

Good workers: television documentary, migration and the Italian nation, 1956–1964

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This paper examines a series of documentaries produced in the period between 1956 and 1964 that document the activities of Italian migrants around the world (a corpus of more than 100 films and programmes altogether). These films, which record the dedicated and laborious nature of Italians around the globe, play a double role. On the one hand, they serve as a necessary adjunct to the establishment of a ‘labour culture’ in Italy, a central aspect of the compromise between labour unrest and the demands of capital in which the figure of the worker is continually praised. At the same time, they serve to obscure and rewrite the Italian collective memory concerning the legacy of Fascist imperialism and Italian involvement in colonial expansion, in the process recasting the Italian coloniser as the ‘good worker’.

Keywords: migration; television documentary; public memory; modernisation; labour

1. Introduction

In the final scenes of the series *Verso le metropoli* (1961), a six-part documentary outlining the path by which Southern migrants made their way to the cities of Northern Italy and overseas, we are shown a small town bar in which a group of about 20 men are gathered around a television set. They are asked by a voice off-screen if they watch and enjoy television. The answers vary, but most of the men interviewed say that they do watch television and enjoy it very much. We are then shown the mayor of the town in the same bar, but the television is nowhere in the shot. The same voice asks why he thinks people are leaving his town at such a rapid rate. ‘The idea to leave’, says the mayor, ‘comes from television, films’.

Between 1954 and 1965 a number of films were produced that followed the hundreds of thousands of Italians who left the country following the war. Rarely discussed in studies of Italian migration in the postwar period, this article argues that the discourse concerning migration to which these documentaries belong is helpful for understanding the cultural, political and economic formation of the Italian nation-state in these years. In these documentaries, the portrayal of the Italian migrant as the labour force driving postwar modernisation projects around the world, from the building of Sydney and New York to the great dams and hydroelectric projects of Ghana, Tanzania and Venezuela, formed an

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important adjunct to projects for national industrial and economic development in postwar Italy. In line with the ruling Christian Democrat party's drive to contain the Communist Party and harmonise popular opinion with their geopolitical and economic positioning of Italy in the Cold War, the representations of the migrant in these documentaries were an element in the effort to co-opt labour in the reconstruction of postwar Italy. Italian workers were portrayed as industrious, capable and (most important given the political and ideological exigencies of the day) as independent economic agents.

However, more than simply holding a mirror up to the nation, this mapping was deeply implicated in the project of dealing with the legacy of Fascist Imperialism and Italian colonialism. These documentaries portrayed the Italians as labouring subjects as they revisited many of the sites where the most terrible atrocities of Italian expansion occurred (Ethiopia, Greece, Libya). In the process, they attempted to write over the figure of the Italian as coloniser and replace it with the Italian as diligent worker and benevolent supervisor engaged in a modernisation project guaranteed by liberal markets and democracies.

In order to better understand the construction of the migrant and migration in Italy during these years, this article places these representations in the context of the imagination of the new social order that was taking shape as part of the major cultural and economic changes of Italy's 'economic miracle'. I argue that the discourse around the migrant in Italy provided an example of the new ways of exercising state power (and powerlessness) that developed as part of the emergent global political and economic position of postwar Italy. Thus, these television documentaries belong to the postwar liberal settlement between government and civil society that was taking shape in Italy.

2. The economic miracle

In the 15 years following the end of the Second World War, much of Italian life was significantly altered. At the end of the war, the nation's transportation infrastructure had been destroyed, including one-quarter of the railway system and more than 90% of port facilities (Ventresca 2004, 25). Agriculture had been devastated and most people got by on less than survival wages, spending almost all their money on overpriced and increasingly scarce food supplies (Crainz 1996; Foot 2001). Yet, by the beginning of the 1960s, Italians would find themselves in the middle of one of the most rapid economic recoveries in modern history. This not only involved a return to economic prosperity, but a fundamental transformation in the way that Italians lived. As Crainz notes, 'Italian society experienced over the course of a few years a profound break with the past: in modes of production and consumption, in ways of thinking and dreaming, of living the present and imagining the future' (Crainz 1996, vii).

Central to the Christian Democrat project for cultural and political hegemony was the adoption and adaptation of the worker and of labour (*lavoro*) as central figures in Italian political discourse as well as in culture more generally. As San Giovanni has recently shown in his history of labour in Italian popular culture, the image of the labourer that is most prominent in this period is one that negotiates the volatility of more radical communist-inspired conceptions of workers with the more conservative images tied to the Catholic Church and prewar Italy (San Giovanni 2006). Much of the popular success of the Christian Democrat programme for change was a result of its ability to adapt the

language of labour that grounded the communist party's popular appeal in a way that did not entail its revolutionary political programme.

Alongside work, migration was often cited as a factor in the reconstruction of Italy during the period following the end of the Second World War. It is common for discussions during this period to focus on the role of migration as a population 'safety valve' that allowed an overcrowded nation to rebuild after the widespread destruction caused by the war (Fontani 1962; Tomasi 1964). Indeed, the possibility of migration loomed large in the minds of Italians generally. Surveys from the period show that the number of Italians who desired to migrate was as high as 49.1% in 1946 and was still 30% in 1953 (Rinauro 2005, 520). While not all acted on their interest, roughly 1.9 million people left Italy permanently while nearly a million more lived outside the country for some period of time between 1946 and 1957. This figure would increase throughout the 1960s to around 250,000 individuals leaving every year (with nearly two million Italians residing in Germany by 1973). In later years, remittances sent home by workers abroad were also of considerable importance to the Italian economy as a way of bringing foreign capital into the devastated national economy (Mini 1968, 271).

The representations of migration that I will look at in the next section were constructed in a context defined by the particular understanding of both labour and migration discussed above. At one level, these films helped to spread an image of migration that assuaged fears that prospective migrants might have. But beyond providing information to calm the anxieties of viewers, the representations of migration and the figure of the migrant found in these programmes were central for understanding how the emergent settlement at 'home' was linked to the evolving economic and political order regulating the global movement of migrants and the flow of capital. The travels of Italian migrants on television screens plotted one course through the new geopolitical and national settlement of the Cold War, linking national industrial development programmes and the reconstruction of the Italian state to the logics and languages of the postwar economic and political order.

3. Migration on early television in Italy

While a great deal has been written about the importance of television in the production of social, economic and political consensus in Italy during these years, there is hardly any mention of representations of migration in these discussions. This is surprising since, in the 10 years following the introduction of television to Italy in 1955, there were more than 100 documentaries and series episodes produced that focused on the subject of migration, varying in length from 15 minutes to an hour (see Appendix 1 for a list). It was among the more frequently covered themes in the early days of Italian television. But it is important to place the portrayal of migration in the context of television and media culture in Italy as well as the political and economic changes taking place in the nation more generally.

The documentaries on Italians living abroad were an important subgenre, capturing the world outside Italy as experienced by Italians. Most of these short documentaries were filmed as part of the series *Viaggi del telegiornale* (Travels in Television News), which was aired three times a week at 10:15 p.m. (before the late evening news), and were often given the generic titles of 'Italians in...' or 'The Italians of...'. The expense of producing these programmes meant that the documentaries focusing on Italians around the world were

often produced in tandem with general interest telefilms about a particular country. For example, the documentary *Italiani in Tanganika* (Italians in Tanganyika) was produced by the same crew that made *Tanganika Oggi* (Tanganyika Today); the same establishing footage (shots of trees, cities and government buildings in the capital city) was used in both films.

Formally speaking, the documentaries adopted many of the stylistic features of news documentary common to the period (Curtin 1995; Ellis and McLane 2005). Visually, the documentaries often made use of extended medium-range shots, following a single activity for a long period of time (for example, a two-minute shot of a worker on the Akisombo dam in Ghana searching for tree stumps in the newly flooded river valley). Interviews mainly consisted of fixed-frame close-ups in which the speaker addressed the camera directly. While they were shot on location, there was relatively little ambient audio used in the productions. There was almost no dialogue from the participants; a single narrator whose voice was not recorded on location provided commentary. Even in interview sequences, answers were given to questions that were voiced over by the narrator in the studio.

The fixed shots and dominant narrative presence created a clear demarcation between the viewers 'back home' (from whose position and for whom the narrator and host spoke) and 'life on the frontier'. Indeed, the line between 'home' and 'away' was often incorporated into the documentaries themselves. It was not uncommon for the opening scenes to consist of footage showing the subjects of the films (typically labourers) or the television crew itself arriving on location, often with some ambient noise (the sound of planes or cars) in the background. The fixing of the camera in place (as opposed to handheld shooting) and the replacement of ambient noise with the studio-recorded voice of the narrator introducing the subject of the programme signalled the arrival 'on location'.

In terms of their approach to the subject, the documentaries fall into two categories. The first type looks at the daily life of Italian communities around the world, noting the way in which their way of life had been transformed by time and distance. For example, during a tour around New York's Little Italy's in *Piccola Italia di New York* (1957), we are taken to see the *bocce* courts and shown the thriving community that develops around them. The guide in the programme is Pietro Di Donato, author of the immigrant modernist novel *Christ in Concrete* [1939], who speaks a fractured Italian that is closer to dialect than the standard language. In *Gli Italiani nel Canada* (1957), the streets of Montreal's Little Italy are toured, showing the variety of commercial and industrial enterprises that Italians have been able to create. In *Italiani nel quinto continente* (1961), this is done through the extended shots of the goods and services that the Italian community in Australia imports and produces for itself in order to keep the homeland alive. The films make an effort to communicate that, in spite of the attractions the new cultures offer to emigrants, Italian culture survives and flourishes.

The second type focuses on the positive effects that Italian labour had on a new environment; this kind of programme was often organised around major public works projects or agricultural development. In *La grande diga sulla Kariba* (1957), it is a dam in Tanganyika. The great dam at Akisombo, a centrepiece of Nkrumah's development plans for Ghana, is also the focus of several documentaries (for example, *Quelli di Akisombo* [1963]). *Oggi nel Kenia* (1958) and *Libia d'oggi* (1960) both look at the role of Italian settlers in agricultural development. The films portray the Italian abroad as benevolent

supervisors and good workers, helping the less civilised natives move into the twentieth century.

In order to give a better idea of these two approaches to representing Italians abroad it is helpful to discuss two of these documentaries – one of each kind – in greater detail: *Italiani nel quinto continente* (1961) (Italians in the Fifth Continent) and *La grande diga sulla Kariba* (1957) (The Great Dam on the Kariba).

Italiani nel quinto continente, produced by Franco Prosperi and Fabrizio Palombelli, was one of a series of documentaries that attempted to capture the way of life among the small but rapidly growing Italian community in Australia. It is an excellent example of the first type of documentary mentioned above: those that look at the lives of Italian communities around the globe. *Italiani nel quinto continente* begins with footage of a man riding a donkey across the desert, while the slow lament of ‘La Ballata del fiume’ (The Ballad of the River) plays. As was common among many of these documentaries, it begins by re-enacting the arrival of a group of Italians in Australia by following them from the time they board the boat in Italy until they arrive in Sydney. In the narrator’s description of these migrants during the voyage, particular attention is paid to distinguishing them from previous generations, contrasting their sense of hope and promise with the misery that drove earlier waves of travellers.

The next segment moves from Sydney to Melbourne, where the largest Italian community has settled. It shows the process through which the newly arrived migrant settles in Australia. The segment begins with a few establishing shots of the city as well as scenes of Italian commerce and stores from other migrant communities (Greek, German). We are then shown a simulated interview at the Italian consulate where the newly arrived migrant is asked by consular staff if he/she speaks English and if he/she is or plans to get married. In the middle of the segment, the consul speaks directly to the camera and explains the importance of family ties for successful settlement and the difficulty of finding adequate lodging in Australia.

The third segment moves through Melbourne’s Little Italy, showing the development of Italian commerce in the city. There are interviews with the bookseller and baker. Along with shots of storefronts and people walking on the street, the narrator talks about the nature of Little Italies in general, the dangers of isolation and the importance of eventual assimilation. Moving past the storefronts we are shown that while many of the goods are made in Italy, some of them are produced in Australia. Finally we are shown a couple on their wedding day and told once more about the importance of family. The narrator points out that it was an arranged marriage and that the couple had met only once in Italy before the ceremony took place. The final segment shows a representative of the Australian department of Foreign Affairs who stresses to the viewer that ‘Italians are still welcome in the country. The possibility of this place is enormous and it will welcome another 30 million’.

Turning now to the second kind of documentary on migration, a good example is *La grande diga sulla Kariba* (The Great Dam on the Kariba), produced by Giovanni Salvi; it is one of about a dozen documentaries that looks at Italian labourers in Central Africa, constructing major works projects in newly independent nations. Other documentaries of this kind include *Quelli di Akisombo*, *Italiani nel Venezuela* and *La grande diga sullo Zambesi*. Like the documentary on Australia, it also begins with the journey of the Italian worker to another country. In this case, it is the worker travelling to the worksite of a hydroelectric dam in what was then Rhodesia. He is asked how long he is going for, how

long he went for last time and what he thinks of the weather in Africa. Seated with his wife on the plane, the couple also speak about the birth of their child in Kariba.

In the next segment, we are taken on a quick tour of the worksite. In a voiceover, the narrator explains the make-up of the dam's labour force; it consists of a couple of hundred Italian and European workers and a few thousand African workers. The Italians are shown as the skilled labour that teaches the native labourers modern construction techniques. Shots of land movers as well as scenes of the Italian managers talking to workers and moving around the worksite give the viewer a sense of the size of the project and the labour involved. We are then shown the canteen where the Italians are able to find their 'own' foods prepared by the staff in the kitchen. There are a few shots of an African cook who, we are told, has learned to make pasta and other Italian dishes to suit Italian tastes. While we are shown many workers, there is no ambient audio on any of this footage; vaguely martial flute music is played in the background of the narrator's description to complement the air of industry.

It is only at the end of the shot sequence, when we are introduced to the lead surveyor on the site, that the narrator cedes space. In the interview, the surveyor laments the image of Italians working abroad, complaining:

Given that I have the chance, I want to say that we, here, are very annoyed by what people say about us. When they write that we are a band of heroes, it's annoying. When they write that we're a group of bums, it bugs us even more. Here in Kariba, you find that people are here to solve the problem of everyday life in a straightforward and honest way. You behave here as you would anywhere else.

After some interstitial shots of Italians and Africans working together on the site, we are shown a series of interview segments with Italian workers. A supervisor describing his position says: 'As a labourer, wherever I go, I have to work'. An engineer, noting that the Italians had taken over where an American company had failed, describes Kariba as 'An ugly airport, lots of trees, a river and, of course, blacks'. When asked his opinion of the locals, he responds, 'They are a good, but poor people'.

In the final segment, we follow the path of the river from the dam to the ocean, tracing the impact of the construction on the region. This leads to an interview with a foreman who describes the size of the dam and the amount of materials that were used to build it. The interview breaks off in the middle as we are told that there has been an emergency on the work site: a flood. We are shown the response to the crisis. In the final scene of the programme, we are once more told about the output of the dam, the number of workers and the importance of the project for the development of Africa. The narrator declares that the men in Kariba are models for Italians everywhere and that these men (and those like them) should continue to work to improve the conditions of others around the world.

It is not difficult to see the way in which these two forms of documentary are articulated through longstanding understandings of the relationship between the West and the rest (Hall 1996). However, they also speak to the ambiguous position that Italy was seen to occupy geopolitically in this moment. There were concerns about which of the emerging 'three worlds' Italy would belong to and these documentaries were one of a whole body of discourses that served to secure and defend its place in the North Atlantic, capitalist and liberal democratic world (Gundle 2000). These documentaries are part of the body of media images produced under the watchful eye of the Christian Democrat party

that attempt to recuperate these social and political tensions into a stable image of the nation as a modernising project.

In the case of the documentaries in which life in Australia and other settler nations is discussed (the United States, Argentina, Venezuela, Canada), there is a double movement in the way that Italian migrants are positioned. On the one hand, Italians abroad are seen as constantly threatened by the twin anxieties of total assimilation and longing for what they have left behind. Thus, there is a constant effort made to show that the Italians that left are still Italian in meaningful ways.

However, these documentaries were not simply attempts to capture the nostalgia of Italians living abroad for what they left behind. They are also about showing that the Italians who left home are already members of the kind of modern society that was still in the process of being constructed in Italy. This is particularly clear, for example, in *Italiani in Venezuela* (1959), where the contribution of Italians to the social and cultural life of the country is paired with the construction of a factory for the production of steel. While often performing basic kinds of labour, the nostalgia of the workers abroad is tempered by desiring portrayals of industrial development in which Italian labour is central. In this way, the resignation of many of the interview subjects regarding the possibility of finding a new 'home' is recuperated into the project of Italian national development by suggesting that industrial and economic development offer the solution (whether in Italy or elsewhere) to the problem of migration.

In the documentaries filmed in Africa (as well as a few that were filmed in South America), the nostalgia takes a back seat to the image of the Italian as productive worker. In these films, the Italian is portrayed as the worker and sympathetic supervisor. As already noted, the majority of these documentaries are focused on the construction of a major works project or agricultural development. Once again, the Italians portrayed are seen as actors in a modernising project, this time a project given as a gift from Europe to the less civilised parts of the world.¹

In the not very distant background of this portrayal is an attempt to overcome the legacies of Italian colonialism and the Fascist dreams of empire of the prewar period by forgetting them. Brotherhood and international solidarity are invoked as the guiding principles of the encounter between Italian and African workers. The legacy of colonial brutality is explicitly invoked as what is being avoided in each of these sites by the new Italian migration. This is undoubtedly a part of the broader process through which Italian involvement in European expansion into Africa was forgotten or denied as the product of an earlier (and now dead) period. The Italian worker is transformed from being the coloniser into the good boss. The glory of the nation is served through the charity of these workers, willing to explain the miracles of technology to the less civilised people of the earth. In these films, the pain and loneliness of migration is not cast in the light of nostalgia, but as a by-product of the technological and cultural advancement of the Italians. In the process, these films participated in what Steven Ricci (Ricci 2008) has described as the historical amnesia regarding the realities of colonialism in visual representation, an issue that has also been raised by historians of Italian colonial history such as Angelo Del Boca (Del Boca 2005).

Interestingly, many of the tropes used in the prewar documentaries produced by the *Istituto LUCE* continue to dominate representations of Africa. Ruth Ben-Ghiat, in her discussion of cinema's role in Italian Fascism, has described the way in which documentary regarding the Italian conquest of Ethiopia was linked to the Fascist project

of national and foreign modernisation (Ben-Ghiat 1996). Indeed, the translatability of these tropes is particularly striking, moving from the Fascist era to the era of the postwar reconstruction. For this reason, it is worth noting that Franco Prosperi (the director of *Italiani nel quinto continente*) would later be known for his role in directing the films *Mondo cane* (1962) and, perhaps more controversially and relevant to the topic at hand, *Africa addio* (1966). Along with these films on Australia, Prosperi had produced documentaries on Italians living in several African countries along with Stanis Nievo, the production manager on *Africa Addio*. It is fair to argue that there is both a figurative and a literal link between these early films, their portrayal of Italian migrant labour and more virulent forms of nostalgia for Italian colonialism, rearticulating the links between these visual tropes and Fascist discourse both before and after the Second World War.

Thus, the weight of the colonial past is not wholly absent from these documentaries, and it is useful to place them in the broader context of Italy's relationship with the continent across the Mediterranean. Although the positioning of the migrant differs in these documentaries, there are some common elements. Common to these portrayals, these representations show the migrant as the site in which the Italian state is present beyond its borders as a symbol of Italy's postwar economic and industrial development. The migrant is also discursively positioned as the ideal national subject and a redemptive figure in the eyes of both the nation and the dominant powers of the globe. In this way, the migrant stands in for the integration of Italy into the postwar geopolitical space of the Cold War as a peaceful and dutiful member of the North Atlantic block.

Of course, this is not an entirely frictionless replacement of postwar guilt with the hopes of the ideology of the economic miracle. *Insabbiati*, a segment produced for *TV7* (the weekly news magazine connected to the *Telegiornale*), portrays the lives of the Italian truck drivers who remained in Ethiopia after the war. Broadcast in 1965, the film shows the men whose numbers dwindle every year as the need for their services diminishes. The legacy of Italian colonialism is directly referenced as the film shows the increasingly difficult lives these men lead. The segment ends on a tragic note, recognising that the Italian truck drivers of Ethiopia are 'stuck in the sands of Africa'. While the film does not directly link the presence of the drivers to Italian colonial ambitions, it is a different take than is present in most of the other films portraying Italians in the developing world. In the other films, the end of the war marked a fresh start, a world in which Italy would be able to change how it was perceived. However, in this film we see the remnants of that earlier period. While this is hardly the dominant theme in these documentaries, its unique qualities cause it to stand out in the context of a relatively coherent and homogeneous discourse about migration during the years.

4. Training migrants: *Italiani nel mondo* and *Guida per gli emigranti*

An important adjunct to these documentaries was the body of educational materials diffused through television, radio and print. *Guida per gli emigranti* (A Guide for Emigrants) (which would later be known as *Italiani nel mondo*), broadcast on television bi-weekly between 1958 and 1965, was a 15-minute programme intended to inform migrants about life abroad. An episode from 1961 consists of an introductory segment in which the Minister of External Affairs is asked about the current levels of migration to non-European destinations. The interview is mainly focused on the statistics and gives

little space to other questions aside from very general expressions of positive sentiments toward Italians abroad. The main segment of the show involves a trip to a car factory in Cologne where 900 Italian workers live. The segment mixes shots of the plant with short interviews with the workers. The interviews deal with the basics of migration: How much do you make? Where do you live? How many in a room? What's the food like?

Programmes like this found their complement in publications intended to provide background for migrants thinking about leaving. Starting in 1945 and continuing until 1981, the bi-weekly magazine *Italiani nel mondo* was among the most prominent of these publications. While an ostensibly private publication, the majority of the publications' operating costs were covered by a subsidy from the Ministry of External Affairs. The links between the Ministry and the publication were so extensive that for much of the magazine's history it occupied offices across the street from the ministry. In *Italiani nel mondo*, the reader found the textual equivalent of the documentaries discussed above: profiles of Italians living abroad and the kinds of life they led. It also published statements from government representatives on the subject of Italians abroad and summarised government reports on immigration and remittances.

In these programmes and the magazine, the vision of the Italian abroad as industrious and part of a programme for economic development was translated into an education programme that was intended to assuage the fears of prospective migrants. The sacrifice of the migrant, recognised in the documentaries in terms of nostalgia and distance from home, were reworked in terms that made emigration one of the many forms of collective sacrifice that were necessary in Italy after the war. Along with providing basic information about how to emigrate and possible destinations, these programmes also taught Italians that migration was a viable, and even noble, life choice. These programmes were one of the sites in which the Christian Democrat programme for national development was translated into a policy-promoting emigration.

As life in Italy improved in the course of the years of the economic miracle, the portrayal of emigration took on increasingly celebratory tones. The problem was no longer simply convincing people to emigrate, but reminding Italians that those who had left were still important contributors to the nation's economy. This is particularly clear given the way in which *Italiani nel mondo* (the magazine) and *Guida per gli emigrati* contextualised migration. Upon the renaming of the programme from *Guida per gli emigranti* to *Italiani nel mondo*, the producer of the show outlined the new focus of the programme. 'The programme', he explained, 'is no longer an overview of the search for manual labour beyond our borders, but a direct testimony of what Italians have done and continue to do in all of the world's countries' (Barbicinti 1964, 35). Henceforth, the show would consist of two kinds of stories. On the one hand, there would be 'information: participation in fairs, industrial shows, art exhibitions, the success of our films, our scientists, our success in art, politics and medicine' (Barbicinti 1964). On the other hand, it would include new stories about great Italians from the past and present who had made a mark internationally. The framing was even broader in the case of the magazine *Italiani nel mondo* where stories concerning the international impact of Italians abroad ranged from the present day to profiles of Christopher Columbus.²

Central to this context was a growing attention paid to the movement of Italian goods around the globe. The magazine offered extensive coverage of touring international trade shows like *Italia produce* (C.M. 1957; del Giardino 1957) and design shows like *Italia lavora* at the Brooklyn Museum in 1961 (Baldi 1951). This connection was also made in a

variety of sites on television where programmes like ‘Made in Italy’ (always in English) traced the development and manufacture of Italian products in much the same way that the movement of Italians working abroad had been followed in documentary. In the series *Gli italiani e l'industria* (1966), this equivalence was made explicit in the final episode dealing with Italians working abroad. As the series producer explained, these workers were ‘not understood in terms of migration, but as the presence of our country in the world, a presence that our products have affirmed and continue to affirm all over’ (Ruffilli 1966, 13).

While it moves beyond the scope of the body of documentaries that are the focus of this article, this pairing of ‘Made in Italy’ deserves further consideration, and two brief comments in particular. At one level, this new attention to objects speaks to the reduced role that migration will play in popular consciousness from the mid-1960s onwards (a shift that coincides with a drop in the number of permanent emigrants leaving Italy). At the same time, however, it brings into focus a key moment in the emergence of what might now be described as the ‘cultural economy’ (Du Gay and Pryke 2002; Anheier and Isar 2008) in Italy during the late 1960s and early 1970s. It lays the framework for the increased importance of the production of goods that symbolise Italian style and expertise. Of course the political advantages for the government during these years of talking about things rather than people should not be overlooked. After all, objects do not complain about working conditions, go on strike, or fall victim to exploitation and accident (and they certainly do not vote).

5. Conclusion

In these programmes, the migrant, laborious, nationalist and invested in the project of capitalist industrial modernisation, could be seen as part of a global vision that opposes the threat of communism while reaffirming the legitimacy of the Italian state. The containment of communism was a central concern of the Christian Democratic Party in dealing with migration. Mariano Rumor’s report to the third congress of the Christian Democratic Congress in 1949, a document that programmatically lays out the party’s positions on emigration, outlines in detail the limitations and failings of the communist approach to the issue. Instead of a revolutionary change transforming capitalism (which Rumor describes as just a rhetorical ruse on the part of state oligarchs), the Christian Democrats embraced the rights of the individual and the importance of the state in ensuring that the right and duty of the individual to work was protected and cultivated. Rumor’s statement is full of allusions to Soviet work camps and other forms of forced labour to which he contrasts the Christian Democratic policies of freedom and liberty.

The turn to objects mentioned above marked a transformation in the nature of the discourse on migration, but it did not result in the disappearance of the Italian worker abroad in popular and political discourse. If anything, the tendency to represent the Italian worker as both economically productive and a wholly independent agent would become more pronounced as the years passed. Eventually, the choice for migration eventually came to be described as one that was ultimately and entirely the decision of the individual himself (in contrast with the discourses that circulated under Fascism). The role of the government was not to intervene directly in this decision, but rather to support those individuals who decided to seek their livelihoods outside the nation. By 1970,

Aldo Moro, serving as Foreign Minister at the time, was able to make this clear in his introduction to the report on Italian labour of that year. 'Full employment', he writes, 'represents the highest aim of every national society that wants to guarantee its dependants a decorous level of life. Such a goal does not exclude the search for work outside national borders which is no longer – as it once was – a consequence of necessity, but the result of a free and motivated economic choice' (Direttore Generale dell'emigrazione e degli Affari Sociali 1970, ix).

The freedom of the migrant is an interesting analogue to the ceding of agency to the emigrant in a report on radio and television use among Italians in the United States. The report concludes that the goal cannot be to push the children of Italians to listen to Italian language programmes for fear that this will become an obstacle to their assimilation into American society:

Perhaps the only thing to do is to wait for the Italian-Americans to complete the process of assimilation into American society, when they will probably have fewer immediate concerns and will have absorbed from the middle class certain cultural interests of a more or less authentic nature. With English language programs opportunely arranged I believe we can count on a public of distant Italian origin as well as one interested in Italian things. (Cadin 1964, 35)

There is in this perhaps an acknowledgement of the utility of a gap between the realities of migration, both the hardships of the first generation and the slow assimilation of later generations, and the images that circulated regarding it in Italy. The integration of the migrant into the nation was intentionally partial, positioning the migrants and their descendants at the forefront of a much bolder world that had yet to arrive in Italy while linking them affectively and symbolically (and hopefully economically) to their 'home'.

At the core of this understanding of the relationship between the representation of migration and its practice is the production of a particular kind of subject with particular kinds of agency. The function of these documentaries as propaganda was not simply the imposition of particular meanings, but should be seen within a broader context within which the nationalised liberal subject was produced. Of course, the set of relations that I have mapped out here was never as neat as this, particularly given that the project of nation-building in Italy had been (and continues to be) a relatively recent and openly fragmentary and partial process. It would be an overstatement to claim that all the benefits (cultural, political or economic) of these forms of agency were captured by the state or the national economy. In this respect, we must also be aware of the simultaneous fragmentation and internal conflict in the Italian polity that takes place during these years. In this regard, these documentaries belonged to one aspect of the struggle over the meaning of the Italian nation, its place in the world, and to the role that the figure of labour played in mediating these debates.

Notes

1. It should not escape notice that the documentaries discussed here are usually grounded in the figure of the family. Throughout the documentaries on Africa, it is the male working abroad for his family (who are either on site or back in Italy) that structures his position as the good boss. Similarly, in the case of the documentary on Australia (but also addressed in documentaries on New York and Argentina), it is the family that is central to maintaining the Italian identity at such a great distance. In an essay on Italian film in the years immediately following the war,

Ruth Ben-Ghiat notes that the subject of masculinity is a recurrent theme across many different genres. She writes, 'Military surrender and foreign occupation; the loss of Italy's colonial empire; the emotional and political legacies of civil war; the eclipse of the male icon Mussolini; and widespread trauma and deprivation affected each individual differently but left a collective sense of shame and disgrace. The films of this era address these feelings of abjection' (Ben Ghiat 2005, 337). The figure of masculinity that is portrayed in these documentaries is one successor to the transitional figure that Ben Ghiat elaborates. No longer struggling with how to reconstitute masculinity within the framework of the family and the nation, these documentaries accomplish a recovery of masculine productivity (both biological and economic) but at the cost of an uneasy erasure of the trauma of the previous 20 years. In the process, they allow for an effortless passage through the same spaces once occupied by the Italian coloniser. The documentaries place masculine labour in the foreground as the symbol of migration, leaving women migrants behind as either absent entirely from spaces of migration or as the passive (and silent) parties coming along in order to maintain the family structure. It is another aspect of what Tasca describes as the 'average housewife' in these years, writing: 'Ironically, when the public virtues of the new republic were being negotiated, the majority of women assumed a solely private role in which they resumed [after the years of resistance] the familiar virtues of wives and mothers to legitimate them [women in Italy] as citizens' (Tasca 2004, 111). Ultimately, one sees the emergence of a figure of the family that is not distantly related in its form and significance to the familial model that Ginsborg would later argue as being at the centre of much of modern Italian history (Ginsborg 2003).

2. These articles were also accompanied by considerable coverage of the space programme. The magazine ran detailed articles covering the development of the space programme in Argentina, Brazil, France, Japan, Spain, as well as the space superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. The articles on space rarely made mention of migration directly, but one might suggest that the interplanetary exploration was meant to resonate in some way with the international journeys of Italians around the world.

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Appendix 1. RAI Telefilms on emigration, 1956–1965

The list of films below was compiled after my research at the archives of RAI in Rome. I used the database of programmes that were available in the RAI archives as well as working through issues of RAI's weekly television magazine, Radiocorriere. I was able to screen a large number of these programmes (many of them are now available digitally for researchers at the RAI archives at RAI's headquarters on Viale Mazzini). This list does not include series like Guida per gli emigranti, which was produced bi-weekly from 1961 until 1964, when it was re-titled Italiani nel mondo (a change discussed in the text). Nor does this list include radio programmes, such as the programme Lavoro italiano nel mondo (broadcast weekly in the mid-1950s).

Year	Program title	Producer(s)
1956	Italiani a Londra	Valentine Selsey
1957	Canada	Giovanni Salvi
1957	Gli italiani in Canada	Giovanni Salvi
1957	Rhodesia d'oggi	Giuseppe Lisi, Franco Lazzaretti
1957	Piccola Italia di New York	Gian Gaspare Napolitano
1957	La grande diga sullo Zambesi	Giuseppe Lisi, Franco Lazzaretti
1957	Italcable	Andrea Pittiruti, Armando Pizzo
1957	Il mondo è piccolo	
1958	Gli italiani di Tanganika	Properi, Franco/Palombelli and Nievo

(continued)

Continued.

Year	Program title	Producer(s)
1958	Tempo Libero	Sergio Spina
1958	Città tra due mondi: Hong Kong	Antonio Cifariello
1958	Gli italiani in Brasile	Ugo Gregoretti
1958	Fattorie italiane nel paese dei kikuyu	Properi, Franco/Palombelli and Nievo
1958	Italiani nel ecuatore	Properi, Franco/Palombelli and Nievo
1958	Gli italiani in Uganda	Properi, Franco/Palombelli and Nievo
1958	Oggi nel Kenia	Properi, Franco/Palombelli and Nievo
1958	Oggi nel Tanganika	Properi, Franco/Palombelli
1958	Arriverderci Italia	Ugo Zatterin, Enzo Trapani
1959	Argentina (Parte Prima)	Giuseppe Lisi, Franco Simongini
1959	Argentina (Parte Seconda)	Giuseppe Lisi, Franco Simongini
1959	Italiani in Venezuela	Raimondo Musu, Armando Tamburella
1959	Italiani in Grecia	Guido Gianni
1959	Il Petrolio del Sahara	Fabiano Fabiani
1960	Un villaggio sulle rive dello Zambesi	Giovanni Salvi
1960	Ghana, anno tre	Alberto Pandolfi
1960	La Città dell'acciaio sulle rive dell'orinoco	Mario Parodi
1960	Somali, Dieci anni dopo	Guido Manera
1960	Missioni italiane in Asia	Brando Giordani
1960	Libia d'oggi – Dieci anni di un regno	Enrico Moscatelli
1960	Libia d'oggi – Un paese in cammino	Enrico Moscatelli
1960	Libia d'oggi – Nostri quarantamila	Enrico Moscatelli
1960	La Nigeria apre le porte	Gian Gaspare Napolitano
1960	È il più piccolo è Togo	Gian Gaspare Napolitano
1960	Costa d'Avorio	Gian Gaspare Napolitano
1960	La Liberia fu la prima	Gian Gaspare Napolitano
1960	La grande diga di Kariba	Giovanni Salvi
1960	Quinto continente	Properi, Franco/Palombelli
1960	Gli uomini dell'acciaio	
1961	Tunisia oggi	
1961	Guida per gli emigranti	Gianni, Carancini
1961	Taccuino Canadese	Lamberti Sorrentino, Gigi Martello
1961	Italiani nel quinto continente – Italiani in Australia	Properi, Franco/Palombelli and Nievo
	Italiani nel quinto continente – La Piccola Italia di Sidney	Properi, Franco/Palombelli
1961	Italiani della Canna	Properi, Franco/Palombelli
1961	Mese Economico (story about Italian work abroad)	Massimo De Marchis, Renata Bentivoglio
1961	Un paese tranquillo	Francesco Thelung
1961	Da Salto a Punta del Este	Francesco Thelung
1961	L'Italia al telefono	Nanni Cordona
1961	Tu sei del mio Paese	Gabriella Cosimini, Raimondo Musu
1961	La Fabbrica del successo: San Paolo	
1961	Uruguay – Un giorno a Montevideo	Francesco Thelung
1961	Senegal and Gambia	Gian Gaspare Napolitano
1962	Verso le metropolis – Fuga dal Paese (1st episode)	Vittorio Zincome, Giuliano Tomei
1962	Verso le metropolis – Incontro con la città' (2nd episode)	Vittorio Zincome, Giuliano Tomei

(continued)

Continued.

Year	Program title	Producer(s)
1962	Verso le metropolis – Un nuovo Lavoro (3rd episode)	Vittorio Zincome, Giuliano Tomei
1962	Verso le metropolis – Nuovi Cittadini (4th episode)	Vittorio Zincome, Giuliano Tomei
1962	Verso le metropolis – Vita in Citta' (5th episode)	Vittorio Zincome, Giuliano Tomei
1962	Verso le metropolis – Che cosa si puo' fare? (6th episode)	Vittorio Zincome, Giuliano Tomei
1962	La mia New York	Carlo Mazzarella
1962	Un giorno con Haile' Selassie	Gianni Bisiach
1962	L'America all'Europa	
1962	L'Europa all'America	
1962	Nel cuore dell'Australia	Lee Robinson (Fremantle)
1962	Il Niger, giovane repubblica	Claude Yutra
1963	Montecatini	Ugo Zatterin
1963	Costo del lavoro	Ugo Zatterin
1963	Occupazione	Ugo Zatterin
1963	Totocalcio/Miracolo Economico	Ugo Zatterin
1963	Acciaio per la pace	Gina Purificato
1963	Viaggio all'eta' della pietra	Antonio Cifariello
1963	Dio Nere, Diavolo Bianco	Antonio Cifariello
1963	Ad Ovest di Pago Pago	Antonio Cifariello
1963	Viti Levu	Antonio Cifariello
1963	Quelli di Akosombo	Bruno Ambrosi
	Nkrumah: storia e leggenda di un capo dell'Africa nuova	Arrigo Levi
1965	Insabbiati (Camionisti Italiani in Etiopia)	Giorgio Vecchietti
1965	Mille e una etiopia	