

Orienting the Occident Italian Travel and Migrant Writing in Mexico (1890-1932)

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Abstract This article addresses a comparatively neglected corpus of Italian travel and migrant writing in Mexico, ranging from Luigi Bruni's *Attraverso il Messico* (1890) to Emilio Cecchi's *Messico* (1932). It does so from the methodological angle of nation-making and through the seemingly counter-intuitive prism of Italian Orientalism(s). This article focuses on two key moments of both Italian and Mexican history: Post-Unification/*Porfiriato* and *Ventennio*/Post-Revolution. The discussion revolves around the problematization of the construction of an Otherized subalternity as a way for the emerging elites to discursively develop and circulate their worldview.

Keywords Post-colonial Theory. Transnational Italy. Mexico. Orientalisms. Transnational Modernity.

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Peer review

Submitted 2020-05-28
Accepted 2020-07-29
Published 2020-12-22

Open access

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Citation Savarino Roggero, S.; Zuccala, B. (2020). "Orienting the Occident: Italian Travel and Migrant Writing in Mexico (1890-1932)". *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie occidentale*, 54, 87-120.

I negri [sic] d'America non sono barbari; barbari erano i
bianchi che mercanteggiavano la carne umana,
e la davano al miglior offerente d'America.
(Bruni 1890, 26)¹

Fu la memoria delle popolazioni indigene che la
conquista volle distruggere [...] il
passato era troncato, la storia non esisteva più.
Si era abolito il tempo.
(Barzini 1923, 218)²

Quelle forze indie - Azteche, Tolteche e Maia - [...] da
sole non possono fronteggiare
la Sfinge dei grattacieli, ma possono trovare nella loro fusione
con lo spirito latino quella divina materia con cui
gli uomini creano la Civiltà del mondo.
(Appelius 1929, 13)³

1 Introduction

The notion of 'Modern Italy' is perhaps even more problematic⁴ than those of 'modernity' and 'nationhood' or their entanglement(s).⁵ Yet, what is by now (relatively) uncontroversial is the unquestionably important role played, in the construction of these concepts, by "Greater Italy" (Choate 2008, 6)⁶ - that is, by the transnational 'transit' of people, goods and ideas as well as by the cultural production that has stemmed from such movements.⁷ This is one of the fundamental premises upon which this essay's specific focus on literary pro-

This essay is the result of the concerted efforts of the two authors. Should a distinction be made for institutional reasons, sections 1, 2, 3 were written by Zuccala; and sections 4, 5 as well as the abstract were written by Savarino Roggero.

1 'American negroes [sic] are not barbarians, barbaric were the whites, who traded in human flesh, | and gave it to the top bidder in America' (Unless otherwise indicated all translations are by the Authors).

2 'It was the indigenous people's memory that the conquerors sought to destroy [...] | the past was truncated, history no longer existed. Time was abolished.'

3 'Those indigenous forces - Azteque, Tolteque and Maia - [...] cannot face | the Sphinx of the Skyscraper on their own, but can find in their fusion with the Latin Spirit that divine matter with which men create the world's Civilization'.

4 The notion is indeed thought-provoking enough to be worthy of a major British publication bearing the same name (*Modern Italy*: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/modern-italy>).

5 See at the very least: Allen, Russo 1997 and, from a postcolonial angle, Romeo, Lombardi-Diop 2012, as well as the perhaps overly pessimistic monograph by Graziano (2013).

6 See also Gentile 2006.

7 As to both Italy and 'physical' travels, see at least: Verdicchio 1997, Choate 2008, and Gabaccia 2000. More broadly, it will suffice to mention Chakrabarty's (2007) radical

duction is based. It may be argued that the nation-making aspects of travel and migrant writing *a fortiori* become even worthier and more promising of scholarly investigation if the destination of such travels – ‘in dialogue with’ which such writing is produced – is concurrently confronted with ‘identity issues’ comparable to those facing the place/community ‘of origin’ of those narratives.

Drawing on these combined premises, this article focuses on a by and large neglected and diverse corpus of literary works in Italian on Mexico: ‘*avventuriero*’ Luigi Bruni’s *Attraverso il Messico. Miei viaggi e mie avventure* (1890); Milanese entrepreneur Ubaldo Moriconi’s *Da Genova ai deserti dei Mayas (Ricordi d’un viaggio commerciale)* (1902); renowned reporter Luigi Barzini (Sr.)’s *Sul Mar dei Caraibi* (1923); “Anglophobe” (Burdett 2007, 67) journalist Arnaldo Cipolla’s *Montezuma contro Cristo* (1927); ‘openly’ fascist sympathizer⁸ and globe-trotter Mario Appelius’ *L’Aquila di Chapultepec* (1929), and posh Emilio Cecchi’s *Messico* ([1932] 1996). Apart from some relatively minor exceptions,⁹ this corpus has remained for the most part unpublished and largely unexplored, to the point that some of these works – particularly those by Bruni and Moriconi – are virtually unknown and impossible to retrieve from public or private collections. Likewise, the majority of these works are not only untranslated and unavailable to an Anglophone public but also almost entirely untouched¹⁰ by Anglophone cultural historians and literary and cultural studies scholars alike. This limited corpus, while by no means exhaustive, aims to give the reader a sufficiently representative sample of Italian writing ‘focusing on’ and ‘written from’ Mexico, in two key historical moments. The two periods selected are crucial both for the ‘modern’¹¹ Italian nation¹² and a Mexico that was also beginning, during the Porfiriato Era (1876-1910), its uneasy journey towards a ‘modernity’

‘decentring’ intellectual gesture, and Mignolo’s (1995) equally destabilizing postulate, as well as his influential ‘spatial’ work on border thinking, to be mentioned again later.

8 See Savarino Roggero 2015, 91-101.

9 Emilio Cecchi’s work was republished (1st edition in 1985, 2nd edition in 1996) by Adelphi in Milan, with Italo Calvino’s preface.

10 Some exceptions, such as the aforementioned British historian Charles Burdett, will be discussed below.

11 Scare quotes are linked to methodology, as explained later.

12 In the aftermath of its tumultuous, quasi-colonial unification in 1861-70, the Italian nation was “a new creation” (Choate 2008, 3) to be understood as little more than Anderson’s “imagined community” (1983): “Long before its formal constitution as a nation-state, Italy had a well-defined linguistic and cultural shape imposed on it by the economic, social, cultural, and political elites of the peninsula, but also by the foreigners who periodically invaded or toured it (or both). These epics of the nation as a cultural and linguistic community contrasted enormously with the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Italian states of the pre-unification period, and with the social realities of the country after its formal unification” (Forlenza, Thomassen 2015, 10).

(Gilbert, Buchenau 2013, 15-36) that for many remains both a goal yet to be achieved and one that is intrinsically ill-defined.¹³

The cogency of such a comparative Italian-Mexican investigation is 'quantitatively' strengthened by the fact that, starting from the *fin de siècle* and more intensively during the first half of the 20th century, Mexico became a sought-after destination for Europeans, in particular *periodistas*, writers and public intellectuals of different calibre. They all went to Mexico looking for what appeared to be, at first glance, a vaguely 'exotic' subject for their narrations, chasing after archaeological sites, indigenous cultures, spectacular tropical deserts, volcanic formations and pristine, 'authentic' landscapes, as well as, particularly in this period, political experiments. What attracted not only other Europeans but Anglophone Americans as well (widely quoted by Cecchi) also attracted the Italian and Italian-Mexican authors of the works examined in this piece. The intrinsically seductive late 19th-century blend of 'Mexican-ness' that triggered the *mal d'avventura*¹⁴ of these 'cultural explorers' became irresistible with the explosion of the 1910 revolution. The revolution in many ways (see for example Knight's 'classic' monograph, 1990) followed up on the Porfiriato's nationalistic and *caudillistas* policies - much like Italy in the 1920s and 1930s did with preceding liberal Italy, and both 'Italie', did with the unfulfilled myth of Risorgimento's nation-building. It confronted and attempted to blend (at every level, from the political and the cultural to the religious) existing, hybrid indigenous pre-Hispanic cultures with what, for some, remains nothing more than a superficially 'modern' Hispanic overcoat.

13 We left certain works out of the corpus for various reasons. We do not focus on Carlo Cattaneo's essay on Mexico, *Gli antichi messicani* (1860, then in Cattaneo 1884-87, later in Cattaneo 1942), not only because it does not fit into our chosen timeframe, but more importantly because the book does not engage with contemporary Mexico as much as it does with pre-Hispanic Mexican cultures. These are analysed from the point of view of an anti-diffusionist scholar, who uses the Mexican case study to try to disprove hegemonic theorists of Eurasian origin of Meso-American cultures, such as the influential Paduan professor and author Paolo Marzolo. Likewise, we did not include Aldo Baroni's *Yucatàn* (1937) because it is a text first published in Spanish, and one that poses a number of readership- and market-oriented questions, which cannot logistically be addressed in the limited space of this piece. The very little known *Avventura Sudamericana* by Enrico Rocca (1926) was also omitted owing to the limited space it devotes to Mexico (slightly over 20 pages - from 281 to 304 - and less than 1/10 of the overall narrative space). Along the same lines we did not analyse the Mexican section of Pietro Belli's *Al di là dei mari* (1925) or the second take on Mexico by Cecchi in *America amara* (1940-3). The heavily quantitative *Messico* (1926) by G.V. Callegari is also not explored in detail here, nor is Dollero's *Il Messico d'oggi* (1914). Lastly, Enrico Carrara's *Ventotto porti dell'America Latina con la R. Nave Italia* (1925) ought to be mentioned for its brief account of Mexico, but without the need to include it in a corpus of Mexico-centred travel writings. These works will feature in our book-length publication, currently in preparation.

14 I borrow the captivating formula used in Livio Sposito's only existing biography of Appellius (Sposito 1993).

2 Orienting the 'Modern' Nation

This essay both anticipates and ushers in a larger, book-length project of which this methodological section may well be seen as representing a pre-text and/or an inter-textual overture. The essay aims to (re)introduce this corpus of largely forgotten texts to the scholarly and general public (mostly Anglophone but also Italian- and Spanish speaking), from an angle which is less either purely historiographic or 'eruditely impressionistic'¹⁵ than the few previous works on these authors or, more generally, Italian authors dealing with Mexico (see Savarino Roggero 2007; Raveggi 2011; Schilirò 2015). Thus, this essay focuses on the cultural and postcolonial studies angle of an 'orientalized'¹⁶ alterity, almost entirely overlooked by previous commentators.

The 'Oriental(ist)' approach adopted for this investigation may appear to be 'geographically/spatially' counterintuitive while, at a closer look, it is in fact utterly timely. There are at least two theoretical reasons related to methodological "distant reading" (Moretti 2013), and a third reason based on close cross-examination of textual elements. To begin with, since the early 2000s, transnational and transcultural Italian Studies scholarship has progressively, if belatedly, opened up to the field of postcolonial studies (see Ponzanesi 2012; Virga 2017; Bouchard 2018; Virga, Zuccala 2018). For two of the members of its so-called "Holy Trinity", Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak (Young 1995, 163; Moore-Gilbert 2013), the field is inextricably linked to the vastly influential, if controversial book *Orientalism* ([1978] 1979) by E. Said. Said's work, in turn, has given 'theoretical' as well as 'linguistic' consistency to the very notion of ethno-socio-cultural alterity in the area of cultural studies.

In other words, it is simply no longer theoretically/methodologically viable to approach any Mediterranean South-to-Global South discursive relations - in this case the (Italian) literary rendition of (Mexican) 'alterity' - without at least considering the many postcolonial, theory-centred exegetic paths that have stemmed from the admittedly wide entry point of Saidian Orientalism. Secondly, recent

¹⁵ I borrow from Rimmon-Kenan's notion of "impressionistic criticism" ([1987] 2002).

¹⁶ See Miguel Mellino's succinct rendition of the 'essence' of Said's book: "L'Orientalismo, attraverso la sua graduale metamorfosi storica da mero campo del sapere (accademico e testuale) a 'disciplina di accumulazione sistematica di territori e di popolazioni' (Said 1978, 126), [riesce] a trasformare progressivamente l'Oriente da semplice 'esterno-costitutivo' [...] dell'Occidente a un (s)oggetto-altro separato, inferiore, arretrato, silenzioso, passivo, femminile, estraneo ed esotico" (Orientalism, through its gradual, historical metamorphosis from mere (textual and academic) field of knowledge to a 'discipline of accumulation of territories and people' (Said 1978, 126) [managed] to turn the Orient from a simple 'external constituent' of the Occident into a Sub-/Ob-ject which is Other, separate, inferior, backward, silent, passive, feminine, foreign and exotic; Mellino 2009, 17).

studies such as De Donno (2019, building on De Donno 2006, 2010), and Spackman – for whom “it is the lability of Italian identity, and its not quite ‘European-ness’, that brings the process of ‘Westernization’ and ‘Europeanization’ [through orientalizing(s)] into higher relief” (2017, 4) – have focused on how a by no means flawless (Macfie 2000) yet undeniably influential scholarly concept is theoretically enabling in the Italian context. The concept is especially useful when it comes to the negotiation of hybrid and often blurred sociocultural and ‘racial’ identities (Giuliani, Lombardi-Diop 2013).¹⁷ It is also very useful in understanding the progressive articulation of the notion of (Aryan-) Mediterranean *latinidad* as a basis for all discourses of ‘regeneration’ and ‘modernization’ of the Italian nation in liberal Italy and subsequently in fascist *Anni Venti* and *Trenta*.

Yet, it is not only this set of intersecting theoretical premises that motivates choosing ‘Orientalism(s)’ as one of the methodological foci around which to build the ellipsis of our argument. In fact, when one approaches the actual corpus, one cannot help but progressively connect this ‘abstract’ methodological notion of ‘Otherization’ as a meaning- and identity-making device for ‘Orienting the nation’, with the proliferation of textual evidence indicating how a certain notion of the ‘Other = Orient’ equation is part of the “Inconscio Strutturale” (Structural Unconscious; Mellino 2009, 11-17) of these observers and cultural mediators. ‘Orienting the nation’, then, far from serving as a prescriptive framework, is to be understood here in the two-fold sense of:

1. The (Italian) narrative act of applying some sort of Oriental lens to the representations of a country (Mexico) that, albeit not geographically ‘Oriental’ from a Mediterranean European perspective, was nonetheless the receptacle of orientalizing projections and fantasies.
2. The meaning-making operation through which to exploit that very ‘aura’, in order to make an ideological contribution in the way of orienting/steering/shaping the ‘shaky’ cultural and political identity of a newborn nation (Italy). The nation was in itself internally traversed by North vs South orientalizing patterns as well as not immune from being treated as the “Oriente domestico” (Di Gesù 2015) of Europe.

Some, but not all the writers taken into consideration here are “Accidental Orientalists” (Spackman 2017). They reached Mexico from Italy after extensive East-bound peregrinations: Barzini mostly through

¹⁷ We shall use ‘race’ in scare quotes when referring to Italian discourses and context, in keeping with the intersectionality and social constructiveness of this concept in relation to Italian-ness. See Poidimani 2009.

Japan and China, Cipolla and Appellius mostly to India and China, as well as throughout the African continent. They found themselves pondering whether and to what extent indigenous Mexican culture might have been, in fact, the result of 'pre-historical' West-bound migrations of 'some Orientals', and reached different conclusions.

It will be shown how these cultural explorers, while being neither government nor diplomatic representatives, displayed some version of an orientalizing "Structural Unconscious" (Mellino 2009, 11-17). For all of them, each in their own peculiar way, some projection of the "Other = Orient" dyad - be it intermittent, latent, patent, suppressed or exasperated - becomes a novel and theoretically necessary angle from which to investigate their comparative discussions on how the modernity of the Italian nation could be made modern, or at least nudged in that direction. As to modernity itself - the second methodological focus of our argument - we will not evoke the frankly outmoded anxiety of trying to prove the 'objective' state of 'non-backwardness' to which Italy is ritually condemned.¹⁸ Rather, we will adopt (and adapt)¹⁹ a much more promising framework of "competing narratives of the modern", as convincingly formulated by Forlenza and Thomassen (2015, 2). For these two scholars, (especially Italian) 'modernity' is more fruitfully approached as a "specific kind of historical self-understanding", as a "multitude of historical narratives that took shape during crucial junctures in the country's political history, narratives that in different periods came to underpin cultural identity and political legitimacy" (Forlenza, Thomassen 2015, 2). This framework, with its focus on both narrative and memory and its basis on individual as well as collective "experientiality" (and "rituals and symbolism"; Forlenza, Thomassen 2015, 13), appears particularly useful when applied to a corpus of what is in fact not only literature, hence narrative *par excellence*, but one that pays particular attention to Mexican private and public rituals,²⁰ to 'translate Mexican culture' to an Italian readership via negotiating domestication and foreignization of cultural/'racial' diversity.²¹ This chosen hybrid framework

18 "As a nation, Italy has ritually been described, in popular, academic, and political discourse, as 'backward', a country struggling to catch up with modernity [...]. The metaphor has become the preferred way of dealing with Italian differences relative to an idealized European modernity" (Forlenza, Thomassen 2015, 2-3). The critics continue: "The 'running-behind-modernity' approach to Italy is normatively problematic, analytically obfuscating, and theoretically disabling" (5). See also Agnew 1997.

19 On the 'permeability' of theory, and the way in which theory is itself filtered and changed by the (very choice of the) corpus to which it is applied, Rimmon-Kenan's introduction to Rimmon-Kenan (1996, 1) comes to mind.

20 For example, *la corrida*, featuring heavily in the works of the *Anni Venti* as a national allegory of sorts.

21 We borrow here from David Katan's influential monograph (2004). On 'domestication' vs 'foreignization' see at least the 'classic' Venuti 1995.

will also help one avoid retrospective ideological projections and refrain from de-historicizing these authors' inevitable idiosyncrasies.²²

3 Bruni (1890) and Moriconi (1902). Liberal Italy *vis-à-vis* Diaz's Mexico

For Forlenza and Thomassen, "'liberal Italy' (1861-1915) must be understood first and foremost as the sociohistorical juncture in which a particular "*philosophy of modernity*" (Forlenza, Thomassen 2015, 23; our emphasis) is elaborated and promoted. This philosophy revolves around the "civilizing mission" (social, economic, cultural), carried out "in the name of human progress" (2015, 28) by a liberal, monarchic (northern) elite. Such a self-assigned mission, and the perception that there were entities and forces constantly threatening it triggered what, in her insightful book on Pinocchio as a national allegorization, Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg calls "[post-unification] anxiety" (2007, 2).²³

Our reading will focus on the intertwining of this "complesso dello stato d'assedio" (siege complex; Duggan 2011, 24) narrative and the varyingly latent - in the Saidian sense - Otherizing and orientalizing patterns displayed by the texts. The themes of liberal Italy are, to a large extent, the same that came to maturation during the year of fascist rule. Likewise, the themes one finds in the first pair of texts under consideration here, by Bruni and Moriconi respectively, are *in nuce* those representing a *fil rouge* unfolding throughout the corpus. Alongside and intertwined with the underlying trope of the Other/Orient, are 1) the negotiation of the relationship not only

²² Dijkstra's words come to mind: "Inspired by the creative fervor and imaginative sweep of a talent [...] we tend to assume that innovative thought accompanies innovative form" (1986, ix). On the contrary: "exceptional talent in art does not necessarily imply an exceptional analytic capacity on the part of the artist" (1986, ix). While this is not to claim 'exceptional talent' on the part of these artists (with the possible exception of E. Cecchi, and with the 19th-century authors, on the contrary, appearing artistically mediocre at best), the point about ideology seems fair enough.

²³ This concept is well illustrated by Lucia Re: "Proprio nella fase in cui si sta finalmente profilando e consolidando su scala nazionale l'affermazione non solo economica e politica, ma anche ideologica e culturale della classe borghese in ascesa, e dei cosiddetti 'galantuomini', subentrano tensioni e rivendicazioni di classe ma anche di genere, che la mettono immediatamente in crisi e sulle difensive, portando alla ribalta in Italia le perturbanti istanze dell'anarchia, del socialismo e del femminismo" (At the very moment when the emerging bourgeoisie of the so-called 'gentlemen' is consolidating its national power, not only economically and politically but also ideologically and culturally, class as well as gender tensions and revendications arise. These tensions generate a crisis and open the door to the destabilizing rise of anarchism, socialism and feminism; 2009, 73).

with the nation of Italy but with diasporic and increasingly imperialist ‘wannabe’ “Greater Italy”; 2) the negotiation/articulation of the notion of a Rome-centred *latinidad* vis-à-vis those of a) “la questione indiana” (the indigenous question; Barzini 1923, 219) and b) the intimidating proximity of the Anglo-Saxon empire of the neighbouring United States. Our cursory analysis of how these themes emerge in the earlier post-unification texts, albeit rather unsystematically, will provide the footprint for analysing the very same tropes in the *Ventennio*-centred section. In addition, what brings together liberals Bruni and Moriconi, thus enabling their joint analysis – alongside the timeframe – is the fact that they both are for all intents and purposes unknown as authors beyond what can be inferred from their respective texts. Each text is the only known publication for each author.

As is well exemplified *ex negativo* by the very existence and content of Cattaneo’s famous essay *Gli antichi messicani* (1884-87, 409-40),²⁴ liberal Italy is the time in which diffusionist theories of American and European civilization begin to circulate.²⁵ The first of our authors, the unknown Luigi Bruni, migrant and *avventuriero* from the “antico ducato di Parma e Piacenza” (the ancient Duchy of Parma and Piacenza; Bruni 1890, 4), points this out rather early on in his equally unknown memoir *Attraverso il Messico. Miei viaggi e mie avventure*:

24 The essay was then republished in 1942 as part of the *India, Messico, Cina* book by Bompiani, from which we will be quoting.

25 These notions spread despite the fierce opposition of, for example, Carlo Cattaneo himself: “Le immaginazioni commosse da una qualunque somiglianza, vedono tra questi monumenti l’identico e non vedono il diverso” (Imaginations susceptible to these resemblances focus on what is similar and ignore what is different; 1942, 127). And again: “Per tutto ciò, se nelle arti, nelle religioni o nelle lingue del Anahuac si potesse rinvenir qualche vestigio ben certo di popoli stranieri all’America, ciò che finora non avvenne, [...] la chiave di questa somiglianza primigena non è da cercarsi nell’Asia o nell’Africa, ma nella natura umana” (Even if in the arts, religions and languages of Anahuac one could find some real evidence that they are not from America, which has not been the case thus far, the key for those resemblances would not be in their Asian or African origins, but rather, in human nature; 1942, 151-2). Lastly: “I discordi tentativi fatti da molti eruditi di diverse scole per identificare li Aztechi ora ai Giaponesi, ora ai Chinesi, ora ai Mongoli, ora agli Indo-europei, ora agli Egizii, ora agli Ebrei, ora per la lingua, ora per le piramidi e i papiri, ora per le fattezze del volto, ora per le idee religiose, finiscono a elidersi mutualmente e darsi una generale negativa [...]. Noi invitiamo eruditi della forza dell’amico Biondelli e dell’amico Marzolo, a cercare nel complesso delle lingue dell’impero messicano le vestigia dell’azione reciproca che quei popoli ebbero fra loro” (The arguments made by many scholars from different backgrounds to identify the Aztecs with the Japanese, the Chinese, the Mongolians, the Indo-Europeans or the Jews – in relation to either their language, their pyramids, their papyri, their features, or their religious ideas – end up cancelling each other out [...]. We invite intellectuals of the calibre of our friends Biondelli and Marzolo to search the bundle of languages of the Mexican empire for signs of their influence on one another; 1942, 155-6). Bernardino Biondelli and Paolo Marzolo are therefore presented as Italian precursors of diffusionist theories.

Secondo questa opinione di cotali eruditi, ammessa come più probabile dalla maggior parte degli scienziati, gli uomini che primi arrivarono al continente americano passarono dall'Asia all'America o per un gran braccio di terra [...] o per una non interrotta successione di piccole isole. (1890, 37)

According to the view held by these intellectuals and shared by most of the scientific community, the first humans to get to the American continent crossed over from Asia to America either through a narrow strip of land or through a row of small islands.

These explicit opening remarks enable the reader's "overcoding" (Eco 1976, 134), in which (some notion of) orientalization plays a significant role. Other than this framing consideration, all the (modern) reader knows about Bruni – which is not the case with the more fashionable, widely read travelling-reporters of the *Anni Venti* – is what one can gather from the only text he managed to publish. In addition, there are no paratexts of any sort to guide further our exegesis: self-portrayed, northern middle-class Bruni leaves Italy in 1858 for France after receiving what appears to be – from his occasionally scholastic style – a classical as well as patriotic education – and then returns to newly Unified Italy in the years when Florence was its temporary capital. In 1868, upon his father's death, he leaves the then-unified *patria* once again and reaches Mexico only in 1872, after spending some time in Texas. Bruni does not travel as a missionary, nor as a diplomat, and only briefly considers the option of "fondare una colonia" (founding a colony; Bruni 1890, 33).²⁶ Furthermore, he does not have the backing of a large and mighty news agency, unlike some of those who would follow (Cipolla and Appellius in particular).

Yet, on the one hand he does keep fellow diasporic Italians, scattered throughout "Greater Italy", in mind, hence aiming his writing both at the "compatrioti sparsi nelle Americhe, od altrove" (fellow Italians in the Americas or elsewhere; Bruni 1890, 9)²⁷ and at Italians in Italy, to whom "far conoscere le bellezze di questo Paese [Mexico]" (to show Mexico's beauties; 24). On the other hand, he does not forget to thank liberal leader, order-and-progress advocate and "xenophile" Porfirio Diaz (2). The line between travel and migrant writing is intrinsically blurred,²⁸ and Bruni indeed appears to toe the

26 I borrow the framework used by Finaldi's new history of Italian colonialism (2018).

27 "Il fine [...] di mantener vivo fra gli italiani l'amore della lontana patria" (The objective of keeping the love of the homeland alive; Bruni 1890, 6).

28 The line separating a 'traveller' from a 'migrant' is equally blurred. With Braidotti's influential notion of 'nomadism' (1994) in mind, one might be tempted to locate this line/distinction somewhere along a choice-necessity *continuum*. See also Scapp, Seitz (2018), from which one may derive the notion of "thinking in transit", useful here.

line during the twenty years spent in Hispanophone North-America. Mexico becomes his “seconda Patria” (second homeland; 56) by the time the narration stops, with the narrated self rejoining the elderly narrator in 1890. In Bruni there is a quasi-academic, categorizing curiosity towards the Mexican ‘Other’, as he endeavours to describe what he sees in some detail and rigour. In particular, he endeavours to taxonomize the demographic variety he encounters: “le molteplici famiglie etnografiche di cui si compone la razza indigena” (the many ethnographic families of which the indigenous race is made; 45). Likewise, he contextualizes what he regards as the cruel religious practices of the *Aztechi*, by making a transcultural effort to understand them in the context of ‘another’ conception of the sacred (91). His taxonomic discourse therefore does go beyond what would be, in Saidian terms, an “us vs them”²⁹ dichotomy. Yet, in attempting to pursue this quasi-academic, positivist route (De Donno 2019) at times the (counter-)discourse of his fundamentally binary “inconscio strutturale” emerges. To begin with, the ‘privilege’ of historical precision is reserved to the rise of (Western) ‘modern’ civilization (e.g. “Cortez abbandonò l’isola di Cuba il giorno 10 febbraio 1519”, Cortez left the island of Cuba on February 10, 1519; 64),³⁰ which he refers to as a “scoperta [of the continent] del famoso Navigatore” (a discovery [of the American continent] made by the famous Navigator; 57) – indeed without transcending the sociocultural framework of his positionality. In addition, he displays an overall preference for *la razza pura* (the pure race), chiefly European but also indigenous, and, on the contrary, a thinly disguised unease when facing any form of *mestizaje*. Overall, “l’indiano” comes across as beautiful and noble (91), even though intrinsically prone to cruelty, on occasion. As to “gli indiani” in Nueva Laredo (Mexico), Bruni goes as far as asserting that their family customs are so admirable that “più di una nazione europea potrebbe prendere lezioni in una capanna messicana” (more than one European nation could learn things in a Mexican hut; 92). But when dissecting the kind of life lessons one (in Italy) might learn in said Mexican shack, one finds that these are, quite literally, what one might read about in the educational bestseller *Libro Cuore* (*Heart*, 1887) by Edmondo De Amicis (Verdicchio 1997, 38): from respecting the elderly and one’s parents to the value of hard work, all the way through an unquestionably problematic, ‘gendered’ resignation to domestic violence.

29 But Said himself discusses how the urge for categorization on the one hand, and essentializing binarism on the other, idiosyncratically coexist ([1978] 1979, 225).

30 Further and clearer: “Non è qui uopo di parlare dei re che si succedettero fino alla conquista di Cortez, giacché questa non è storia” (This is not the appropriate place to talk about the Kings who came before Cortez, because that is not history; 57).

[S]e [tuo marito] ti maltratta, lamentati con dolcezza. (1890, 94)

[I]f [your husband] beats you, do complain, but gracefully.

Meanwhile, in Italy, the parliament was unsuccessfully debating divorce laws (Seymour 2009).

At the opposite end of the spectrum, *il meticcio* generally comes across as corrupt, ambiguous and hard to classify, hence inherently dangerous and anxiety-inducing.³¹ This characterization is rather insistent, with an entire chapter devoted to describing the mischiefs of a *mestizo* who runs a game house; the story ends with a murder and the owner fleeing into the night (Bruni 1890, 127-35). Italian cultural historians have long highlighted that if there is something that links liberal and fascist Italy it is the progressive attention to 'race' and 'race' discourses as a unifying national concept. Bruni's leanings echo what recent scholarship (Giuliani-Caponetto 2015) has been pointing out: that dealing with *meticcio* in *Africa Orientale Italiana* – resulting from quite inevitable miscegenation – was one of the great challenges of the Italian colonial presence on the continent, as beautifully narrated and dramatized by Gabriella Ghermandi in her masterpiece *Regina di fiori e di perle* (2007), with respect to post-1935 Ethiopia.

In 1890, the year of publication of *Attraverso il Messico*, the newly acquired Italian possessions of Massawa e Assab are merged to form the Italian *Colonia Eritrea*. Bruni does not in fact appear to dislike colonial enterprises/endeavours. He reads them as a military display of national "strong volition" (Cammarano 2011) and as a way of making "la grande Italia" (Great Italy; Gentile 2006) even Greater.³² He even celebrates those efforts in one of the poems – titled "Il Messico e l'Italia" – included in *Attraverso il Messico* as an appendix:

Il soldato [italiano] non pave sembiante:
E si l'Africa il poote ridir (1890, 227)

No one scares the [Italian] soldier
as Africa can tell

The only redeeming feature of the intrinsically suspicious and confounding *mestizo* seems to be assimilation-through-acculturation.

³¹ "The ambiguous position of the biracial subject confounds any sense of 'truth' in racial identity, recasting race as an uncertain and shifting field of differences" (Bost 2003, 19).

³² This attitude is corroborated by his assertion that: "le leggi dei paesi nascenti è sempre quella del più forte; sebbene son di avviso che la medesima legge [...] sia pure quella dei paesi inciviliti" (the law regulating newborn countries is the law of the jungle, but I think the same law [...] applies to civilized countries too; 1890, 41).

Amongst the *mestizo* upper classes what can be thought of as Bhabha's "mimicry" (1984) occurs, which patently serves to reassure Bruni:

Il carattere degli abitanti è lodevole, *ché* [our emphasis] l'alta società messicana è pulita, benevola, gentile con gli stranieri, segue il costume europeo e specialmente il francese. (Bruni 1890, 147)

The character of the people is lovely, *because* [our emphasis] the Mexican high society is clean, kind, gentle with foreigners; it follows European customs, especially French.

On the contrary, he criticizes all that appears to be detrimental either to an idea of progress based on 'speed' and 'technology', which Crispi's Italy was struggling to achieve, or to the appreciation of one's own country. Primarily, he deprecates an orientalized "indolenza" (indolence), which he attributes to people from the Tropics, and which was equally attributed to Southern Italians in those years.³³

Devesi rimproverare spesso la loro indolenza; ma questa malattia è comune nei Paesi Tropicali. [...] Gli abitanti messicani [di classe bassa], o per apatia, o per qualsiasi altra ragione, non sono presi dalle maestose bellezze del loro Paese. (Bruni 1890, 87)

[Lower-class] Mexicans, be it for apathy or for whatever other reason, do not appreciate the monumental beauties of their country. [...] Their apathy is to be blamed, but that's common to all Tropical places.

Yet, with discourse and counter-discourse here increasingly short-circuiting throughout the corpus, the model of continental efficiency, order and progress used to undermine the *mestizo*'s integrity is the same model vehemently rejected by Bruni when deployed to draw a parallel between Latins/Italians and Anglo-Saxons. In so doing, the text paves the way for what will become a love-hate relationship with "The Yankees" (see, famously, Gentile 2003) during the *Ventennio*:

Una sola parola: Siete voi uno Yankee?
Giammai: Mi vanto italiano. (1890, 33)

Are you American?
Most certainly not: I am proud to be Italian.

33 See 'classic' Dickie 1998; Moe 2002, 2004 and Wong 2006, as well as Zuccala 2018 for a case study.

Bruni's rather restrained, descriptive and scholastic literary style does not enable a true Bakhtinian polyphony (Bakhtin 1981) of competing discourses. Nonetheless, his text gives us a glimpse of how the identity of the liberal Italian elite (northern, bourgeois, fundamentally conservative) began to take shape at that time as an intermediate entity, 'in-between' the equally undesirable poles of 'The Yankee-Anglo-Saxon' and the 'Mexican-*mestizo* Other'. Unless, of course, the latter is Spivak's "native informant" (1988): docile because domesticated by exposure to European culture and thereby *de facto* accepted and assimilated into a white/European *casta*.³⁴ Amidst these unsystematic narrativizations of identity, the narration fades away with a display of the elderly Bruni's "pleasing melancholy" (Duncan 1999, 152). He is by now inhabiting the hybrid third space³⁵ of a diasporic Italian-ness, imperfectly forged through layers of reciprocal Otherization. From a "primitive" Mexican border he yearns nostalgically for a long-lost "paese dove [...] si parla la dolce favella dell'Alighieri (the country where the people speak the sweet language of Alighieri; 109), which he wistfully hopes to be able to see again some day.

The polyphonic intertwining of *discourse* and *counter-discourse* (Terdiman 1985) emerges more clearly from the text of Milanese entrepreneur Ubaldo A. Moriconi, of whom also very little is known other than what emerges from his neglected book *Da Genova ai deserti dei Mayas*. For his text too, once "the author is dead" (Barthes [1967] 1977) what remain is - post-structurally - the narration with its tensions and patterns.

As Eco (1983) suggests, the title represents an unavoidable conditioning of interpretation. Along these lines, the operation of cultural mediation/translation attempted by *Da Genova ai deserti dei Mayas* (1902, published in Bergamo) is to be understood as more deliberate than Bruni's: the pre-Hispanic picturesque element is exoticized in a manner that transcends temporal and spatial accuracy, insofar as Mexican deserts are evidently not in the Maya region (and one could speculate, the desert could be more easily associated with the Oriental Egyptians who, like the Mayas, built pyramids, and the Eastern Africans, who had shattered Italy's imperialist dreams in Adwa in 1896).

As Choate noted (2008), for most *fin de siècle* Italians of all social and cultural backgrounds emigration was thought of as an unavoidable reality, and the only variable was the destination.³⁶ That is indeed

34 On the intersectional notion of caste in the Latin American context, see Bost 2003.

35 A hybrid space that also turns linguistic, with Bruni's Italian getting increasingly idiosyncratic and dense with Hispanicisms, even beyond the superficial stratum of vocabulary, and down into the depth of syntax.

36 This is not to say that there was no opposition to the concept of emigration. Suffice it to mention nationalist Enrico Corradini, who famously regarded emigration as

the case for Moriconi, who published his book at the height of Italian emigration – the year after, in fact, Italy passed its (second) farsighted emigration law for protecting migrants’ rights, which he mentions in passing (1902, 102). He explicitly intends to make a contribution in steering migratory fluxes.³⁷ With a clear(er) political agenda and target audience in mind, his narrative endeavours to inform as well as to persuade potential emigrants, as compared to Bruni. Playing with his role of supposedly “reliable” narrator (Shen 2013) and self-reflexively addressing the reader in more than one occasion, Moriconi tells us that he will try to be – in his recounting – both entrepreneur and *touriste* (tellingly using two words of Anglo-French derivation, possibly in an attempt to evoke some ‘updated’ version of extra European *grand touring*). He thus shows a self-conscious awareness, more than Bruni does, of being able to orient the reader-response by giving them information dense with “exotic mystique” (Choate 2008, 8). Moriconi also proves to be more skilfully inter-medial, by using the then emerging art of photography, and declaring that he will reproduce Mexico through transmedial “istantanee” (pictures – taken with his *Eastman* – accompanied by descriptions).³⁸

We might say that, in Moriconi, ‘orienting’ domestic migratory fluxes strikingly prevails over ‘orientalizing’ Mexico for the amusement-reassurance of European readers,³⁹ but by this we should not leave the broad ‘Otherizing’ patterns in the text go unacknowledged.

In Moriconi’s travelogue one witnesses a substantial gendering (feminization) of all things (lower *casta*) Mexican. He devotes an entire chapter to a rather stereotypical – yet interestingly not oversexualized – Yucateca “Venere” (Venus),⁴⁰ but also narrativizes the idea of a widespread oriental-like femininity of Mexican (*mestizas*)

the quintessential failure of the liberal state and compared it to the tragedy of Jewish diaspora (Choate 2008, 7). See also Moricola 2008 on Latin America.

37 “Come si dovrebbe fare per dirigere al Messico almeno una piccola parte del nostro contingente migratorio?” (How could we steer at least a small portion of our migrants towards Mexico?; Moriconi 1902, 158).

38 On (Italian) photography and (Italian) ideology see Minghelli, Hill 2016 as well as Andreani, Pazzaglia 2019.

39 Yet a passing reference to a version of diffusionist theory does appear at page 69. It is the version according to which the first Oriental colonizers of central America were the inhabitants of disappeared Atlantis, a thesis to be later espoused by Vasconcelos.

40 The chapter features no fewer than 14 photos of Mexican women. While the actual photographic representation does not suggest full assimilation of the trope of the Black Venus – at least in as far as there is no sexualization of the photographed subjects – a flirtation with the theme emerges more clearly from the descriptions that accompany these “istantanee”. His gendered rendition of Mexico starts with the Yucateca Southern woman from Merida, which is exemplary: the narration focuses on and exalts her reclusive nature, her modesty, her self-control, which is nonetheless, admittedly, corroborated by the overwhelming jealousy of her male counter-part, the ‘native’ man, so as to suggest that there might be in fact, however hidden, an over-sensu-

lower classes: the coach-driver is an effeminate youth characterized by “dolci insistenze” (a gentle insistence; 1902, 120) and elsewhere the lower classes are equally characterized by a “falsetto femminile” (effeminate falsetto; 120). This is idiosyncratically linked to a certain in-built, child-like hypocrisy and “una vocina infantile” (an infantile voice; 133-4), which metonymically marks their infantilization. Likewise, feminization and infantilization of the Other pair with the portrait of a lack of self-restraint reified by a general lack of tidiness, in a way that recalls the description of the secluded Ottoman harem by Italian travelling princess Trivulzio di Belgiojoso (Spackman 2017):

Messico supera le metropoli europee per la poca pulizia che caratterizza il basso ceto, composto esclusivamente di indi [by which - confusingly enough - he means *mestizos*] apatici e acerimi nemici della pulizia. (1902, 128)

Mexico City beats European cities as far as the lack of cleanliness of the lower classes go, made up exclusively of indigenous people [...] apathetic and fierce enemies of cleanliness.

All these partially essentializing associations (Oriental-untidy = child = woman), predictably draw upon the reassuringly positivistic taxonomy of Lombroso,⁴¹ and his studies of physiognomic determinism, on which Lombroso’s followers such as Giuseppe Sergi (1841-1936) would dwell in their pseudo-racial profiling of the Italian Southerner (Giuliani 2014):

Osservi quel gruppo di piccoli galantuomini, dai cui ceffi non traspare alcuno di quei tratti antropomorfistici che ricordino le buone intenzioni del creatore. (Moriconi 1902, 138)

Have a look at that gathering of small ‘gentlemen’, on the faces of whom there are no anthropomorphic traces of the Creator’s good intentions].

Moriconi’s text also makes more explicit and transparent how – à la Said – the description of the subaltern Other is by and large a way to address problems of the (national) Self, in an attempt to consolidate its (narrated) identity:

ality to be tamed. This highlights what appears to be a tendency of polarization in the rendition of the Other.

41 See for example his fundamental work *L'uomo delinquente* (Lombroso 1876).

Fino ad oggi, noi altri italiani, credevamo di avere il primato in fatto di lazzaronismo. Ebbene è tempo di far cadere anche quest'altra illusione. (137-8)

Up to this day, we Italians have been thinking that we had some sort of primacy regarding laziness. Well, it is now time to debunk this myth, too.

In *fin de siècle* Italy the emerging *questione meridionale* was indeed one of the more pressing questions, and this specific cultural preoccupation implicitly informs Moriconi's text. In his statement, "noi Italiani credevamo" (we Italians believed; 138), there is all the ambiguity of a newborn nation marred by a North-South divide, which is acknowledged and discursively constructed, both domestically and by judgmental and 'developed' liberal continental Europe. As De Donno puts it, "As in the case of the Orient, the Mediterranean is also a domesticated trope used for a variety of purposes related to the cultural renewal of modern Italy" (2019, 2; see also seminal Verdicchio 1997). Accordingly, the representation of the 'orientalized' *mestizo* conjoins with that of the 'beyond-Rome'⁴² Southerner, also oriental-ized 'under the Western eyes' of Lombard bourgeois Moriconi:

In un bugigattolo oscuro e fetente, dove lavoravano attorno a un deschetto da ciabattino due giovinotti *calabresi* [our emphasis], fra le grida giulive di quattro o cinque marmocchi nudi, i cui corpicini sembravano carte topografiche, tanto erano incrostati di sudiciume [...] mi ricevette cortesemente il capo di casa.

In a dark and filthy little room, two young Calabrese boys were at work around a cobbler's table. Four or five little naked kids were joyfully screaming and shouting. Their filthy bodies looked like topographic maps. [...] Then along came the head of the household. (169)

In a narrative attempt, on Moriconi's part, to assimilate the "dissonant national subject" of "The South" (Verdicchio 1997, 23), this poor shoemaker, who lives like the lower-class *mestizo* Mexicans, has nonetheless given his newborn son the *tria nomina*, "i patriottici nomi di Vittorio Umberto Garibaldi (the patriotic names of Vittorio Umberto Garibaldi; 171), in a Roman onomastic revival anticipating

42 Luigi Cazzato (2017), one of the theorists of 'Pensiero Meridiano', alongside internationally renowned philosopher of 'slowness' Franco Cassano (1995), argues that European auto-orientalization started at Naples. See also Verdicchio (1997, 52-3) on Italian auto-Orientalism.

fascist resurgences. That is, much like Moriconi and Bruni (and presumably their readers), even the shoemaker is *facendo gli Italiani*:⁴³ he is depicted as spontaneously attempting to participate in the Italian State project of nation-making.

4 Barzini and the *Ventennio* Writers

4.1 Luigi Barzini (1923), Emilio Cecchi (1932): Thinking People, Rethinking Borders

On the one hand, so-called revolutionary modernity is as important a feature of liberal Italy's political discourse as it is of fascist nation-making narratives. Recent studies by political historians have analysed the importance of the notion of the *Risorgimento* 'revolution' in the nation-making narratives promoted by liberal Italy - with a particular emphasis on the end of this period, the 1911 Jubilee⁴⁴ - but even more vehemently by the fascist nationalist political project-turned-regime (from 1925). At the same time, "the Mexican Revolution is the defining event of modern Mexican history" (Gilbert, Buchenau 2013, 1). It is therefore not surprising that all post-1910 travellers and reporters' texts inevitably filter their *miradas* through the 'entry point' of the notion of revolution and the way it impacts Mexican people. From 1922 onwards, in particular, Italians cannot help but compare (post)revolutionary Mexico with the new fascist experiment 'launched' that very year, while at the same time transcending the revolutionary topic itself.

Not all texts examined here appear to negotiate and filter the variously veiled discussions of domestic issues and ideological preoccupations in the same way. Out of the four pieces of writing under consideration from the fascist period,⁴⁵ Luigi Barzini's and Emilio Cecchi's texts ought to be considered together for their seemingly quite detached and literary take, whereas Arnaldo Cipolla and Mario Appellius appear to form a narrative block of their own.

Barzini is a typical Italian liberal man of the 19th century, one for whom history is a "galoppata" (gallop; Barzini 1923, 180) towards a

⁴³ This is the programmatic formula of post-Unification policy-making famously (albeit unconfirmed) attributed to Massimo D'Azeglio.

⁴⁴ The ideals promoted by the Jubilee celebrations were to be solidified through both internal consolidation and political (colonial) expansion - celebrated for example by Pascoli in the famous "La Grande Proletaria si è mossa" composition (Forlenza, Thomassen 2015, 25). See also Gentile 2006.

⁴⁵ In post-'intentionalist' literary criticism, we believe one ought to focus on the texts, avoiding venturing into ultimately disabling speculations about 'authorial intention'.

fundamentally Christian modernity and (Western, post-Enlightenment) technology-fuelled rationality. He is also the first (but not the last) of our authors to travel to 'the Orient' extensively⁴⁶ before arriving in Mexico. Barzini never speaks of his (Tuscan and Italian) homeland, much like Cecchi and unlike the other writers. Nevertheless, similar cultural preoccupations progressively emerge, especially from what, in a postcolonial optic, can be regarded as the silences and margins of his narrative. A consummate reporter, he skilfully plays with familiarization/domestication⁴⁷ and defamiliarization/foreignization⁴⁸ so as to firmly grab his reader's attention, before delving into the topic that appears to interest him the most: "il popolo" (the crowd) and its faltering, yet possible 'civilization' in a time of revolutionary transition.

At the core of Barzini's analysis - alongside an explicit endorsement of diffusionist theories⁴⁹ complemented by numerous cursory parallels with Oriental cultures and human types⁵⁰ - there is in fact the question of the Mexican "massa" (crowd; 1923, 180). For Barzini, as was the case for Moriconi, *la massa* is fundamentally and generically *indio* (even though mostly *mestiza* in actuality) and fundamentally subaltern and muted,⁵¹ trapped in an ahistorical immobility: "Quando si arriva al Messico si trova che quel passato lontano vive ancora sotto una sottile scorza di modernità e di cristiane-

46 He became famous especially for reporting on the Russian-Japanese war (1904-05; see Barzini 1906). Barzini, born in Orvieto in 1874 and son of an entrepreneur, started off as a correspondent in 1899 with the *Corriere della Sera*. In 1900 he covered the Universal Exposition in Paris and the Boxers rebellion in China, then moved to Argentina. He went back to Russia in 1902, then to the Balkans, then Japan (1904) to follow the war. A few years later he reported on the Pekin-to-Paris race (Barzini 1908), in a book which became a bestseller. His work features in *Corriere della Sera* in Italian. His proclivity to and experience in covering war zones is evident in the highly descriptive opening of his Mexican reportage (Barzini 1923, 166-75).

47 "La Piazza di Veracruz mi porta in Sicilia" (Veracruz's square takes me to Sicily; Barzini 1923, 168).

48 "La disposizione a terrazze della terra messicana fa pensare alla conformazione di un altro pianeta" (The terraced structure of the Mexican land reminds one of another planet; Barzini 1923, 174).

49 "Tutto nella cultura azteca ricorda l'Asia" (Everything in the Aztec culture reminds one of Asia; 216).

50 "Il loro aspetto non ci è nuovo: osservando quei corpi piccoli e robusti [...] questi indigeni sembrano Giapponesi senza sorriso [...] chissà che non fossero veramente una discendenza di navigatori giapponesi venuti dall'Alaska" (Their appearance is not new: observing their small, chunky bodies [...] these indigenous people look like smileless Japanese [...] perhaps they really were the descendants of Japanese seafarers who had come from Alaska; 214).

51 "Quel che avviene intorno a loro non li interessa. Guardano senza vedere, chiusi, separati dal resto del mondo in un'inerzia timida" (What happens around them does not interest them. They look without seeing, secluded, sealed off from the rest of the world by a shy inertia; 212).

simo" (When one gets to Mexico, one finds that a supposedly long-lost past actually still lives under a thin overcoat of modernity and Christianity; 1923, 180). All his narrative excursions into religion,⁵² *corridos*, politics and revolutions⁵³ are in fact nothing but digressions to discuss more or less obliquely what he considers the crucial issue: how the "massa india" (the Indian masses) behave and the relationship with their leader, underneath which both the Italian reader of the time and the contemporary scholar cannot help but detect the rise of the Italian (fascist) leader.⁵⁴

The *corrida* metonymically represents the ('irrational', 'emotional') way Mexican people always conduct themselves:

È difficile vedere dei cambiamenti più rapidi e più profondi nel cambiamento di una folla. Così il popolo messicano è in ogni cosa. Esso si precipita come il toro dietro l'illusione. (Barzini 1923, 198)

It is difficult to see deeper and more abrupt changes than those characterising the Mexican people. They are always like this. They rush ahead, bull-like, to chase after the illusion.

Yet, a degree of counter-discursive complexity comes to the fore. On the one hand, Barzini insists on the Otherizing immobility of the Mexican 'subaltern' - "le moltitudini indiane [...] in un'amnesia spaventosa [...] sono immobilizzate in un' [...] infanzia della razza" (the indigenous multitude [...] in a full amnesia [...] are immobilized in an infancy of the race; 218). But on the other hand, he undermines his own stereotype by openly blaming colonial endeavours in ways that presage a postcolonial understanding of history:

Fu la memoria delle popolazioni indigene che la conquista volle distruggere [...] il passato era troncato, la storia non esisteva più. Si era abolito il tempo. (Barzini 1923, 218)

It was the indigenous people's memory that the conquerors sought to destroy [...] the past was truncated, history no longer existed. Time was abolished.

52 "L'indio ha un modo barbaro di essere pio" (The *indio* is pious, yet in a barbaric way; 181). And again: "La religione non insinua nella coscienza indiana in sentimento del male e del bene [...] la religione della massa è un feticismo esaltato e fanatico [...] la religione cattolica non ha tentato di mutare l'anima del popolo" (Religion does not instil in the *indio's* heart the notions of good and evil [...] for most people religion is an exalted fetish of fanaticism [...] religion has not tried to alter the soul of the masses; 201-3).

53 "Da anni Messico è il centro di una convulsione politica, economica e sociale" (Mexico has been in the middle of political, economical and social convulsions for years; 186).

54 See Duggan 2011 and Gentile 2016.

Even though the book was published in 1923, the new fascist political formation is not mentioned at all in Barzini's discourse and yet the "political unconscious" (Jameson 1981) is clear enough: with its exaltation of the role of a Mexican *caudillo*, the only one capable to lead and create and instil a sense of *patria* in an otherwise "atona moltitudine" (mute multitude; 228),⁵⁵ Barzini's text echoes the efforts of the Italian political formation-turning-regime, which at the time was busy creating a "culto del Duce" (cult of The Duce; Duggan 2011, 20). To corroborate this overt scholarly association, there is one single 'resurfacing' of the Italian subtext. The indigenous male, with his "cortesia asiatica" (Asian courtesy), is said to "battersi a modo suo, come l'ascaro" (fight in his own way, like the Ascaro; 178), the local soldiers from Eritrea who were enrolled in the Royal Corps of Colonial Troops of the Royal Italian Army since 1889.

Lastly, Barzini also provides an anti-American tirade which will find its full manifestation in Cipolla and Appellius. But it is given limited space⁵⁶ and used primarily as a device to provide the *moltitudine* with a unified nationalistic and ultimately redeeming feature: that of being the "baluardo avanzato dell'America Latina contro la penetrazione del gigante del Nord" (Latin America's first bastion against the Northern Giant; 230).

Like Barzini, "Cecchi rarely expressed himself directly on issues of political significance" (Burdett 2007, 69). In Emilio Cecchi's *Messico* the discussion of both diffusionism and civilization takes a markedly higher cultural turn,⁵⁷ bordering on modernist, playfully self-reflexive literature. Diffusionism is discussed and substantially endorsed⁵⁸ in relation to, for example, visual arts:

Osservando questi dipinti, subito colpisce la loro vicinanza all'arte orientale. In America, il richiamo all'Oriente ha spesso ragione di prodursi. (Cecchi 1996, 55)

55 "Finché un'evoluzione non si compie, è necessario che il governo centrale sia l'espressione di una forza soverchiante" (Until some sort of evolution is not complete, it is necessary that the central government be the expression of an overreaching force; 1923, 226).

56 Barzini was, after all, corresponding in English for the *Daily Telegraph*. On the intrinsic ambiguity of anti-American discourse in the *Ventennio*, see Gentile 2003.

57 "Part of the greater sophistication of *Messico* derived from its author's awareness of the relation between the impressions that he formed during his journey and those recorded by other travellers in different epochs to the same places" (Burdett 2007, 68).

58 "Si sa che alcuni studiosi, dalla affinità di quei motivi ed altri elementi, vorrebbero documentare un diretto trasporto d'influenze, dal bacino Mediterraneo e indiano all'America del Nord; se non addirittura l'origine degli Indiani d'America e degli antichi Messicani, da popolazioni emigrate dall'Egitto e l'Oriente" (It is a known thing that, drawing on those similarities and correspondences, some scholars argue that a direct influence has taken place, from the Mediterranean and the Indian areas to North America; some even link Native Americans and ancient Mexicans to people who migrated from Egypt and the Orient; 59).

Looking at these paintings, what immediately strikes the observer is their proximity to Oriental art. In America, the association with the Orient is often well motivated.⁵⁹

The entire text is a homage *ante litteram* to Kristevan (1980) intertextuality, with allusions and evocations ranging from classics such as D.H. Lawrence's *Mornings in Mexico* (1927) to Brenner and Leighton's *The Wind That Swept Mexico* (1943) to (Italian) local works such as those by historian Niccolò Rodolico.⁶⁰ Everything is assessed in relation to the capacity to produce art and by extension 'culture', as demonstrated by the quasi-Bourdieuian (Bourdieu, Darbel, Schnapper 1990) analysis of the presence of indigenous people in the National Museum ([1932] 1996, 111).⁶¹ It is precisely the more pronounced literary quality of Cecchi's work that brings the anxieties of his mildly fascist *inconscio strutturale* into higher relief. During summer break after teaching at Berkeley (1930-31),⁶² Cecchi goes from California to Mexico City and returns, via Arizona and New Mexico. The *Messico* reader is accompanied, if not haunted, by images of deterioration and decay,⁶³ but they are not as unilateral as one might expect. The originality of his "border thinking"⁶⁴ lies in the fact that these images are to be found both on the Anglo-Saxon U.S. side and on that of Mexico. Through the lens of cultural production Cecchi achieves what can be understood as a liberating relativization of hierarchies

59 "Dall'Alaska a Città del Messico, al Perù. E le molteplici concordanze fra certe decorazioni, nelle ceramiche del Nuovo Messico, e motivi d'arte caldea, persiana, dell'India asiatica e delle isole del Pacifico, da tempo furono rilevate. [...] lo stesso richiamo s'impone con speciale evidenza per le nostre pitture" (From Alaska to Mexico City to Peru. And the many correspondences between decorations, the New Mexico pottery, and tropes and themes of Caldean, Persian, Indian, Pacific Islands art have long been pointed out. [...] and the same echoes one finds in our paintings; 55).

60 And Vasconcelos and Guzman and Traven, and the list could continue.

61 A museum which, by the by, "non potrebbe competere con altri d'America e d'Europa" (could not compete with those in the United States and in Europe; [1932] 1996, 115). "Da un lato, nel chiostro, camminano decrepiti mendicanti e peoni; o siedono su qualche pietra, nobilmente atteggiati negli scialli. Discorrono a voce bassa, con parole rade. A coppie vanno lenti lenti, d'un passo senza rumore. Con quella dignità asiatica, e una cera dalle privazioni fatta trasparente, sembrano vivere fuori del secolo, in una specie di limbo" (On one side of the courtyard, beggars and peons stumble around, or sit around on a stone, with noble demeanour. They speak softly, with few words. They walk very slowly in pairs, with no noise. They bear an Asian dignity, and a transparent air of deprivation, they seem to be living out of time, in a kind of limbo; 125).

62 For more on Cecchi's itinerary, see Raveggi 2011.

63 Images such as desolated ghost towns in California, ancient reptiles, ancient-looking Indians on the U.S. side, "il funerale di un bambino" (the funeral of a child; [1932] 1996, 107) in Xochimilco, the "sinistre allegorie cosmiche" (sinister cosmic allegories; 117) and the "emblemi macabri" (macabre emblems; 117) in the Mexican National Museum.

64 We are loosely thinking of Mignolo here. See for example Mignolo, Tlostanova 2006.

of civility: “E forse, tutto considerato, sarebbe meglio che le stirpi e i popoli, quando sentono di andar giù, che non ce la possono fare, si facessero di buona voglia ammazzare” (And perhaps, all in all, it would be better if races and people demanded to be eliminated, when they feel that they are declining and that they cannot make it; [1932] 1996, 48), is Cecchi’s wistful conclusion, which leaves the (Italian) reader not knowing what to think or better, *whom* to think of. Who is the ‘primitive’ and/or ‘decayed’ (and who, by contrast, the modern and the civilized/er)? The American “indiani”, with their commodified spectacles contrived for visiting *gringos*? Or the “furious” Mexicans with their *corridos*, their accompanying songs,⁶⁵ and their exhibited eroticism? Or indeed the Anglo-Saxons, with their “delusione della modernità” (delusion of modernity; 64), their “innocenza incredibilmente rozza [...] da non intendere neanche la possibilità del dolore [di chi gli è assoggettato]” (incredibly unsophisticated naivety [...] to the point where they cannot even understand the pain [of their subjects]; 69), their ugly museums or their obsessions with the bureaucratic, formalistic, soulless nonsense of the Immigration Office?

4.2 Cipolla (1927), Appellius (1929), and the Indo-(Aryan-)Latin ‘Race’

The set of themes and ultimately the post-unification/(post)colonial anxieties that already exist in embryo in the 19th-century *avventurieri* Bruni and Moriconi and become more articulate in the *litterati* Barzini and Cecchi emerge in the most prominent and controversial way in the last two travel writers. The U.S. growing plutocracy and the *problema indio* in particular come to the fore in their texts, couched in an underlying, albeit often latent, orientalizing subtext. A little more bibliography exists on these writers, and detailed bio-bibliographical profiling can therefore be omitted. As per the preceding pairs, also Arnaldo Cipolla’s (1927) and Mario Appellius’ (1929) texts can be analysed jointly for a number of reasons: both authors held more or less explicit diffusionist views regarding the origin of Mexican native cultures, which have been entirely overlooked by critics and yet are crucial to these authors’ racialized – not simplistically racist – take. Before Mexico, they both had been to India⁶⁶ and spoken to and written

⁶⁵ “Come non preferire la loro estrosa malinconia alle brillanti convenzionalità di una perpetrazione hollywoodiana?” (How could one not prefer their creative melancholy instead of the brilliantly executed conformism of a Hollywood performance; [1932] 1996, 87).

⁶⁶ See Cipolla [1922] 1925 and Appellius 1925. An overall idea of their global itineraries is given by the list of their publications: see Appellius 1924, 1925, 1926a, 1926b, 1929, 1931, 1934 and Cipolla 1923, [1922] 1925, 1927, 1930, 1933.

about Gandhi. Cipolla considered him little more than an agitator, while Appelius admired him greatly and compared him to Lenin and Mussolini (Burdett 2007). In addition, they both had criticized what they regarded as the overly separatist style of British rule. More crucially, they were both invested in the meaning-making processes of fascist nationalist narratives, even though in different degrees.

For Arnaldo Cipolla,⁶⁷ diffusionism is a scientific quasi-certainty. He speaks of the first people of Mexico as of “quella civiltà misteriosa di sacrificatori di uomini [...] venuta probabilmente attraverso il Pacifico dall’estremo Oriente” (that mysterious civilization of sacrificers who are likely to have come via the Pacific from the Far East; 1927, 10). He regards them as “la vera popolazione del paese” (the country’s true people; 1927, 87). Yet, he also considers them as a by now fundamentally, historically, and racially degenerated populace: “Vedo che gli indi del Messico sono fratelli degeneri dei mongoli, asiatici intristiti nell’esilio” (I see that the indigenous people of Mexico are the degenerated brothers of the Mongolians, Asians made sadder by exile; 1927, 92). As to the possibility that they might ‘elevate’ themselves, Cipolla remains rather vague, only commenting on the positive, if superficial, impact of the Church. This explains the overtly religious title of his book, referring to the anti-clerical measures taken by the new Calles government, which Cipolla harshly criticizes. He generically reports the view of “chi ben li conosce” (those who know them well; 1927, 101) for whom “alla loro elevazione si oppone la mancanza, nella razza, di ogni senso volitivo e la falsità della sua natura” (the race’s lack of willpower and intrinsic falsity counters the possibility of their elevation; 101).

He then manages to link this (to him) obvious cultural/‘racial’⁶⁸ degeneration to the second big issue that he sees Mexico must confront: the United States.

Chi ha detto che il Messico è un feudo degli Stati Uniti non ha certo colto nel segno [...]; tutta l’America Latina [...] lo considera il campione dell’anti-anglossassonismo e dell’idea Pan-Sudamericana. (13)

Those who say that Mexico is one of the U.S.’ feudal possessions are gravely mistaken [...]; the whole of Latin America [...] considers Mexico to be the ‘champion’ of anti-Anglo-Saxonism and of the Pan-South-Americanist ideal,

67 Cipolla stayed in the country between May and July 1926. Using the capital as his base, he made excursions west to Puebla and Guadalajara as well as to Veracruz and Tampico on the eastern shoreline.

68 As Burdett (2007) notes, the race-culture synonymity remains unchallenged in the two authors, much like in the preceding and the following ones.

he affirms early on. Most of his narration thereafter is counter-punctual, insofar as it is aimed at highlighting Mexico's '*latinidad*' vis-à-vis the incumbent Anglo-Saxonnness of the U.S.

Esso è la barriera, probabilmente valida ancora, della latinità o per lo meno dell'anti-anglosassonismo contro la strapotenza dell'America del Nord. (6)

It is the only still-valid barrier of Latin-ness and anti-Anglo-Saxonism against the North American superpower.

When reporting about India (1925), Cipolla had discussed at length the "material benefits" (Burdett 2007, 55) and the supposed superiority and modernity of British rule, and yet his perspective appears to shift significantly when an element of (Spanish, colonial) *latinidad* is introduced. His narrative plays with both the oriental and orientalized immobility of the *indio* and the all-consuming striving for (a specific kind of) modernization that characterizes the "strapotere" (overwhelming power) of the Anglo-Saxons: "Il Messico è un poco la Russia d'America, dove vi si rappresenta altresì l'Oriente, nei suoi antichi usi e costumi" (Mexico is a bit like the Russia of America, where the Orient is also represented, with its ancient traditions and customs; 23).

Along these comparative lines he goes as far as criticising Mexico precisely for promoting an abstract "nazionalismo azteco" (Aztec nationalism; 35) on the one hand, while playing 'pigmentocratic' and Anglo-Saxon on the other, instead of genuinely embracing its role of champion of Latinized Pan-Americanism:

Il tipo indigeno autoctono e il suo folklore sono quasi introvabili nella rappresentazione grafica del paese [...] il governo ostacola accanitamente la loro diffusione. I messicani, insomma, vorrebbero essere tutti rosei al pari di Anglosassoni. (87)

Native individuals and their folklore are almost impossible to find in the visual renditions of the country [...] the government strongly opposes their visibility. That is to say: Mexicans would like to look all rosy, like the Anglo-Saxons.

Such a keen interest, on Cipolla's part, in what was happening in Mexico at the time - especially with regard to the forgotten indigenous masses and the mistreated foreign clergymen (many of whom were Italian) - is certainly due to the intrinsically compelling scenario that unfolds before the reporter. This is "un prezioso campo sperimentale" (a precious experimental terrain), as Appellius (1929, 105) would call it two years later. Cipolla's interest also echoes, how-

ever indirectly (Burdett 2007, 55), the domestic preoccupations and issues that Mussolini's post-1925 (post-"Delitto Matteotti") increasingly authoritarian regime was confronting. Mussolini was then *en route* towards a politically convenient *conciliazione* (1929) with the Catholic Church while competing (until 1936) strategies for dealing with indigenous colonial subjects in Africa Orientale Italiana⁶⁹ were being negotiated within a regime that had not yet reached full totalitarian status. The very pivot of the whole argument, the notion of a fundamental and shared, albeit hybrid, *latinidad*, was at the basis of *Anni Venti* and early *Trenta* ambitious, if largely ineffectual, politics aimed at Latin America.⁷⁰

The very same concerns are echoed in Mario Appelius' text. Appelius' work is possibly the most systematic and 'treaty-like' as well as the most ideologically assertive. It is therefore also the one from which one can arguably draw the most substantial conclusions as far as "nation and [travel] narration" go.⁷¹ In his Mexican reportage Appelius sets out – not without criticism and perplexities – to look for what the visionary and controversial, yet widely influential, Mexican philosopher Vasconcelos had called the Indo-Latin race (in his famous work *The Cosmic Race*, 1925):⁷²

La mia fantasticheria di latino [...] sa di trovare in Messico uno dei campi di battaglia della Latinità, dove la civiltà latina lotta contro la formidabile pressione anglosassone. [...] Come latino io vedo soprattutto nel Messico il popolo che monta la guardia al Rio Bravo. (Appelius 1929, 13-14)

In my Latin fantasies, I regard Mexico as one of the battlegrounds of Latin-ness, where Latin civilization resists the formidable Anglo-Saxon pressure. As a Latin myself, I see Mexico, first and foremost, as he who guards the Rio Bravo.

⁶⁹ See Poidimani 2009, and Barrera 1996 as well as Giuliani-Caponetto 2015.

⁷⁰ See Savarino Roggero 2002, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2015 and Bertonha 2010. If one were to look for an episode that might be regarded as the breaking point of these trans-Atlantic liaisons, one should mention the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (1935). In this instance the Italians hoped to receive the support of fellow 'Latin' Mexicans, who, on the contrary, supported the Ethiopians against fellow Latins-turned-imperialists.

⁷¹ While the evocation of Bhabha is obvious, we are also referring to the Italian Studies scholar Lucia Re (2009).

⁷² See Manrique 2016 for a detailed account of Vasconcelos' syncretism, which bases the 'dream' of the decline of the white race on its essentialized superiority and on the 'gift' of religion:

Amidst open concessions⁷³ to romance and eroticism (see the chapter titled “Amante Maia di una notte tropicale”, Appelius 1929, 183-95),⁷⁴ long and naturalistic descriptive digressions, and a pathos-laden account of his visit to the Italian community of Chipilo,⁷⁵ Appelius’ quest for rapproaching “latinidades distantes” (Savarino Roggero 2015) does not pivot on the explicit, ‘scientific’ acknowledgement of (Oriental) diffusionism. Yet, apart from isolated counter-instances,⁷⁶ that is unmistakably the underlying assumption.⁷⁷ About the *indio* he says, for example: “Piccolo, quadrato, color terracotta, fortemente asiatico, il vogatore [di Xochimilco] è in genere un indio puro, pacato e silenzioso” (Small, square, terracotta-coloured, strongly Asian, the [Xochimilco] rower is a pure, docile, silent kind of *indio*; 112), before praising the girls and “i loro corpi indo-asiatici” (their Indo-Asian bodies; 135). We seem to be – with Appelius – at the level of ‘impressionism’: “A volte si ha l’impressione di essere dinanzi ad una fantastica esposizione di tappeti d’Oriente” (Sometimes one has the impression to be looking at a wondrous exhibition of Oriental carpets; 516). Yet, the seemingly random use of orientalizing comparisons acquires a more distinctly tactical connotation if one considers – alongside seminal studies by Italian-British historian Fabrizio De Donno (2006, 2010) – what had been the trend among Italian Orientalists

73 These romanticizations are informed by a textbook (see Loomba [1998] 2015, 98) ‘colonial desire = sexualization of the land’ equation: *sufficit* to mention Appelius’ description of the Southern capital city Mérida: “L’amore è nell’aria. Il plenilunio avvolge le cose e le persone in un vago pallore. Nella perlacea chiarezza della notte Mérida, la bianca, sembra ancora più bianca. Quasi si direbbe che è pallida. Pallore di deliquio. Pallore voluttuoso di una donna insonne che abusa della sua forza” (Love is in the air. The full moon embraces people and things in a vague paleness. In the pearly light of the night, Mérida, the white, looks even whiter, paler, even. A swoony paleness. Voluptuous pallor of a sleepless woman who abuses her strength; Appelius 1929, 187). Likewise, the “Notte tiepida del Yucatàn [è] soave come un bacio di donna!” (The tender Yucatàn night is sweet as a woman’s kiss; 201).

74 Concessions of the same kind of those one finds in his *India* (1925); see Burdett 2007.

75 In homage to the “Ubi Italicus - Ibi Italia” (Appelius 1929, 218) fascist motto. Equally moving, or supposedly so, is the anecdote of the suicidal former fascist soldier Antonio Furlaneto (217-26), which gives the narrator the opportunity to magnify the action of *i fasci*, who are portrayed as taking care of the corpse in ways unthinkable in a time of “altri governi” (other governments). On the *Nave Italia* commercial expedition, which is also referred to in Appelius’ text, see Savarino Roggero 2015.

76 “La generalità delle figure è strettamente originale” (shapes are overall fully original; 58), says Appelius on one occasion, speaking of the materials on display at the Archeology Museum.

77 Underneath this assumption, in turn, ‘textbook’ Saidian Orientalism lurks: “I Maia sono una vecchia razza india, pacifica, paziente, tenace, che ha la *rassegnazione* [italics added] degli asiatici” (Mayas are an ancient Indian race, a peaceful and patient one, a stubborn one bearing an Asian resignation; Appelius 1929, 167). Quantitatively: ‘Asia’ and derivatives appear 38 times, with 5 occurrences of ‘Oriente/ale’ complementing it. Idiosyncratically enough, he does not cease to refer to 1492 as “scoperta dell’America” (discovery of America; 199).

since the *Risorgimento* and especially in the first phases of the fascist era. Orientalism was strategically used by fascist discourse in the early 1930s to enhance a racial and non-racist discourse in opposition to the English and other continental powers, as De Donno has convincingly illustrated. More specifically, Italian Orientalists had gradually tried to strengthen the link between ‘the Orient’ (Aryan) and ‘the Mediterranean’ (Latin) as a route towards regenerated yet alternative (not simply Aryan-Anglo Saxon) modernity. The concept of a “(Greek-Indo-Italic) Aryan unity” (De Donno 2006, 397) put forth by these scholars is implicitly echoed by the Latin-Indo-Oriental unity promoted by Appellius.

Quelle forze indie – Azteche, Tolteche e Maia – [...] da sole non possono fronteggiare la Sfinge dei grattacieli, ma possono trovare nella loro fusione con lo spirito latino quella divina materia con cui gli uomini creano la Civiltà del mondo. (14)

Those indigenous forces – Azteque, Tolteque and Maya – [...] cannot face the Sphinx of the skyscrapers on their own, but can find in their fusion with the Latin Spirit that divine matter with which men create the world’s Civilization.

Appellius praises the incorporation (through miscegenation) of these by-now ‘degenerated’⁷⁸ Orientals into “quello che in un non lontano domani dovrà essere il tipo indo-latino del messicano moderno” (what in a not-so-distant future will have to be the Indo-Latin type of the modern Mexican; 1929, 38), in line with what some fascist intellectuals (e.g. Dr. Nicola Pende’s school) were doing, while campaigning for somewhat inclusive racial policies to be adopted by the fascist regime.

5 Some ‘Opening’ Conclusions

Within the confines of this introductory overview one cannot hope to engage in an exhaustive literary, cultural or sociopolitical analysis of a corpus that proves to be rich and largely unexplored – particularly in the English language – and situated at the intersection of theoretical studies on peripheral (e.g. Italian) *Orientalisms* and alternative narrative conceptualizations of modernity.

Indeed, this relatively cursory analysis aims to raise more questions than it manages to fully answer – and it could not be any differ-

⁷⁸ He echoes Vasconcelos.

ent.⁷⁹ Specifically, what remains to be explored further can be understood along four cultural studies-bound trajectories: 1) the uniquely layered way in which an often latent Orientalism is displayed by these Italian travellers and their texts to reflect and counter a national and international discourse, which was orientalizing their own country; 2) the full extent of how the notion of a hybrid and orientalized *latinidad* – characterizing both the target and the source culture(s) of these narrations – complicates even further our understanding of how Italian *fin de siècle* and fascist cultures dealt with racialization in relation to nation-making; 3) the extent to which gender plays an important role in the self-understanding and narrations of national modernity; 4) the extent to which, in these specific case studies, transitioning from liberal to fascist, as much as the transition from Porfiriato to post-revolutionary Mexico, is a process of continuity rather than one of rupture.

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⁷⁹ In agreement with François Livi (Comoy Fusaro 2007, 23), we would not wish it otherwise.

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