

migration: exploitation, prejudice, and fear. It is a touching and important work of fiction by an engaged filmmaker whose films take the medium well beyond its assumed limits, thus meriting greater distribution and attention. The place of documentaries cannot be usurped as a means of social expression and the recounting of marginalized histories, just as the term *fiction* cannot diminish a film's social impact. As I write this, notice has come that *Io sono Li* is a finalist for the European Parliament's Lux Prize and that it will be shown again at the Venice Film Festival a year after its premiere — a most deserved honor and recognition.

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*Italy: Love It or Leave It.*  
 By Gustav Hofer and Luca Ragazzi.  
 Hiq Productions, 2011.  
 75 minutes. DVD format, color.

Visitors to Italy often express admiration for it based on a superficial understanding of the *bel paese* — its ancient past, its picturesque towns and landscapes, and its local traditions and cuisine. While Italians are often proud of their own regional cultures and customs, their love for Italy has historically been complicated and put to the test by long-standing problems such as widespread corruption, a weak sense of national identity, and a shortage of attractive job opportunities, issues that still today play a crucial role in many people's decision to leave the country. An estimated 60,000 young people, most of whom have a university degree, leave Italy every year to explore professional opportunities that cities like Paris, London, and Berlin may offer or else take up the challenge of proving themselves in less familiar non-European destinations.

Whether or not to stay is the pressing question that informs and substantiates the documentary film *Italy: Love It or Leave It*, by Gustav Hofer and Luca Ragazzi. After six years of living in an apartment in Rome, the couple receives an eviction notice that compels them to confront the possibility of moving out not only of their usual living space but out of Italy altogether. Berlin could become their new home, Hofer proposes. The reasons for leaving are partially summed up at the beginning of the documentary through letters from their expatriate friends — parents with young children, colleagues, other couples. While an Italian audience is presumably familiar with these reasons, the film takes a closer look at specific aspects of contemporary life that appear to keep the country stagnant: the precarious conditions of factory workers, lack of respect toward the environment, an aging and often corrupt political class, and the commodification of women's bodies. In doing so, the film also provides a non-Italian audience with a more contemporary view of the most urgent issues affecting Italy in recent years. The film's exploration of a more hopeful Italy runs parallel to this disenchanting gaze; it is an Italy that often operates out of the limelight, made of people who fight daily against different forms of social and cultural inequality.

The film is successful in striking a balance between the two opposing viewpoints that frame Hofer and Ragazzi's dilemma of whether to stay or leave. In fact, each of them takes up a side, sharing his opinions mostly through voice-over narration as they both guide us through the film. Hofer, a northerner from the Trentino-Alto Adige region, has a practical, almost cynical approach to the question. For him, Italy has no allure. The latest statistics on the socioeconomic state of the country support his position, and he does not buy into clichés. To Ragazzi, a Roman with a visceral love for Italy and its traditions, Hofer replies (as translated in the subtitles): "You're ridiculous. We can't stay in Italy for the aqueducts. And Sophia Loren is 75 and lives in Switzerland." Before making a final decision, the couple takes six months to travel across Italy in search of inspiring stories and tangible realities that may revive their passion for their country and convince them to stay. From north to south, we see them driving a series of ever-changing vintage Fiat 500s as they attempt to unpack some of the political, social, and economic contradictions of contemporary Italy. That the filmmakers choose to take their trip in Fiat 500s comes to illustrate one of the ways the film counters stereotypical images of iconic symbols of Italy with a more accurate and up-to-date view of the nation. For instance, the archival footage advertising the original Fiat 500 of the Italian Economic Boom of the 1950s contrasts with the sense of uncertainty that currently dominates the Turin-based Fiat and its factory workers, as suggested by interviewee Mary Epifania who works on the assembly lines. Similarly, the relocation of production of the classic Italian stove-top espresso maker Bialetti from the Piedmont region to Romania calls into question what a good Italian coffee is and if such an item can be made outside of Italy. These examples indirectly raise the deeper issue of how much immigration to Italy and the Italian diaspora shape, support, and produce what we commonly conceive of as Italian. However, despite the topic of migration as the opening conceit of the film, the filmmakers seem not to fully address its multiple manifestations. For instance, they do not take note until later in the film of how much the "Made in Italy" label relies on immigrant workers; nor do they ever acknowledge, even subtly, contributions Italians have made outside of Italy.

Hofer and Ragazzi also unpack the stereotypical image of the Italian landscape. Although we still get a sense of picturesque Italy during their trip, the documentary focuses on the alarming connections between environmental neglect, organized crime, and political corruption, as exemplified by the waste-management issue in Campania and the so-called Ecomonsters in Sicily, large incomplete concrete structures resulting from failed public- and private-sector decisions. Another important contradiction the film pinpoints is with regard to food and human rights. Indeed, if sharing a meal has a social and affective value in Italy (that is, food creates conviviality, as the founder of the Slow Food movement Carlo Petrini states in one interview), it is equally true that a good part of the produce that makes Slow Food possible and successful is picked by immigrants. To illustrate this, the filmmakers drive to Rosarno, a town in Calabria that symbolizes the exploitation of immigrant farm workers and that drew international attention for workers' riots in January 2010. In this instance, Hofer and Ragazzi make an admirable effort to come to terms with Italy's relationship to migration; however, they do not openly acknowledge their own privileged position and the choices they have even as they consider immigrants who leave their own countries for lack of economic options.

The consistent use of interviews throughout the film, cleverly interspersed with animation sequences that impart a dynamic rhythm to the narrative, effectively serves to emphasize Italy's contradictions. One of the most fascinating themes emerging from the interviews is the nature of change that is slowly catching on in the country. As Ragazzi admits, complaining is not enough to make you love Italy and stay. The interview segments suggest a variety of approaches for contending with present difficulties but also for forging a better future. To mention a few, the mayor of Capo Rizzuto (Crotone province, Calabria), a town plagued by the 'Ndrangheta crime syndicate, reminds us of the importance of applying the law to defy the threats of organized crime; Giuseppe, a volunteer in Rosarno, speaks of the Italians' loss of memory of their own experience of migration; Neapolitan actress Loredana Simioli shows how irony can be powerfully used to spur reflection on environmental issues; while Claudia D'Aita argues for a creative reuse of unfinished public works in Sicily as a source of tourism. But perhaps the film's most compelling interview in relation to the urgency for change comes from the co-director of *Il corpo delle donne* (Women's bodies, 2009), Lorella Zanardo. She addresses the issue of the degrading role of women's bodies in Italian media in recent decades, the cultural impact of those images on women themselves, and the relevance of the Internet to carry out an active protest against a pervasive model shaped by the male gaze, which, as she points out, "in Italy is a powerful force."

The topic of women in *Italy: Love It or Leave It* is also part of the political scene centered on the figure of former Prime Minister Berlusconi and his recent sex scandal "Rubygate." The references to Berlusconi are plenty, and if on the one hand they may seem to burden the documentary, on the other they reflect the great extent to which this political leader has catalyzed the discourse about Italy at all levels in the past several years. In fact, the film premiered a few months before Berlusconi resigned in November 2011, amid a heated political climate and a polarized social scenario characterized by his supporters and detractors. Through a sound bite that sums up Berlusconi's conservative views on the rights of homosexuals, Hofer and Ragazzi touch upon the topic of gay couples explored in their acclaimed documentary *Improvvisamente l'inverno scorso* (Suddenly, Last Winter, 2008). Instead, in the latest and broader examination of Berlusconi's Italy, Hofer provocatively asks a group of Berlusconi's older fervent supporters: "What country have you left us with?" which opens the problematic question of how wisely the older generations have used national resources to build a future for their children in Italy. In a country layered with contradictions, the documentary's message, spelled out by Ragazzi toward the end of the film, seems to be that "you have to focus on the beautiful aspects or you won't survive."

In what begins as a personal quest, Hofer and Ragazzi's documentary raises numerous discussion topics about contemporary Italy that seem to require an audience somewhat familiar with the country's current national affairs. In addition, the film's adoption of a transnational perspective makes it fascinating to an international viewer, although the latter should not expect to find much historical depth in it. This, unfortunately, holds especially true in relation to issues of migration, which often remain vaguely defined, despite the title and opening scenes, which suggest otherwise.

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