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CERES Brown Bag Talk:
**THE POLITICS OF PITY IN ITALIAN VIEWS
OF DEFEATED GERMANY**

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This talk examines one thread of the much larger history I am working on, a history of Italy and Germany's social reconstruction in the wake of war and fascism that begins with the end of the "Rome-Berlin Axis" amid Germans' occupation of Italy in 1943 and ends in the early twenty-first century. Historian Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann has shown how images of defeated Germany, specifically a Germany in ruins, became an important visual memory not only for Germans but also for American and British observers, those on the ground and those consuming the images of ruins on the frontpage of newspapers back home. Feelings of triumph and thoughts of vengeance soon gave way to expressions of shock and to pity. When looking to understand the transition from wartime to peacetime, the importance of that shift in the western powers' perceptions of Germans can hardly be exaggerated.

If gazing at German ruins played an important role in easing relations between occupied and (western) occupiers, and in establishing the conditions for the lived peace, my talk argues that something similar can be seen at work in German-Italian relations after the first postwar years. Drawing on examples as famous as Roberto Rossellini and as little known as the Italian boy scouts who crisscrossed Germany on missions of peace, it shows how Italians viewed Germans as objects of pity and humanitarian aid. Public displays of sympathy were notably confined to Catholic and liberal circles within Italy but not to the ruling elite: they circulated broadly in popular weeklies and cinema newsreels, in Lambretta motorbike ads and in the accounts of those who ventured north in the early postwar years. The pitying gaze cast on Italians' former allies and enemies served several purposes: it humanized Germans, balancing the otherwise dominate image of the "bad German,"; it empowered Italians, by placing Germans on the receiving end of their charity; and it offered Italians a

means of performing their preferred postwar identity – to assert their claim to a seat at the diplomatic table and to a leadership position in the rebuilding of an explicitly Christian Europe. Even after Germans' fortunes greatly improved, many Italians continued to connect with West Germans over this older model – contributing to West Germans' own victim narratives and the solidarity of the Cold War order.

