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# Indolence and Regeneration: Tropes and Tensions of Risorgimento Patriotism

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SILVANA PATRIARCA

IN THE LAST HALF CENTURY, the historiography of the Italian Risorgimento, operating within a conventional understanding of political thought, has usually emphasized the differences between the more conservative liberals or “moderates,” who until 1848 favored a confederation of states under the leadership of one of the established rulers, and the democrats, who favored instead the creation of a unitary or federal state under a republican constitution.<sup>1</sup> The focus on the political currents of the Risorgimento has overshadowed, as a recent study has pointed out,<sup>2</sup> the fact that patriots of different stripes shared common sentiments and cultural conceptions about that obscure object of desire, the nation, starting with the common use

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive account of Risorgimento political currents in this mode, see Giorgio Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia moderna*, Vol. 2, *Dalla Restaurazione alla rivoluzione nazionale* (Milan, 1958). There is a wealth of research on the individual political currents (see, for example, the studies on the moderates by Sergio La Salvia and Umberto Carpi and the studies on the democrats by Franco Della Peruta). Denis Mack Smith has also strongly emphasized conflict: see his *Cavour and Garibaldi, 1860: A Study in Political Conflict* (Cambridge, 1954). For a recent overview informed by wider concerns, see Adrian Lyttelton, “The National Question in Italy,” in *The National Question in Europe in Historical Context*, Mikuláš Teich and Roy Porter, eds. (New York, 1993), 63–105. The influence of Gramscian preoccupations and categories on postwar historiography (such as the issue of the moderates’ hegemony) is partly responsible for this emphasis. Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* which contained his reflections on the Risorgimento were published in 1948–1951. An English version of some of his writings on the Risorgimento is in Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York, 1971), 52–120. For a critical review of the historiography on the Risorgimento, particularly in the post-1945 period, see Lucy Riall, *The Italian Risorgimento: State, Society, and National Unification* (New York, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Alberto M. Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento: Parentela, santità e onore alle origini dell'Italia unita* (Turin, 2000), 53. Banti’s innovative study has shown the presence of similar cultural symbols and an ethnic conception of the nation across the political divide, but the author has focused his analysis exclusively on *Italian* texts without considering the significant role played also by other Europeans in the construction of Italy.

of the very words “Risorgimento” and “regeneration”<sup>3</sup> to indicate the enterprise in which they were involved and their common aspiration. It has also overshadowed, I will add, the fact that supporters (and critics) of the Italian nation extended beyond national boundaries.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, in the early nineteenth century, individuals with different ideological convictions and different national origins participated intensely in a discourse on Italy and on the “national character” of the Italians. Largely shaped by Enlightenment preoccupations, the discourse of national character was everywhere a discourse of “virtues” and “vices,”<sup>5</sup> but it characterized Italian patriotism in its own distinctive, although not unique, fashion. This Italian discourse of national character, a formation endowed with remarkable endurance, deserves more attention than it has received so far<sup>6</sup> if we want to understand better Italian patriotism and nationalism, especially today when, due to the vast domestic and international political changes of the past fifteen years, they are back in fashion.<sup>7</sup>

In the following pages, I take on the task of examining some important but neglected characteristics of this discourse during the central years of the Risorgimento (c. 1815–1861). About three decades ago, literary historian Giulio Bollati in a justly famous and often reprinted essay pointed out that an enduring feature of Italian history was “the simultaneity of primacy and decadence, of objective

<sup>3</sup> “Regeneration” was the term most commonly used during the “revolutionary triennium” (1796–1799) when the influence of French republicanism was at its strongest. The two terms coexisted in the first half of the nineteenth century, but “Risorgimento” became the favorite term in the second half of the century: see Erasmo Leso, *Lingua e rivoluzione: Ricerche sul vocabolario politico italiano nel triennio rivoluzionario 1796–1799* (Venice, 1991), 153–54.

<sup>4</sup> For a recent innovative account of this sympathy among the British middle class, see Maura O'Connor, *The Romance of Italy and the English Political Imagination* (New York, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of the very important presence of this construct in European political thought, see Roberto Romani, *National Character and Public Spirit in Britain and France, 1750–1914* (Cambridge, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Exceptions are Giulio Bollati (who was, not by accident, a literary historian), “L’Italiano,” in *Storia d’Italia*, Vol. 1, *I caratteri originali* (Turin, 1972), 949–1022, now in Bollati, *L’Italiano: Il carattere nazionale come storia e come invenzione* 2nd edn. (1983, Turin, 1996), 34–123; and Giovanni Aliberti, *La resa di Cavour: Il carattere nazionale italiano tra mito e cronaca, 1820–1976* (Florence, 2000), whose analysis, however, is not as conceptually rigorous and systematic as one would like it to be. Emilio Gentile, *La Grande Italia: Ascesa e declino del mito della nazione nel ventesimo secolo* (Milan, 1997), refers to the importance of national character, but does not analyze it in a systematic way. Ideas of national character are still very common fare in contemporary Italian journalism and popular culture: I have examined this issue in “National Identity or National Character? Old Paradigms and New Vocabularies,” in *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento*, Albert R. Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg, eds. (New York, 2001), 299–319; and in “Italian Neo-Patriotism: Debating National Identity in the 1990s,” *Modern Italy* 6, no. 1 (2001): 21–34. For both political and scholarly reasons Italian research on Italian nationalism and national identity was very limited in the post-1945 period. It resumed vigorously in the 1990s, but with few exceptions (notably Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento*; and Alberto M. Banti and Roberto Bizzocchi, eds., *Immagini della nazione nell’Italia del Risorgimento* [Rome, 2002]) it has been concerned primarily with the period after unification and with issues of nation building and memory: see, for example, Simonetta Soldani and Gabriele Turi, eds., *Fare gli italiani: Scuola e cultura nell’Italia contemporanea* (Bologna, 1993); Giovanni Spadolini, ed., *Nazione e nazionalità in Italia: Dall’alba del secolo ai giorni nostri* (Rome, 1994); Mario Isnenghi, ed., *I luoghi della memoria*, 3 vols. (Rome, 1996–1997).

<sup>7</sup> I have examined some features of this return in “Italian Neo-Patriotism.” Throughout this essay, when I refer to Risorgimento nationalism I will be generally using the term patriotism in order to be faithful to the vocabulary of the period and not because of an intrinsic difference between patriotism and nationalism. Some have argued that patriotism as conditional “love of country” historically preceded nationalism, which claims unconditional identification with the national entity. See, for example, Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1995).

inferiority overcompensated by an invincible sense of superiority.” The exaggerated claims of cultural superiority that nineteenth-century Italian intellectuals, imbued with a strong classical culture, made in a situation of “objective inferiority” would have generated a “pathological form of consciousness,” which had not yet completely disappeared from Italian history. Bollati pointed out the pattern of continuous confrontation between the “pitiless perseverance of foreigners in considering Italy as a country of ruins and memories and the incessant confutations that responded to it.”<sup>8</sup> Working within a linear and Marxist view of historical development and convinced that the “Italian character” was mainly an elite invention obeying certain ideological and political interests, Bollati concentrated his analysis on these ideological aspects and abandoned his other suggestive intuition on the discursive dynamics that stood behind the formation of an Italian “consciousness.”<sup>9</sup>

Without adopting the problematic categories of consciousness and pathology, it is worth pursuing further Bollati’s intuition about the dynamics that historically have generated Italians’ self-representations and particularly about the role that the “mirrors” offered by foreign observers had in the constitution of Italian patriotic discourse. As I will try to show, a set of highly symptomatic (although in no way exclusively Italian) metaphors informed the discourse of Risorgimento patriotism. While eager to proclaim the cultural uniqueness and even superiority of their nation in order to claim their historical right to statehood, Italian patriots had to account for the present state of decline of Italy (which in the mid-1820s Alphonse de Lamartine described as a land where “everything is asleep”), not to mention the rather limited enthusiasm that the inhabitants of the peninsula exhibited toward the national cause. Hence, the often hyperbolic praise of Italian civilization was rarely disjoined from a denunciation of the many “vices” that needed to be eradicated among the actual Italians in order for Italy to reacquire its legitimate place in Europe. The lofty Italy of the patriotic imaginary sharply contrasted with the sobering reality of its “degenerate” people.

The way this people was described depended only in part on the existence of attitudes and ways of life that conflicted with the ideals of the patriots. Even more important was the patriots’ partial acceptance or internalization<sup>10</sup> of certain stereotypes of Italy’s inhabitants that had been circulating in Europe at least since the mid-eighteenth century. Indeed, in the first half of the nineteenth century, Italy was constituted as a nation in a Europe-wide dialogue between unequal partners,<sup>11</sup> if not in a kind of metaphorical “contact zone.”<sup>12</sup> By this I do not mean to imply that

<sup>8</sup> Bollati, *L’Italiano* (1996), 41.

<sup>9</sup> I have offered a more detailed analysis of Bollati’s views in my essay “National Identity or National Character?”

<sup>10</sup> I am borrowing Sander L. Gilman’s term: see his *Jewish Self-Hatred: Antisemitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore, 1986). I am not, of course, assuming an equivalence between the two cases but only using the term for heuristic purposes. On the internalization of stereotypes, see also Seamus Deane’s introduction to Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward W. Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis, 1990), 3–19.

<sup>11</sup> Nelson Moe has helped me think about this transnational dynamic in the cultural creation of Italy: see Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley, Calif., 2002), chap. 1.

<sup>12</sup> The expression comes from Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York, 1992), 6, who uses it to refer to the “space of colonial encounter” or “colonial frontier.”

Italy was a colonial space, but only to point out that Italian patriots intensely felt the burden of outsiders' representations and often spoke within parameters that were not of their own making.<sup>13</sup> They actively engaged these representations and yet at the same time they participated in their reproduction. From this conversation came in part the construction of southern Italy as the internal Other, which, as recent studies have shown, the "modern" Italy of the patriotic imaginary could not contain and recognize fully as its own.<sup>14</sup> But another major outcome of this unequal dialogue was a process of "self-Othering," an absorption and redeployment of negative stereotypes relating to the Italian people as a whole (especially the indolent southerner stereotype) and coexisting with the patriotic denunciation of the foreigners' misrepresentations of Italy. It is this outcome and its lasting consequences that will be the object of my analysis in the following pages, part of a larger attempt to recast the study of Italian patriotism and nationalism as discursive formation.<sup>15</sup>

New approaches to the analysis of representations<sup>16</sup> and to the study of modern nationalism<sup>17</sup> offer important tools for this analytical enterprise and make the recasting of the study of Italian nationalism decidedly overdue. This recasting

<sup>13</sup> It should be clear that I am not constructing a Saidian argument here even though my terminology and my attention to representations have been inspired by Edward Said's fundamental contribution to the study of the representation of the Other. No Italians and arguably no other European peoples were subjected to the type of colonialism that Westerners reserved to peoples overseas, nor did the discourses on them have such an immediate political relevance as those of Orientalists. Some would argue that certain European peoples were "ideologically colonized" (see, for example, Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece* (Stanford, Calif., 1996). Jane Schneider has pointed to Italy's weak player position in nineteenth-century Europe as providing the basis for the establishment of a kind of "neo-orientalist" discourse on the peninsula that has persisted to this day. See "Introduction: The Dynamics of Neo-Orientalism in Italy (1848–1995)," in *Italy's "Southern Question": Orientalism in One Country*, Jane Schneider, ed. (New York, 1998), 1–23. In this essay, I avoid broad generalizations that may run the risk of generating a new binary and focus my analysis on the complex uses that "insiders" make of images that have often an "outside" origin. Michael Herzfeld has explored this dynamic extensively in the case of Greece: see especially his *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State* (New York, 1997); and "Performing Comparisons: Ethnography, Globetrotting, and the Spaces of Social Knowledge," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 57, no. 3 (2001): 259–76.

<sup>14</sup> For this conceptualization, see in particular John Dickie, *Darkest Italy: The Nation and Stereotypes of the Mezzogiorno, 1860–1900* (New York, 1999); and Moe, *View from Vesuvius*. See also Marta Petrusiewicz, *Come il Meridione divenne una questione: Rappresentazioni del Sud prima e dopo il Quarantotto* (Soveria Mannelli, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> This essay is based on the first chapter of a book that I am currently writing on the discourse of Italian character tentatively titled *Italian Vices: The Discourse of National Character from the Risorgimento to the Present, c. 1815–2000*.

<sup>16</sup> The work of Roger Chartier (see especially *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations* [Oxford, 1988]) has provided some important guidelines for my understanding of representations as an integral part of the social fabric, along with the work of feminist scholars such as Mary Poovey, who sees representations as vehicles of ideology but also sites of contestation (*Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* [Chicago, 1988]); and Joan W. Scott, who maintains, after Michel Foucault, the constitutive power of discourse (*Gender and the Politics of History* [New York, 1988]). With regard to this conception, however, see the judicious remarks by Kathleen Canning, "Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience," *Signs* 19, no. 2 (1994), 368–404.

<sup>17</sup> The literature on nationalism has grown vastly in the last twenty years. Probably the most influential book in renovating the study of nationalism in a cultural direction has been Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; London, 1991). For a useful collection of essays that includes both theoretical analyses and empirical studies, see Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, eds. *Becoming National: A Reader* (New York, 1996), in particular the essay by Prasenjit Duara that contests the modernist assumptions of Anderson ("Historicizing



requires shifting the focus from the exclusive analysis of themes and ideas, to which the subject of nationalist ideology has been confined so far in conventional histories of political thought and thinkers, to an analysis of dominant tropes and narratives in the patriotic discursive formation, and in particular to the way in which the discourse of national character *figured* the current state of Italy and the Italians. Today the importance of figuration in the analysis of discursive formations does not seem in need of a novel defense. Many historians would agree with students of linguistics and rhetoric that metaphors do not simply embellish our language, but structure our thought and have crucial conceptual functions.<sup>18</sup> By stressing the importance of language, I am not implying that actors and speakers are mere tools of a language that speaks through them, or, to use a different metaphor, helpless fishes in a dangerous sea of discourse. As the essay should make clear, I believe that concrete historical individuals perform rather complex operations with the language/s available to them, while at the same time their thinking is limited by the dominant metaphors and vocabularies.<sup>19</sup>

Recasting the study of Risorgimento discourse requires also an explicit engagement with the issue of gender, a subject to which recent studies of nationalism have devoted considerable attention in other national cases, but whose analysis in the case of Italy awaits a much fuller treatment.<sup>20</sup> The foreigners' representations of

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National Identity, or Who Imagines What and When," 151–77). I will refer to studies of nationalism in single countries in some of the notes below.

<sup>18</sup> The best and most approachable text (by linguists) that makes the case for this role of metaphors is George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, 1980). Since the onset of what is called the "linguistic turn," historians have been paying more attention to the role of narratives and tropes in discourse: the pioneer in this field has been of course Hayden White. See especially his *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, 1978). One, however, does not have to follow White all the way (especially in his troubling relativistic conclusions, which I do not subscribe to) to recognize the importance of rhetoric in patterns of thought. For a discussion of the linguistic turn, see the relatively old, but still useful essay by John Toews, "Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience," *AHR* 92, no. 4 (1987): 879–97; for a more recent introduction, see Susan A. Crane, "Language, Literary Studies, and Historical Thought," in *Companion to Western Historical Thought*, Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza, eds. (London, 2002), 319–36.

<sup>19</sup> By language here I have in mind both the general meaning of the term (system of signs) and the more specific notion of language as elaborated by J. G. A. Pocock in his studies of political thought: see in particular Pocock, "Introduction: The State of the Art," in *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1985), 1–34. I have, however, some reservations about the excessive insistence on the recovery of authorial intention and the radical contextualism of this approach.

<sup>20</sup> Feminist historians of Italy have called attention to the issue of gender for some time, but they focused at first mainly on the political exclusion of women in post-unification Italy (see, for example, Judith Jeffrey Howard, "Patriot Mothers in the Post-Risorgimento: Women after the Italian Revolution," in *Women, War, and Revolution*, Carol R. Berkin and Clara M. Lovett, eds. [New York, 1980], 237–58) and more recently on women's participation in the Risorgimento: see Christiane Veauvy and Laura Pisano, *Paroles oubliées: Les femmes et la construction de l'Etat-nation en France et en Italie (1789–1860)* (Paris, 1997); Simonetta Soldani, "Donne e nazione nella rivoluzione italiana del 1848," *Passato e presente* 17 (1999): 75–102; and the first issue of *Genesis: Rivista della Società italiana delle storiche* 1 (2002) devoted to this topic. Banti applies a gender perspective to the analysis of narratives and symbols (see *La nazione del Risorgimento*, 83–102), as do Lucy Riall with the figure of Garibaldi ("Storie d'amore, di libertà e d'avventura: La costruzione del mito garibaldino intorno al 1848–49," in Banti and Bizzocchi, *Immagini della nazione*, 157–74) and Steven C. Hughes with the theme of dueling ("Deadly Play: Napoleon, Dueling and the Rearmament of Honor in Italy," *Rivista Napoleonica, Revue Napoléonienne, Napoleonic Review: RNR* 2 [2001]: 27–58). For relevant studies on other countries, see in particular the issue of *Feminist Review* devoted to "Gender, Nationalisms, and National Identities,"

Italy that Italian patriots engaged were profoundly gendered and so were their responses. Indeed, the European discourse of national character was replete with gendered metaphors.<sup>21</sup> Thus, as we will see, to the historical “degeneration” of the Italians conceived as a process of almost literal feminization, patriots opposed a national “regeneration” conceived as a process of almost literal re-virilization of the people. The presence and legacies of these images should prompt us to reconsider the linkages that Risorgimento patriotism has with subsequent inflections of nationalism in the peninsula.

Italy was certainly not a unique case in Europe. Recent studies on the representations of the “margins” of Europe, from Ireland to the Balkans, have pointed out the process of Othering that these lands went through since the eighteenth century in connection with Europe’s attempts to define its identity and the rise of nationalism.<sup>22</sup> Greece offers the best case for comparison with Italy as it too emerged as “cultural construct” before its political constitution, was “burdened” by its classical past, and exhibited traits that were at the same time familiar and exotic to other Europeans.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps even more than the Italians, the Greeks too were seen as “degenerate descendants” of vastly more illustrious ancestors.<sup>24</sup> The spokespersons for the Greek nation claimed not just any great past but the foundational grounds of European civilization, and conceived of their patriotic endeavors as regeneration and particularly as reassertion of their “European” identity.<sup>25</sup> Finally, both Italian and Greek patriots enjoyed international support, although the movement for Greek independence had a more accentuated transnational character as Philhellenism provided not only intellectual but also concrete institutional backing as well as interference.<sup>26</sup>

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no. 44 (1993); and Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann, and Catherine Hall, eds., *Gendered Nations: Nationalism and the Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* (New York, 2000). References to other studies can be found in several of the notes below.

<sup>21</sup> This is ignored, however, by Romani, *National Character*, and by the scholarship on Italian national character mentioned in note 6. For a work that takes gender into consideration, see David A. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680–1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), chap. 5.

<sup>22</sup> On representations of Ireland, see C. L. Innes, “Virgin Territories and Motherlands: Colonial and Nationalist Representations of Africa and Ireland,” *Feminist Review*, no. 47 (1994): 1–14; Roberto Romani, “British Views on Irish National Character, 1800–1846: An Intellectual History,” *History of European Ideas* 23 (1997): 193–219. On Eastern Europe and the Balkans, see Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, Calif., 1994); Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York, 1997); Dušan J. Bjelić and Obied Savić, eds., *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002). For a lucid review of the literature on the Balkans, which has relevant implications also for thinking about other cases, see K. E. Fleming, “Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography,” *AHR* 105, no. 4 (2000): 1218–33.

<sup>23</sup> On the “purification” of the Greek classical heritage to fit the European image of Greece, see Effie F. Athanassopoulou, “An ‘Ancient’ Landscape: European Ideals, Archaeology, and Nation Building in Early Modern Greece,” *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 20, no. 2 (2002): 273–305.

<sup>24</sup> On the images of the Greeks around the time of the war of independence, see Helen Angelomatis-Tsougarakis, *The Eve of the Greek Revival: British Travellers’ Perceptions of Early Nineteenth-Century Greece* (New York, 1990); Thomas Gallant, *Experiencing Dominion: Culture, Identity, and Power in the British Mediterranean* (Notre Dame, Ind., 2002), chap. 2. The greater “degeneration” of the Greeks was conceived as deriving from the long-term contact with the Turkish rulers and thus from an “oriental contamination.”

<sup>25</sup> See Gregory Jusdanis, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature* (Minneapolis, 1991), and Gourgouris, *Dream Nation*.

<sup>26</sup> On Philhellenism, see C. M. Woodhouse, *The Philhellenes* (1969; Rutherford, N.J., 1971).

Surprisingly, the comparison between Italy and Greece is not common in historiographical discourse:<sup>27</sup> Italy is more often compared with northwestern Europe rather than to other Mediterranean countries—except when the question being studied is political corruption, which is often still seen as an almost exclusively “southern” pathology. This essay, however, will not undertake the task of comparing Italy and Greece on the subject of nation making, even though it recognizes the comparison as inspirational. Its main interest is to rethink Italian nationalism by taking into consideration the specific location of Italy in the imaginary map of nineteenth-century Italian patriots in their conversation with their northern European critics and supporters. It aims to make the Italian case relevant to both specialists of Italian history and nonspecialists by showing the need to go beyond the frontiers of the nation when studying nationalist discursive formations, particularly among the peoples that occupy, at any particular historical time, a rather “peripheral” or “semi-peripheral” position.<sup>28</sup> If all national identities are relational,<sup>29</sup> each one is relational in its own fashion.

NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES OF THE ITALIANS have been widely circulating in Europe at least since the late Middle Ages.<sup>30</sup> While in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries they often translated the enmity between Protestants and Catholics, in subsequent times they reflected also the diffusion of environmentalist ideas of human behavior and political institutions. In these representations, Italy and the Italians fared poorly in comparison to northern countries: a character morally corrupted by Catholic superstition and Jesuitism was aggravated by the laziness and effeminacy “typical” of peoples living in a southern climate. The vast literature of the Grand Tour also contributed to the consolidation of its own set of unflattering images of the Italians: notwithstanding the pleasures that travelers often found in some of these very characteristics, they often described the inhabitants of the peninsula as indolent, morally and sexually lax, and easy to resort to fights and arms.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> There are, however, some works that examine the relationships between the Italian and the Greek national movements: see, for example, Antonis Liakos, *L'unificazione italiana e la Grande Idea: Ideologia e azione dei movimenti nazionali in Italia e in Grecia, 1859–1871* (Florence, 1995).

<sup>28</sup> These terms are connected in particular to the work of Immanuel Wallerstein. For their application to Southern Europe, see his “The Relevance of the Concept of Semiperiphery to Southern Europe,” in *Semiperipheral Developments: The Politics of Southern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, Giovanni Arrighi, ed. (Beverly Hills, 1985), 31–39.

<sup>29</sup> On the relational nature of identity, see especially the essays collected in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (Thousand Oaks, Calif., 1996). For the importance of the relation to an “Other” in the constitution of national identity, see Ulf Hedetoft, *Signs of Nations: Studies in the Political Semiotics of Self and Other in Contemporary European Nationalism* (Aldershot, 1995), chaps. 2 and 3. Linda Colley’s *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, Conn., 1992), makes a strong case for the relational construction of British identity in the eighteenth century during the confrontation with the French.

<sup>30</sup> For early examples of negative representations of Italians, see John Peter Colella, “Anti-Italian Attitudes in Medieval and Renaissance England” (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1989); and Henry Heller, *Anti-Italianism in Sixteenth-Century France* (Toronto, 2003). I do not intend to imply that all negative representations were stereotypes, nor that stereotypes were all negative. For a useful analysis of the notion of stereotype especially in terms of its relation to the concept of the Other, see Michael Pickering, *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation* (New York, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> For a comprehensive account of European views of Italy and the Italians in a variety of writings—including diplomatic dispatches, travel literature, and historical accounts—from the end of



Romanticism then added yet another layer to this complex edifice by insisting on the passionate nature of the Italian people.<sup>32</sup>

Although the parameters of the discourse of Italian character may have been first set by foreigners (Cesare de Seta claims that it was in the “mirror of the Grand Tour” that Italians acquired a consciousness of themselves),<sup>33</sup> Italians very soon eagerly joined in. It was in particular intellectuals imbued with Enlightenment ideas and frustrated by the conservatism of Italian rulers who developed very critical accounts of the Italian people: in the Kingdom of Two Sicilies, for example, Giuseppe Palmieri complained in the 1780s about “the ‘inertia,’ the ‘deadly torpor,’ the atmosphere of ‘negligence’ and ‘indolence’ which hung over the whole country.”<sup>34</sup> Palmieri was speaking here of the southern kingdom, but around the same time, in more northern lands, Carlantonio Pilati, while denouncing the Catholic clergy as the main cause of the ruin of Italy, pointed his finger also to the southern climate that made people “lazy, timid, full of vices, and inclined to superstition.”<sup>35</sup> These views did not preclude, however, a strong belief in the changeability of things, and they coexisted with the more “solar” side of the Italian stereotype<sup>36</sup>: for example, in the *Nuova descrizione storica e geografica dell’Italia* (*New Historical and Geographic Description of Italy*, 1782) by another Neapolitan reformer, Giuseppe Maria Galanti, Italians were described as a mild and artistic people, who loved music and enjoyed life.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, in the same period, some men of letters, often committed Catholics but not only, began rediscovering the cultural “primacy” of Italy: Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico was the most famous of these, followed by the great Mantuan erudite Antonio Muratori. While

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the seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, see Franco Venturi, “L’Italia fuori d’Italia,” in *Storia d’Italia*, Vol. 3, *Dal primo Settecento all’Unità* (Turin, 1973), 985–1481. For a more specific focus on travelogues, see Carlo Bernari *et al*, *L’Italia dei grandi viaggiatori*, Franco Paloscia, ed. (Rome, 1986); and Jeremy Black, *Italy and the Grand Tour* (New Haven, Conn., 2003), which focuses on the private correspondence of British grand tourists. For an analysis of specific stereotypes, see Andrew Canepa, “From Degenerate Scoundrel to Noble Savage: The Italian Stereotype in Eighteenth-Century British Travel Literature,” *English Miscellany* 22 (1971): 107–46; and Joseph Luzzi, “Italy without Italians: Literary Origins of a Romantic Myth,” *MLN* 117 no. 1 (2002): 48–83. I refer to other relevant works throughout my notes.

<sup>32</sup> On English romantic views of the Italians, see the old study of C. P. Brand, *Italy and the English Romantics: The Italianate Fashion in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1957), chap. 1. For a more recent and much more sophisticated treatment see O’Connor, *The Romance of Italy*, esp. chap. 2, which also analyzes some French views.

<sup>33</sup> Cesare de Seta, “L’Italia nello specchio del ‘Grand Tour,’” in *Storia d’Italia*, Annali 5, *Il paesaggio*, de Seta, ed. (Turin, 1982), 135.

<sup>34</sup> Cited in Franco Venturi, “The Enlightenment in Southern Italy,” in *Italy and the Enlightenment: Studies in a Cosmopolitan Century*, Stuart Woolf, ed. (London, 1972), 209.

<sup>35</sup> Carlantonio Pilati, *Di una riforma d’Italia ossia dei mezzi di riformare i più cattivi costumi e le più perniciose leggi d’Italia*, 2nd edn. (Villafranca, 1770), in *Illuministi italiani*, Vol. 3, *Riformatori lombardi, piemontesi, e toscani*, Franco Venturi, ed. (Milan-Naples, 1958), 587. Pilati’s book was translated into French and German and had various Italian editions. According to Franco Venturi, partly due to the diffusion of Enlightenment ideas among the intelligentsia of the peninsula, the reaction against foreigners’ harsh portrayal of Italian character did not translate into a chauvinist rejection: see Venturi, “L’Italia fuori d’Italia,” 999. On Italian Enlightenment intellectuals as intransigent critics of national customs (albeit within the problematic of the “public spirit” and not of the nation), see also Massimo Rosati *Il patriottismo italiano: Culture politiche e identità nazionale* (Rome, 2000), 109.

<sup>36</sup> I borrow the notion of the “solar” pole of the stereotype from Bollati, “L’Italiano,” 34.

<sup>37</sup> Giuseppe Maria Galanti, *Nuova descrizione storica e geografica dell’Italia*, 2 vols. (Naples, 1782), now partly in *Illuministi italiani*, Vol. 5, *Riformatori napoletani*, Franco Venturi, ed. (Milan-Naples, 1962). All translations are mine.

Vico in *De antiquissima italorum sapientia* (*On the Very Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, 1710) emphasized the existence of an ancient pre-Roman culture in the peninsula, Muratori in various collections of medieval documents contributed to the reevaluation of the Italian civilization of the Middle Ages and to an awareness of its links with classical antiquity.

In Italy as in other parts of Europe, the cultural and cosmopolitan patriotism of the eighteenth century gave way to a national and more political type of patriotism at the time of the French occupation, when intellectuals linked to the Napoleonic regimes who called themselves patriots pitted Italy's vile present against the great past accomplishments of the Italians in the arts and sciences and argued for the patriotic duty to bring the nation up to the level reached in these better times.<sup>38</sup> In his *Platone in Italia* (*Plato in Italy*, 1804–1806), Vincenzo Cuoco, one of the most active of these intellectuals, articulated the idea of an Italian primacy by elaborating Vico's representation of the peninsula as the site of a very ancient and very wise civilization, older than the Greek one. In this archeological-epistolary narrative of an imaginary trip that the Greek philosopher would have taken in southern Italy in the company of his young friend Cleobolo, Cuoco explicitly invited the Italians to have a better opinion of themselves and to abandon the habit of self-denigration: "a moderate and reasonable opinion of oneself is the true principle of national energy."<sup>39</sup> As director of the *Giornale italiano* (*Italian Journal*, 1803–1806), he saw his task as exactly one of "regenerating" the nation, an enterprise, he observed, more difficult than that of creating it.<sup>40</sup>

The text that gave this older theme of primacy the most elaborate articulation and rhetorical amplification during the central years of the Risorgimento was the Piedmontese abbé Vincenzo Gioberti's *Del primato morale e civile degli italiani* (*On the Moral and Civil Primacy of Italians*), published in Brussels, where the author was in exile, in 1843. In spite of its prolix and often convoluted prose, it enjoyed a vast audience at the time and became the most read political tract of the Risorgimento in the whole peninsula.<sup>41</sup> Following in the steps of Vico and Cuoco, Gioberti proclaimed the superiority of Italian civilization, a superiority that had an ethnic basis (the Italians being the "most illustrious" branch of the mythic "Pelagic" people) and was dependent on Catholicism, the "most perfect"<sup>42</sup> religion whose head, not by accident, resided in the peninsula. Italy's primacy stretched from action (its outstanding creativity in particular with regard to the arts, politics, and religion) to thought (from scientific to aesthetic), and Gioberti went as far as proclaiming Italy "mother nation of mankind."

<sup>38</sup> Stefano Nutini, "'Rigenerare' e 'rigenerazione': Alcune linee interpretative," in *Idee e parole nel giacobinismo italiano*, Eluggero Pii, ed. (Florence, 1990), 49–63. See also Leso, *Lingua e rivoluzione*.

<sup>39</sup> Vincenzo Cuoco, *Platone in Italia*, Fausto Nicolini, ed. (1804–1806; Bari, 1928), 259.

<sup>40</sup> *Giornale italiano*, no. 164 (1805), review of *Le vite de' famosi capitani d'Italia*.

<sup>41</sup> In his preface to Vincenzo Gioberti, *Del primato morale e civile degli italiani* (Milan, 1938), ix, Ugo Redanò claims that "it reached" 80,000 copies, but does not specify the exact time period. S. J. Woolf points to the many reprints that followed the first edition (Woolf, *A History of Italy, 1700–1860: The Social Constraints of Political Change* (London, 1979), 343).

<sup>42</sup> Vincenzo Gioberti, *Del primato morale e civile degli Italiani*, Giuseppe Balsamo-Crivelli, ed., 3 vols. (Turin, 1920), 2: 147. This edition is based on the second revised edition published in 1844 (the original edition was published in Brussels by Meline in 1843). I will be citing from the 1920 edition. No recent critical edition is available.

A former Mazzinian who had an extensive knowledge of both classical and contemporary authors, from Cicero to Machiavelli, from Rousseau to Madame de Staël, from Malthus to Sismondi, and spent the 1830s and 1840s in exile in Paris and Brussels, the abbé knew how to deploy his eloquence to maximum effect.<sup>43</sup> His emphasis on the greatness of Italian civilization and its universal values was supposed to dignify the Italians and help them recover from the state of abjection in which they lay. The lavish praise that for hundreds of pages Gioberti poured on Italian civilization is certainly the most striking feature of the text (and certainly the most foreign to a contemporary ear), and historians and critics have focused primarily on this feature.<sup>44</sup> Other features of the text have received little or no attention, such as the author's conclusion of his long-winded eulogy with a section entitled "Invective against Italian *Ozio* [Indolence]" in which he denounced the principal vices of the contemporary inhabitants of the peninsula, and of its privileged classes in particular: "The greatest evil of Italy, I repeat, is the voluntary decline of national genius, the weakening of patriotic spirits, the excessive love of money and pleasure, the frivolity of customs, the slavery of intellects, the imitation of foreign things, the bad ordering of education, of public and private discipline . . . Who impedes the nobility and the wealthy from studying and writing? . . . Who obliges young gentlemen to *infemminire* [become effeminate] in their *ozio*?"<sup>45</sup> The passage is remarkable for bringing together two major figures to which Risorgimento writers often resorted to represent the current state of decline and deficiency of the Italians: indolence and effeminacy. The main Italian disease was an affliction of the will,<sup>46</sup> a moral sickness that had emasculated and feminized a previously highly endowed people.

Metaphors of feminization were of course not unique to the Italians. As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has observed, "figurations of gender, themselves asymmetrical, mark asymmetrical flows of power. Power is associated with virility, its absence with emasculation and the feminine."<sup>47</sup> Following in the steps of Machiavelli, the rhetoric of republican political discourse distinguished sharply between manly virtue and female corruption.<sup>48</sup> The critique of the "degenerate, effeminate French," for example, was a central component of the French republican discourse of the late eighteenth century: French national character, allegedly corrupted by aristocrats and women's excessive power, was blamed for France's problems.<sup>49</sup> However, in the case of some peoples, effeminacy was not just a temporary deviation from a manly norm. Enlightenment political theorists such as Montes-

<sup>43</sup> On Gioberti's life, see *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, s.v. Gioberti, Vincenzo; and Giorgio Rumi, *Gioberti* (Bologna, 1999).

<sup>44</sup> As noticed by Bollati, "L'Italiano," 106–108.

<sup>45</sup> Gioberti, *Primato*, 3: 200–201.

<sup>46</sup> I would like to thank Jeffrey Freedman for helping me understand the meaning of "voluntary decline."

<sup>47</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Political Camp or the Ambiguous Engendering of the American Republic," in Blom, Hagemann, and Hall, *Gendered Nations*, 271.

<sup>48</sup> For a gendered analysis of Machiavelli's work, see Hanna F. Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Berkeley, Calif., 1984); and Wendy Brown, *Manhood and Politics: A Feminist Reading in Political Theory* (Totowa, N.J., 1988). On the gendered discourse of French Republicanism, see Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988).

<sup>49</sup> Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France*, chap. 5.

quieu, who believed in the role of climate in shaping human attitudes and institutions, spatialized the male-female binary by attributing traits traditionally associated with the female to “Orientals” and southerners.<sup>50</sup> Italy certainly fit in this latter category.

By the early nineteenth century, these gendered images and metaphors, strengthened as they were by a more than century-long process of demilitarization of Italian society,<sup>51</sup> profoundly informed all sorts of discourses about the Italians. In French-occupied Italy, the letters of the agents of Napoleon in the peninsula warned that Italians could not be trusted because they had acquired “the same character, the same habits of women, the subjected sex” while at the same time harboring in their heart some strong male passions—a dangerous combination if seen from the standpoint of an occupying force.<sup>52</sup> And in one of the most influential texts of early romanticism, *Corinne, or Italy* (1807), that fierce opponent of Napoleon, Madame de Staël, while personifying the plight of Italy in the tragic destiny of the eponymous heroine, painted the Italians as an effeminate and indolent people: “In Italy, the men are worth much less than the women, for they have women’s faults as well as their own”<sup>53</sup> declares the male protagonist, the Englishman Lord Nelvil. The half-Italian Corinne, while defending her compatriots, states that “Italians are as indolent as orientals in their daily lives . . . Life is nothing more than a dream-filled sleep under a beautiful sky.”<sup>54</sup>

Resorting to the image of a feminine Italy to indicate its state of inferiority and subjection could of course also serve to draw sympathy for the country and its people. Indeed, as Maura O’Connor has recently argued, the feminized Italy of Madame de Staël and Lord Byron, as well as of a host of Victorian travelers who read their books and followed in their steps, helped draw members of the English

<sup>50</sup> Moe has recently called attention to the north-south axis in Montesquieu that is at times conflated with the more notorious Europe versus Asia opposition (*View from Vesuvius*, 23–27). He also points out that by the nineteenth century Montesquieu’s name became almost synonymous with the climatic theory. And this in spite of the fact, we should add, that Montesquieu’s writings contained a rather more complex view of the factors shaping human institutions and the character of peoples: on this complexity, see Jean-Patrice Courtois, “L’Europe et son autre dans *L’Esprit des Lois*,” in *L’Europe de Montesquieu: Actes du Colloque de Gênes (26–29 mai 1993)*, Alberto Postigliola and Maria Grazia Bottaro Palumbo, eds. (Naples, 1995), 309–28.

<sup>51</sup> On this process, see Gregory Hanlon, *The Twilight of a Military Tradition: Italian Aristocrats and European Conflicts, 1560–1800* (New York, 1998). According to the author, Piedmont was the only exception to this trend.

<sup>52</sup> Cited in Venturi, “L’Italia fuori d’Italia,” 1128; on the French views of the Italians as effeminate, see also M. G. Broers, “Noble Romans and Regenerated Citizens: The Morality of Conscription in Napoleonic Italy, 1800–1814,” *War in History* 8 no. 3 (2001): 249–70. The lack of a military ethos in the nobility and the influence of the Catholic Church were seen as the main roots of the trait.

<sup>53</sup> Madame de Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, Sylvia Raphael, trans. (Oxford, 1998), 97. It is worth recalling that this text was used as a guidebook by many European travelers to Italy in the early nineteenth century. Even more damning observations on the Italians can be found in de Staël’s essay *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1800; Paris, 1998), chap. 10. On the impact of de Staël among Italian Romantics (liberal and patriotic almost by definition), see John C. Isbell, “The Italian Romantics and Madame de Staël: Art, Society and Nationhood,” *Rivista di Letteratura Moderna e Comparata*, n.s., 50 (1997): 355–69. De Staël is also given credit for the indirect diffusion of Montesquieu’s ideas at a time when his thought received less attention than in the eighteenth century: see Domenico Felice, *Modération et justice: Lectures de Montesquieu en Italie* (Bologna, 1995), 93. On the gender aspects of *Corinne*, see also O’Connor, *Romance of Italy*, 27–32; and Glenda Sluga, “Gender and the Nation: Madame de Staël or Italy,” *Women’s Writing* 10, no. 2 (2003): 241–51.

<sup>54</sup> De Staël, *Corinne*, 102.



middle class to support the Italian national cause.<sup>55</sup> But sympathy for the country did not necessarily imply embracing also its people, and opinions about Italians were often at variance with the image of Italy as the “fair maiden.” Travelers who raved about the beauty and heritage of the country had harsher words for the Italians: some saw them as wasting their time “in the daily parades of the Corso” or “in weak if not wicked gallantry.”<sup>56</sup> If they lived in a state of “contented slavery,” they were mostly to blame for their sorry condition. A similar pattern characterized the representation of Italy and its people among Italian patriots. While artists represented Italy as a young woman in tears or holding a sad and meditative expression<sup>57</sup> (See Figure 1), and poets lamented her unhappy fate (most famously in Giacomo Leopardi’s 1818 poem “All’Italia”),<sup>58</sup> the effeminacy of the Italian people stood for an unredeemed state of moral and political decline, a condition that attracted the strongest condemnation.

We will return to the trope of effeminacy later when we examine how contemporaries analyzed the origins of that condition. Let us now consider the other trope that was closely intertwined with effeminacy, that is, *ozio* (indolence). A complex term with both a positive and a negative meaning and a history of “upward mobility” from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, in Italian patriotic discourse *ozio* was inflected in an exclusively negative manner to indicate not just idleness but a mode of being characterized by self-indulgent inactivity.<sup>59</sup> Indeed *ozio* evoked a state of passivity and moral weakness fitting to describe a people that had lost its independence and fallen into a state of degrading subjection that some compared to slavery. So, far from being simply a private sin, *ozio*, as another prominent Piedmontese patriot, Cesare Balbo, claimed, was a dangerous “*vizio di Stato*” (state vice).<sup>60</sup> This use of the notion of *ozio* resembled Machiavelli’s: for the Florentine secretary *ozio* was the opposite of *virtù* and functioned as “a label for all those characteristics which he regard[ed] as harmful for civic life.”<sup>61</sup> Yet in the case of nineteenth-century moderate patriots, the republican concern for civic life had been displaced by a concern for the autonomous existence of the nation. For these thinkers, *ozio* had less to do with Machiavelli (with whom, as Catholics and monarchists, they had not much affinity) than with Montesquieu’s and de

<sup>55</sup> O’Connor, *The Romance of Italy*, esp. chap. 2.

<sup>56</sup> O’Connor, *The Romance of Italy*, 47.

<sup>57</sup> See Fernando Mazzocca, “L’iconografia della patria tra l’età delle riforme e l’Unità,” in Banti and Bizzocchi, *Immagini della nazione*, 89–111.

<sup>58</sup> See Giacomo Leopardi, *Canti*, Niccolò Gallo and Cesare Garboli, eds. (Turin, 1993), 3–10.

<sup>59</sup> For a discussion of the growing importance and changing meanings of the notion of indolence from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, see Willard Spiegelman, *Majestic Indolence: English Romantic Poetry and the Work of Art* (New York, 1995). Steven C. Hughes has also noticed the mostly negative meanings of the term in nineteenth-century Italy: see “The Theory and Practice of Ozio in Italian Policing: Bologna and Beyond,” *Criminal Justice History: An International Annual* 6 (1985): 89–103.

<sup>60</sup> Cesare Balbo, *Pensieri ed esempi* (Florence, 1854), 347–78.

<sup>61</sup> See Heather Ingman, “Machiavelli’s ‘ozio’ and Montaigne’s ‘oysiveté,’” *French Studies Bulletin* 30 (1989): 7. At the very beginning of the *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius*, Machiavelli lashed out at the “evils caused by the proud indolence which prevails in most of the Christian States” (I am quoting from *The Prince and the Discourses*, Christian E. Detmold, trans. [New York, 1950], 104) and reserved very harsh words of condemnation for the “effeminizing” influence of the Christian religion “interpreted according to the promptings of indolence rather than those of virtue” (see esp. book 2, chap. 2, 285–86).



FIGURE 1: Francesco Hayez, *La Meditazione (Italy in 1848)*, 1851. Reproduced with kind permission of Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Verona.

Staël's notion of  *paresse* (indolence or laziness) as a defining attribute of southern peoples and "Orientals" alike, albeit in different ways and degrees.

The writings of Cesare Balbo, an admirer of Montesquieu and the author of *Delle speranze d'Italia (On the Hopes of Italy, 1844)*, another founding text of moderate liberalism, provide a wealth of evidence on this connection. His denunciation of *ozio* as the preeminent vice of the Italian people was revealing: "The essential vice of our fatherland is *ozio* . . . Indolence, *beato far niente* [blessed doing nothing], or even (as I heard from an Italian statesman who was being self-critical) *beatissimo far niente*; the saying that the world runs by itself, are the major Italian vices. . . It is not a native, natural vice since we were the most industrious nation of the world; but it is by now an old, national vice . . . *It is not an Oriental vice* [my

emphasis], but it is still an anti-Christian vice.”<sup>62</sup> In this passage, the telling equation between *ozio* and “*beato far niente*” and the reference to the Orient lead us back not to Machiavelli but to the gaze of foreign travelers and observers—both Montesquieu and de Staël were among them—who described again and again the inhabitants of the peninsula as an indolent and morally loose people and who were often explicitly evoked in Balbo’s patriotic reflections.<sup>63</sup>

Balbo’s writings point clearly to the dynamic often at the origin of Italian patriotic discourse, namely, on the one hand, the acceptance and internalization of negative stereotypes such as the “indolent southerners” image, and, on the other, the effort to respond to and to qualify these representations. While indicting Italians for their indolence, Balbo was eager to stress the historicity and thus temporary nature of Italian *ozio*: for this reason, he underlined that it was not an “Oriental” vice, meaning it was not an innate attribute of the Italians—an implicit correction of Montesquieu’s climatic theory that tended to naturalize character and to draw southern Europe dangerously close to the region of the world defined as Europe’s Other. For Balbo, as for other Italian patriots, national resurgence and regeneration meant a full recovery of the legitimate place of Italy in Christian and industrious Europe and thus the end of any possible association of the Italians with the “Orientals” and their “abject” features. This is also why Balbo defined Italian *ozio* as “anti-Christian”: in his view it stood inherently opposed to his idea of the driving logic of Western civilization in which Christianity, economic development, and the development of liberal political institutions went side by side and constituted a single whole. Since the development of Christian Europe contrasted historically with the lack of development of the “despotic” and non-Christian Orient, Italy in its current state was a denial of its own authentic, Christian and European identity.<sup>64</sup>

In contrast to Gioberti, Balbo rejected the idea of a perennial primacy of Italy, which, if justifiable as the expression of a patriotic sentiment, was blatantly denied by the present state of the country vis-à-vis other powerful European states. If a contest for primacy were to take place at the time, there was no doubt for the Anglophile Balbo that England was going to win: with its industriousness and liberal institutions, England was the champion of *ozio*’s opposite, *operosità* (industriousness), and provided the model to contemporary nations and peoples who wanted to achieve nationhood. But another thing was also certain: if Italy’s present state was one of extreme degradation, things had not always been that way. In fact there had been a time when Italians were the very opposite of *oziosi*. We will examine later the issue of the historical origins of Italian *ozio* for these authors. Here let us further point out that as a figure of Italian degeneration, *ozio* was a very *gendered* category: for Gioberti, as we have seen earlier, *ozio* made the youth

<sup>62</sup> Cesare Balbo, *Le Speranze d’Italia*, Achille Corbelli, ed. (Paris, 1844; Turin, 1925), 205. On Balbo’s admiration for Montesquieu, see Felice, *Modération et justice*, 99–100; and Maria Fubini Leuzzi, “Introduzione,” in Cesare Balbo, *Storia d’Italia e altri scritti editi e inediti*, Maria Fubini Leuzzi, ed. (Turin, 1984), 15.

<sup>63</sup> See for an example of this conversation the dialogue entitled “Lo straniero” (The foreigner) in Balbo, *Pensieri ed esempi*, 347–78; and Balbo, *Pensieri sulla storia d’Italia: Studi* (Florence, 1858), 549–54. Both works were published posthumously but were written before *Delle speranze d’Italia*.

<sup>64</sup> Francesco Traniello, “Incunaboli d’imperialismo europeo: Cesare Balbo, l’Occidente e il Mediterraneo,” *Contemporanea: Rivista di storia dell’800 e del’900* 1 (1998): 263–79.

effeminate, for Balbo, it was at the origin of the disappearance of military virtue and of a contemptuous *mollezza* (a combination of love of luxury and sexual laxity conjuring up effeminacy).<sup>65</sup>

Although both Gioberti and Balbo seemingly imputed *ozio* to the whole Italian population, in fact they had in mind less the popular classes (as would usually be the case after unification) than the elites. For these moderates, the elites bore the main burden in the work of national regeneration. While in England gentlemen were always busy in some activities even in their leisure, in Italy, according to Balbo, “the little count [*Contino*] and the little seigneur [*Signorino*] are from their infancy raised into softness, laziness, insignificance.”<sup>66</sup> This type of education was not going to produce the leadership needed to bring about Italian regeneration. Let us not forget that these criticisms came often from within the very social groups that were supposed to provide this leadership. While Gioberti came from a modest petty bourgeois family, Balbo was a nobleman who had spent time in Paris and elsewhere in the service of Napoleon (of whom he had grown increasingly critical) and then in exile. He knew well both the habits of the nobility and the republican language that criticized those habits and the negative influence they had on society. In his youth, he and his closest friends loved to read Jean-Jacques Rousseau and shared a passion for playwright Vittorio Alfieri’s anti-tyrant writings and his “*culto del forte sentire*” (cult of strong feelings). During the Restoration, the political culture of these liberal noblemen combined elements of French republicanism with more conservative beliefs such as adherence to Catholicism (although often imbued with aspirations of spiritual renewal).<sup>67</sup> Their desire to redeem the Italian *patria* was often cast in the language of the recovery of manly honor, a value that, as Alberto M. Banti has recently pointed out, had a particular resonance in the world of the aristocracy.<sup>68</sup> This recovery undoubtedly required the abandonment of an indolent lifestyle.

Without reaching the level of elaboration that Balbo gave to the whole problematic of *ozio* in many of his works, preoccupations about the indolence and effeminacy of the Italians surfaced in many Risorgimento writings. In his political-military essay of 1846 entitled *Della nazionalità italiana* (*On Italian Nationality*), another Piedmontese moderate, colonel Giacomo Durando pointed out that the Italian character had lost its primacy in industriousness and was “very relaxed” due to an “intentionally emasculating” education.<sup>69</sup> As they never had a “true flag” around which to gather and face invasions, the Italian people had lost faith and the sentiment of their dignity. The same language was to be found in the periodicals that sprang up in the Italian states in the second half of the 1840s during the period of enthusiasm generated by the reforming attitudes adopted by some of the rulers and most notably by Pope Pius IX. Writing in *L’Italiano*, a liberal journal published in Bologna between the spring of 1847 and the spring of 1848, Augusto Aglebert represented the recovery of nationhood as a moral self-conquest, a reform of the self and of its old habits: “Our achievement is of an entirely moral kind, it is our civil

<sup>65</sup> Cesare Balbo, *Pensieri sulla storia d’Italia*, 513.

<sup>66</sup> Balbo, *Pensieri ed esempi*, 106.

<sup>67</sup> See Ettore Passerin d’Entrèves, *La giovinezza di Cesare Balbo* (Florence, 1940), 55–62.

<sup>68</sup> Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento*, 139–48.

<sup>69</sup> Giacomo Durando, *Della nazionalità italiana: Saggio politico-militare* (Paris, 1846), 249.



existence—to try to make it better, by strengthening our virtues, by fleeing vice, by abhorring indolence, inertia and *mollezza* as the three most formidable enemies that can be thrown against us.”<sup>70</sup>

If *ozio* constituted the most damning vice for the moderates, democrats like Giuseppe Mazzini seemed to be more concerned with other troublesome sides in the Italian character. In one of his early writings in the journal *Giovine Italia* (*Young Italy*), he called individualism the “first” Italian vice. By individualism he actually meant municipalism or exclusive attachment to the “*piccola patria*,” the city or village where one was born, a tendency, he claimed, fostered by oppressive foreign governments, not a natural inclination. Besides this there were other attitudes shared by all Italians: “no other people has perhaps more obstacles to overcome [than the Italians]—nor is it good to hide them. We have enemies within . . . We have the provincial divisions that the many centuries of common disgrace have weakened, but not destroyed. We have, and this is our mortal plague, the lack of faith in ourselves, and in our forces, so that many among the Italians feel impotent in action . . . We have the inexperience in the arts of war, the innate distrust of leaders, and the perennial suspicion of betrayals, which events have produced in us.”<sup>71</sup>

In this passage, Mazzini did not refer to *ozio* explicitly, and he was not concerned with the lack of industriousness that preoccupied moderates like Balbo and Durando, yet the configuration of attitudes he described amounted to a mixture of impotence, lack of self-confidence and trust in others that certainly resembled political *ozio* in its effects since—most troubling for those who aspired to radical change—it made any sustained revolutionary action very difficult. Mazzini’s insistence on the notion of “duty” could also be read in light of this fight against indolence and resignation. Other democrats were more explicit: Giuseppe Montanelli, a Tuscan critic of the moderates, attributed the degeneration of Tuscan character to the “*politica eviratrice*” (emasculating politics) of their absolute rulers,<sup>72</sup> and called the “*infingardaggine*” (sloth) of the Italians “[their] biggest obstacle to regeneration.”<sup>73</sup>

BUT WHAT OF THE SOUTH WITHIN THE SOUTH, namely, southern Italy? Did it occupy a distinct place in this literature? Were southern Italians unfavorably contrasted to the rest of Italy? Not really, even though most of the writers we have mentioned so far were Piedmontese, or, in any event, northern, as it was northerners who took the lead in the debate on the Italian question in the 1830s and 1840s. As the internal diversity of Italy constituted an irresistible argument in favor of the confederate solution to the national question advocated by most moderates in the pre-1848 period, differences were certainly examined, but, far from being contrasted and

<sup>70</sup> Augusto Aglebert, “Italiani!” *L’Italiano* (April 20, 1847).

<sup>71</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini, “D’alcune cause che impedirono finora lo sviluppo della libertà in Italia. Articolo 2,” in *Interessi e principii*, Michele Rago, ed. (Milan, 1944) 77 (orig. in *La Giovine Italia*, 1832).

<sup>72</sup> Giuseppe Montanelli, *Memorie sull’Italia e specialmente sulla Toscana dal 1814 al 1850*, in *Opere politiche 1847–1862*, Paolo Bagnoli, ed., vol. 2, part 1 (Yuri, 1853; Florence, 1997), 13.

<sup>73</sup> Montanelli, *Memorie*, 29.

emphasized as they will be in a later period, they were de-emphasized and reconciled.

In the concluding sections of the *Primato*, after arguing that the internal diversity of Italy constituted a veritable synthesis and mirror of Europe and one of the reasons of its superiority, Gioberti provided some outlines of what he called a “moral geography” of the country. In a few pages, he described the characteristics of Piedmont, Lombardy and Venetia, Liguria, Tuscany and Latium, Naples and Sicily, and praised the two cities of Florence and Rome, which he considered the best expression of the “Italian genius.” He placed the “true heart” of the country in the center of the peninsula, in Tuscany and Latium, with their capital cities Florence and Rome, “the two undivided centers of language, civilization, religion” not only of Italy but also of Europe and the world.<sup>74</sup> In contrast, the Piedmontese and the Neapolitans were two extremes in terms of character traits, and in a sense they compensated for each other: “The Neapolitans are the opposite of the Piedmontese, and they err by excess, as the latter err by lack: in the former the imagination, the courage, the passionate enthusiasm, the mobility, the luxuriant thought, affect, and style are present in great quantity and are even too abundant, in the latter they are often missing or scarce . . . in such peoples military value is not rare, even though the French maintain the opposite.”<sup>75</sup> The great artistic and scientific achievements of the Neapolitans from antiquity to more recent times were the spontaneous result of their “genius,” more than of their “discipline,” and one could only imagine what even greater achievements they would be capable of if they only learned this “northern” virtue. Thus while consolidating certain commonplaces about the south, Gioberti’s descriptive strategies also valorized, as Nelson Moe has observed, some aspects of southern-ness, which may in part account for the success of the *Primato*.<sup>76</sup>

When Cesare Balbo referred to the vices and virtues of the Italians in his *Speranze*, he did not make much of regional distinctions either, even though he too stressed that Italy gathered “provinces and peoples almost as different from one another as . . . the most northern and southern peoples of Europe”<sup>77</sup> (and therefore a confederation of states was the best solution to the Italian question). In other writings, however, he spent some time outlining the specificities of the Piedmontese character, which he considered as partly exempt from the bad influences under which Italians had been raised for generations. The history of Piedmont-Sardinia differed from the rest in one most important way. While most of the peninsula lay under foreign control, the Savoyard dynasty had been able to preserve its independence. As a consequence, military valor had not disappeared and trust between rulers and the ruled had strengthened. Moreover, “corrupt” customs had not developed there as much as in the rest of Italy: in particular *cicisbei*—namely, gallants, who, as we will see, were the epitome of Italian degeneration—were fewer, women were more moral, and the youth less lazy.<sup>78</sup> Less passionate and less

<sup>74</sup> Gioberti, *Primato*, 3: 168.

<sup>75</sup> Gioberti, *Primato*, 3: 182–84.

<sup>76</sup> Moe, *View from Vesuvius*, 119.

<sup>77</sup> Balbo, *Speranze*, 34.

<sup>78</sup> Cesare Balbo, “Della società in Italia,” in *Lettere di politica e letteratura: edite e inedite; Precedute da un discorso sulle rivoluzioni* (1823; Florence, 1855).

ferocious, but more loyal and militarily predisposed: this was the Piedmontese subject, a type that projected more solidity than vivacity.<sup>79</sup>

BALBO'S REFLECTIONS ON PIEDMONTESE CHARACTER placed him solidly in the camp of those political thinkers who saw national character as primarily a product of historical circumstances and experiences. In this view, natural factors such as climate or race played a subordinate role to history in shaping the virtues and vices of peoples (at least of white peoples, that is). Not surprisingly, there was little place for a purely naturalistic account of Italian vices among Risorgimento thinkers.<sup>80</sup> But if climate played only a marginal role, what were the culprits of the degenerate state of the Italians? In answering this question, we must examine the historical narratives that increasingly featured the Italian people as the subject of history. In these too we will find at work the trope of effeminacy embodied in the figure of the *cicisbeo*.

It is significant that it was a Swiss scholar with a great passion for Italy who first provided a full-fledged explanation of the historical roots of the problem. This scholar was republican historian and political economist Jean-Léonard-Charles Simonde de Sismondi. Born in Geneva and a member of Madame de Staël's circle, he lived for some years in Tuscany on a property acquired by his father, a pastor of the Reformed Church, during the turmoil of the French Revolution. As he made Italy his adopted country, he even invented Italian ancestors: a Pisan aristocratic family by the name of de Sismondi (a name that coincidentally sounded like his original surname Simonde and that he happily appropriated).<sup>81</sup> Between 1807 and 1818, Sismondi published an extremely influential history of medieval Italy, the *Histoire des Républiques Italiennes du Moyen Age* (*History of the Italian Republics in the Middle Ages*), a work that Roberto Bizzocchi has called a "key text in the objectification of the character of modern Italians."<sup>82</sup> In this monumental work, the Genevan historian produced a painstaking account of the trajectory of the Italian communes from the fall of the Roman Empire to their resurgence in the later Middle Ages, to their demise in the hands of local despots. He intended to show

<sup>79</sup> Cesare Balbo, "Del naturale de' Piemontesi," in *Lettere di politica*, 238–62. As for the democrats, Mazzini and his followers denied the relevance of the argument about internal diversity, and even democratic writers of federalist conviction such as Carlo Cattaneo played down regional distinctions when they responded to the foreigners' commonplaces about the Italians.

<sup>80</sup> Although Italians accepted certain traits of the southern stereotype, the climatic theory of national character found a skeptical reception in the peninsula: the Venetian Enlightenment thinker Francesco Algarotti, for example, found sounder arguments in David Hume, who questioned naturalistic accounts of national character in his essay "Of National Character" (1748). The Italian Jacobin Melchiorre Gioia rejected political relativism based on climatic theories of national character in 1796 (see Domenico Felice, "Note sulla fortuna di Montesquieu nel giacobinismo italiano, 1796–1799," in *Idee e parole nel giacobinismo italiano*, 14–15) and later attacked the arguments put forward by Charles-Victor Bonstetten (a member of Madame de Staël's circle) about the influence of climate in shaping the "*homme du Nord*" (northern man) and the "*homme du Midi*" (southern man): see Gioia's review of Bonstetten in *Annali universali di statistica* 5 (1825): 245–301. On this, see also Moe, *View from Vesuvius*, 27–31.

<sup>81</sup> On Sismondi's life, see Jean R. de Salis, *Sismondi, 1773–1842*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1932). For a more recent and more detailed study of the period to 1800, see Paul Waeber, *Sismondi. Une biographie*, Vol. 1, *Les devanciers et la traverse de la Révolution: Chroniques familiales 1692–1800* (Geneva, 1991).

<sup>82</sup> Roberts Bizzocchi, "Cicisbei: La morale italiana," *Storica* 3 (1997): 63–90.

that Italian character had known much better times and celebrated those times: in the medieval republics Italians were free and independent and gave other Europeans principles of civilization and governments. It was only the loss of liberty that brought about corruption and decline, and these were deepened by the arrival of the Spaniards and the absolute domination of the Catholic Church in the peninsula from the Counter-Reformation onward. Then casuists corrupted and even subverted morals, rituals and pomp took precedence over substance, and people learned not to obey their conscience but “to cheat [*ruser*] with it”: as a result nowhere else could one find a people more taken up with religious practices and less inclined to observe the duties and virtues preached by Christianity.<sup>83</sup>

In an overwhelmingly Catholic society, the claims of the historian from Calvinist Geneva (himself an agnostic) about the responsibilities of the church were not likely to find much favor, even among a patriotic readership with an evangelical sensibility,<sup>84</sup> and the issue never really entered the debate during the Risorgimento.<sup>85</sup> Yet Sismondi's *The History of Italian Republics* became the most influential work of Italian history of the Risorgimento and for good reasons: it provided a positive reconstruction of Italian history as well as a very usable past for all Italian patriots of federalist conviction. It also provided something that historians have less noticed, an effective account of the origins of what many—foreigners and Italians—considered the epitome of Italian degeneration: the “shameful” habit of *cicisbeismo*. According to Sismondi, while in the wholesome republics “the inclination to work had been, until the mid-sixteenth century, the distinctive quality of the Italians,”<sup>86</sup> under despotism domestic and foreign (especially under the new Spanish rulers imbued with “Castilian prejudices”), “all kinds of work” became contemptuous in the eyes of the Italian nobility. These new attitudes, along with the new custom of primogeniture, condemned large numbers of males to a “constant laziness” (“*constant fainéantise*”), and to give the sons of the nobility something to do, the “bizarre rights and duties” of the *cicisbeo* were “invented”<sup>87</sup>: now ladies were no longer allowed to appear in public on their own, but they had to be

<sup>83</sup> J. L. C. Simonde de Sismondi, *Histoire des Républiques Italiennes du Moyen Age*, 5th edn., vol. 8 (1807–1818; Brussels, 1839); see esp. chap. 14, “What are the causes that have changed the Italian character after the subjection of their Republics.” All translations are mine.

<sup>84</sup> Alessandro Manzoni immediately mounted a defense of Catholicism in his *Osservazioni sulla morale cattolica* (*Observations on Catholic Morals*, 1819). On the presence of an evangelical sensibility in the ranks of Italian patriots, particularly in northern Italy, see Giorgio Spini, *Risorgimento e protestanti* (1956; Torino, 1998), esp. chap. 3.

<sup>85</sup> Perhaps thanks also to Sismondi's decision to expunge the most direct criticism of the Catholic Church (and indeed the whole last chapter) from the shorter version of his work published in 1832. On the reception of Sismondi during the Risorgimento, see Giuseppe Galasso, “Le Repubbliche italiane del Sismondi e il Risorgimento,” in *Le passioni dello storico: Studi in onore di Giuseppe Giarrizzo*, Antonio Coco, ed. (Catania, 1999), 221–42; and Adrian Lyttelton, “Creating a National Past: History, Myth, and Image in the Risorgimento,” in Ascoli and von Henneberg, *Making and Remaking Italy*, 27–74.

<sup>86</sup> Sismondi, *Histoire des Républiques*, vol. 8.

<sup>87</sup> Sismondi, *Histoire des Républiques*, 8: 383–84. In explaining the historical origins of the Italian character, Sismondi relied on another national stereotype by then also well consolidated, the stereotype of the Spaniards. Southern and Catholic like the Italians, the Spaniards shared many of the vices of the Italians only compounded by those that they acquired as holders of imperial power: besides laziness and an excessive sense of honor and pride, their negative traits included a tendency to be violent and cruel (probably a legacy, among others, of the “black legend”); that Spaniards were the product of a mixing of “races” was also held against them: see J. N. Hillgarth, *The Mirror of Spain 1500–1700: The Formation of a Myth* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2000), esp. chaps. 8 and 16.



accompanied by a man, not their spouse, but rather their male friend or lover. The result of this invention, thundered Sismondi (who, needless to say, had been himself in the position of enjoying the favors of more than one married Italian lady), was a disorder unequal to any other: as it became customary, and even required, for women to appear in public with their lover, "Italians ceased to be men."<sup>88</sup>

But what exactly was *cicisbeismo*? While references to *cicisbei* abound in the travel literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,<sup>89</sup> scholars diverge not only in their interpretation of the phenomenon but also on its very nature. While some claim that this peculiar institution of Italian aristocratic society in the early modern period was enshrined in marriage contracts,<sup>90</sup> others question this claim and see it as a primarily eighteenth-century custom of the nobility whose exact nature, however, is difficult to pinpoint.<sup>91</sup> Roberto Bizzocchi points out the resemblance between the figure of the Italian *cicisbeo*, the French *petit-maître*, and even more the Spanish *estrecho* or *chichisbeo*, which would make the *cavalier servente* something akin to a custom of Mediterranean Europe.<sup>92</sup> Other scholars, not only of feminist conviction, see it as a sign of the increasing freedom and power of aristocratic women in the sociable eighteenth century, an interpretation that appears to be supported not only by the large number of moralizing pamphlets and tracts attacking the custom but also by the visual evidence. (See Figure 2.)<sup>93</sup>

Be this as it may, historians and historical anthropologists have neglected an aspect that seems very significant if we want to understand the place of *cicisbeismo* in the figuration of the narrative of Italian decline: namely that the Italian term *cicisbeo* referred then (and still refers today) both to a *cavalier servente* and to a *damerino*, i.e., a man who pays almost exclusive attention to his external appearance in society, to his dress and manners, and devotes a lot of his time to the company

<sup>88</sup> Sismondi, *Histoire des Républiques*, 8: 384.

<sup>89</sup> For the eighteenth century, see in particular James Boswell, *Boswell on the Grand Tour: Italy, Corsica, and France 1765–1766*, Frank Brady, ed. (New York, 1955), 17–19; and Tobias Smollett, *Travels through France and Italy* (1766; Fontwell, 1969). See also Black, *Italy and the Grand Tour*, 123–26. For an early nineteenth-century example, see John Forsyth, *Remarks on the Antiquities, Arts, and Letters during an Excursion in Italy in 1802 and 1803*, 2nd edn., (London, 1816), 377, 411–12. Poet Ugo Foscolo responded to Forsyth's description of *cicisbeismo* and particularly his unflattering portrayal of Italian women in an article entitled "The Women of Italy" published in *London Magazine* in 1826 (now in *Scritti vari di critica storica e letteraria, 1817–1827*, Ugo Foscolo, Umberto Limentani, and John Lindon, eds. [Florence, 1978], 417–69), where he explained the phenomenon sociologically as a result of feudal customs still dominating in the Italian aristocracy, and linked it to the political degeneration of the Italians. Stendhal famously referred to Italian *cicisbei* at the very beginning of the *Charterhouse of Parma* (1839): "In the Middle Ages the republicans of Lombardy had given proof of a valour equal to that of the French, and had deserved to see their city razed to the ground by the German Emperors. Ever since they had become *loyal subjects* their main business had been the printing of sonnets upon little handkerchiefs of rose-colored taffeta on the occasion of the marriage of some young lady belonging to a rich or a noble family. Two or three years after that great event in her life, this young lady would select a *cavalier servente*: the name of the *cicisbeo* chosen by her husband's family sometimes occupied an honorable place in the marriage contract. It was a far cry from such effeminate manners to the deep emotions aroused by the unexpected arrival of the French army." I cite from the translation by Margaret R. B. Shaw, Penguin edition (1958), 19.

<sup>90</sup> See, for example, Marzio Barbagli, *Sotto lo stesso tetto: Mutamenti della famiglia in Italia dal XV al XX secolo* (Bologna, 2000), 331–36.

<sup>91</sup> Bizzocchi, "Cicisbei," 67–69.

<sup>92</sup> Bizzocchi, "Cicisbei," 77.

<sup>93</sup> Carla Pellandra Cazzoli, "Dames et sigisbées: Un début d'emancipation féminine?" *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 193 (1980): 2028–35; Luciano Guerri, *La discussione sulla donna nell'Italia del Settecento: Aspetti e problemi* (Turin, 1987), chap. 3.

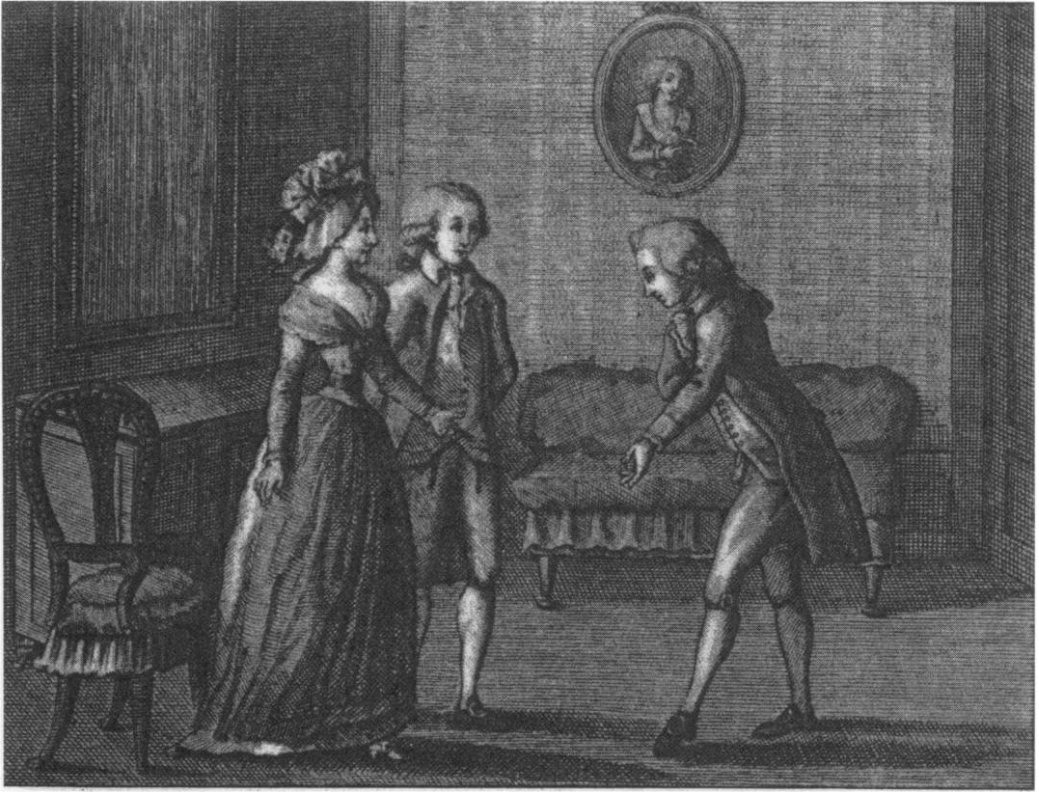


FIGURE 2: Luigi Ponelato, “Il cicisbeo,” etching from Carlo Goldoni, *Opere teatrali*, vol. 13 (Venice, 1790), reproduced in Rita Levi Pisetzsky, *Storia del costume in Italia*, vol. 4 (Milan, 1969).

of women. Indeed the *cicisbeo* is the effeminate *and* indolent nobleman par excellence, and as such he was the privileged target of late eighteenth-century anti-aristocratic satires such as Giuseppe Parini’s *Il Giorno* (1763–1765).<sup>94</sup> The conflation of these two meanings of the word helps explain why *cicisbeismo*, whatever its reality, became a symbol of the moral and political degradation that patriots wanted to eradicate. In blaming the foreigners (read the Spaniards) for Italy’s loss of independence in the sixteenth century and for the decline that followed,<sup>95</sup> Gioberti claimed that they had “created the grand courts and the oriental [*all’uso orientale*] royal palaces and introduced with them exorbitant luxury, legal and privileged adultery, the realm of the cutthroats [*cagnotti*], of the favorites and of the prostitutes, who since then were known as courtesans, introduced and legitimated ruinous wars of conquest and of succession; in other words [it was they who] brought to a peak the moral and civil decline of the derelict Italy.”<sup>96</sup> In this passage, Gioberti represented the decline of Italy as literally a process of

<sup>94</sup> On Parini and more generally on the attacks on the culture of the nobility in the eighteenth century, see Mario Domenichelli, *Cavaliere e gentiluomo: Saggio sulla cultura aristocratica in Europa (1513–1915)* (Rome, 2002), chaps. 9–11.

<sup>95</sup> Gioberti, *Primato*, 1: chap. 3.

<sup>96</sup> Gioberti, *Primato*, 1: 149.

orientalization of Italian court society with all the attached sexual dissipation and disorder—the phrase “legal and privileged adultery” clearly referred to *cicisbeismo*.

Analyzing what went wrong in the Italian past in order to explain the present was high on the agenda of patriotic writers. Even more than Gioberti, who was a philosopher, Balbo, a historian by vocation, took up in earnest the task. While granting, in homage to Montesquieu, that “the sweet climate, the beautiful country” were an invitation to *ozio*, he maintained that *ozio*’s roots were to be found in history: *ozio* was the result of three centuries of bad government when the Italian states “[did] not let the collectivity participate in any deliberation,” and of foreign oppression “which impede[d] so many initiatives that are incompatible with a state of subjection.”<sup>97</sup> Much more than nature, corrupt political and social institutions produced an abundance of vices and a scarcity of public virtues among the Italians. It was a situation in which “dependence produces vice, and this in turn produces dependence . . . this is the vicious circle from which it is difficult to come out.”<sup>98</sup> History thus carried the burden of explaining the rather dismal present. To be sure, the Italian past was not a continuous series of disasters, but a mixture of good and evil. In his popular *Sommario della storia d’Italia* (*Summary of Italian History*, 1846), the first summary of the whole sweep of Italian history from antiquity to the present, Balbo divided this “national” history (which he patriotically dubbed as “the longest and richest” in the world)<sup>99</sup> into seven eras: the first (dominated by the rise of the Etruscans) and the second era (Republican Rome) were among the good ones, followed by three very bad ones (the Roman empire, the barbarian invasions, and the Carolingian empire), in turn followed by the finest of all, the age of the communes. But the era that followed the splendor of the communes, namely the period between the mid-sixteenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century, saw the greatest degradation of the Italians: Balbo went so far as to call that period, both in the *Speranze* and in the *Sommario*, “the degenerate century.”<sup>100</sup>

It was in this “infamous” era that the inhabitants of the peninsula, having lost their independence and, with it, their political and military capacity, had become indolent and effeminate. Balbo deployed the trope of indolence to characterize also other eras of decline in the history of Italy, in particular that of the Roman empire, whose tyranny and slavery had no equal in history and transformed everything into “indolence and vices and corruption,” eventually bringing about the end of the Roman state.<sup>101</sup> Yet the “degenerate century” was much worse than any of the past eras of decline because it occurred at the very time when other Christian nations in Europe set out—for the first time in history—on a course of “irreversible” progress. Balbo’s own emphasis on the greatness of the period of the medieval communes (a term that he preferred to the democratic sounding “republics”) and his own account of the origins of Italian *ozio* and effeminacy were a testimony to the power of

<sup>97</sup> Balbo, *Speranze*, 205.

<sup>98</sup> Balbo, *Speranze*, 189.

<sup>99</sup> Cesare Balbo, *Sommario della storia d’Italia*, in *Storia d’Italia e altri scritti editi e inediti*, 734. This work first appeared in the *Nuova Enciclopedia Popolare*, F. Predari, ed. (Turin, 1846), and was published in the same year as a separate volume; the first uncensored version came out the following year.

<sup>100</sup> Balbo, *Speranze*, 62–70; Balbo, *Sommario*, 738.

<sup>101</sup> Balbo, *Sommario*, 735–36.

Sismondi's narrative.<sup>102</sup> Like Sismondi, in his history Balbo too described the period from the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis (1559) to the eighteenth-century as a time when the aristocracy became corrupt and lost its true nature in the idleness of the courts, and when the majority of the Italians lost any remnant of civic spirit and military prowess and devoted their lives to the sweet pleasures of lovemaking and womanizing.<sup>103</sup> *Cicisbeismo* ruled.

In the democratic ranks, too, both Mazzinians and federalists were convinced that past experiences had profoundly corrupted their compatriots: centuries of foreign oppression had made the Italian people servile and deprived them of hope for positive change. Climate and race had nothing to do with it: in reality, these "facts" were often deployed, as Mazzini pointed out, in the service of reaction or to justify a moderate course of action. In democratic thinking, the negative influence of foreign rulers was compounded by the emasculating effect of indigenous despotism. For example, Giuseppe Montanelli thus railed against the corrupting role of the *principato* on the Tuscan character: "the degenerate Tuscan, while making fun of the abhorred master behind his back, addressed him with an obsequious and servile face; nor was he avoiding making great shows of respect in front of the last little employee, if this was in his interest and assured him some favors from the despised authority."<sup>104</sup> For Montanelli, the Florentine mask of the domestic servant *Stenterello* was the perfect embodiment of this cowardly and dissimulating character. As Giacomo Leopardi observed in his notebook in 1821, this character configuration was shaped by unequal power relations and applied to diverse people and even nations in similar structural positions: because women were subjected to men, they were "usually malicious, shrewd, cunning, false, astute . . ." (and the list went on), and so were "weak, or poor, or ugly" men, courtiers, and even "entire nations (such as those subjected to despotism)."<sup>105</sup>

If the relatively remote past had left a profound stain on the character of the people, the immediate past was not a source of great hopes either: in the first half of the nineteenth century, insurrectionary attempts failed repeatedly, thus exposing, according to Mazzini, the numerous mistakes and deficiencies of the revolutionaries: their lack of energy, of faith, of science, of strong ties with the oppressed masses.<sup>106</sup> To avoid falling, unpatriotically, into the arms of despair, it was, however, important not to forget that the past contained also a key to the future. An ex-Mazzinian exile to England, Antonio Gallenga, writing in the 1840s and for a British public, saw many reasons to be optimistic. Along with phases of profound decline when Italians "had been schooled to accept good and evil with passive resignation" and in which the elites had "waste[d] their energies in a life of insolence, idleness, and unlawful excitement," there had been phases of greatness, as literary history clearly showed: the great artists and scholars of the past from

<sup>102</sup> Balbo had words of high praise for Sismondi's work: "I do not know if there ever was another [history] as rapidly and as much read as [Sismondi's *History of the Italian Republics*], and which passed as much into the blood of a nation." Balbo, *Pensieri sulla storia d'Italia*, 469. He appreciated Sismondi's skills as a historian and his fairness, but he also declared that true national histories could be written only by native historians.

<sup>103</sup> Balbo, *Sommario*, 623–24.

<sup>104</sup> Montanelli, *Memorie*, 14.

<sup>105</sup> Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone di pensieri*, Anna Maria Moroni, ed., vol. 2 (Milan, 1983), 741.

<sup>106</sup> Mazzini, "D'alcune cause," 32–33.



Dante to Machiavelli illustrated what to expect of a reborn Italian civilization. And indeed from the eighteenth century on, there had been many signs of progress, starting with the Italian republic of letters whose “heroic” members, such as Antonio Muratori, “not enervated by the seductions of a southern climate, or of an effeminate age,” had worked relentlessly to collect Italian antiquities.<sup>107</sup> Like the Italophile Sismondi, Italian patriots, democrats and moderates alike, trusted that since the faults of the Italian character were a contingent product of history, change was possible, and history in turn would help Italians to get rid of them. When the revolution broke out in 1848, many agreed that the renewal was definitely taking place: a Milanese newspaper of democratic convictions that began publication in April of 1848, optimistically expressed this entrenched patriotic desire in its very title: *L'Italia rigenerata*.<sup>108</sup>

AS THE DEGENERATION OF THE ITALIAN PEOPLE symbolized by *ozio* was cast in gendered terms as a state of emasculation and feminization, for both moderates and democrats the regeneration of the Italians meant a recovery of manhood, an almost literal process of de-feminization and re-virilization of the country and its people. Centuries of foreign domination, as well as, for the democrats, of absolutism, had produced the syndrome of a servile-dependent-effeminate character: a dependent people had learned to defend itself by resorting for too long to the typical “weapon of the weak: cunning.”<sup>109</sup> But now the time had come when all that had to end. How? The patriots’ contrasting political stances and ideologies insured that they would have differing views on the role that the Italians themselves should have in their own regeneration and on the means to be used in the process, but here too there were some similarities.

For Mazzini and his followers, only a radical change obtained through radical means could help remove the deep stain that history had left on the Italians, on their character and reputation. Partly due to the frequency of failed revolutions and insurrections in the first half of the nineteenth century, Mazzini’s writings were a constant call to renewed sacrifice and martyrdom for the country and for liberty: “Liberty is bought with blood and sacrifice.”<sup>110</sup> In his famous endorsement of the war of insurrection by guerrilla fighters, Mazzini stressed how this type of popular war would insure not only victory but also “a true and popular regeneration”: the people would be educated with the arts of war and would seal the conquest of its rights and independence “through blood.” It is through arms that “nations [are] fortified because insurrection cancels the imprint of slavery from the face of the insurgents, because this type of guerrilla war educates the soul to independence and

<sup>107</sup> Luigi Mariotti [Antonio Gallenga], *Italy: Past and Present*, 2 vols. (London, 1848), quotes from 1: 419, 421. On Gallenga, see Toni Cerutti, *Antonio Gallenga: An Italian Writer in Victorian England* (London, 1974).

<sup>108</sup> *L'Italia rigenerata: Giornale di politica, scienze, letteratura, teatri, arti e commerci* was a liberal-democratic biweekly published in Milan in April-July 1848.

<sup>109</sup> Mariotti [Gallenga], *Italy*, 392.

<sup>110</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini, “I collaboratori della ‘Giovine Italia’ ai loro concittadini,” in *Scritti politici editi e inediti* (Imola, 1907), 2: 72 (orig. in *La Giovine Italia*, 1832).

to that active and powerful life which makes peoples great.”<sup>111</sup> The desire to belie the accusation of Italian cowardice by promoting bold and fearless actions (and without paying too much attention to the possible consequences in terms of loss of human lives) underwrote the appeals that Mazzini regularly addressed to the Italian youth, inviting them to fight and take a leadership role in the name of their sense of honor and love of fatherland. Honor and “immortal glory” would be their rewards. Insurrection was justified even if it failed because direct action by the people in the process of their liberation had an irreplaceable moral value: “when a people after long years of torments and of repressed conspiracies has reached the extremes of disgrace and hatred—when faith [*fiducia*] only is lacking, impeded by the fear and diffidence that the habit of slavery generates in the multitudes—the first [people] who show their faith by their deeds are a powerful means of inspiration.”<sup>112</sup>

This was a view shared by democrats and revolutionaries throughout the peninsula (even though after 1848 many of them began to consider insurrection an unrealistic option), but, as we have seen, also the moderates embraced the theme of a “moral regeneration,” although they had different ideas on the most appropriate methods to achieve it. Antonio Gallenga spoke forcefully of the national revolution as the “recasting of the individual and national characters.”<sup>113</sup> Laying out at the beginning of 1848 the requirements for the regeneration of Italian character, Gallenga emphasized the need to show “prodigies of valour”: the restoration of Italian honor demanded no less. Indeed, in his words again, “Liberty too cheaply obtained is generally held too cheaply.”<sup>114</sup> That did not mean endorsing conspiracies and popular revolutions, but rather reforms and military discipline. Colonel Giacomo Durando was adamant when he declared in 1846 that “Only long and persistent wars have the capacity to give a new and strong character to a slothful people, and to establish the redeemed nationality on solid foundations.” Carried away by his vision, he added that even if in the enterprise half of the Italian population were to perish, the “other half would reconstitute in a few years a new race baptized anew and made younger by the blood of the immolated generation.”<sup>115</sup>

Thus the moderates did not exclude the shedding of blood in wars, provided that these wars were waged by regular armies. What they worried about was direct action by the people that could escape their control. Indeed, Gioberti for all his talk about the primacy of the Italians, maintained that the Italian people did not exist yet: it was “a desire and not a fact, an assumption and not a reality, a name and not a thing . . . There certainly is an Italy and an Italian stock, united by blood, by

<sup>111</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini, “Della guerra d’insurrezione conveniente all’Italia,” in *Scritti politici editi e inediti*, 2: 230 (orig. in *La Giovine Italia*, 1833; reprinted as a pamphlet with an appendix of instructions in 1849). Alberto M. Banti and Marco Mondini have noted also this “moral” meaning that war assumed for the Italian patriots: see “Da Novara a Custoza: Culture militari e discorso nazionale tra Risorgimento e Unità,” in *Storia d’Italia*, Annali 18, *Guerra e pace*, Walter Barberis, ed. (Turin, 2002), 419.

<sup>112</sup> Mazzini, “Alla gioventù italiana,” in *Scritti politici editi e inediti*, 2: 381 (orig. in *La Giovine Italia*, 1834).

<sup>113</sup> Mariotti [Gallenga], *Italy*, 1: xxiv.

<sup>114</sup> Mariotti [Gallenga], *Italy*, 2: 426, 427.

<sup>115</sup> Durando, *Della nazionalità italiana*, 254, 255.

religion, by an illustrious written language; but [they are] divided by governments, laws, institutions, popular language, customs, affections, habits.”<sup>116</sup> By denying the existence of the Italian people as a unified and willful subject, Gioberti was denying the viability of Mazzini’s unitarian solution to the national question, and at the same time the popular action that the latter proposed to achieve this goal. Popular revolutions were a counterproductive evil: they could not be controlled, and the terror was always a possibility lurking behind the corner. In contrast, moderation could assure a lasting change, and, moreover, only the moderate stance had “national” roots: indeed it was the truly “native” stance since moderatism reflected the antiquity of Italian civilization—and civilization in itself always exerts a moderating influence.<sup>117</sup>

But to change the old entrenched habits of indolence and passivity (and we might add to prepare for war if needed), it was necessary to operate at various levels. For Cesare Balbo, the way out of what he called the “vicious circle” of a “dependence-fostering vice” (in turn fostering more dependence) began in the home: the absence of public virtues could be at least in part compensated by stimulating private virtues, i.e., those practiced individually and in the family circle and thus available to everybody. Balbo claimed that things were already improving in Italian families: *cicisbeismo*, that epitome of Italian effeminacy, no longer characterized the behavior of the elites as it used to. Providing yet another example of the ideology of separate spheres that developed in Risorgimento Italy,<sup>118</sup> he praised in particular Italian women for devoting themselves more to their families and not as much as before to society relations. Of course, when he spoke of Italian women he had in mind primarily aristocratic women, and it was especially their habits that he wanted to change in the direction of a neater separation of spheres between men and women. And to whoever pointed out that women could be and had been a source of inspiration to men’s action, he retorted, citing Napoleon, that the best model of a woman was the one who gave her husband a large number of children.<sup>119</sup>

It is difficult to find a better instance of the intimate convergence between nineteenth-century nationalism and the emergence of a new sexual morality pointed out some years ago by George L. Mosse and other scholars of gender and nationalism.<sup>120</sup> To put it more precisely, a patriotic discourse imbued with gendered metaphors had difficulties escaping a patriarchal type of politics requiring the restriction of women’s presence in the public sphere—even when it profited from women’s activism in favor of the patriotic cause.<sup>121</sup> Distinction between appropriate

<sup>116</sup> Gioberti, *Primato*, 1: 92–93.

<sup>117</sup> Balbo, *Speranze*, 10.

<sup>118</sup> See Lucia Re, “Passion and Sexual Difference: The Risorgimento and the Gendering of Writing in Nineteenth-Century Italian Culture,” in Ascoli and von Henneberg, *Making and Remaking Italy*, 155–200.

<sup>119</sup> See Balbo, “Lo straniero. Dialogo primo,” in *Pensieri ed esempi*, 356.

<sup>120</sup> See George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Madison, Wis., 1985); and Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York, 1996); see also the interdisciplinary collection Andrew Parker et al., eds., *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (London, 1992).

<sup>121</sup> On women’s participation in the Risorgimento, see works cited in note 20 and also Laura Guidi, “Patriottismo femminile e travestimenti sulla scena risorgimentale,” *Studi storici* 41 (2000): 571–86.

“male” and “female” behaviors and spheres of activity had to be strengthened. Gender reform required a reshaping of man and woman. Balbo advocated activities that could bring about a less effeminate and more virile model of masculinity: horse riding, deer hunting, and vigorous alpine walks were to be promoted in order to shape the type of men who would restore “Italian hopes.”<sup>122</sup> Like the German patriots who in the first half of the nineteenth century created a great number of gymnastic societies to prop up the virility of German men<sup>123</sup> or the Bengali nationalists who promoted all sorts of manly sports to counter the “effeteness” of their people,<sup>124</sup> in the 1840s members of the aristocratic and bourgeois classes in Piedmont and Tuscany established the first societies to promote gymnastic education and strengthen the bodies of future soldiers.<sup>125</sup> And Balbo did not stop there: he also invited the Italians to travel to distant lands following the example of “more civilized” countries, and more precisely to volunteer in the “beautiful wars of Christian conquest,” a training ground for “other wars, from which will arise greater [Italian] hopes.”<sup>126</sup>

The patriarchal character of Italian patriotism was not confined to moderate men. While promoting women’s education, patriotic women of moderate conviction such as Caterina Franceschi Ferrucci stressed how the *patria* needed “both courageous, honest, wise men and modest and good-hearted women.”<sup>127</sup> Even a democrat like Mazzini who was sensitive to the question of women’s rights and repeatedly proclaimed their equality with men, in his strong idealization of woman as the “angel of the hearth” tended to confine women inside the domestic realm.<sup>128</sup> If women wanted to be something more than nurses at times of wars and insurrections, sneaking into battle by cross-dressing was often their only option.<sup>129</sup>

DURING THE CENTRAL YEARS OF THE RISORGIMENTO, patriots of different political convictions agreed that Italians had fallen into a state of extreme degradation as a consequence of centuries of foreign oppression and despotism but that they were

<sup>122</sup> Balbo, *Speranze*, 195–96. He also invited the youth to travel to distant lands and volunteer in the “beautiful wars of Christian conquest.”

<sup>123</sup> Mosse has called attention to the phenomenon in *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991), 28. For a detailed study, see Daniel A. McMillan, “German Incarnate: Politics, Gender and Sociability in the Gymnastics Movement, 1811–1871” (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1997).

<sup>124</sup> See John Rosselli, “The Self-Image of Effeteness: Physical Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal,” *Past and Present*, no. 86 (1980): 121–48.

<sup>125</sup> On the establishment of the first gymnastic societies in Turin and Florence in 1844, see Patrizia Ferrara, *L’Italia in palestra: Storia, documenti e immagini della ginnastica dal 1833 al 1973* (Rome, 1992), 29–47. It is interesting to note that in the same year Balbo published *Le Speranze d’Italia* where he encouraged deer hunting and alpine walks. For the period after unification, see Gaetano Bonetta, *Corpo e nazione: L’educazione ginnastica, igienica e sessuale dell’Italia liberale* (Milan, 1990).

<sup>126</sup> Balbo, *Speranze*, 196.

<sup>127</sup> See Caterina Franceschi Ferrucci, *Degli studi delle donne* (Turin, 1853), 359. On this and other women writers in nineteenth-century Italy, see the relevant essays collected in Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood, eds., *A History of Women’s Writing in Italy* (Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>128</sup> See especially Mazzini, *Dei doveri dell’uomo* (Naples, 1860), chap. 6, “Duties to the Family.” In the Mazzinian ranks, however, there were also women such as Anna Maria Mozzoni who espoused both patriotism and feminism.

<sup>129</sup> Guidi, “Patriottismo femminile e travestimenti.”



also heading toward regeneration. Both in Italy and abroad, supporters of the Italian cause cast the national question in moral and gendered terms predicated on representations of Italian character that often originated in the gaze of the northern tourist. Having become “lazy” and “effeminate,” Italians had to operate a “moral and intellectual revolution” if they wanted to recover their ancient greatness and their legitimate place in the world of nations. Their whole character had to be reshaped in a more active and virile way. This is why, in spite of its original association with republicanism, the vocabulary of “regeneration” was to be found even among the more conservative liberals as a way of expressing the final aim of patriotic action. The fact that these tropes in particular structured the process of self-objectification was in itself significant not only because it crucially contributed to gendering the patriotic movement, but also because it generated enduring discursive habits and resilient ways of self-understanding among the national elites.

Neither the figuration of the “degenerate” Italians nor the metaphor of regeneration was unique to Italy. Like the Italian patriots, the early advocates of Greek emancipation such as Adamantios Korais and Ioannis Kapodistrias also denounced the vices of their compatriots and conceived of national recovery in terms of character regeneration.<sup>130</sup> And since the process of nation building was not an easy one in either country, national regeneration was a trope with a lasting future in the political discourse of both countries.<sup>131</sup> The sudden and almost “miraculous” acquisition of Italian independence and unity that occurred in 1860 left many democratic patriots worried that that very miracle was in fact a mixed blessing: too little blood had been shed, no real moral regeneration had occurred, and much more work lay ahead. Mazzini was of course the most disappointed of all given his republican conviction, but after the humiliating defeats by Austria in the war of 1866, some moderates also began to express profound disappointments and preoccupations: historian and social observer Pasquale Villari famously regretted that unity and freedom had arrived too soon, after too short a fight. As a result, the Italians were unchanged, still as indolent and ignorant as they had been under the old regimes, and, he sighed, “with indolent and ignorant men everything goes wrong.”<sup>132</sup>

But states are rarely, if ever, built on the virtues of a people: geopolitics, diplomacy, and armies always play a more prominent role. In clashing with this reality and with the poor performance of Italy in the competitive state system of the late nineteenth century, a discourse that carried high moral requirements and expectations was to generate an acrimonious disappointment, one of the foundations for the development of a more intense and aggressive nationalism in later

<sup>130</sup> A selection of the writings of Korais and Kapodistrias is in Richard Clogg, ed., *The Movement for Greek Independence 1770–1821: A Collection of Documents* (London, 1976).

<sup>131</sup> For Greece, see Gerasimos Augustinos, *Consciousness and History: Nationalist Critics of Greek Society 1897–1914* (Boulder, 1977). On the importance of the theme of regeneration (but not of gender) in Italian nationalism, see Gentile, *La Grande Italia*.

<sup>132</sup> This is a central theme of what is probably Villari’s most famous article: “Di chi è la colpa. O sia la pace e la guerra” [Who is to Blame? Or, Peace and War], *Il Politecnico*, September 1866 (now in Pasquale Villari, *I mali dell’Italia. Scritti su mafia, camorra e brigantaggio*, Eugenio Garin, ed. [Florence, 1995], 143–95), but it also appears in many of his subsequent writings on social and political issues. On the pessimism about the new Italy that characterized the attitudes of many intellectuals, see Alberto Asor Rosa, “La Cultura,” in *Storia d’Italia*, Vol. 4, *Dall’Unità a oggi* (Turin, 1975), 821–39.

years. The study of the gendered tropes of this discourse allows us to go beyond the neat opposition between the “benign” nationalism of the Risorgimento and its malignant successor, an opposition that hides similarities that nationalisms share across ideological divides. It also allows us to see the older discursive roots of the shriller masculinist rhetoric of later Italian nationalism and its obsession with the question of remaking the character of the Italians.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>133</sup> For an analysis of this masculinist rhetoric, see Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis, 1996). On the fascist obsession with remaking the Italian character, see Gentile, *La Grande Italia*, chap. 9, and Aliberti, *La resa di Cavour*, chap. 6.

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