12, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> M. L. Roberts, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> F. LaGuardia, *The Making of An Insurgent*, New York 1948, p. 176–177.

<sup>41</sup> M. L. Roberts, op. cit., p. 160.

were deemed unfit for service as “mentally ill”, male heterosexuality was presented as “normative and even patriotic”<sup>42</sup>. Thus sex had become a powerful tool of political and military propaganda, with potentially explosive consequences. A contemporary woman historian claims:

Military propagandists had used pinups – images of gorgeous all-American girls like Rita Hayworth – to [...] inspire the soldiers. [...] Once aroused, the GI libido proved difficult to contain. [...]. The acts of rescue, protection and sexual dominance all restored GI’s sense of manliness crucial for the successful prosecution of war. [...] But such fantasies also unleashed a veritable tsunami of male lust. The GIs were known for their promiscuity in all theaters, whether European, Mediterranean, or Pacific. [...] Sex was fundamental to how the US military framed, fought and won the war in Europe<sup>43</sup>.

The results proved terrible. Even in Great Britain – enjoying a conspicuously privileged status as a key ally – there were serious concerns related to the “friendly invasion” of 1.5 million Americans “overpaid, oversexed and over here”<sup>44</sup>. After the successful invasion of France in June 1944 a GI sent his wife a rather shocking letter: “Just a few weeks ago the Germans were using these roads, buildings, fields, chairs, tables, toilets, women, and now we are”<sup>45</sup>. Women were thus classified as one of the fruits of victory to be “used”. From the standpoint of gender studies, this meant that women’s sexuality was “mobilized in the context of war”, women were oppressed and stigmatized, whereas the American soldier possessing women represented “the power that the United States asserts over foreign lands and people”<sup>46</sup>. One might find particularly shocking that when sexual excesses in the form of rape occurred, the army’s response was generally to downplay the problem scapegoating African Americans as the primary perpetrators<sup>47</sup>. U.S. military officials even went as far as warning their allies of the sexual danger allegedly posed by black GIs to the white women of the occupied territories<sup>48</sup>.

It is quite understandable that another crucial policy matter also arose in this context. Army circles needed to determine whether in order to avoid rape they would favor sexual relations in the form of marriage or prostitution. Again, in the military’s own words it was all the question of either dating “decent

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<sup>42</sup> S. Zeiger, *op. cit.*, pp. 75, 80.

<sup>43</sup> M. L. Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 7–11.

<sup>44</sup> S. Zeiger, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>45</sup> M. L. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>46</sup> S. Zeiger, *op. cit.*, pp. 2–3.

<sup>47</sup> M. L. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> S. Zeiger, *op. cit.*, p. 6.



women” or “finding something to fuck”<sup>49</sup>. No comprehensive policy was applied globally while a number of alternative solutions were favored according to what Zeiger defined as “cultural, racial and gender biases” of the military authorities or the geopolitics of sex. For example, while those soldiers stationed in Britain were expected to be looking for their prospective spouses to be brought to the United States, such perspectives were excluded in the case of the servicemen sent to areas like Black Africa. In practice, U.S.-adopted policies ranged from the creation of a class of mostly European (80%) war brides; through the establishment of military “tolerated” public houses, including those meant strictly for “Negroes”, guarded by the Military Police (MP) in countries like Italy; to nothing short of walled “women’s villages” i.e. sex camps created in parts of Africa (e.g. Liberia). These measures were primarily adopted in order to prevent the threat of venereal disease (VD), potentially detrimental to the army’s fighting capacity. For these reasons as many as 50 million condoms were reportedly distributed among U.S. servicemen every month<sup>50</sup>.

Needless to say this kind of politics of sex has been interpreted within the framework of gender studies in terms of “female disempowerment”, “projecting American power around the globe”, with the intention “to preserve and extend male control over women”<sup>51</sup>. A particular aspect of the problem is the thoroughly studied worldwide issue of WW2 war brides, a term now referring to a privileged category of immigration, foreign wives selected by the GIs<sup>52</sup>. A 1944 U.S. army report revealed that the scale of the problem of soldier marriage couldn’t compare to WW1 experience. Since the soldiers’ minimum age had dropped to 18 (it used to be at least 20 years of age in the Great War), far fewer GIs were already married when they first set foot in Europe in 1943. Consequently, over 125,000 of them got married during WW2. Among the 114,000 wives admitted to the United States, in line with the War Brides Act of 1945, a vast majority (almost 85,000) were European, while half of the women involved were white English-speakers from Britain, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Thus it was largely all about white American men marrying white European or Anglo-Saxon women<sup>53</sup>. Obviously, the figures referring to the nationality and race of American war brides reflected quite accurately the cultural prestige and political standing of their respective countries from the point of view of the army officials whose permission was required for U.S. servicemen to marry a foreign girlfriend.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibidem, p. 97.

<sup>50</sup> M. L. Roberts, op. cit., p. 159.

<sup>51</sup> S. Zeiger, op. cit., pp. 71, 79.

<sup>52</sup> C. Fallows, *Love & War: Stories of War Brides from the Great War to Vietnam*, New York 2002.

<sup>53</sup> S. Zeiger, op. cit., pp. 71–73.

What was then the position of Italy within this international hierarchy or the geopolitics of sex? First of all, it must be mentioned that in another army survey in the summer of 1945, when answering the question: "Have you ever had intercourse in Italy?", 74% of white men and as many as 96% of black men responded in the positive, most of them declaring they had sex once a month<sup>54</sup>. Although U.S. officials attempted to isolate their men from health hazards, placing most of the dangerous brothels "off limits", those steps, as such inefficient, came too late as already in October 1943, according to army statistics, 1 in 4 Allied soldiers suffered from VD, while this figure stood at 3 in 4 among U.S. segregated "colored" troops<sup>55</sup>. Between September 1944 and April 1945 over 3000 servicemen were put out of action in Italy due to VD while only 900 were reported as actual battle casualties<sup>56</sup>. Since, as we have seen, unemployment, misery and famine were ubiquitous in Naples and all of the Italian South, it now fell again to Italian women – since their fathers and husbands were physically or symbolically absent – to provide for their families' needs. As a result, the Bureau of Psychological Warfare believed there were "42,000 women in Naples engaged either on a regular or occasional basis in prostitution. This out of a nubile female population of perhaps 150,000. It seems incredible"<sup>57</sup>. Therefore it became a common misconception, widely shared by American officials, that in Italy "prostitution is accepted as a part of the social structure"<sup>58</sup>. Or – as one British physician put it – "in Sicily and Italy we met a world sexually mad"<sup>59</sup>.

No wonder only 9,046 Italian women were brought to the United States under the War Bride Act of 1945, a very modest figure taking into consideration the huge numbers of U.S. troops deployed in Italy and the long duration of their stay. In fact, few GIs asked for permission to marry Italian girls. An important exception was provided by Italian American servicemen, often encouraged by their families to find a nice Italian girl to marry. Another reason was also the bias of U.S. military authorities summarily dismissing their soldiers' requests to marry Italian women<sup>60</sup>. This happened also because upon closer inspection prospective Italian war brides frequently turned out to be notorious prostitutes<sup>61</sup>.

Within the general framework of U.S. geopolitics of sex in World War II, Italy was therefore considered "a midway point" between the industrial North

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<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, p. 96.

<sup>55</sup> P. De Marco, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>56</sup> I. Williams, op. cit., p. 197.

<sup>57</sup> N. Lewis, op. cit., p. 115.

<sup>58</sup> S. Zeiger, op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>59</sup> I. Williams, op. cit., p. 196.

<sup>60</sup> S. Zeiger, op. cit., pp. 99–102.

<sup>61</sup> N. Lewis, op. cit., p. 114.

and the colonial South. Although undoubtedly a part of Europe, Italy could never attain a status similar to that of Great Britain (where marriage was given priority before prostitution), not only due to its rather ambiguous status as a co-belligerent and not an ally. It also stemmed from the deeply embedded prejudice – not unlike racism – against Italian immigrants in the United States, labelled as *dagoes* or *wops*<sup>62</sup>. The Italians that young American soldiers encountered after their seaborne landings could not have done more to confirm the preexisting negative stereotypes. “Ninety-nine out of a hundred Neapolitans are crooked. I should know. I’m a native of Naples myself” – one Italian officer told his new American colleague<sup>63</sup>. Unaware of the destructive moral and physical impact of the military defeat, especially in the underdeveloped regions of the Italian South, many Americans thought of more or less all Italians as “lazy, untrustworthy, superstitious, excitable and [...] Catholic”<sup>64</sup>.

### **Italy as America’s War Bride? Stories of the Gender Shock**

There exist a variety of primary sources shading light on the abovementioned “clash of civilizations” of 1943–1945 from both the Italian and American standpoint. Apart from official records and literature, the GIs’ arrival was preserved in the local memories of Italy’s cities, villages and regions through first-hand witness accounts, folklore and local culture as well as locally-based research projects. An exceptionally rich and unique set of primary film sources was provided by the rise of Neorealism, a new film school, hiring unprofessional working-class actors to render the realities of their everyday lives. From the American perspective there has been a wide range of wartime memories authored by generals and simple soldiers. For obvious reasons it is not either the popular and rather conservative Ike or General Mark Clark, the liberator of Rome and great celebrity of the day, but the common servicemen who provide us with far more insight into the less glorious and aesthetically attractive aspects of the Italian campaign. These sources deserve an in-depth study as they enable their readers to understand how the awkward status of Italy as America’s “allied enemy” and the geopolitics of sex shaped the lives of specific individuals, women and men, exposed to the “shock of America” in the form of a gender shock of 1943–1945.

Perhaps the most imminent expression of the problems in question is provided by what has remained to this day a very well-known Neapolitan folk song:

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<sup>62</sup> S. LaGumina, *Wop!: A Documentary History of Anti-Italian Discrimination in the United States*, New York 1999.

<sup>63</sup> R. M. Hill, E. Craig Hill, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>64</sup> I. Williams, op. cit., p. 31.

“Tammurriata nera” or “The Black Dance”, dating back to 1944. The lyrics by Edoardo Nicolardi, to the music by E. A. Mario, originally written in the Neapolitan language (dialect), and not Italian, can be regarded as the population’s first and sincere reaction to a new phenomenon:

E’ nato nu criaturo, è nato niro,  
 e ’a mamma ’o chiamma gGiro,  
 sissignore, ’o chiamma gGiro. [...]  
 sti cose nun so’ rare se ne vedono a migliare. [...]  
 va truvanno mò chi è stato,  
 c’ha cugliuto buono ’o tiro  
 chillo ’o fatto è niro niro, niro niro comm’a cche... [...]  
 ’E signurine napulitane fanno ’e figlie cu ’e ’mericane,  
 nce verimme ogge o dimane mmiezo Porta Capuana. [...]  
 Aieressera a piazza Dante ’o stommaco mio era vacante,  
 si nun era p’o contrabbando, ì’ mò già stevo ’o campusanto.  
 Sigarette papà caramelle mamma,  
 biscuit bambino dduie dollare ’e signurine.  
 A Cuncetta e a Nanninella ’e piacevan’e caramelle,  
 mò se presentano pe’ zitelle e vann’a fernì ’ncopp’e burdelle.

A baby’s born and he’s all black,  
 and his mom calls him *Ciro*, yeah, she calls him *Ciro*! [...]  
 Now, it’s no uncommon case,  
 you see thousands of ‘em! [...]  
 now go find who dun it,  
 go find who made the good shot,  
 and the baby’s all black, black like don’t know what! [...]  
 The Neapolitan girls make babies with Americans,  
 see you today or tomorrow at Porta Capuana. [...]  
 Yesterday night in Piazza Dante I had an empty stomach,  
 wasn’t it for smuggling, I’d now be stone dead.  
 Cigarettes for dad, sweets for mom,  
 Biscuits for the kids and two dollars for the gal.  
 Concetta and Nanninella they liked sweets so much,  
 now nobody wants to marry ‘em and they get in whorehouses<sup>65</sup>.

One can understand what great a shock it proved for the community of Naples to witness this mass-scale (“thousands of them”) problem of black children born to local girls from anonymous African American fathers, unidentifiable since to Neapolitans they all looked the same (“go find...”). The unhappy girls

<sup>65</sup> E. Nicolardi, *Tammurriata nera*, <http://www.antiwarsongs.org/> [accessed on November 1, 2014]; American English translation by Riccardo Venturi.

must bear what is regarded as deep shame (“black like I don’t know what”) even if they decide to give their babies traditional Neapolitan names (“Ciro”). However, the newborn is only an ultimate proof of the girls’ humiliation as we get to know it is starvation that drives them to have a hasty intercourse (later in the song referred to as “American express”) with black GIs in order to obtain cigarettes, sweets or biscuits for the whole family, including their own children or siblings. However, if young girls “like sweets too much” like Concetta and Nanninella (diminutives suggest their young age), they are likely to lose their honor and thus the only options left to them will be prostitution for the rest of their lives (or suicide).

There are plenty of other sources corroborating the reliability of this account in its many aspects. It is perhaps particularly shocking to find out that according to Italian medical statistics 310 among women treated for VD at Naples’ Pace Hospital were minors, some of them barely five years old<sup>66</sup>. As far as the idea of sex for food is concerned, a British serviceman recalled a letter from a father, “probably put together by the village priest” in the rural areas outside Naples:

This girl, as you know, has no mother, and she hasn’t eaten for days. Being out of work I can’t feed my family. If you could arrange to give her a good square meal once a day, I’d be quite happy for her to stay [with you], and perhaps we could come to some mutually satisfactory understanding in due course<sup>67</sup>.

Some children would associate African Americans with sweets, like in a satirical cartoon published on Naples’ “Don Chisciotte” magazine in October 1944, whose caption read:

Father to son: If you do not behave yourself, I will call for a black man.  
Son to father: Great! I’m not afraid. He already came here yesterday when you were out. He brought some candies for mum and some sweet chocolate for me.

Another group of visual sources are propaganda posters displayed throughout the city of Naples in 1944, showing a beautiful white woman resisting an ugly black soldier, with a caption saying: “Defend her! She could be your mother, your wife, your sister or your daughter!” or “No Italian woman for those beasts!” (alongside a doctored photograph of an African American soldier with exaggerated racial features)<sup>68</sup>.

Black GIs often complained about “Jim Crowism” uniting their own white officers and Italian civilians. In particular, Italian men, whose traditional status

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<sup>66</sup> P. De Marco, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>67</sup> N. Lewis, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>68</sup> M. Porzio, op. cit., pp. 106–107.

was seriously threatened, solemnly deplored the moral collapse of their country and their women, especially with respect to their relations with African Americans. According to a black American war reporter leaflets were published heavily coming down on “a group of women of Naples, dragging themselves in the gutter, [who] dare to go out on the streets with Negroes”, allegedly signed by Italian American GIs of the “Italian American Committee for the Preservation of Italian Race”<sup>69</sup>. Undoubtedly, to them and many Italians what was happening constituted a major shock, a gender shock related to the images of manhood and femininity. In their letters one could read:

In Naples, [there is] black market and trade of all kinds, especially of woman flash, the moral and spiritual condition is terrible. [...] [Americans have] ruined everything in Italy, literally everything, not only the houses, roads, railroads, bridges and aqueducts, but also its good customs and morale. [...] In Naples there are 4000 girls and boys in hospital, all sick with venereal disease, caught from those damn blacks [...]. Sicily which is a typical expression of honor, dignity etc. doesn't have any more honest, pure, sincere girls. Everything has crumbled. Moral values have been banished, sacrificed, overthrown! These are the direct consequences of this war! [...] The spread of prostitution [...], a continuous insult to seriousness and dignity [...]. The customs of Sicily have changed, the basic principles of healthy education have been annihilated. [...] Women offer a most disgusting performance. They are prostitutes for the Allies. Just think that I have seen some even with the blacks<sup>70</sup>.

Italian women were thus especially stigmatized for maintaining intimate relations with “the blacks”. They were called “traitors of the fatherland” or simply “whores”, got insulted and, even if accompanied by Allied soldiers, assaulted in the streets by young Italian men who at times tried to shave their heads<sup>71</sup>.

A less radical form of protest against the new customs came from the Catholic Church. A witness remembered:

On my way back to Piazza Plebiscito, I noticed with surprise that the Catholic Action was fighting here too its battle for morality, with posters on the walls. But that too was a Neapolitan battle: it was fought on its own account, without anyone taking notice of it, especially at that evening hour. I saw many women walk by on the arms of Allied soldiers between me and those few posters and didn't know if I should curse, or laugh, or begin to scream from grief, like Neapolitans do. [...] What was happening was so immeasurable, and urgent, and difficult, that just thinking about

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<sup>69</sup> M. A. Huddle (ed.), *Roi Ottley's World War II. The Lost Diary of an African American Journalist*, Lawrence, KS 2011, p. 178.

<sup>70</sup> M. Porzio, op. cit., pp. 110–112.

<sup>71</sup> S. Zeiger, op. cit., p. 101.

it took one's breath away; it was somewhat like the thought of our duty when we're on the line to move forward, always move forward, in order to liberate women and children from the torment of the front<sup>72</sup>.

However, in order to sense the entire horror of the reality of the years 1943–1945 in Naples one needs to entrust oneself to the guidance of Curzio Malaparte, a highly controversial Italian intellectual, an eye-witness to those events and the author of "The Skin", a novel first published in Italian in 1949, at the same time probably the most aesthetically shocking and philosophically sophisticated account of "the shock of America" in Italy. According to one Anglo-Saxon scholar, "in Malaparte's deeply pessimistic worldview, self-abasement turns into a form of exhibitionism"<sup>73</sup>. With his typical bitter irony, Malaparte opens his novel with a dedication to "all the brave, good and honorable American soldiers [...] who died in vain in the cause of European freedom"<sup>74</sup>. Throughout his book he will be coming back to his complex attitude toward Americans and the American myths, full of sarcasm and sense of cultural superiority:

I like the Americans because they are good and sincere Christians; because they believe that Christ is always on the side of those who are in the right; because they believe it is a sin to be in the wrong, that it is immoral to be in the wrong; because they believe that they alone are honorable men, and that all the nations of Europe are more or less dishonest; because they believe that a conquered nation is a nation of criminals, that defeat is a moral stigma, an expression of divine justice. [...] As a race you are too tall. America needs to come down to our level. [...] You are too tall [...], too handsome. It's immoral that the world should contain a race of men who are so tall, so handsome and so healthy. [...] American civilization needs shorter legs<sup>75</sup>.

In Malaparte's view,

Naples was in the throes of the «plague». [...] This was a plague profoundly different from, but no less horrible than, the epidemics which from time to time devastated Europe during the Middle Ages. The extraordinary thing about this most modern of diseases was that it corrupted not the body but the soul [...]. It was a kind of moral plague, against which it seemed that there was no defense<sup>76</sup>.

In many cases one might think that the idealistic, if naïve, Americans arriving to Europe which is "all like Naples"<sup>77</sup> with their "useless Cartesian logic"<sup>78</sup> are likely

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<sup>72</sup> E. Corti, *The Last Soldiers of the King. Wartime Italy 1943–1945*, Columbia 2003, p. 257.

<sup>73</sup> D. W. Ellwood, *The Shock of America*, p. 282.

<sup>74</sup> C. Malaparte, *The Skin*, New York 2013, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 15, 29.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 7, 28.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 214.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 24.

to get corrupted by the Italians who will do anything for the sake of “saving their skin”<sup>79</sup>. This is the case with his account of “modern black slavery” in occupied Naples. The gist of the story is that cunning Neapolitan boys would pay each other “buying” African American slaves i.e. soldiers whom they would introduce to their sisters or mothers in order to draw benefits from their affection:

And the Negro would come home every evening with gifts of sugar, cigarettes, spam, bacon, bread, white flour, vests, stockings, shoes, uniforms, bedspreads, overcoats, and vast quantities of candy. The «black» was delighted by the quiet family life, the decorousness and warmth of his welcome, the smiles of the women and children [...]. After a few days the fortunate Negro, having become the slave of this poor, warmhearted Neapolitan family, would become engaged to one of his master’s daughters and he would return home with gifts for his fiancée [...] which the father and brothers of his fiancée sold to dealers on the black market. It was also possible to buy white slaves in the jungle that was Naples, but they showed little return, and so cost less<sup>80</sup>.

One can easily explain why black “slaves” tended to be more generous to their Italian families: the treatment they received in Naples was apparently much better than what they could ever dream of in America. In fact, just like Roi Ottley, the African American journalist, most black “slaves” failed to grasp the real motivation behind such attitudes and considered the Italian people “wonderful in their hospitality to the Negro troops, inviting them to their homes, churches and social affairs”<sup>81</sup>.

Nonetheless Malaparte is also eager to introduce his reader to the darkest aspects of Naples’ life:

Drunken soldiers danced with women who were almost or completely naked in the squares and streets, in the midst of the wreckage of the houses that had been destroyed in the air raids. There was a mad orgy of drinking, eating, gaiety, singing, laughing, prodigality and revelry, amid the frightful stench that emanated from the countless hundreds of corpses buried beneath the ruins<sup>82</sup>.

Other accounts mentioned Naples’ cemetery as “the lovers’ lane”<sup>83</sup>. On many occasions does Malaparte mention women willing to sell themselves to GIs for as little as five dollars<sup>84</sup>, however he also goes much further than that up to the point where very few of his readers are ready to follow. One of the most disturbing

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<sup>79</sup> Ibidem, p. 145.

<sup>80</sup> Ibidem, p. 24.

<sup>81</sup> M. A. Huddle (ed.), op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>82</sup> C. Malaparte, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>83</sup> N. Lewis, op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>84</sup> C. Malaparte, op. cit., p. 61.



images is that of Neapolitan mothers selling their young children to Moroccan soldiers in the French service. Having presented a full, detailed picture of how the boys are touched and examined before being paid for, Malaparte moves on to assert solemnly:

For so many centuries of poverty and slavery such things have never been heard of in Naples. In Naples they have always sold everything, but not the children. In Naples they have traded everything but not the children. In the streets of Naples children have never been sold. In Naples children are sacred. They are the only sacred thing in Naples. [...] And now in Square della Cappella Vecchia, at the heart of Naples, between the proud palaces of Monte di Dio, Chiatamone, Piazza dei Martiri and the synagogue, Moroccan soldiers were buying Neapolitan children for very little money<sup>85</sup>.

Another story of that kind is that of the “Virgin of Naples”, allegedly a genuine virgin girl, a rare phenomenon at that time, so that – in Malaparte’s symbolic vision – Allied soldiers would pay “one dollar each” to merely see her while an African American thought it necessary to verify her virginity with his own finger<sup>86</sup>. Although Malaparte’s intention was undoubtedly to shock his readers and to illustrate the utter humiliation of innocent and helpless Italians (women and children) by primitive soldiery, in fact one cannot ignore first-hand accounts from other witnesses, not very remote from the novel’s aesthetically repugnant images. Norman Lewis, the British officer, reported a very similar scene on March 26, 1944:

Today at the top of the Via Roma near the Piazza Dante I was stopped by a pleasant-faced old lady, who had nothing for sale but who implored me to go with her to her house [...]. She had something to show me [...]. The single, windowless room was lit by a minute electric bulb over the usual shrine, and I saw a girl standing in a corner. The reason for the appeal now became clear. This, said the woman, was her child, aged thirteen, and she wished to prostitute her. Many soldiers, it seems, will pay for sexual activity less than full intercourse, and she had a revolting scale of fees for these services. [...] I told the woman that I would report her to the police, and she pretended to weep, but it was an empty threat, and she knew it. Nothing can be done. There are no police to deal with the thousands of squalid little crimes like this committed every day in the city<sup>87</sup>.

Italian sources in turn have emphasized an almost incredibly wide range of acts of sexual violence committed by Allied “colored” troops against Italians. For example, only in December 1943, an African American serviceman raped

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 133.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 52–53.

<sup>87</sup> N. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

an Italian peasant woman, the 57-year-old Rosaria Z.; three French Arabs assaulted a 19-year old girl in Atella di Napoli, while in Aversa three Arabs and one Frenchman attacked a 19-year-old boy. Moreover, a peasant from the Bari area complained to the local authorities that women had to stay in their homes at all times as British Indian soldiers guarding a nearby munition factory would force them to have sex as soon as they left. Although official Italian statistics pointed out that almost 90% of the reported 1157 rapes between September 8, 1943 and December 31, 1945 were actually committed by French (Moroccan) troops, local civilians – many of them still illiterate – would often blame all these on African Americans as they failed to distinguish correctly between the different ethnic groups and were convinced the United States was in charge of all military operations in their country<sup>88</sup>. Moreover Italian authors are generally inclined to explain the sexual violence perpetrated by “colored troops” in terms of their will to take revenge for centuries of white colonization<sup>89</sup>. Again, those accounts are confirmed by a shocking testimony of the British witness:

The French colonial troops are on the rampage again. Whenever they take a town or a village, a wholesale rape of the population takes place. Recently all females in the villages of Patricia, Pofi, Isoletta, Supino, and Morolo were violated. In Lenola, which fell to the Allies on May 21, fifty women were raped, but – as these were not enough to go round – children and even old men were violated. It is reported to be normal for two Moroccans to assault a woman simultaneously, one having normal intercourse while the other commits sodomy. In many cases severe damage to the genitals, rectum and uterus has been caused. In Castro di Volsci doctors treated 300 victims of rape, and at Ceccano the British have been forced to build a guarded camp to protect Italian women. Many Moors have deserted, and are attacking villages far behind the lines [...] <sup>90</sup>.

The worst experience of any of Malaparte’s readers is, however, no doubt the scene of General Cork’s (in fact, General Mark Clark’s) banquet, again aesthetically disgusting, yet symbolically crucial. Also this part of the novel was based on solid facts.

All Neapolitans believe – our British witness wrote – that at the banquet offered to welcome General Clark – who had expressed preference for fish – the principal course was a baby manatee – the most prized item of the [Naples] aquarium’s collection – which was boiled and served with a garlic sauce<sup>91</sup>.

Malaparte utilized this popular belief but as usual went much further than that. In his version General Clark demanded fish to be served while at the same time

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<sup>88</sup> I. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>89</sup> M. Porzio, *op. cit.*, pp. 82–85.

<sup>90</sup> N. Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 143–144.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61.

issuing strict orders for no boats to leave the harbors for military security reasons. Eager to please their new master Neapolitans served what they assured him to be an extremely rare fish from the city aquarium. However, to those present at the banquet what they saw seemed strikingly similar to a body of a little girl cooked in water and served with mayonnaise. The outraged American guests refused to eat and accused Italians of being savage barbarians<sup>92</sup>.

Although Malaparte in the end does not make it entirely clear whether what was served was a fish or a girl, he certainly means to use the unforgettable and highly disturbing scene to discuss the nature of the relations between Americans and Italians. The body of the fish/girl symbolizes the fate of Italian women physically and metaphorically devoured by powerful American men. Using this horrible metaphor Malaparte heavily comes down on both Americans and Italians. In his view the former are guilty because they act as ruthless conquerors, while the latter because they are all too eager to play the part of a defeated and humiliated people. In another crucial dialogue with his American counterpart Malaparte's Italian character comes up with his main accusation:

– Naples has always been like this – said Jimmy.

– No, it has never been like this. – I said – Such things have never been seen in Naples. If you didn't like this, if you didn't enjoy such shows, such things would not be happening in Naples. One would not be able to see such things in Naples<sup>93</sup>.

Contemporary Italian scholars – though they consider Malaparte's image of wartime Italy “certainly unjustified” – generally agree that the problems he revealed “must have reached extremely wide dimensions at that time”<sup>94</sup>. Nonetheless, few other authors have provided us with accounts as sharp as his.

In the 1946 film “Paisà” by Roberto Rosellini, Italian women are continuously accompanied by frequently drunk American GIs, most of them African Americans, however any allusions to sex are very delicate. An important scene is when a black serviceman, having shared the sorrows of his inferior status in racially segregated America with a young Italian, follows him to his house only to find out that the boy lives in an unbelievable misery and poverty in the slums of Naples. The soldier feels so ashamed that he quickly runs away. Another vital moment is a white GI's judgment on Italian women: he believes when they first welcomed Americans as liberators, they were truly the most charming ladies of the world but now after six months his feeling is they have all turned into vulgar prostitutes. Heavily drunk, he cannot see that the prostitute he talks to is in fact the very same charming lady who welcomed him six months earlier,

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<sup>92</sup> C. Malaparte, op. cit., pp. 248–256.

<sup>93</sup> Ibidem, p. 54.

<sup>94</sup> P. De Marco, op. cit., p. 46.

whom the harsh living conditions under Allied occupation have compelled to resort to prostitution<sup>95</sup>. A similar topic of relations between Italian women and African American GIs is featured in another neorealist movie, Alberto Lattuada and Federico Fellini's "Senza pietà" of 1948. Destitute girls are sent by Italian authorities to a Catholic monastery with a harsh sense of discipline, symbolizing the conservative face of Italy. They will run away with two African American servicemen, representing their myths of freedom and the American dream. Racial prejudice is also present since one of the girls, a newcomer to the town, asks others how on earth they can deal with "negroes". The rather surprising reply is that they are not too much black, just slightly sunburnt, and will be happy to take the girls with them to America<sup>96</sup>. In the 1981 film adaptation of Malaparte's "The Skin" by Liliana Cavani, yet another attitude is presented: idle and blasé Italian women aristocrats refer to young and naïve American soldiers as "Vitamin A" to be used for their well-being and pleasure<sup>97</sup>.

Other accounts offer insight into some far more complex cases of Italian-American relations. An important story which attracted the attention of much of the Italian public opinion in 1945 was the case of Lydia Cirillo of Torre Annunziata (Naples). She was cheated by an English captain, Lush Sidney, who had promised to marry her and then after a few months revealed he had a wife and children in Alexandria and wished to join his family in Egypt. Lydia Cirillo killed him and her trial received an impressive press coverage as an expression of the problem of Italian women exploited by Allied men. By some she was glorified as the one who "avenged the lost honor of Italian women"<sup>98</sup>. However, most women demonstrated far more conformist approaches. A 16-year-old Anna from Naples married a GI aged 35, "at the strong urging of her parents, who hoped to provide protection for at least one of their eighteen children"<sup>99</sup>. Another radical, but not extremely rare, example was that of Giovanna I., a servant and mistress in the house of Calogero B. (in Catanzaro, Calabria), who escaped from his house to some friends in Naples to what turned out to be a brothel for American soldiers. She chose to be a prostitute for dollars, rather than a servant mistress in a provincial town. It was not a unique case of that kind since Italian authorities were seriously worried by the morally doubtful behavior of "many women [...] driven by the mirage of considerable profit [...] where there are numerous Allied troops"<sup>100</sup>.

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<sup>95</sup> R. Rosellini, *Paisà*, 1946.

<sup>96</sup> A. Lattuada, F. Fellini, *Senza pietà*, 1948.

<sup>97</sup> L. Cavani, *La pelle*, 1981.

<sup>98</sup> M. Porzio, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>99</sup> S. Zeiger, op. cit., p. 102.

<sup>100</sup> M. Porzio, op. cit., p. 101.

In the words of one Italian scholar, “it was no earlier than 1943 that most people [in Italy] truly discovered America”<sup>101</sup>. What happened was a veritable “clash of civilizations”, when a largely conservative, Catholic, poor and defeated Italian society with its sense of ancient civilization, experienced “the shock of America”, liberal, progressive, rich and triumphant. With a bit of Malaparte’s sarcasm, one could argue that “instead of slavery, the Allies had brought them freedom. [...] Such were these wonderful armies, born, like Venus, of the sea foam”<sup>102</sup>. In the realities of the years 1943–1945 “the shock of America” proved to be largely a gender shock, exposing Italian women (at times also children and even men) to sexual exploitation by Allied, often African American, men in full defiance of the customs and gender roles dominant in the Italian South.

The experience turned out to be highly frustrating, if not tragic, to both sides, also with respect to their own myths and self-perceptions. Some Italian soldiers had serious doubts about their patriotic commitment to their country:

There wasn’t a street where one didn’t see women beside or on the arms of foreigners, or wearing multicolored fluttering clothes on fast-moving American jeeps. We bitterly realized that what we had heard was true: Rome had become a huge house of prostitution. Comments began among us: «Damned bitches! [...] They say that it’s even worse in Naples. [...] Here we are risking our lives for this world of whores and thieves. [...] It’s disgusting to be Italian!»<sup>103</sup>.

Similarly, John Horne Burns, the author of a best-selling American WW2 novel, “The Gallery”, saw in Italy the bottom of Dante’s inferno:

I remember that my heart finally broke in Naples [...]. I found out that America was a country just like any other, except that she had more material wealth and more advanced plumbing [...]. And I found out that outside the propaganda writers [...] Americans were very poor spiritually. Their ideals were something to make dollars on. They had bankrupt souls. [...] Therefore my heart broke<sup>104</sup>.

An American military historian has rightly stressed that although in 1943–1945 “the people did what they had to do in order to survive; [...] the experience has left a scar”<sup>105</sup>. Even strong contemporary anti-Americanism, so widespread in Italy, can be interpreted in reference to the bitter experience of humiliation in the aftermath of World War 2. Even more so since the Liberation in 1945 did not put an end to America’s strong and dominant presence on the Peninsula. One

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<sup>101</sup> Ibidem, p. 31.

<sup>102</sup> C. Malaparte, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>103</sup> E. Corti, op. cit., p. 240.

<sup>104</sup> J. H. Burns, *The Gallery*, New York 2004, pp. 280–282.

<sup>105</sup> E. Morris, op. cit., p. 199.

might agree with Ilaria Serra that in fact, in the context of the Cold War, whole Italy was destined to become “America’s war bride” since in fact “America took possession of Italy, symbolically, by «taking» its women”<sup>106</sup>. This paved the way for later crucial developments such as the system of Italian “frozen democracy” under strict U.S. supervision which would last until the fall of the Iron Curtain.

### **Zderzenie cywilizacji? Amerykańska armia, włoskie kobiety i *Gender Shock* lat 1943–1945**

W latach 1943–1945 Włochy znalazły się w stanie de facto wojny domowej i podwójnej okupacji, niemieckiej – na Północy i alianckiej – na Południu. Wbrew faszystowskiej propagandzie głoszącej przyrodzone Włochom męstwo oraz wyższość ich rasy, oznaczało to dla pokonanego narodu status pogardzanego i bezsilnego świadka triumfu alianckich armii, w pamięci zbiorowej symbolizowanych przez postać czarnoskórego żołnierza amerykańskiego. Podczas gdy włoscy mężczyźni pozostawali – fizycznie jako jeńcy wojenni lub przynajmniej symbolicznie jako bierni obserwatorzy – nieobecni w przestrzeni publicznej, to na włoskie kobiety spadł ciężar zapewnienia członkom swych rodzin minimum środków niezbędnych do przeżycia, poprzez szeroką gamę kontaktów z mężczyznami w alianckich mundurach. W warunkach konserwatywnego i patriarchalnego dotąd włoskiego Południa, zwłaszcza Neapolu znanego Amerykanom jako „przyczółek dziwek” (ang. *bitchhead*), spowodowało to głęboki szok kulturowy związany z nagłymi przemianami dotychczasowych ról społecznie i kulturowo przypisanych płci (*gender shock*) oraz doznaną fizyczną i symboliczną przemocą (gwałt, wymuszona okolicznościami prostytutacja czy małżeństwo). Obficie dostępne włoskie i amerykańskie źródła, otwierając różnorodne perspektywy badawcze, kreślą obraz wydarzeń lat 1943–1945 jako wyraźnego kryzysu dotychczasowej tożsamości tak włoskiej, jak i amerykańskiej w kontekście dla obu stron moralnie destrukcyjnych, gdyż dalekich od łatwej jednoznaczności, doświadczeń wojennych. Z punktu widzenia *gender studies* przykład włoski stanowi ciekawy przypadek szerszego problemu, określanego jako *geopolitics of sex*, politycznego wymiaru kształtowania przez amerykańskie dowództwo relacji pomiędzy żołnierzami a kobietami na obszarze działań wojennych II wojny światowej. W kontekście zimnowojennym widać natomiast wyraźnie, że szok i upokorzenie lat 1943–1945 stanowi kulturowe tło dla statusu Włoch jako „zamrożonej demokracji” – bezbronny kraj pozostającego pod kuratelą Stanów Zjednoczonych, ale i ujawniającego głębokie pokłady antyamerykanizmu.

<sup>106</sup> I. Serra, *America’s War Bride. How Life Magazine Feminized Italy in the 1950s* [in:] “*Italica*”, vol. 86, No. 3, p. 452.