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Italy Celebrates Columbus: The Indian Rediscovered

NAILA CLERICI

Smoke signals rise from the top of the highest Genovese skyscraper. . . and on 7 November 1991, people protesting against poor Columbus call him *boia*, the executioner.¹ On "Columbus Day," 12 October, the newspapers report that the Great Admiral is "executed" in absentia by a minor radical leftist group and that "anti-Columbians paralyze the town."² On 11 October 1992, a large rally takes place in Genoa. What is happening in Italy?

This paper presents a brief overview of what has been happening in Italy with regard to the Columbus quincentenary of 1992. It also makes an effort to analyze some of the reasons behind what is becoming a highly complex and difficult public issue in the country.

GENOA: THE CENTER OF ACTIVITIES

Because Genoa is the supposed birthplace of Columbus, it has been the most involved municipality in the 1992 quincentenary activities. To support these activities, the Italian government passed a special bill ("Celebrations of the Quincentennial Discovery of America," law no. 418, 8 August 1985) and granted a substantial amount of money, in yearly installments, to finance the

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celebrations—\$830 million for Genoa alone.³ The availability of these funds has resulted in mixed reactions from the Genovese.

From an economic point of view, the quincentenary funds appeared to be highly desirable. For decades, Genoa has been in an economic recession, with more than 20,000 jobs lost over the last twenty years. In addition, the city center has become generally downgraded, and there is a large population of drug addicts. Consequently, the city welcomed the quincentenary money as an opportunity for positive changes, including new job opportunities. Quincentenary funds would be used to restore the medieval harbor, build new roads, renew the subway, and construct a big convention center, in the hope that tourism and other related economic activities would improve. In this local context, it is apparent that more importance is given to the economic opportunities offered by the Columbus quincentenary than to any ideological debate about the so-called discovery. When such discussions do occur, they soon are mixed with current social and economic problems, confusing this historic event. Even Renzo Piano, the architect responsible for the plan to restore the old harbor of Genoa—where the Expo '92 was located—joined the debate over the commercialization of the quincentenary. Piano, who used to appear on television to advertise Genoa and the celebrations, now states that "Genoa betrayed the Expo."⁴ Soon other voices spoke up to criticize how money was allocated by the state and to express concerns regarding the need to provide more objective information about the indigenous people of the "New World."

In Genoa, the debate over the historical meaning of Columbus became even stronger when people started to doubt the tangible economic gains that the quincentenary funds might bring. More and more people wanted to give voice to the views of America's indigenous peoples and recognized that there was not much to celebrate in 1992. Various political, cultural, and religious groups opposed to any joyous celebration of the quincentenary got together and chose as a logo for their campaign "Five Hundred Years Are Enough."⁵ Similar antiquincentenary groups emerged throughout the country. Even the trade unions, who initially—at least in Genoa—were quite supportive of the celebrations for the economic opportunities offered, recognized that "the encounter generated patterns of marginalization and oppression for the benefit of few people who got big profits."⁶

The formal quincentenary program scheduled from 15 May through 15 August 1992 was entitled "Expo '92," an international

exposition dedicated to "The Ship and the Sea" and was located in the old harbor of Genoa. In charge of Expo was the institution "Ente Colombo '92," which was founded by law in 1988 as a public commission among the Liguria region, Genoa province, Genoa municipality, Genoa Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Craft, and the Harbor Autonomous Union and has received both public and private funds. The opinions of its members vary, but their public statements are all quite diplomatic, i. e., "Columbus represented the spirit of his time . . . I understand the attitudes of those populations [the Indians]: The tragic events they suffered are a cruel reality not debatable," said the head commissioner of Expo, the Honorable Alberto Bemporad. "[W]e do not celebrate the discovery as a conquest but as an encounter, as a reciprocal discovery between old and new," said Odoardo Scaletti, official spokesperson for Ente '92.⁷

The presence of popular public figures in the Expo '92 program made the debate over the quincentenary highly political, and the news media have focused on it. In *L'Indipendente* and *Il Mattino di Napoli*, two daily newspapers, columnists warned of terrorism against the Columbus celebrations, an apparent effort to discredit opponents of the quincentenary.⁸ Even if nothing could be proved, people of the various antiquincentenary committees have been deeply upset. Such unfounded assertions from the press quickly overshadowed their efforts to carry on a public debate about contemporary indigenous issues.

Because of extensive community involvement throughout Italy and the many events linked to the quincentenary, this paper will focus on various cultural organizations and their efforts to present their own interpretations of the Columbus quincentenary.

THE ROLE OF CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE ITALIAN 1992 QUINCENTENARY

In Italy, with its highly localized cultures, traditions, and diverse political parties, cultural organizations play a significant role in the development of public support for various points of view. Because of the diversity of Italian community life, it is almost impossible to get the various active and interested cultural organizations to work together—oddly like the competing ways in which various Indian groups are responding to the quincentenary. However, the declaration of intent to which many organiza-

tions subscribe contains common aims that are very idealistic and meaningful:

We cannot accept the programs of the official celebrations that offend the dignity of the Native populations. We also believe that it is the role of indigenous organizations to tell us the history of their resistance in order for us to become knowledgeable about our "discovery." This aim should be achieved by the Native people without mediators. This should be done in order to make the European population able to acquire correct information and, therefore, become capable of modifying their attitude, of acquiring knowledge, and expressing respect at the same time.⁹

Like the wide variety of political parties, Italy has a large number of organizations guided by various cultural and social purposes. Some organizations are branches of international organizations like World Wildlife Fund, Amnesty or Survival International, UNESCO, Lega per i Diritti dei Popoli (League for the Rights of the Peoples of the World), or Fondazione Lelio Basso (a nongovernmental organization or NGO). Some organizations are national, like Campagna Nord-Sud, Rete Radie Resch, CRIC, while others are local (city or neighborhood), like Sestante, Tendenze, Fata Morgana.¹⁰

With the growing public awareness and political response to the potential opportunities created by the quincentenary, new and old cultural organizations sprang into action. The "Five Hundred Years Are Enough" committee in Genoa, the "Amerindia" in Bologna, and the "Circolo 11 Ottobre" (11 October, the last days the natives were alone) in Savona are examples of committees created to present new points of view regarding the quincentenary. With the exception of Soconas Incomindios, none of the organizations direct their activities toward Native Americans as a full-time objective. Some organizations direct their primary interests toward support of various Latin American countries with which they can relate ideologically and politically, such as the "Italy-Nicaragua," "Oscar Romero,"¹¹ or "Italy-Salvador" committees—all involved in special projects of cooperation. Many of these organizations were formed with leftist and communist militants. In the past, these organizations had difficulty distinguishing between proletarian issues and those related to ethnic and cultural differences, like those of the Indians. For example, for a long time they ignored or denied the situation of the

Miskitos of Nicaragua. Nowadays, they are reluctant to criticize meetings of indigenous peoples, such as the one held in Guatemala in October 1991, in which the top priority was solidarity with Cuba, and Indian delegates were few in number.¹²

Other cultural organizations, such as the Movement for Development and Peace, or the Volunteers for Development, or Third World Information, or MAIS (an NGO directed toward agricultural development in the Third World), are mainly involved in projects of cooperation. Some others identify as their main concern the preservation of the world ecosystem but now want information on Indian themes. Few of these latter organizations have any deep knowledge of issues related to indigenous peoples. The list of organizations interested in indigenous issues is long, but, compared to the large majority of the Italian population, relatively few people are open to active support or greater understanding of native cultures.

Because of the Columbus quincentenary, many of the organizations mentioned above decided to take the side of the Indians and support their protest. But sometimes this open-mindedness is not enough, because the amount of information they get is scarce and their direct experience with indigenous peoples is very limited; e. g., the "Officina" (The Factory) organization partially shifted from worldwide political instances to present contemporary Indian issues during the last few years, including support for Leonard Peltier. The members of such groups have good intentions, but they are not well informed about American Indian issues.

Cultural organizations inspired by communist and socialist ideas, such as the Gramsci Institute or Turati Circle, have not shown any interest in the quincentenary. And except for the local Genovese unions, little interest has been shown by the large national and international trade unions. In contrast, CIDI (a democratic teachers' committee), a leftist-oriented organization of teachers from elementary to high school, has organized various conventions to share information among its members about issues related to the Americas and the Indians. Similarly, IRRSAE, a regional organization funded by the Ministry of Education for continuing education of teachers, has presented to its members information on American Indians. The aim is to stress critical historical and anthropological points of view in an effort to inform teachers about the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

A leading Indian support group is Soconas Incomindios, which has been involved with Native American issues since 1978. The

organization started as a solidarity committee for the Indians of the United States under the influence of the various actions of Indian protest organized by the American Indian Movement during the 1970s. It soon widened its field of interest, covering other realities confronting Indians throughout North and South America. The organization's charter gives its goal:

[J]oin all those who are interested in the cultures of American Indians . . . in order to promote the knowledge of their cultures, history and recent day issues . . . ; promote and maintain contacts with Native Americans and their organizations . . . ; periodically promote meetings and debates regarding the aforesaid problems

Although Soconas Incomindios held its own quincentenary convention in Genoa in July 1992, it continues to contribute to the organization of other conventions and meetings. Through its magazine, *Tepee*, it informs the membership and public about specific Indian case studies (for example, current events involving the Mohawk, the Lubicon Cree, the Sioux of the Black Hills area, the people of the Amazon forest). Soconas Incomindios has always taken a critical approach to Indian topics that are seldom discussed by other organizations or the general public.

Soconas Incomindios also has proposed to discuss the meaning of solidarity in the context of Indian protests and why Italians and Europeans in general want to participate in such actions. What is the source of this solidarity? Do we understand each other? Some Italian supporters believe that if we (Italians and Indians) are talking about worldwide perspectives on the environment and human rights, then all the actions should be reciprocal, and cultural understanding should be reciprocal as well.

Some of the topics of the July 1992 meeting of the European support groups were Indian education, legal issues, ecology, Indian prisoners, and the impact of colonialism.¹³

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS OF CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS AND OFFICIAL INSTITUTIONS

Among the most prominent conventions organized or planned by cultural organizations have been "Light and Shade of the Quincentenary" (Perugia, 1991) and "500 Years from the Conquest," by Lega per i Diritti dei Popoli and Amerindia (Bologna,

1991), which is mainly for teachers. The stress has been on Latin America, because the leadership of Lega is more knowledgeable about this region. What has to be noted is the wide interest among teachers and the fact that, in these conventions, they do not just talk about cultural topics; they analyze textbooks and provide reading and visual material on Indian peoples. This means that, in the future, a large portion of the young Italian population will be well informed and will do research on issues related to Native Americans.

Some Italian university professors, mainly in the fields of history, ethnology, and anthropology, are offering courses and giving lectures on topics broadly related to the Americas. The Lelio Basso Foundation, mentioned earlier, proposed a two-day seminar about minorities for December 1991 in Rome; the purpose of the seminar was to define the concept of *minority* and, particularly, to clarify the distinction between nation, people, and minority, especially from the point of view of international law. One of the points on the agenda was the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Beyond this effort, only the University of Perugia has shown any interest in contemporary Indian issues, i. e., the persistence of indigenous identity and the use of the term *savage* in historiography.

More recently, the announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize exerted an impact on university and cultural committee activities. The University of Torino, together with several cultural organizations, gave honorary citizenship to Rigoberta Menchu, a Maya Indian from Guatemala who received the prize.

Throughout Italy, cultural organizations and exhibits cover Latin America in more detail than North America. This reflects the Italian public's still deeply rooted belief that the poor of the world share similar problems and that together they can fight to free themselves from the economic and political pressures imposed by the dominant society.

Another convention, in October 1992, "Understanding the Amazon Indians," was sponsored by a group of Sicilian teachers and was intended to analyze in detail various subjects related to the Amazon, including geography, ethnology, and the historical role of the Catholic church. The organizers seemed open to opportunities to examine topics such as Indian education, social and spiritual values, mythology, and legends. The intention of the conference was to make comparisons between the Indians of the Amazon today and those of nineteenth-century North America and the likelihood of history repeating itself.

The network "500 Years Are Enough" organized and presented a three-day convention in Genoa in early November 1991. The convention logo was the earth, looking like a half-eaten fruit. The eroded part was the Southern Hemisphere. The drawing supposedly showed that all the dispossessed and the conquered are in the southern part of the world. The presentation stressed the same themes: North-South dichotomy, biosphere, survival, debt. The program's theme was the continuing iniquities of the past five centuries. It solicited a sympathetic view of the "others," the aboriginal people, admitting that a neutral and objective point of view is almost impossible. It also stressed the need to give back what historically has been taken illegally from the Indians, such as land and minerals. Unfortunately, few Indians or other indigenous peoples were among the speakers.

Another convention dealing only with cultural issues was the one organized in November 1991 by the "Committee for 500 Years from Discovery," from the town of Novara. The title of the convention was "The Invention of the Indies: Images and Imagery of Overseas." Again, topics related to Italian culture, not Indian culture, were preferred, such as Italian immigration to the Americas or reports on Fray Marcos da Niza's travels. Generally, the Italian role in exploration and discovery has been a popular theme, with less interest in the Indian.

One proposed but not funded project that was directed toward contemporary Indian issues was "Esta Tierra Es Nuestra Tierra," or "This Land Is Our Land." Its organizers hoped to have Indian traditional religious or spiritual leaders teach selected elite European intellectuals about the spiritual world of Native Americans. This project illustrates how good intentions are often handicapped by poor knowledge about indigenous peoples and their cultures.

QUINCENTENARY EXHIBITIONS

What is remarkable about the Italian response to the quincentenary is that none of the big, important tourist towns prepared any exhibitions about Native Americans. The last such effort was the "Circles of the World" (originated from the Denver Art Museum), which was in Genoa in 1985. Since then, only minor exhibitions have opened, very few dealing with the present situation of Indians, except for the small exhibitions put together by Soconas Incomindios and other independent cultural organizations. The

apparent reason for this paucity of Indian exhibitions is that those in charge, i. e., directors and art historians, are mainly experts on European or Oriental art and often consider the expressive culture of Native Americans to be crafts, not art. Only pre-Columbian Meso- and South American cultures are given some interest. It is believed that exhibitions on present-day Indian issues would attract little public interest and provoke even less public enthusiasm. One reason for this remarkable view is the still-persistent popular myth in Italy of the vanished Native Americans. Few Italians accept the idea of a modern Indian; this would be a historical and cultural contradiction.

The "Amerindia" committee held various cultural activities beginning in October 1990, including a small, didactic exhibition about the Shuar Indians. This was put together by the MLAL (Movement of Lay People for Latin America). Again, such efforts prove that small, independent organizations are more open to contemporary Indian events and issues. The introduction to the MLAL exhibition says,

[T]he explanatory texts come from statements and thoughts of the Shuar ethnic group. They denounce the destruction of their traditional way of life. This is due to sky-rocketing development and irrational exploitation carried on by oil companies at the interest of white people.

An exhibition called "America of the Vanquished" was put together in 1991 by Calumet, a cultural association from the town of Poggibonsi. Also, an exhibition of *molas* done by Kuna Indians from Panama was organized by URIHI, a documentation center, recently opened in Milan, that collects information on environment and indigenous peoples. "With the Eyes of Memory" is a traveling exhibition compiled by the members of Soconas Incomindios. Its various sections contain Indian posters, old photographs, and books, intended to evoke what is considered a fascinating past linked to present-day events.

The Italian media have given wide coverage to the Amazon Indians and to related issues such as rainforest destruction. The "500 Years Are Enough" committee of Ferrara organized a photographic exhibition called "Indians: Nostalgia of the Future" in the spring of 1992, while another exhibition and related cultural activities, "To Know and Understand the Amazon Indians," was privately sponsored by furniture manufacturing of Cantu'. Fees collected from visitors were used to buy a Jeep ambulance for the Xavantes.

One proposed exhibition by URIHI was titled "The Last Indians of North America," which included a section about the dilemma of the Indians in contemporary America, along with contemporary literary productions by American Indians, a program quite unusual for Italy. Unfortunately, no municipality has shown any interest in having the exhibition. Official reasons given were that the cost was too high, but probably the real reason was that municipalities do not dare take risks and be innovative or provocative. This is the case with "1492-1728: Two Worlds Compared" (Genoa, May through October 1992), the most important exhibition sponsored by the Italian Ministry for Cultural Affairs, along with the National Committee for the Celebration of the Quincentenary. This exhibition, in both structure and content, reflects a careful effort to avoid controversy. According to the title, the time period should not have gone beyond early eighteenth century; nevertheless, many of the objects shown were from native cultures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. No reference was made to historical or contemporary events.

The few other exhibitions advertised at the national level and publicly funded preferred to deal with archaeological remains. Several Italian municipalities caught, like the old conquerors, by the lure of gold have organized exhibits. "The Land of Eldorado" (Genoa, May-August 1991); "Gold from Colombia" (Genoa through January 1992); "Inca Peru: Ritual, Magic and Mystery" (Rome, January-April 1992); and "Ecuador, the Land and the Gold" have been popular with the public. In Genoa, two exhibits, "Animals and Plants from the Americas to Europe" (through 1992) and "The Sweetest Discovery," about the cocoa plant (May-October 1992), are efforts to expand public interest.

OTHER CULTURAL EVENTS

Many lecture series offered in Italy on topics related to the quincentenary are funded and organized by cultural organizations, municipalities (usually through the Department of Cultural Activities or Tourism), universities, libraries, and bookstores. Because the study of Native American cultures at the university level has never been widespread in Italy, some of the Italian scholars giving lectures have only a general knowledge about American topics. Many guest speakers come from Latin America, but few are of Indian origin; some are natives of Canada or the United States.¹⁴

Some of the cultural programs include plays, concerts, and movies. *The Great Dream*, a play staged by the Lega Internazionale per i Diritti dei Popoli, is about life before and after the conquest in what could be ancient Mexico or the Andes and includes a parade of music and dances. The text is based on *Memoria del Fuego* by Edoardo Galeano.¹⁵ A satirical play, *America Has Discovered Me*, has been staged by a small amateur company located in Aosta. Ronni Bessi, the author, imagines a Columbus who is fascinated by the inhabitants and the nature of the New World and decides not to reveal his discovery. *Johan Padan and the Discovery of America* is written by Dario Fo, the most well-known radical leftist playwright in Italy. Johan Padan, a poor man from Padova, escapes his personal problems and becomes a sailor on Columbus's ship, the Santa Maria. The play portrays the natives very well on a personal and human level, with funny and sad dialogue; at the same time, many events are historically correct.

PROTESTS AND PARADES

As far as I am aware, there have been only a few public protests of the Columbus 1992 quincentenary. One was organized on 12 October 1991 in Genoa and was called "Colomboia," a combination of Italian words that means "Columbus the Executioner" [*Boia*]. People gathered near the Columbus clock, which counted the hours, minutes, and seconds until 12 October 1992, the exact anniversary of the "discovery." However, the clock was a useless marker of history, because it did not give the correct time. On 15 May 1992, the day of the opening of Expo '92, people opposed to the celebration held a candlelight march in Genoa that ended at the house of Columbus, where they placed the candles as a symbolic homage to the indigenous peoples who have suffered and died since the "discovery." Also in Genoa, on 16 May 1992, a human chain was formed; "From the Conquest of the New World to the Making of a New World" were the words on the leaflet circulated at the event. Other public protests were planned for October 1992, including a peace march from Genoa to Assisi.

QUINCENTENARY AS POPULAR CULTURE: "GADGETS" AND MEDIA

Major events invariably result in the promotion of a variety of popular gadgets that memorialize history in the popular mind. Watches with three small sailing ships, Columbus banners, and puppets for the Genoa football teams are available around the city. One can also find grocery bags with Columbus's portrait on them and tins of beer with the illustration of his ships. T-shirts have emerged from Soconas Incomindios, Abya Yala, and Tendenze that remind people that America is the land of Native American peoples.

The cultural events mentioned above are appreciated by only a relatively small number of people. For the great majority of the public, information about the quincentenary has come from the media. As in the United States, information is in the form of "bites," which inform the public only superficially. The three public television channels, plus the special channel devoted to schools and education, confirm the tendency to stress topics related to how peoples and cultures are connected to Europe rather than about indigenous peoples or cultures. Only one program was planned to give an overview presentation of the indigenous peoples of the Americas but only as part of a general view of American society. One program, developed in collaboration with some American networks, discussed Columbus's landing place. Only the third channel (more leftist oriented) gave some brief news on American Indians.

Mino Damato, a well-known television news anchor, had some Indian guests on his show for TeleMontecarlo (a private channel), but his usually rushed program did not allow for the communication of important and complex intercultural issues. The Genoa Opera House hoped to include, in its 1992 fall program, an opera entitled *Columbus*, written in the nineteenth century. In addition, Giorgio Agnetti, a contemporary classic composer, wrote a piece for brass that is dedicated to America. Agnetti imagines Columbus's voyage, but the music of the discovery is not triumphal: New life is brought to a new land while destroying the life that is already there.

The print media—newspapers and magazines—have shown mixed interest in the quincentenary. Newspapers present information about Indian guest speakers in Italian towns and usually mention that the natives of the New World find nothing worth celebrating in 1992.¹⁶ In the cultural sections of the newspapers, the

impact of Western society on the cultures of the New World is discussed more extensively. There is a tendency to stress the positive aspects of the impact of Western society: "The role of Columbus should be analyzed in his historical time," instead of "using him as a puppet to raise critical present day issues."¹⁷ In general, considering the number of newspapers and magazines published in Italy, the news about Columbus and the Indians is fairly abundant.¹⁸ The Italian media simply have preferred to deal with the past selectively and have chosen to ignore many contemporary legal, political, and economic Indian issues.

THE CHURCH'S POSITION ON THE QUINCENTENARY

In addition to the various cultural organizations, the Catholic church is involved in the quincentenary. I do not intend to discuss in great detail the position of the Catholic church. Everyone knows that the Pope, during his pastoral visits to American countries, expressed his concern about the living conditions of the indigenous peoples in a diplomatic way. I quote from a national newspaper: "The Pope absolves Brazil of the ecological disaster The Indians charge that their spirituality has been replaced by other faiths that are ruining their cultures The Pope will feast at Santo Domingo to remember the arrival of Columbus and of Christianity in the new continent" ¹⁹

Many individual missionaries have changed their methods of operating among indigenous peoples, preferring to improve health and economic conditions rather than imposing conversion. Some of these missionaries, most identified with "liberation theology," are active through various Italian committees and have been giving lectures on behalf of indigenous peoples. The division in the church regarding its historic and contemporary role with indigenous peoples has resulted in internal and public criticism of church policies and views. For example, Peruvian theologian José Pires is quoted as saying, "The Vatican . . . is preparing celebrations that we not only refuse to recognize but also denounce as an anti-evangelical provocation. These celebrations are against the poverty of faith (which is the faith's richness) and the suffering of those people" ²⁰

Religious fraternities such as the Jesuits or the Salesiani are more open to debate. For example, the Missionary Diocesan

Center recently organized a convention in Torino on the five hundred years since the conquest.

The Evangelic Valdes church took an official position on behalf of the natives.²¹ Members of the Jewish community say that they were dispossessed from all the territories of the Spanish Crown in 1492, just as the American Indians were dispossessed of their lands, so they feel a common loss marked by the quincentenary of 1992.²²

CONCLUSIONS

In the chapel of the recently restored Duke's Palace in Genoa is a painting (by Giovanni Battista Carlone, 1603–77) that depicts the Columbian "discovery" of America. At the center of the painting is Columbus holding a cross, standing triumphantly on the shores of the new lands. To the side and in the background is a soldier violently destroying a statue, supposedly an Indian idol. Strangely enough, the idol looks more like a Roman/Italian statue than an Indian sculpture. Apart from poor ethnographic knowledge on the part of painters of that time, an alternative interpretation can be offered: In the belief that we are killing the "other," we are, in truth, destroying ourselves.

For Italians today, it is difficult to look beyond the immediate history that surrounds them—high unemployment, increased immigration from North Africa, and the decay of their cities—and instead focus on the often remote and complex historical issues raised by the Columbus quincentenary. In addition, there has been a conscious national and local effort to talk and act in neutral terms about the Columbian "encounter" or "discovery." As a result, the number of Italians actively involved in antiquincentenary events is small.

One issue that many Italians do raise reflects their lack of understanding of the diversity and deep historical and cultural differences among Indian nations. Italians wonder why indigenous peoples do not unite when they are confronted by the common poverty and powerlessness created by the domination of Western cultures and capitalism. This point of view may seem curious, given the highly individualized and regional nature of Italian politics and culture, but it is an Italian view.

It is certain that the events of the 1992 quincentenary year in Italy have added little to the Italian public's critical knowledge of

Native Americans, particularly of their contemporary affairs. The media often reinforce popular, erroneous notions that there no longer are true Indians in North America and that the few remaining survivors still live closed in reservations (Italian journalists love to use this term, meaning "segregated").

The debate about native peoples is made even more difficult by the fact that Italians approach it in a different way according to their political orientation. Many prefer to avoid what they think is a direct attack on the United States; others, who oppose United States foreign policy, use the treatment of Indians to attack and injure the United States' international reputation.

In Italian culture, the Indian has become something of a metaphor or conceptual vehicle with which to publicly explore internal national ills. An example of this attitude is a peculiar Italian movement of the 1970s called "Metropolitan Indians." Those that took part in the movement were people who did not benefit from the economic growth of the time and claimed that suburban metropolitan areas are the Italian form of a "reservation." "Both Indian and Italian marginalized cultures should fight on a common ground to overcome their problems," they stated. These same issues have emerged in the 1990s. Here is a manifesto printed by a small group of anarchists from Tuscany:

1492-1992 Out of Reservations!

Here [in Italy] is different.
Barbed wire everywhere,
ranges, walls.
Boundaries, jails,
barracks, factories.
Here is different.
You breathe freely
lead from (exhaust) pipe,
rogor, diazine.
Here is different.
You die of work.
Or under a block of marble [there are marble caves]
or falling from a scaffolding.
Or a thousand other ways.
Here life has no value
compared to profit.
For profit you sell,
you buy,
you poison, you kill. Everything.

Here is like there.
500 years of exploitation
and oppression
have not smothered
the dream to live
without masters,
without jails,
without borders!²³

Despite everything, the Italian public is interested in and loves American Indians. At the turn of the century, they attended Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in great crowds. Today, similar interest is reflected by the large attendance at movies such as *Dances with Wolves* and at lectures given by Indian guest speakers. Indians have achieved something of the status of untarnished folk heroes among the Italian public. It is unfortunate that the five hundredth anniversary of the Columbian "discovery" has not been used to give Indians an opportunity to meet Italian people, to share their culture with those with whom they also share the most important historical event in human history, the linking of the Old and New Worlds.

NOTES

1. No author, "Segnali di Fumo per gli Indiani d'America," *Il Secolo XIX*, 8 November 1991, 13.

2. R.M., "Il Comune Celebra Colombo gli Autonomi gli Fanno la Festa," *Il Secolo XIX*, 13 October 1991; No name, "Gli Anticolombiani Paralizzano la Città," *Il Lavoro*, 13 October 1991.

3. Genoa received approximately \$830,000,000 for the various projects. Most important are the restoration of the ancient harbor, which lasted three years and is not finished yet; the restoration of the Duke's Palace, which lasted ten years; the restoration of Corso Italia (Italy Avenue), which lasted three years; the organization and promotion of Expo '92 done by Ente Colombo '92, a special commission set up to manage the exposition. The exposition was located in the restored buildings of the harbor.

4. Piero Valentino, "Il 'J'Accuse' di Renzo Piano. Genova Ha Tradito l'Expo" ("I accuse' by Piano. Genoa Betrayed the Expo"), *La Repubblica*, 21 May 1992.

5. Among the promoters are the following organizations: Campagna Nord-Sud (committee dealing with issues like North-South, biosphere, debt, survival), Comitato Salvaguardia Amazzonia (aimed at the protection of the Amazon forest), Comunità Laici Missionari Cattolici (community of lay Catholic missionaries), Coordinamento Associazioni Extracomunitari Liguria (connec-

tion of non-European immigrants), Mondo Nuovo (New World, deals with issues related to America but also tries to conceive new worldwide relationships between developed and underdeveloped countries), Pax Christi (Catholic organization supporting peace and friendship), Verdi Per Genova (Green party), Campagna Terra Nostra (committee dealing with issues such as environment and solidarity), WWF, Soconas Incomindios.

6. *Circular Letter* by Regional Trade Unions Joint Offices, C.G.L., C.I.S.L., U.I.L., "1492-1992: Non Celebrare ma Capire" ("Do Not Celebrate But Understand"), Genoa, 12 May 1992.

7. No author, "I Tamburi dei Pellerossa contro Cristoforo Colombo" ("Red Skin Drums against Columbus"), *La Repubblica*, 20 July 1990.

8. Adrkrans [news agency], "Fanno Paura i Nemici di Colombo" ("Columbus's Enemies Scared"), *L'Indipendente*, 14 May 1992; Giampietro Olivetto, "Scatta l'Allarme Terrorismo sulle Colombiadi" ("The Alarm of Terrorism against the Columbus Celebrations Starts"), *Il Mattino*, 14 May 1992.

9. Introduction to "*Esta Tierra Es Nuestra Tierra*," Firenze, 1990 (a joint proposal for cultural activities).

10. Fondazione Lelio Basso is a nongovernmental organization recognized by the U.N. that does social research aimed at the independence of peoples. *Campagna Nord-Sud*, the Campaign North-South, is a committee that deals with environment, poverty, development in the Third World. *Rete Radie Resch* is an international association for solidarity and peace that is privately funded. CRIC is a regional center for assistance and cooperation.

11. Oscar Romero was a Catholic bishop who was killed by a death squad while saying mass in San Salvador on 24 March 1980.

12. Only one of the fifteen Brazilian delegates was Indian. See Dominique Dhombres, "Les Indiens veulent faire de 1992 une année de résistance populaire" ("Indians want to make 1992 a year of popular resistance"), *Le Monde*, 15 October 1991.

13. The meeting was held in Genoa, 22-25 July 1992. For the proceedings, write Soconas Incomindios, C.P. 292, I 10024 Moncalieri (Torino), Italy.

14. Among some of the natives who recently traveled around Italy to give lectures, I can quote Don Patrick Martin, a Mohawk from Canada, Frank Dreaver of AIM (for the case of Leonard Peltier), Bobby Castillo of AIM, Avelino Cox Molina, a Miskito from Nicaragua, Nakoa Olguin from Hawaii, Rigoberta Menchu from Guatemala, and Nelly Ayenao, a Mapuche from Chile. A group of Apache—including John Wesley Franklin Stanley, Sr., Brenda Kenton, and Ola Cassadore Davis—have come more than once for the Mount Graham issue, since the Vatican is involved.

15. Edoardo Galeano is an Uruguayan writer. His trilogy *Memory of the Fire* is a sort of fiction history of the whole American continent from an indigenous perspective, based on historical sources.

16. "I Tamburi dei Pellerossa contro Cristoforo Colombo" ("Redskin Drums against Columbus").

17. Gaetano Scardocchia, "Colombo l'Inafferrabile" ("Elusive Columbus"), *La Stampa*, 17 October 1991; Alberto Papuzzi, "Giu' le Mani da Colombo" ("Hands Off Columbus"), *La Stampa*, 3 December 1991. See also Giovanni Spadolini, "Colombo Non C'e' Piu'" ("Columbus Is Not Here Anymore"), *La Stampa*, 25 October 1991; Gaetano Scardocchia, "Il Buon Colombo tra i Cannibali" ("Good Columbus among the Cannibals"), *La Stampa*, 21 January 1992; Pier Luigi Vercesi, "Tremila Avanti Cristo, gli Dei Maya Accendono l'Universo" ("3,000

B.C. Mayan Gods Light the Universe"), *La Stampa*, 15 March 1992.

18. Magazines, especially the ones dedicated to special topics, have devoted pages to Columbus's voyages but also to various past and present native groups, showing interesting photographs as well. *Airone*, for instance, a monthly magazine about ecology and cultures, contained topics related to Native American cultures throughout 1992. *Famiglia Cristiana*, a weekly Catholic magazine, dedicated many issues to Native Americans. In addition, *Tepee*, the quarterly of Soconas Incomindios, is completely dedicated to history, culture, ethnology, literature, and present-day issues related to Native Americans.

19. No author, "Il Papa absolve il Brasile dal Disastro Ecologico," *La Stampa*, 17 October 1991.

20. Ciro Castaldo, no title, *Mondo e Missione*, April 1991, 264.

21. See *Report of Synod of Evangelic and Methodist Churches*, Torre Pellice, 25-30 August 1991.

22. See Anna Borioni and Massimo Pieri, *Maledetta Isabella Maledetto Colombo (Damned Isabel, Damned Columbus)* (Venice, Italy: Marsilio, 1991).

23. Centro di Documentazione Anarchica, Querceta, 1992 [booklet with no title]. The so-called alternative groups do not forget the point of view of the natives:

The Natives refuse the term conquest because they say that cultural resistance is still on and they have not been completely conquered. We can talk about unceasing conquest, this related to the North-South issue and the world wide ecological problems. During the 19th century it was the North American transcontinental railroad that determined the historical course; currently, it is the South American transamazon highway, but the blood tribute is always the same.